



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **MP: Legal Committee discusses today the demands of the demonstrators with representatives of the blocs.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Mohsen al-Sadoun, the parliamentary legal committee member said "A meeting will be held today 7, Jan, in the Constitutional Hall in the House of Representatives, between the Legal Committee and the representatives of the parliamentary blocs to discuss the demands of the demonstrators."

Al-Sadoun an MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The meeting will discuss the laws demanded by the demonstrators, and these are the general amnesty law, amendments to the terrorism law and the accountability and justice law."

He added: "These amendments will be presented to the House of Representatives to find mechanisms to legislate laws, for approval."

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GFHGLI](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFHGLI)

- **State of law MP accuses some politicians of trying to drag the Iraqis to sectarian strife.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the state of law coalition, Jabbar al-Kenani called Iraqi people "not to engage behind what he called sectarian sedition that some politicians / did not name / want to get personal gains."

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today 7, Jan "There are some politicians are trying to influence the Iraqi street and demonstrators in Anbar, Salahuddin and Nineveh to spark sectarian strife between the components of the Iraqi people and tearing the national cohesion for personal gains."

He added: "The Iraqi people and all its components are more wise than been exploited by those who want to stir up sectarian strife in favor of foreign agendas, which want to tear the unity of Iraq," calling the Iraqi people to "unite and not to hear these cries aimed to disrupt the national unity."

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GFHGJL](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFHGJL)

- **MP: İraqiya will make a formal request to interrogate al-Maliki as a prelude to the withdrawal of confidence.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the İraqiya coalition, Hamid al-Zobaie said that "İraqiya coalition will submit a formal request to the Presidency of the Council of Representatives to question Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki as a prelude to withdraw confidence from the government."

Al-Zobaie said in a statement to the National İraqi News Agency / NINA / "the İraqiya and other political blocs had failed to persuade President Jalal Talabani to sent a letter to the parliament to withdraw confidence from the government, hence the other constitutional option to withdraw confidence from Maliki and the government will be through questioning him" noting that "The service and security files, the financial and administrative corruption will be the basic of the questioning in parliament."

He explained, "The recent crisis has united İraqiya coalition, and it will continue its national project in order to implement the demands of the demonstrators and its masses as well as the rest of the İraqi people. İraqiya's work would not be alone in the coming period, but will be in collaboration with other political blocs."

He said: "The political and public pressure on Maliki affected him clearly and explicitly, and his speech yesterday on the occasion of Army Day was more flexible than his previous speeches, which he directed to the demonstrators."

It was scheduled that the House of Representatives to hold an extraordinary session yesterday called House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi to discuss the current situation and demands of the demonstrators in a number of provinces, but the blocs of the Iraqi National Alliance, except Ahrar bloc, of the Sadrist movement, boycotted the session, causing the lack of a quorum."

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GFHGJE](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFHGJE)

- **Kurdish MP: Political problems cannot be solved by dissolving the House of Representatives and the Cabinet.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Kurdistan coalition forces, Baker Siddiq said that the existing political problems could not be resolved by dissolving the House of Representatives and the council of Ministers.

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The political crisis needs a mechanism and a decision to be resolved," noting that "the solution is accessible to the government and the House of Representatives; therefore the both parties are capable to resolve the crisis."

He pointed out that: "The Kurdistan coalition forces refuse dissolving the parliament and holding early elections, because the situation that the country is going through do not allow to go to so dangerous option on the political process and the general situation in the country."

The head of the Iraqiya coalition, Iyad Allawi and the head of the National Dialogue Front, Saleh al-Mutlaq had called to dissolve the government and parliament and hold early parliamentary elections.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GFHGIM](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFHGIM)

## 2. IRAN

- **Asia is purchasing nearly all of Iran's oil**

TEHRAN, Jan. 7 (MNA) – Four Asian countries are now purchasing nearly all of Iran's oil exports according a report this week from the Economist's Intelligence Unit (EIU).

“Almost all of Iran's oil exports now go to China, South Korea, Japan and India,” the report said even as it noted a sharp decline in the amount of oil each country purchased from Iran during 2012.

With many of Iran's oil customers bowing to Western sanctions, Iran's dependence on the four Asian countries has grown substantially. Tehran has become especially dependent on China, which has long been its primary trading partner. Still, China is now estimated to purchase roughly 50% of Iran's total oil exports.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1785360>

- **Tehran stock exchange gained 55 percent in 2012**

TEHRAN, Jan. 7 (MNA) – The main index of Tehran stock exchange (TSE) gained more than 55 percent last year. TEDPIX (price and dividend index) was 24403.1 at the beginning of 2012 and closed at 37860.6 at the end of December.

The market capitalization of Tehran stock exchange grew about 44 percent in 2012 and finally reached IRR 1726.7 trillion.

Total value of shares and rights trading in the year amounted above IRR 218 trillion, which is slightly (2.1 percent) more than the value in 2011. The volume of equity trading had about 7.2 percent growth last year comparing the figure in 2011 and stood above 74.85 billion shares.

The rising trends in 2012 also included number of equity trades with about 12 percent comparing 2011, pushing the figure to nearly five million.

Although 6 IPOs were accomplished last year at TSE, the total number of listed companies shrank, due to some of the previously listed ones' transfer to Iran Farabourse (Iran's OTC and SMEs Exchange). At the end of 2012 TSE had 322 listed companies.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1785299>

- **Iran to unveil five new radioisotopes**

TEHRAN, Jan. 7 (MNA) – Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Director Fereydoun Abbasi has said that Iran plans to unveil five new domestically produced radioisotopes.

“The atomic energy organization has already produced 15 radioisotopes, and the production of five new radioisotopes is underway,” Abbasi said on the sidelines of a ceremony held in Tehran on Sunday to commemorate Iranian nuclear scientists who have been assassinated by terrorists.

Radioisotope is a radioactive isotope which is used in physical and biological researches and therapeutics.

The radioisotopes which are produced in Iran are mainly used for diagnosis and treatment of various cancers or are used to alleviate cancer-related pains.

Commenting on the next round of talks between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is scheduled to be held on January 16, Abbasi said, “The talks should be held in such a way that our fundamental rights are guaranteed so that we can enjoy our rights in return for our obligations to the agency.”

The latest round of talks between Iran and the UN nuclear agency was held in Tehran on December 13.

On December 14, IAEA Deputy Director General Herman Nackaerts said that progress had been made in the Tehran talks.

The IAEA team leader also said that the next round of talks between Iran and the IAEA was expected to lead to a deal on resuming an investigation into Tehran's nuclear program.

On the negotiations between Iran and the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) over the country's nuclear program, Abbasi said that the sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States are not related to nuclear talks, adding that the sanctions are adopted because Iran is an independent country, but Iran will not relinquish its nuclear rights.

Iran says a new round of talks between Iran and the six major powers will be held in January.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Abbasi said that Iranian security and intelligence forces have uncovered and foiled several plots to assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1785167>

- **Ties with Africa important for Iran: Salehi**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says the expansion of ties with the African continent is important for the Islamic Republic.

“Considering our affinities with this continent, we should place Africa among the priorities of our foreign policy and solemnly take measures in support of this continent,” Salehi said in an address to a gathering of Iranian expatriates in the Ghanaian capital of Accra on Sunday.

The Iranian foreign minister also called for "effective measures" to promote the ties between Iran and the countries in the African continent, in particular Ghana.



Ghana's economic growth heralds a "bright future" for the country, he said.

During his visit to Ghana, Salehi is set to meet with senior Ghanaian officials, hold talks on the expansion of Tehran-Accra relations and discuss the latest regional and international developments.

He will also participate in the inauguration ceremony of President-elect John Dramani Mahama.

Thirteen African heads of state, one prime minister, two vice presidents and 18 government foreign delegations are expected to attend Mahama's swearing-in ceremony at Independence Square in Accra on January 7.

In a meeting with Benin's Foreign Minister Nassirou Bako-Arifari earlier on Sunday, Salehi noted that as the current president of the African Union, Benin can play a significant role in international developments.

Salehi praised the enhanced relations between Tehran and Porto-Novo, and called for the further expansion of cooperation between the two countries.

Bako-Arifari, for his part, lauded Iran's policy toward Africa and Benin in particular and said, "as a regional power" and as the chair of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Iran can promote the level of diplomatic ties between countries.

The two officials also discussed the latest developments in the African continent, including those of Mali and the Central African Republic.

On Saturday, Salehi began his tour of three African countries, namely Benin, Ghana and Burkina Faso, in order to expand the Islamic Republic's relations with these countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/07/282225/ties-with-africa-important-for-iran/>

### 3. SYRIA

- **Excerpts from Assad's speech**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad outlines his plan for peace, blaming "murderous criminals" for country's violence.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has laid out his plan to end the conflict in the country in a speech at the Opera House in Damascus.



Below are some excerpts from Sunday's speech:

'Hope born from pain'

"Today we meet and suffering permeates Syrian land and there is no place for joy in any corner of the country while security and safety are absent from its streets and alleyways."

"We meet today and there are mothers who have lost their finest children and families who have lost their providers, children who have been orphaned and brothers divided among the martyrs, the refugees, and the missing."

"But from the womb of pain hope must be born and from the depth of suffering the most important solutions are produced."

Call to mobilise

"Syria will only exit this calamity by converting this energy into a total national mobilisation to save the country from the clutches of a crisis which has no precedent in this region."

"Every citizen is responsible for doing what he can to offer something no matter how simple in his eyes, for the nation is for everyone and we all must defend it with all that we have."

"Terrorists holding the views of al-Qaeda who call themselves jihadists are the ones running the terrorist operations here and we are fighting them. It is not impossible to destroy them if we have the courage."

'War in every sense of the word'

"Whoever talks solely of a political solution only is turning a blind eye to the facts and he is either ignorant or has been fooled into selling his people and the blood of martyrs for free and we will not allow this."

"We are now in a state of war in every sense of the word. This war targets Syria using a handful of Syrians and many foreigners. Thus, this is a war of defending the nation."

Political initiative

"We will have dialogue with all those who opposed us politically and all who have rejected our positions as long as their positions were not based on trying to destroy our principles and national foundations."

"We will have dialogue with all parties and individuals that did not sell our country to the foreigner. The political solution will be along the following lines:

"The first stage: First of all, regional and foreign countries must stop funding, arming and harbouring militants at the same time that gunmen stop all terrorist operations in order to ease the return of displaced Syrians to their original homes in safety and security."

"Immediately after that, all military operations by our armed forces will stop, though they will reserve the right to respond in the case of attack on the security of the nation or residents or public and private property."

"Second, a mechanism will be created to ensure commitment to all previous agreements for controlling the borders."

"Third, the current government will immediately begin intensive communications with all elements of Syrian society, its parties and organisations...It will hold a national dialogue conference that all forces interested in a solution in Syria can participate in."

"The second stage: First, the current government will hold a comprehensive national dialogue to reach a national pact that commits to the sovereignty of Syria and the unity and peace of its territory and the rejection of intervention in its affairs and the rejection of terrorism and violence in all its forms."

"This pact is what will outline the political future of Syria and will propose a new constitutional and legal system along with its political and economic features. It will agree on new laws for parties, elections and local administration."

"Second, the national pact will be sent for popular referendum."

"Third, an expanded government will be formed, which includes all elements of Syrian society and it will implement the articles of the pact."

"Fourth, the new constitution will be put to popular referendum and after it is confirmed, the expanded government will use the new agreed laws from the pact and the new constitution and will run new parliamentary elections."

"The third stage will be the forming of a new government according to the constitution."

"Second, a truth and reconciliation conference will be held and a general amnesty will be issued for all those arrested because of the events, in keeping with civil law."

"Third will be the work towards rehabilitating infrastructure and rebuilding and compensation to citizens hurt by events."

- **Opposition and world leaders dismiss peace plan outlined by Syrian president, saying his speech offered nothing new.**

The Syrian opposition has rejected President Bashar al-Assad's initiative to end the conflict in the country that he laid out in a speech in Damascus.

Speaking on Sunday, Assad said the first step was for foreign powers to end their support for armed rebels seeking to topple his regime, paving the way for political dialogue.

The opposition and several world leaders have dismissed his speech as offering nothing new.

National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces

"The speech by Bashar Assad confirms his incompetence as a head of state who realises the grave responsibilities he carries during this critical time in Syria's history. Furthermore, it

demonstrates that he is incapable of initiating a political solution that puts forward a resolution for the country's struggle and an exit for his regime with minimum losses because he cannot see himself and his narrow based rule except as remaining in power despite being rejected by his people and his traditional allies.

"Assad repeated the talk about a national unity government, a national dialogue, and a new constitution – which is an acknowledgement of the failure and illegitimacy of the constitution that was passed and prepared under the supervision of his regime- at the same time as his militias commit massacres against the residents across Syria.

"The Syrian Coalition believes the speech of Bashar Assad was a pre-emptive strike against both Arab and international diplomatic solutions equally. Meanwhile, the Coalition reaffirms its commitment to any solution that stops bloodshed and ensures the fulfillment of fundamental principles that have been agreed upon by most revolutionary and opposition forces, most important of which is the removal of Assad and the end of his security forces.

Omar Idlibi, Local Co-ordination Committees spokesman

"The difference, compared to previous speeches, is that al-Assad has admitted for the first time that Syria is not living in peace. But the initiative he has suggested is a crippling blow to Ibrahim, the UN-Arab League envoy to Syria.

"The Syrian regime does not recognise the Syrian opposition coalition. Al-Assad meanwhile, keeps categorising opposition groups into national and foreign-linked opposition. He has also based all his suggestions to resolve the crisis on his incumbent government's structure while directing all efforts to fighting terrorism.

"This is an attempt to legalise the liquidation of whoever opposes the regime, along with their popular civilian grassroots".

US State Department

"Bashar al-Assad's speech today is yet another attempt by the regime to cling to power and does nothing to advance the Syrian people's goal of a political transition. His initiative is detached from reality, undermines the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and would only allow the regime to further perpetuate its bloody oppression of the Syrian people.

"For nearly two years, the Asad regime has brutalised its own people. Even today, as Assad speaks of dialogue, the regime is deliberately stoking sectarian tensions and continuing to kill its own people by attacking Sunni towns and villages in the mixed areas of Jabal Akrad and Jabal Turkmen in Lattakia province.

"Assad has lost all legitimacy and must step aside to enable a political solution and a democratic transition that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. The United States continues to support the Geneva Action Group's framework for a political solution, which was endorsed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the Arab League, and the UN General Assembly. We will continue our efforts in support of Joint Special Representative Brahimi to build international unity behind it and to urge all parties in Syria to take meaningful steps toward its implementation."

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu

"His remarks are just repetitions of what he's said all along. They are the same promises he made to us.

"As Assad no longer has the representative authority over the Syrian people, his words have lost persuasiveness ... A transition period needs to be completed swiftly through talks with representatives of the Syrian nation."

EU Foreign Affairs Chief Catherine Ashton (via a spokesman)

"We will look carefully if there is anything new in the speech but we maintain our position that Assad has to step aside and allow for a political transition."

British Foreign Secretary William Hague

"#AssadSpeech beyond hypocritical. Deaths, violence and oppression engulfing Syria are his own making, empty promises of reform fool no one."

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle

"Unfortunately the Assad speech contains no new insights.

"Instead of martial tones again, he should finally free the way up for a transition government and a political new start in Syria."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201316155134706233.html>

- **Iran supports Syrian president's plan to resolve crisis**

The Iranian foreign minister has expressed Tehran's support for the plan proposed by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to resolve the crisis in Syria.



"In line with its fundamental stance with regards to resolving the Syrian crisis in a political manner, Iran supports Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's initiative in proposing a comprehensive plan to defuse the crisis in this country," Ali Akbar Salehi said on Sunday.

Salehi also hailed the Syrian president's emphasis on Damascus' continued support for Palestine and resistance against Israel.

In a key speech on Sunday, Assad said his government is always ready to hold talks with the opposition and political parties and would call for a “comprehensive national dialog” in the near future.

The Syrian president added that the country’s constitution would be put to referendum and a general amnesty would be announced. He also warned against an “agenda to partition Syria.”

Salehi said implementing the plan could pave the way for building a stable and bright future for the Syrian people and the region.

He also called on all Syrian parties and opposition groups as well as regional and international parties to use this opportunity and make efforts to resolve the current crisis and provide grounds for the realization of a Syrian-Syrian resolution in order to prevent instability and crisis from spreading in the region.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since mid-March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of security personnel, have been killed in the violence.

The Syrian government says the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants fighting the Syrian government are foreign nationals.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/07/282219/iran-backs-syrian-presidents-plan-salehi/>

- **Syrian opposition rejects Assad's peace plan**

Initiative dismissed as "empty rhetoric" as the president refuses to talk to those he calls "criminals and extremists".

Syrian opposition groups have rejected a new peace initiative by President Bashar al-Assad that includes a national reconciliation conference and a new government and constitution.

The president was speaking on Sunday in a rare address to the nation, his first since June, demanded that Western countries stop funding and arming rebels and said he is ready to hold a dialogue with those "who have not betrayed Syria".

He spoke in a hall at the Opera House in central Damascus, and the audience frequently broke out in cheers and applause.

The Syrian opposition, including rebels on the ground, were quick to reject Assad's proposal.

Louay Safi, a member of the Syrian National Coalition opposition bloc, dismissed the address to the nation as "empty rhetoric".

"He did not offer to step down, which was a precondition to start any negotiation," Safi told Al Jazeera.

"He has shown that he is a dictator that we cannot negotiate with. I think he has no desire to relinquish power. He wants to crush the opposition and he hopes he can stay over for the next 40 years like his father did."

Opposition leaders have repeatedly said they will accept nothing less than the president's departure, dismissing any kind of settlement that leaves Assad in the picture.

"There's not a single opposition leader who can go public and say 'we will negotiate and compromise with Assad in power', a senior commander of the Free Syrian Army told Al Jazeera.

Assad said his nation is in a "state of war".

"We are fighting an external aggression that is more dangerous than any others, because they use us to kill each other," he said.

Assad stressed the presence of religious extremists and jihadi elements among those fighting in Syria, calling them "terrorists" and "servants who know nothing but the language of slaughter".

"We have terrorists who follow the ideology of al-Qaeda. We brothers fight against these people. Most of them are not Syrian ... We will teach them a lesson," Assad said.

Assad spoke before a collage of pictures of what appeared to be Syrians who have been killed since March 2011.

The internet was cut in many parts of Damascus before the address, apparently for security reasons.

As in previous speeches, Assad denied that there was a popular uprising against his family's decades-long rule.

"Is this a revolution and are these revolutionaries? By God I say they are a bunch of criminals," he said.

He said Syria will not take dictates from anyone but urged Syrians to unite to save the country.

"Every citizen is responsible for doing what he can to offer something, no matter how simple in his eyes, for the nation is for everyone and we all must defend it with all that we have," he said.

"The first part of a political solution would require regional powers to stop funding and arming [the rebels], an end to terrorism and controlling the borders," he said.

He said this would then be followed by dialogue and a national reconciliation conference and the formation of a wide representative government which would then oversee new elections, a new constitution and general amnesty.

'Detached from reality'

Assad's foreign foes were scornful and dismissive of the speech. "His remarks are just repetitions of what he's said all along," said Ahmet Davutoglu, foreign minister of Syria's northern neighbour and former friend Turkey.

"It seems he's locked himself up in a room and only reads the intelligence reports presented to him."

The US state department said Assad's speech "is yet another attempt by the regime to cling to power and does nothing to advance the Syrian people's goal of a political transition".

"His initiative is detached from reality, undermines the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and would only allow the regime to further perpetuate its bloody oppression of the Syrian people," Victoria Nuland, the state department spokesperson, said.

Catherine Ashton, EU foreign affairs chief, said Brussels would "look carefully if there is anything new in the speech, but we maintain our position that Assad has to step aside and allow for a political transition".

Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra, reporting from Antakya, in neighbouring Turkey, said the speech was "a recipe for further stalemate over the issue of Syria, unless the international community decides to do anything about it.

"But it seems the international community is not really in favour of a decisive victory of the opposition, because they're worried about the potential of the rebels unleashing sectarian revenge killings," he said.

"At the same time, they don't think Assad should stay in power by clamping down on the opposition. They're thinking of different alternatives."

The 21-month uprising against Assad has become a civil war that the UN says has killed 60,000 people.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013161004953919.html>

#### 4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **No results from meeting of Center-Left leaders**

Tzipi Livni Party head Tzipi Livni said Monday morning that she failed to reach an agreement with Labor and Yesh Atid over forming an opposition bloc against an "extreme" Netanyahu-led government.

In a joint statement issued following the meeting, the parties said the meeting took place in a "good atmosphere" and that they would meet again should the need arise.

The three met to discuss the potential formation of a Center-Left coalition to challenge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the upcoming elections.

Speaking to Army Radio, Livni said "We did not do what we need to do - release a joint statement saying we will work together and ensure there will either be a national-unity government on the basis of what we believe in or an extremist government that we and the public do not want."

At the meeting, Livni also admitted - for the first time - that she would "manage" if Yachimovich formed a government, not herself. According to Israel Radio, Livni told Yacimovich that it is in her

interest to forces, because Labor is the largest party bloc - and "most likely to form a government."

Labor party head Shelly Yacimovich reiterated her call for Livni and Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid to publicly announce that they would not join a Netanyahu-led government. "For the public to know there are intentions to give Netanyahu a real fight, we all have to rule out joining his government."

However, Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar told Israel Radio on Monday that although the leaders did not reach an agreement to form an opposition bloc, it was decided that the party leaders would meet with Meretz and representatives of the Arab parties to request the new Prime Minister to recognize them as one bloc.

Livni called for Yacimovich and Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid to form a "united front" toward victory over the Likud-Yisrael Beytenu joint list, speaking to Channel 2 News last Friday, two days after Yacimovich put herself at the fore of the Center-Left bloc by saying she would rather be opposition leader than join a Netanyahu coalition.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=298665>

- **Jailed Barghouti calls for Palestinian 'spring'**

Fatah leader calls for popular protests in West Bank, Gaza to force Fatah and Hamas to end dispute, achieve Palestinian unity.

Jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti on Sunday called for a Palestinian "spring" to force Fatah and Hamas to end their dispute and achieve unity.



He also expressed opposition to disbanding the Palestinian Authority and called for a comprehensive review of its performance and duties.

Barghouti, who is serving five life terms in Israeli prison for his role in terror attacks against Israel during the second intifada, called on Palestinians to launch widespread protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to force Hamas and Fatah to end their dispute.

His remarks were published by his lawyer and supporters on the 48th anniversary of the launching of Fatah's first armed attack on Israel.

This was the first time that Barghouti had called for a Palestinian uprising against Fatah and Hamas. "I call on the Palestinian people and youth to take the initiative to impose unity," Barghouti said.

"I call on them to take to the streets in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the diaspora and protest in front of the offices of the Palestinian factions and leaderships until the end of the division."

Barghouti said that Palestinians should not wait for Egypt or any other country to achieve reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. "We need reconciliation now and without delay," he stressed.

Barghouti, who was arrested in Ramallah by the IDF in 2002, said that although the recent UN General Assembly vote in favor of upgrading the Palestinians' status to non-member observer state was a step forward, the only way to establish a Palestinian state is through actions on the ground and not in New York.

"What is needed now is a battle on the ground to end the occupation and solidify the Palestinian state," he said. "A Palestinian state on the ground can be achieved only through the effort, resistance and sacrifices of the Palestinians and not by going to New York."

Barghouti said that the PA leadership should now seek membership in various UN agencies and demand sanctions and boycotts against Israel.

Criticizing the performance of the PA, Barghouti urged the PLO to define its duties "in a way that serves the Palestinian independence project." Palestinians are completely opposed to turning the PA into a security guard for Israel and settlements, he noted.

Barghouti also criticized the PA for creating the false impression that it is engaged in building a Palestinian economy and development projects while Palestinians were still under "occupation."

"What we need is not the dismantlement of the Palestinian Authority," Barghouti said, referring to PA President Mahmoud Abbas's recurring threats to disband the PA. "Rather, what we need is a full review of its missions and performance."

The PA does not have sovereignty over one meter of the land, Barghouti claimed. "Israel is doing whatever it wants - occupations and settlements," he said. "Every night Israel arrests people and enters all parts of the West Bank."

Barghouti further criticized the PA leadership for continuing to believe in the peace process with Israel. "The peace negotiations have completely failed," he said. "Those who continue to believe in negotiations are losers and misleading their people. The negotiations have only led to illusions and more settlements and Judaization [of Jerusalem]. The next Israeli government will be more extremist than the current one."

Barghouti criticized his Fatah faction for failing to hold internal elections and reforms. He pointed out that the last municipal elections in the West Bank showed that Fatah was still weak and confused.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=298610>

- **Official: PLO seeking return of refugees to Damascus camp**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- PLO leaders, the Free Syria Army and Syrian regime forces are in ongoing talks to finalize an agreement to allow Palestinian refugees who fled fighting in a Damascus camp to return, a PLO official said.



Anwar Abdul-Hadi, a senior PLO official in Damascus, told Ma'an late Sunday that the deal had been delayed because of several demands by the Free Syria Army.

Initial reports of a deal to end violence in Yarmouk camp and allow refugees to return were released earlier on Sunday by sources in Syria.

Abdul Hadi said that PLO representatives responsible for holding talks had rushed into announcing an agreement had been reached without having secured guarantees that Palestinian refugees could return to the camp.

PLO representatives have put forward three major demands in the negotiations. All armed groups, including Palestinian gunmen, must withdraw from the camp, food and fuel must be allowed in for residents, and the neutrality of the camp must be respected by all sides, Abdul Hadi said.

The PLO will not call for refugees to return to Yarmouk while gunmen still operate inside the camp, he added.

Six Palestinians were killed in Syria on Saturday, including a five-year-old girl in Sbeineh refugee camp, sources said Sunday. Yarmouk has been under total blockade by the Syrian army for four days, preventing the entry of fuel, food and medical supplies, they added.

In December, heavy fighting broke out in Yarmouk between Syrian rebels and the army, causing Palestinians to flee.

Syria hosts half a million Palestinian refugees, descendants of those admitted after the creation of Israel in 1948.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=554058>

- **Israel's PM plans to build Syria-Golan fence**

Binyamin Netanyahu pledges to erect 70km barrier along eastern edge of occupied Golan Heights to stop "jihad" fighters.

Israel's prime minister has pledged to build a fortified fence along the frontier with Syria, warning that hardline Islamist forces have taken over the area.



Binyamin Netanyahu spoke at a weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad delivered a rare nationwide address in Syria, calling for a national reconciliation conference.

Assad claimed that "terrorists who carry the ideology of al-Qaeda" were active in his country and demanded that foreign countries stop arming the rebels.

Netanyahu said the Syrian regime was "unstable", and Israel was concerned about the country's chemical weapons capabilities.

He said Israel needed a barrier on its frontier with Syria, similar to a structure it has almost completed along its border with Egypt - which has nearly stopped the flow of African migrants.

'Identical fence'

Israel has largely stayed out of the civil war that has engulfed Syria and left more than 60,000 people dead according to the UN, but it is concerned that violence could spill over.

Israel worries that Assad might try to draw it into the fighting as a distraction if his situation becomes desperate.

An even greater concern for Israel is a scenario in which Assad is toppled, Islamists take his place and gain control of Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons.

"We intend to erect an identical fence, with a few changes based on the actual territory, along the Golan Heights," Netanyahu said.

"We know that on the other side of our border with Syria today, the Syrian army has moved away, and in its place, global jihad forces have moved in."

"Global jihad" is the term Israel uses for forces influenced by al-Qaeda, and Syria's rebels include some al-Qaeda-allied groups.

"We are co-ordinating our intelligence and readiness with the United States and others so that we might be prepared for any scenario and possibility that could arise," Netanyahu said.

His office did not say how long it would take to complete the project.

Golan Heights tensions

Israel captured the Golan Heights in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed the strategic plateau, a move not recognised by the international community.

Despite constant hostility between the two countries, Syria has kept the border mostly quiet since a second war in 1973.

Israel has grown jittery since pro-Palestinian activists breached the frontier during two demonstrations in 2011. Following that unrest, Israel began laying mines along the frontier and reinforcing the fence that already exists.

Defence officials say they have already fortified 10km out of the planned 70km route it plans along the edge of the occupied Golan Heights.

Since the uprising against Assad began in March 2011, several mortar rounds and other light munitions have landed on the Israeli side of the frontier.

Israel suspects these were cases of stray fire and were not intended to spark a new front, but Israel fired warning shots back to deter further incidents.

Israel has almost completed a barrier along 200km of its border with Egypt to block African migrants and fighters from crossing in from the lawless Sinai Peninsula.

Israel previously constructed a separation barrier along, and in, the West Bank.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/20131615255472448.html>

## 5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **A year of tumultuous times for all branches of state**

The year 2012 was supposed to witness Egypt's transition from the revolutionary state back to the stability of elected bodies and sovereign institutions.



However, the transition turned out to be longer and more complicated than expected, and the final outcome of the year was an elected president, a dismantled Parliament and a constitution that a considerable number of political players are unhappy with.

Egypt Independent lays this tumultuous process in chronological order within each branch of government.

Executive power

10 March: The nomination process for presidential elections opens. From that day until the final list of candidates was announced in May, candidates dropped in and out of the presidential race due to legal complications.

8 April: As doubts surface regarding the eligibility of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Khairat al-Shater, the Brotherhood decides to field a back up candidate, Mohamed Morsy, in the last day of nomination.

15 April: The elections committee disqualifies 10 candidates who were found illegible, including Shater, former spy chief Omar Suleiman and Salafi preacher Hazem Salah Abu Ismail.

24 April: The ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces ratifies the political isolation law issued by Parliament, which temporarily suspends the political rights of Hosni Mubarak's regime men. As a result, the elections committee disqualifies Mubarak's last prime minister, Ahmed Shafiq.

25 April: The committee accepts Shafiq's appeal, reinstates him in the race and refers the political isolation law to the Supreme Constitutional Court.

8 May: An administrative court rules that referring the law to the Supreme Constitutional Court is outside the jurisdiction of the committee. This raises speculations that Shafiq would be disqualified.

12 May: The Supreme Administrative Court ruled in favor of the elections committee in its appeal against the ruling denying it the right to refer the law to the SCC.

23 May: The polls open for the first round of the presidential election.

28 May: The most debated candidate, Shafiq, and the last to join the race, Mohamed Morsy, move on to the runoff.

14 June: Two days before the runoffs, the legitimacy of Shafiq's candidacy is finally confirmed, when the SCC rules against the political isolation law.

17 June: The final round of elections concludes, followed by a week of confusion in which both candidates announce and celebrate their victory, warning of election fraud in favor of the other candidate.

24 June: The elections committee announces Morsy's victory with 51.7 percent of the vote and the executive power is transferred from the SCAF to Egypt's first post-revolution elected president.

Legislative authority

23 January: The first post-revolution Parliament is inducted and takes over the legislative authority, which the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces had held since the dissolution of both houses of Parliament in February 2011. But before relinquishing legislative power, the SCAF controversially issued three laws in the period between the election of the Parliament and its induction.

28 February: The Shura Council is inducted. One-third of the council that is supposed to be appointed by the president remains vacant due to the absence of a president.

14 June: The Supreme Constitutional Court dismantles the People's Assembly on the grounds that the elections law distributing the seats into one-third for individual winners and two-thirds for party lists is unconstitutional. The law was issued by the SCAF in December after political parties objected to an earlier law issued in June 2011 distributing the seats in half between lists and individuals.

18 June: The SCAF issues a constitutional declaration assigning legislative authority back to itself.

8 July: President Mohamed Morsy attempts to reverse the dissolution of Parliament, inviting the outgoing assembly to reconvene and calling for early parliamentary elections.

10 July: Considering the president's decision an infringement on its sovereignty, the SCC orders a halt on the president's decision to restore Parliament, warning that not respecting its rulings is punishable by law.

12 July: As a result of the judiciary's outrage, Morsy withdraws his decision to return Parliament.

11 August: Unable to revive the Parliament, Morsy issues a constitutional declaration giving himself legislative power.

21 December: Morsy appoints the missing third in the Shura Council. The appointments were criticized for including a large number of Muslim Brotherhood members and military figures.

26 December: Following the passing of the constitution, Morsy gives the legislative power to the Shura Council, elected in February with a participation rate of less than 8 percent.

### The judiciary

11 October: President Mohamed Morsy appoints Prosecutor General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud as ambassador of the Vatican in an attempt to remove him from his position, which has immunity from the executive authority. However, Mahmoud denies having accepted the new position and announces that he will stay in his position as prosecutor general.

13 October: Morsy retracts his decision to remove Mahmoud, following a meeting with the Supreme Judicial Council that was mediated by the latter and then-vice President Mahmoud Mekky.

22 November: Morsy issues a constitutional declaration that includes removing Mahmoud and appointing Talaat Abdallah in his place as prosecutor general, in addition to giving his decisions immunity from judicial oversight and to the Shura Council and the Constituent Assembly from dissolution by court, although the Supreme Constitutional Court was viewing cases against them at the time.

24 November: Following an emergency General Assembly meeting at the Judges Club and a majority vote, the head of the club, Ahmed al-Zend, announces the suspension of courts and prosecution, and a judicial boycott of the constitutional referendum in response to Morsy's declaration. Many courts across the country respond to the decision, and media reports would signal that 90 percent of judges boycotted the referendum that took place on 15 and 22 December.

2 December: Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups surround the SCC and start a sit-in on the day the court is scheduled to rule in cases calling for the dissolution of the Shura Council and the Constituent Assembly. The court subsequently decides to suspend its work until the sit-in ends.

12 December: The new prosecutor general, Talaat Abdallah, transfers Mostafa Khater, the general prosecutor for East Cairo, to Beni Soueif for six months, after the latter released all those arrested in the clashes between Morsy's opponents and supporters that took place on 5 December by the presidential palace and caused 510 deaths. Khater found no evidence to keep the 137 suspects in custody and only kept 12 pending investigations. Morsy announced in a televised address that the suspects had confessed to being paid to create chaos. In response to the decision, thousands of the Public Prosecution members protested in front of the prosecutor general's office.

13 December: Abdallah retracts his decision to transfer Khater and announces that he will leave office on 23 December after having submitted his resignation to the Supreme Judicial Council, which transferred it to the Justice Ministry.

14 December: In a statement to foreign media from the office of Essam al-Haddad, the president's aide for foreign affairs, Haddad describes the SCC as a counter-revolutionary power, calling its ruling to dissolve the People's Assembly in June "suspicious."

17 December: The SCC responds to the accusation with a statement accusing Haddad of damaging its reputation.

22 December: The prosecutor general retracts his resignation and says he had submitted it under pressure.

23 December: Thousands of the Public Prosecution members protest Abdallah's decision to remain in his post, and announce a sit-in. That night, unknown assailants attack Zend with rocks and birdshot as he exits a Judges Club meeting over Abdallah's decision.

26 December: The Supreme Judicial Council, Zed and heads of Judges Club branches in governorates meet with Abdallah and urge him to relinquish his post. That morning, following the passing of the constitution, Brotherhood members end their sit-in at the SCC allowing it to resume its work. The court's general assembly sent a recommendation to Morsy to reinstate its members who were excluded after the new Constitution passed, lowering the number of its members from 18 to 11.

29 December: The president accepts the recommendation of the SCC.

30 December: The SCC announces 15 January as the ruling session in the cases against the Shura Council and the Constituent Assembly after the constitutional declaration that protected them fell with the passing of the constitution.

31 December: Zed's meeting with the Supreme Judicial Council regarding the prosecutor general fails as Abdallah's office announced that his resignation was not considered an option.

The constitution

24 March: Both houses of Parliament convene and elect the 100 members of the Constituent Assembly, dominated by Islamists.

10 April: The Supreme Constitutional Court rules to dissolve the Constituent Assembly, deeming it unrepresentative.

13 June: Only one day before the SCC rules to dissolve the People's Assembly, both houses of Parliament elect a new Constituent Assembly, also dominated by Islamists, like the first one.

18 June: Following the dissolution of Parliament and only days before the election of a president, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces issues a complementary constitutional declaration, expanding its powers. Among other powers, the declaration returned the legislative authority to

the SCAF. It also gave the SCAF the right to form a new Constituent Assembly in case the current one fails and gave it, the president, the prime minister and the Supreme Judicial Council the right to veto articles in the draft constitution.

The declaration completed the one issued by the SCAF in March 2011, which was the constitutional reference since the suspension of the 1971 Constitution in February 2011.

11 August: Following his election, President Mohamed Morsy issues a declaration canceling the SCAF's June declaration, and reserving the legislative authority and the right to form a new constituent assembly for himself.

He also retires the head of the SCAF, Hussein Tantawi, and Chief of Staff Sami Anan, excluding them from the political scene, which they had dominated for two years.

23 October: After repeatedly postponing several cases against the Constituent Assembly, the administrative court refers the cases to the SCC.

16 November: Church representatives withdraw from the Constituent Assembly in objection to the draft constitution.

18 November: Most liberal representatives withdraw from the Constituent Assembly, also announcing their disapproval of the final draft.

21 November: Morsy issues a new declaration giving his decisions, the Shura Council and the Constituent Assembly immunity from the judiciary, and giving himself the right to take any action necessary to protect the revolution, national unity and national security.

1 December: After a two-day marathon by the remaining members of the Constituent Assembly to finish the draft constitution, the assembly hands it over to the president. Hours later, the president calls for a referendum on the constitution on 15 December.

2 December: The SCC is forced to cancel a session in which it was scheduled to rule on the cases against the Constituent Assembly, due to protests by the Islamist supporters of the draft constitution outside the court.

8 December: Following outrage from the judiciary, opposition and the public over Morsy's November declaration, he issues another one to replace it, removing the most controversial clauses but stating that their effects are not to be reversed.

25 December: The elections committee announces that the constitution passed the referendum with 63.8 percent of the vote, officially becoming Egypt's first post-revolution Constitution.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/year-tumultuous-times-all-branches-state>

- **Prime minister: Egyptian expat remittances increase by 40 percent**

Remittances from Egyptians living abroad have increased by 40 percent, Prime Minister Hesham Qandil said in a press conference Sunday.

Qandil also said the government's priority is to improve public services for all citizens, not just for a particular party or faction.



"If there is one lesson we have learned, it is that political dispute should not influence the economy," he said.

In response to a question about the government's programs that need several years to implement, even though the Cabinet's members are expected to change after the next

parliamentary elections, Qandil said the government is aware of that and will do what it can as fast as it can.

Qandil also said the economic reform program must be activated immediately to address the fiscal deficit, and spending must be rationalized, resources increased and investment maximized.

“But we will keep social justice in mind,” he said, adding that the poor remained poor for a long time because they did not benefit from subsidies of education, health or infrastructure.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/prime-minister-egyptian-expat-remittances-increase-40-percent>

- **Brotherhood figure to leave presidential advisory board**

Shura Council majority leader Essam al-Erian agreed with the presidential office Sunday to leave the president’s advisory board.

He will now head the Freedom and Justice Party’s parliamentary bloc in the upper house of Parliament, and this position would constitute a conflict of interest, according to the new Constitution, he said.

“I cannot have a job with legislative branch and another with the executive branch,” he wrote on Facebook, wishing President Mohamed Morsy success.

Erian joined the presidential advisory team shortly after Morsy’s election.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-figure-leave-presidential-advisory-board>

- **Egypt swears in new cabinet ministers**

Finance portfolio and interior ministry, which controls police, change hands as part of measures to salvage economy.

Egypt's government has sworn in 10 new ministers in a reshuffle of the cabinet aimed at mapping out ways of handling the country's struggling economy.



The key posts that changed hands on Sunday were the ministers of finance and interior, which handles the police.

El Morsi Sayed Hegazy replaced Mumtaz al-Said in the finance ministry while General Mohammed Ibrahim took over from Ahmed Gamal Eddin as interior minister.

The shake-up comes as a delegation of International Monetary Fund officials prepares to meet Egyptian authorities on Monday to discuss a \$4.8bn loan and painful economic restructuring.

President Mohamed Morsi met the new ministers after their swearing-in and discussed ways to revive tourism and attract foreign investors.

Al Jazeera's Rawya Rageh, reporting from Cairo, said the reshuffle was not a surprise as Morsi and Prime Minister Hisham Qandil had been talking about it for some time.

The surprise, she said, was the sacking of Gamal Eddin as interior minister.

But our correspondent said the minister had been blamed for failing to bring the security situation in the country under control.

Brotherhood members

The new finance minister is an expert on Islamic finance and is seen as sympathetic to the aims and thinking of Morsi, elected in June, and to his Muslim Brotherhood. A Brotherhood spokesman denied Hegazy was a member.

But three of the other new ministers are from the Brotherhood, according to the spokesman for the group's Freedom and Justice Party, Ahmed Subaie. They take over the ministries of transportation, local development and supply and interior trade, giving the Brotherhood a total of eight cabinet posts out of 37.

The IMF said it was sending its Middle East and Central Asia director, Masood Ahmed, to discuss the postponed loan agreement and "possible IMF support for Egypt".

Loan talks were delayed last month at Cairo's behest because of unrest in which 11 people died and hundreds were injured in anti-Morsi protests.

A spokesman for the main opposition bloc, the National Salvation Front, said the group was still studying the new appointments and would give its reaction to the moves later.

Egypt's opposition youth group, April Six, said in a statement that the changes were not enough and "will not solve [Egypt's problems]".

Most opposition groups had asked for the whole cabinet to be sacked and replaced by one that would include more technocrats representing all political parties.

Morsi said last month the aim of the reshuffle would be to tackle the country's troubled economy with its rising budget deficit and falling national currency, the Egyptian pound.

Two ministers have already stepped down since late December, in a sign of divisions within the ranks of Qandil's cabinet. Mohammed Mahsoub, the legal and parliamentary affairs minister, quit on December 27, two days after communications minister Hany Mahmud.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201315232025886971.html>

## 6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Arabs to meet over Lebanon's Syrian refugees**

BEIRUT: Arab foreign ministers will hold an emergency meeting in Cairo next to week to address the growing number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the country's National News Agency said Sunday.

"[Lebanon's Foreign Minister Adnan] Mansour was informed Sunday that the Arab league has agreed to hold a meeting on the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon," the state-run news agency said.

The meeting, which will take place on Jan. 13, will address possible assistance to Lebanon by members of the Arab League, the NNA said.

According to the agency, Mansour said he would present in a couple of days a comprehensive report on the situation of the refugees in the country and their needs.

As part of a comprehensive plan to assist the refugees, Cabinet agreed Thursday to urge the Arab League and international organizations to hold extraordinary meetings to highlight the situation of the refugees.

Mansour requested the Arab League meeting earlier this week.

Lebanon's government has repeatedly voiced the difficulties it faces in assisting those displaced by the violence in neighboring Syria.

According to the latest report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the case of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the total number of displaced who have registered with the agency stands at over 180,000.

The number of refugees entering Lebanon from Syria continues to increase.

Last week, more than 5,000 Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees, the agency said Friday, bringing the total number of refugees receiving protection and assistance from the Lebanese government, NGOs and the UNHCR to over 180,100.

The majority, over 67,000, are registered in the north. Most are coming from the Syrian provinces of Aleppo, Homs, Idlib and Damascus.

Last week, 1,650 Syrian refugee children enrolled in Lebanese public schools, bringing the total number to 10,000 throughout the country.

This, says UNHCR, has been one of the biggest challenges of 2012.

Adequate shelter also remains one of the biggest challenges facing Syrian refugees.

So far, they have been living in rented units, with host families or shelters. But the need for more accommodation is needed to cope with the growing influx, the UNHCR said.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jan-06/201124-arabs-to-meet-over-lebanons-syrian-refugees.ashx#ixzz2HHMZw3Qa>

- **Islamic Jihad, Lebanon's General Security discuss refugees**

BEIRUT: An official with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad held talks over the weekend with the head of Lebanon's General Security on the situation of Palestinian refugees in the country.

Both Abu Imad Rifai, the Islamic Jihad representative, and Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim stressed on the need to preserve security inside Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and "keep them away from disputes in the country and the region."

According to an Islamic Jihad statement, the discussions between the two also focused on the issue of Palestinian refugees coming from Syria to Lebanon and ways of providing them with assistance as well as settling their temporary legal stay in the country.

"The meeting stressed on making their [Palestinians refugees] stay in Lebanon easier and secure their needs until the situation is convenient for them to [return] to the camps in Syria," the statement said.

The crisis in Syria has forced some 13,000 Palestinians to flee to Lebanon.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jan-06/201073-islamic-jihad-lebanons-general-security-discuss-refugees.ashx#ixzz2HHMk5XzK>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Kuwaiti gets two years for insulting emir on Twitter**

KUWAIT — A Kuwaiti court sentenced a man to two years in prison for insulting the country's ruler on Twitter, a lawyer following the case said, as the Gulf Arab state cracks down on criticism of the authorities on social media.

According to the verdict Sunday, published by online newspaper Alaan, a tweet written by Rashid Saleh al-Anzi in October "stabbed the rights and powers of the Emir" Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah.

Anzi, who has 5,700 Twitter followers, was expected to appeal, the lawyer, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

Kuwait, a US ally and major oil producer, has been taking a firmer line on politically sensitive comments aired on the Internet.

In June 2012, a man was sentenced to 10 years in prison after he was convicted of endangering state security by insulting the Prophet Mohamed and the Sunni Muslim rulers of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain on social media.

Two months later, authorities detained Sheikh Meshaal al-Malik al-Sabah, a member of the ruling family, over remarks on Twitter in which he accused authorities of corruption and called for political reform, a rights activist said.

While public demonstrations about local issues are common in a state that allows the most dissent in the Gulf, Kuwait has avoided Arab Spring-style mass unrest that toppled three veteran Arab dictators last year.

But tensions have intensified between the hand-picked government, in which ruling family members hold the top posts, and the elected parliament and opposition groups.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/kuwaiti-gets-two-years-insulting-emir-twitter>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Karzai hails close ties with Iran**

TEHRAN, Jan. 7 (MNA) – President Hamid Karzai has said that the relations between Afghanistan and Iran have been greatly strengthened in recent years.

He made the remarks during a meeting with Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Saeed Jalili in Kabul on Saturday.

Karzai also hailed the close cultural and historical ties between the two neighboring countries.

Jalili reiterated Tehran’s position that Iran is ready to help develop Afghanistan in various areas.

“The good and stable relationship between the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is based on deep and historical friendships,” Jalili stated.

Jalili arrived in Kabul on Saturday after making a three-day visit to India. The visit, which came at the invitation of the Afghan government, was arranged to discuss ways to further expand ties between the two countries.

Afghanistan seeking Iranian investment

Jalili also met with Afghan National Security Advisor Rangin Dadfar Spanta in Kabul late on Saturday. The Afghan official asked Jalili to encourage Iranians to make investments in Afghanistan.

The two security officials also discussed a number of security, economic and border issues.

Jalili called for further expansion of economic and cultural ties between the two nations.

The Iranian official also said the current stability in Afghanistan is “unique” in its recent history and “this status must be strengthened.” Jalili added that Iran is ready to assist Afghanistan in this regard.

Spanta highlighted the importance of implementing transit projects including railway system between the countries which in effect will help promote peace and stability in the region.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1785258>

- **Jalili: Iran, Afghanistan should not let West negatively influence ties**

The Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Saeed Jalili says Iran and Afghanistan should not allow the West to negatively influence their friendly ties.



Jalili made the remark during a meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul in Kabul on Sunday.

Jalili also stressed the expansion of ties between the two countries.

Zalmay, for his part, said Afghanistan is positive about the future relations between the two sides.

Jalili met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul on Saturday.

During the meeting, he pointed out that the strong ties between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan are based on deep and historical friendship between the two nations.

The Afghan president noted that Tehran-Kabul ties have been bolstered in recent years due to the two nations' demand and the efforts made by the two countries' governments.

Jalili arrived in Kabul on January 4 after wrapping up a three-day-long visit to India where he held talks with his Indian counterpart, Shivshankar Menon.

His visit to Kabul took place upon an invitation by the Afghan government to discuss ways to further expand ties between the two neighboring countries.

Iran has been playing a helping role in Afghanistan. The Islamic Republic has so far spent over 600 million dollars to build hospitals, schools, bridges, roads, and railways in the country.

The Iranian government has on various occasions expressed concerns over the US double-standard policies regarding the so-called war on terror in Afghanistan.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/07/282177/jalili-sets-store-by-afghan-ties/>

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Sercan DOĞAN**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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