



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **AP Interview: UN envoy says Iraq must hear Sunnis (AP)**

February 11, 2013

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's Shiite-led government should do more to address complaints by the country's disaffected Sunni minority about human rights violations and lack of due process, the U.N. envoy to the country said in an interview Monday.

Sunnis have staged mass rallies in recent weeks to protest what they see as unfair treatment of their sect by the government of Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite accused by critics of monopolizing power.

The protests, along with a recent spike in lethal attacks by suspected Sunni insurgents, have revived fears that sectarianism could one day tear apart Iraq's fragile national fabric. The country is home to a Shiite majority and sizeable Sunni and Kurdish minorities.

Late Monday, a suicide attacker detonated an explosives-laden truck at the gate of a military base in the northern city of Mosul, killing four soldiers and wounding seven, a

police officer and a health official said. Both spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to release information.

Sunni protesters, meanwhile, say they are being targeted unfairly by the government and that vague anti-terrorism laws are being used to detain Sunnis arbitrarily. They have called for a release of prisoners, an investigation of alleged human rights abuses in prisons and ending the practice of holding wives of terror suspects.

The government has formed a committee to consider the demands, and has released about 3,000 detainees. However, thousands held on terrorism-related charges remain in detention, and there has been no sign of progress on changing legislation and policy.

Martin Kobler, the U.N. envoy to Iraq, said that while he believes the head of the committee, Deputy Prime Minister Hussain al-Shahristani, is taking the Sunni concerns seriously, "there is more the government could do" to deal with the protesters' demands.

"We have the impression that a lot of the problems (raised by the demonstrators) are rule of law, human rights problems, the situation in detention centers. And these are all problems the government can solve tomorrow," Kobler told The Associated Press.

The envoy said that while the U.N. does not deal with Sunni political demands, protesters' complaints about human rights violations are of concern.

"Every torture case in a prison is one torture case too many, and those who do it have to be brought to justice," he said, speaking at a U.N. compound in Baghdad's Green Zone, the vast, heavily fortified seat of the Iraqi government.

"This does not change overnight, but this is something we always make very clear, and we are in contact with the Iraqi authorities to bring about an improvement of these human rights demands of the demonstrators," Kobler added.

The spokesmen for the prime minister and deputy prime minister were not available for comment.

The U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Robert Stephen Beecroft, said it would be dangerous to let the problem fester — a warning that seemed largely directed at al-Maliki.

"It's in everybody's interest to engage and try to resolve it now," Beecroft said in an interview broadcast by Iraqi TV station al-Sumaria late Sunday.

"Waiting ... is a risky strategy ... and sometimes things do fizzle out. But often times they get worse," he said, urging both sides to come up with "bold solutions to this, not tentative steps."

Kobler, meanwhile, appealed to the international community to speed up efforts to resettle Iranian exiles who have been living at a former U.S. army base on the outskirts of Baghdad.

On Saturday, assailants fired rockets and mortars at what was once known as Camp Liberty, killing six of the exiles and wounding around 40.

The camp houses about 3,100 members of Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, the militant wing of

a Paris-based Iranian opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. Iraq's pro-Iranian government considers MEK a terrorist group and wants it out of the country.

The refugee camp is meant to be a temporary way station while the United Nations works to find host countries for the refugees. They are unlikely to return to Iran because of their opposition to the regime.

Kobler said the lethal attack "is a serious reminder now to increase the pressure on resettlement countries to offer them resettlement opportunities."

He said he expects Germany and other European countries to offer refuge to some of the exiles in coming months.

Associated Press writer Sinan Salaheddin in Baghdad contributed reporting.

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ap-interview-un-envoy-says-iraq-must-hear-sunnis>

- **Iranian Embassy condemns attacking Camp Liberty (alliraqnews)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Iranian Embassy in Iraq denounced attacking Camp Liberty that hosts the elements of the Mujahedeen Khalq Organization, that opposes the Iranian government, in Baghdad on last Saturday.

The Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Danai, while inaugurating the Iranian school in Karbala, stated "We do condemn attacking Camp Liberty where this attack attempts to create a crisis in Iraq and to accuse Iran of being behind this attack."

Earlier, Camp Liberty was targeted by 20 mortar shells, resulting in killing and injuring 25 of the MKO elements and some Iraqi policemen.

Regarding the current demonstrations in Iraq, Dani said "Iran has a neutral stance over the current demonstrations because it is an internal affair and settling them is related to the Iraqi government."

France strongly condemns attack against Iranian dissidents in Iraq (KUNA)

PARIS, Feb 11 (KUNA) -- France on Monday strongly condemned an attack against Iranian dissidents which caused

several deaths in the Hurriya refugee camp last Saturday in Iraq.

Unknown assailants fired a rocket into the camp which houses opponents of the Iranian regime under the banner of People's Mujahedeen of Iran (Mujahedeen Khalq).

The opposition movement was moved last year and is under the monitoring of a UN representative while a new location outside of Iraq can be found for the inhabitants.

"France firmly condemns the attack carried out against the Hurriya camp last Saturday," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

"We bring our support to the United Nations plan to transfer people in the camp to third countries. This plan is in the process of being implemented and we are ready to participate in it, through coordination with the UN High Commission for Refugees," Paris said.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2292352&Language=en>

- **Lafee denies reports that Anbar protestors postponed their united prayer in Baghdad (NINA)**

11 Feb 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Spokesman for protestors in Anbar province, Sheikh Sa'eed al-Lafee, denied reports that the demonstrators have postponed performing their united Friday Prayer in Abo Haneefa Mosque in Baghdad.

Lafee told NINA on Monday, Feb. 11, "Protestors in Anbar came out in peaceful protests in Ramadi, Falluja and other provinces raising legitimate and constitutional demands that Parliament has acknowledged, but the government's continued stalling made us decide to go to the capital to perform united Friday Prayer.

He added, "Protestors have not postponed performing united Friday Prayer in Baghdad, yet threats by the government some politicians and the militias made them more persistent to go to Baghdad, being rightful and it is on the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the government to respect the people and provide means of transportation to take protestors to Baghdad."

Lafee clarified that the Protest Organizing Committee is who decide whether to postpone performing united Friday Prayer in Baghdad or not; while the Committee has not met to decide postponing the united Friday Prayer in Baghdad.

- **Alwani: Mokhtar Army plans to attack demonstrators (NINA)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from Iraqiya slate, Ahmed al-Alwani, uncovered a plan to attack demonstrators coming from the provinces to to perform united Friday Prayer at Imam Abo Haneefa Mosque in Adhamiya.

In a statement on Monday, Feb. 11, Alwani said that there is a plan to attack demonstrators coming from Iraq's provinces to Adhamiya.

He added that Wathiq al-Batat has planned to ignite a disorder through the terrorist militias he organized and called (Mokhtar Army) and he has supplied them with to carry out terrorist operations against Friday's demonstrators in Adhamiya and other parts of Baghdad.

- **Travelers from Salaheddin, Niniveh provinces prevented from entering Baghdad (NINA)**

11 Feb 2013

Tikrit (NINA) – People coming from the provinces of Salaheddin and Niniveh said that they have been prevented by security forces at Baghdad's northern entrance from entering the city, in fear from that they may participate in next Friday's demonstration that the demonstrations committees intend to hold in Baghdad.

Travelers to Baghdad from the two provinces told NINA, in Tikrit while on their way back to their provinces that security forces prevented them from entering the city of Baghdad, ordering them to return from where they came, and that this measure is being in force since dawn Monday.

Dr. Abdul Hameed Ahmed al-Samara'e, a professor at the University of Salaheddin said he was going to Baghdad on official business concerning the University, but was ordered back by security forces.

Travelers objection to these measures stating that they were going to Baghdad to conduct their business or private

affairs; saying that the government does not care for the peoples' wellbeing and it fears peaceful demonstrations.

- **Elaiwi: The Government has the right to disperse unauthorized demonstration (NINA)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from the National Alliance, Kareem Elaiwi, said that the government has measures and regulations on authorizing demonstrations, because there are legal channels must be followed to organize demonstrations, otherwise the government has the right to take all measures to disperse any unauthorized demonstration.

In a statement to the press on Monday, Feb. 11, Elaiwi said that the government has rules on authorizing demonstrations; saying that the government has its security forces and has the right to execute the law and preserve security and protect peaceful demonstrators when their demands are within the law and the Constitution.

He added that if the demonstration is not authorized, not legal and have not

obtained prior permission, the government has the right to disperse it.

- **Hundreds of clan's members join protesters in Mosul (Shafaq News)**

11 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / Hundreds of people from Tay and Rabia clans headed on Monday to the protests square in Mosul to declare their solidarity with the protesters in Nineveh , Anbar and Salahuddin.

"Shafaq News", reporter in Mosul said that Tay clan in the whole of Iraq headed by Sheikh, Sabah Ghazi represented by five of their clans headed from across Iraq today to Mosel to join Ahrar Square in the center of Mosul."

He also added that " Shaiek of Bani Rabia clan in Nasiriyah in southern, Salem Thabab joined Ahrar Square."

He explained that "more than a thousand people, representing Tay and Bani Rabia in Iraq flocked to Ahrar square to declare their solidarity with the demonstrations in Nineveh, Anbar and Samarra."

The demonstrations and sit-ins announced by several Iraqi provinces are still

continuing since about two months ago that demand to release detainees and women detainees from government prisons and cancel a number of laws and resolutions, including the Justice and Accountability Law and Article 4 terrorism.

- **Iraqi body looking into protesters' demands agrees to amend accountability law (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

The five-member committee formed by the national gathering held its second meeting in the past 24 hours at the office of National Alliance head Ibrahim al-Ja'fari.

A statement released by Al-Ja'fari's media office pointed out the committee continued discussing possible solutions for the problems confronting the political process and means to address the legitimate demands put forward by the protesters.

The statement added that the committee agreed to amend many of the Accountability and Justice Law articles as requested by the protesters provided that the amendment complied with the constitution and law. In addition, the committee agreed to improve favourable

atmosphere to hold the third meeting of the national gathering, expected to be attended by political forces, blocs, and figures.

- **Allawi, Barzani discuss political crisis (alliraqnews)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The head of the Iraqiya Slate, Ayad Allawi, and the President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, discussed the political crisis and the obstacles that face endorsing the 2013 General Budget.

MP, Raad al-Dahlaki, of the IS stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The two sides discussed the current crisis in Iraq," noting that "They have also discussed the obstacles that face endorsing the 2013 General Budget in the parliament."

"The political disputes hindered the political process and delaying endorsing the 2013 General Budget," he concluded.

Earlier, Allawi the Finance Minister, Rafi al-Esawi, arrived in Erbil on Sunday.

A source stated to AIN "Allawi and Esawi arrived in Erbil on Sunday as they will

meet officials of Kurdistan Region to discuss the political crisis in Iraq.”

- **Barazani receives Sadrist delegation (NINA)**

11 Feb 2013

Erbil (NINA) – President of Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barazani, discussed on Monday, Feb. 11, with a delegation representing the Sadrist Trend the political situation in Iraq and demonstrations parts of Iraq are witnessing.

Informed source told NINA that in the meeting a number of issues discussed, including the Parliament's situation and laws being debated.

The source added that the discussion covered also the political situation in Iraq, in general, and the demonstrations the country is witnessing, discussion covered too relation between the two sides, stressing the importance to continue them.

The Sadrist delegation consisted of Mustafa al-Yaquobi and Ahmed Mustafa al-Sadr.

- **Kosert Rassoul, Nijaifi express concern over deepening Iraq's political problems (NINA)**

11 Feb 2013

Erbil (NINA) – First Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Kosert Rassoul, discussed with Speaker of Parliament, Usama al-Nijaifi, and the delegation accompanying him, the problems and crisis encountering the political process in Iraq and efforts exerted to treat them.

A statement to the press on Monday, Feb. 11, by the PUK said that Kosert Rassoul met with Nijaif and the delegation accompanying him, with the presence of the PUK Deputy Secretary General, Barham Saleh, exchanging views over the problems and crisis encountering the political process in Iraq and efforts exerted to treat them.

It added that both sides express concern from deepening the political problems stressing the necessity to treat them through the Constitution and respect of the Iraqi people, without discrimination, as well as consolidate harmony and partnership in managing the country.

- **White bloc: Balance in governmental institutions to be based on provinces' representation, not sect (alliraqnews)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The White bloc called to make the balance in the governmental institution based on the representation of the provinces not on the sect.

A statement by the bloc received by AIN on Monday cited "The sectarian, religious and racial confessionalism did not and will not make Iraq a developed country as the other countries where we call the political blocs and the parliament to make the balance in the governmental institutions based on the representation of the provinces rather than the sect."

"Who calls for achieving the balance in the governmental institutions, must call to achieve it according to the representation of the provinces rather than the sect."

- **Iraq Delays Budget on Dispute Over Kurds' Share: Lawmaker (Bloomberg News)**

By Khalid Al-Ansary and Nayla Razzouk on February 11, 2013

Iraq's parliament postponed a vote on the federal spending plan as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition requested a reduction in the share of Kurdish provinces amid a spat over crude sales, a lawmaker said.

The vote has been delayed "at least until next week," Jaber al-Jabiri, a member of the parliament's financial affairs committee, said by telephone from Baghdad today. The main reason is that Maliki's State of Law bloc wants to decrease the semi- autonomous Kurdish region's share of the state budget to 12 percent from 17 percent, he said.

The Kurds have asked for 4 trillion dinars (\$3.4 billion) for payments due to oil companies working in the Kurdish region in Iraq's north, while the budget draft allocates no more than 750 billion dinars for those businesses this year, al-Jabiri said. The Kurds said the 4 trillion dinars cover retroactive payments from 2010, 2011 and 2012 as well as 2013, he said.

Exxon Mobil Corp (XOM), Total SA, DNO International ASA and Genel Energy Plc are among companies caught in the conflict between Iraq's central

government and the Kurdistan Regional Government over oil-revenue sharing, production contracts and land. Tensions have deepened in recent months, with armed clashes in the disputed Kirkuk area in November and a halt in oil exports from Kurdistan by pipeline in December.

Iraq holds the world's fifth-biggest crude reserves, according to BP Plc statistics that include Canada's oil sands.

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2013-02-11/iraq-delays-budget-on-dispute-over-kurds-share-lawmaker>

- **Zubai accuses three presidencies of attempting not to settle disputes (alliraqnews)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Talal al-Zubai, of the Iraqiya Slate accused the three presidencies of attempting not to settle the disputes and to increase them in a sectarian way.

Speaking to All Iraq News Agency (AIN), he said " The three presidencies must work together to respond to the demonstrators' demands."

"The three presidencies are attempting at not settling the crisis in Iraq and represent a tool to increase them in a sectarian way where they are either belong to political sides or have psychological issues," he added.

"If these presidencies were adherent to settle the crisis, they will have to increase their efforts to do that," he concluded.

- **Kurdistan alliance demands deducting 100 billion dinars from the three presidencies and security (Shafaq News)**

11 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / Kurdistan alliance in Kurdistan Parliament demanded on Monday, to deduct an amount of 100 billion dinars from the budget of the three presidencies and the National Security Council in Kurdistan and pay it to other parties.

This step can contribute in solving part of the differences that hinder the ratification of the budget issues between the opposition parties and the Kurdish bloc in the regional parliament.

"Shafaq News", reporter in the parliament said that "the Kurdish bloc demanded in today's session to deduct 100 billion dinars from the budget allocated for the three presidencies (the region, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament) and the National Security Council for the current year and direct its disbursement to other aspects."

Kurdistan Parliament is currently discussing the draft budget of the region for the current year amid claims of Kurdish opposition forces to return it to the government to make some amendments as it believe that they are necessary for its approval, which was rejected by the parliament in Monday's session according to a report published by "Shafaq News" earlier.

- **INA, KA hold meeting to discuss disputes issues over General Budget law (alliraqnews)**

11 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The representatives of the Iraqi National Alliance and the Kurdistani Alliance hold a meeting at the parliament building to discuss the disputes issues regarding 2013 General Budget law draft.

MP, Ali al-Allaq, of the State of Law Coalition stated to AIN "A meeting is being held between the representatives of the INA and the KA to discuss the pending issues related to the 2013 General Budget law draft."

"One of the pending issues is the ratio of Kurdistan Region," he added, noting that "Some of the issues are technical and others are political where the first one is related to the merits of the oil companies that are working in KR that is about 4.2 IQD Trillion and the Kurds call to be paid, but the government called KR to pay 8 IQD Trillion due to the deficit caused by the reduction of the oil production."

"The other issues are political and related to the ratio of KR where KR calls to keep it 17% of the budget where the political sides are discussing this issue," he pointed out.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28318

2. IRAN

- **Spokesman: Western Powers Lack Necessary Will to End Standoff with Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast said Iran pursues a clear stance in its talks with the G5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany), but the western members of the group lack the necessary will to end disputes with Tehran.

Speaking to reporters in his weekly press conference here in Tehran on Tuesday, Mehman-Parast complained that the western members of the G5+1 (the US, France, Britain and Germany) have adopted a political attitude towards Iran's nuclear issue.

"The reason why the (Iran-G5+1) talks are not yielding desirable results is that the necessary political will for the resolution of the issue is not visible in the western side," Mehman-Parast noted.

The spokesman, however, said Iran is seeking to secure nothing more than the

Iranian nation's inalienable rights and is ready to continue talks.

"We have always said that we are ready to hold talks and negotiations to secure the Iranian nation's rights."

Earlier this month, Deputy chief negotiators of Iran and the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) agreed on the date and venue of the next round of talks between Iran and the six world powers.



Iran's deputy chief negotiator Ali Baqeri and EU foreign policy deputy chief Helga Schmitt in a phone talk on February 5 agreed that the next round of talks between Tehran and the Group 5+1 be held in Kazakhstan on February 26.

The last round of talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany was held in Moscow in June.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107143918>

- **Larijani: Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Guarantees Regional Development**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani underlined that implementation of the major gas pipeline project, which is due to take Iran's rich gas reserves to Pakistan, is of crucial importance for the development of the region.



Addressing a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) in Islamabad, Pakistan, Larijani said Iran will do its best to help construct the gas pipeline.

"Iran spares no effort to help construct the peace pipelines because the pipeline not only serves the interests of Iran and Pakistan but also guarantees regional states' economic and trade progress," Larijani stated.

Last week, Pakistani Ambassador to Tehran Khaled Aziz Babar said that an Iranian company is slated to begin construction work of the Pakistani side of the multi-billion-dollar IP gas pipeline soon.

The Pakistani cabinet, in a recent meeting, okayed a waiver of the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules in order to award the contract directly to the Iranian firm.

"The Iranian company will begin the construction of the pipeline soon," Aziz Babar told FNA last Wednesday.

He noted that the project is underway and it should be completed by December 2015 as per the signed contract.

The project envisages gas inflows of 750 mlm cubic feet per day by the end of

December 2014, which will be consumed by power plants to generate around 4,000 megawatts of electricity.

According to the project proposal, the pipeline will begin from Iran's Assalouyeh Energy Zone in the south and stretch over 1,100 km through Iran. In Pakistan, it will pass through Baluchistan and Sindh but officials now say the route may be changed if China agrees to the project.

The gas will be supplied from the South Pars gas field in the Iranian southern province of Bushehr. The initial capacity of the pipeline will be 22 billion cubic meters of natural gas per annum, which is expected to be later raised to 55 billion cubic meters. It is expected to cost \$7.4 billion.

Iran has already built more than 900 kilometers of the pipeline on its soil.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107143910>

- **Iran Cautions Turkey against Patriot Missile Deployment**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani in a meeting with his

Turkish counterpart Cemil Cicek cautioned Ankara against the deployment of NATO's patriot missiles along Turkey-Syria borders.

During the meeting held in Islamabad on the sidelines of a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO), the two speakers explored avenues for the expansion of bilateral ties and mutual cooperation between the two countries.

Also during the meeting, Larijani expressed dissatisfaction with the deployment of NATO's Patriot missiles along Turkey-Syria border, and said, "According to our experience with the westerners, they will not give up this issue (continued deployment of patriot missiles) easily."

"Big countries come to the region and create havoc and spark war among other countries, and then go," the Iranian parliament speaker said, reminding that regional problems will involve all countries of the region.

Meantime, Larijani pointed to Iran-Turkey good relations, specially in economic

fields, and noted that the Islamic Republic is willing to further strengthen these relations.

Cicek, for his part, underlined that Iran is always considered a friendly and brotherly country for Turkey, and said that the two countries' relations have historical roots.

Last month, an Iranian foreign ministry spokesman lashed out at Ankara for its decision to deploy NATO's Patriot missile batteries, but meantime said that Turkey has assured the Iranian officials that it will not attend any military action against Tehran.

Turkey will neither participate in any military action against Iran nor allow its airspace to be used against Iran, but added that the control of the Patriot missile system was in the hands of the NATO and the West, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast said in an interview with al-Manar TV.

"Iran, however, believes that Western countries and the NATO have deployed the system in Turkey with the aim of supporting the Zionist regime so that in

case of an Israeli military adventurism against Iran and Iran's response to the measure, Western countries can safeguard Israel with the help of the missile system," he added.

On December 4, NATO approved Turkey's request for the deployment of Patriot surface-to-air missiles along its border with Syria.

Meantime, people in Turkey took to the streets and hold massive rallies across the country during the past few weeks to show anger at the possible deployment of NATO's Patriot missiles along their country's border with Syria.

The protesters, who carried placards in condemnation of the Turkish government's demand for the deployment of the NATO Patriot missile systems, set the US and NATO's flags ablaze.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107143902>

- **Iran-US talks would yield no results without Washington's goodwill: Iran**

It is natural that a negotiation where the opposite side has no honesty and does not

intend to cooperate and [show] goodwill and claims to seek talks at the same time as [employing] pressure and threats will not produce any results.”

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast says direct talks between the Islamic Republic and the United States would not yield any results when Washington shows no goodwill.

“It is natural that a negotiation where the opposite side has no honesty and does not intend to cooperate and [show] goodwill and claims to seek talks at the same time as [employing] pressure and threats will not produce any results,” Mehmanparast said during his weekly press conference on Tuesday.

The Iranian official said that Washington needs to stop its hostile policies toward Iran before the Iranian nation considers any such talks.

At the 49th annual Munich Security Conference in Germany on February 2, US Vice President Joe Biden said Washington

was ready to hold direct talks with Iran over the country's nuclear energy program.

However, he noted, "There will be continued pressure."

On February 6, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei rejected talks with the United States under pressure and threats.

"An offer of talks makes sense only when the side [that makes the offer] shows its goodwill," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The US has spearheaded several rounds of sanctions against Iran in recent years, based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran vehemently rejects the allegation, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

The AMIA issue

Referring to the agreement between Iran and Argentina to set up a fact-finding committee to investigate the 1994 bombing attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA), Mehmanparast said, "The officials of Iran and Argentina held talks and agreed to cooperate to clarify the AMIA issue and these agreements are taking their natural course."

Cooperation between the officials of the two countries would definitely help resolve the issue, he added.

On January 27, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and his Argentinean counterpart signed a memorandum of understanding for the two countries to shed light on the bombing of the AMIA building in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people.

Under intense political pressure imposed by the US and Israel, Argentina formally accused Iran of having carried out the bomb attack. The Islamic Republic has categorically denied any involvement in the terrorist bombing.

The Israeli regime reacted angrily to the deal a day after it was signed. “We are stunned by this news item and we will want to receive from the Argentine government a complete picture as to what was agreed upon because this entire affair affects Israel directly,” the Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Yigal Palmor, said on January 28.

In a statement on January 30, however, the Argentinean Foreign Ministry said Israel’s demand for an explanation over the agreement was an “improper action that is strongly rejected.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/12/288587/iranus-talks-would-yield-no-results/>

- **Ceremony held at UN to mark Iran's National Day**



A ceremony commemorating the 34th anniversary of the victory of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution has been held at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City.

On Monday, Iran's Ambassador to the UN Mohammad Khaza’ee as well as a number of high-ranking UN officials, the ambassadors of various countries to the UN, diplomats, journalists and reporters attended the event, named Iran's National Day.

Pointing to the wide participation of political figures in the ceremony, Khaza’ee said, “The glorious holding of a ceremony to mark a country’s national day is indicative of the lofty political standing of that country.”

Special ceremonies were also held at home and abroad on January 31 to remember the day in 1979 when the late founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, returned to the Iranian capital after 15 years in exile.

The day of Imam Khomeini's return to Iran marks the beginning of the celebrations,

dubbed Ten Days of Dawn, that culminate in the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 10.

The Iranian nation toppled the US-backed Pahlavi regime 34 years ago, ending 2,500 years of monarchic rule in the country.

The Islamic Revolution, under the guidance of Imam Khomeini, established a new political system based on Islamic values and democracy.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/12/288572/iran-national-day-ceremony-held-at-un/>

- **Iran, Tajikistan call for enhancement of mutual ties**

Iran's Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and his Tajik counterpart have stressed the expansion of bilateral relations between Tehran and Dushanbe in various spheres.

"There are many grounds for cooperation between Tehran and Dushanbe that should be enhanced," Larijani said in a meeting with Shukurjon Zuhurov in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on Tuesday.

Larijani expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness to implement various projects in Tajikistan, saying, "Iran and Tajikistan can have good cooperation in the fields of water, gas and electricity."

Zuhuro, for his part, hailed the growing economic ties between Tehran and Dushanbe and stressed mutual cooperation in transportation, particularly railway transport.

Larijani arrived in Islamabad on Monday to attend the conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO).

The first PAECO conference, presided over by the Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly Fahmida Mirza, opened on Monday and will run until February 12.

During the event, the representatives of the ECO member countries are scheduled to deliver speeches on the role of parliaments in the promotion of regional trade and investment to ensure sustainable social and economic development in the region.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/12/288556/iran-tajikistan-stress-expansion-of-ties/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Netanyahu's coalition options seen to be closing**

By GIL HOFFMAN

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's efforts to build a broad national unity government suffered multiple setbacks on Monday when his potential coalition partners refused to compromise on key issues.

The first setback occurred when Netanyahu met Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett at the Prime Minister's Office in Tel Aviv. While both sides declined to reveal what was discussed at the meeting, both said afterward that Bayit Yehudi would continue coordinating coalition strategy with Yesh Atid.

Netanyahu had wanted to break the unwritten understanding between Bayit Yehudi and Yesh Atid, in which neither party would join the coalition without the other.

But Likud officials said Bayit Yehudi and Yesh Atid were fully coordinating their negotiation strategy on every issue.

Due to that deal, Netanyahu cannot threaten Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid that he will build a coalition without him. The prime minister cannot even build a cohesive coalition of the 61 MKs on the Center-Right.

A statement released after the Netanyahu-Bennett meeting said only that they had discussed the "issues of the day" and planned to meet again. Unlike official statements released following the prime minister's previous meetings with party leaders, this statement did not mention a "good atmosphere."

But the Likud spokeswoman who issued the statement said it was not dictated by Netanyahu and that she actually had no idea how the meeting went.

The negotiating teams of Likud and Bayit Yehudi will meet in Ramat Gan on Tuesday, after the Likud met Monday with a team from Yesh Atid.

In the meeting with Yesh Atid, Prof. Eugene Kandell, who heads the National Economic Council, presented the Likud's plan for equalizing the burden of military and civilian national service. The plan calls for the IDF to set gradually rising targets for drafting haredim. If the targets are not met, the yeshivas will be fined.

But Yesh Atid wants to see limits placed on the number of ultra-Orthodox men who avoid the army rather than the institution of manpower targets for the draft.

Although the party's negotiators did not reject the Likud's plan outright, they did give an impression that there was little chance they would accept the plan.

One issue Likud and Yesh Atid negotiators did not discuss was portfolios. Lapid wants that issue kept for the very end of the talks because he fears that otherwise he will lose leverage on key issues that are important to his party.

"About 99.9 percent of what you read in the papers about the negotiations is not actually happening," Lapid told his Knesset faction. "There are no discussions on

portfolios. No one spoke to our negotiating team on that. Whatever you are reading is mere speculation that is not connected to us."

Shas co-chairman Eli Yishai attacked Lapid at a meeting of the Shas faction. He said Lapid was working to ensure that the government would lack haredi parties, even though Lapid has never said that he wants a coalition without Shas and United Torah Judaism.

MK Tzipi Livni told her Knesset faction that Netanyahu cannot take for granted that her Tzipi Livni Party would join the government. She said her negotiators were conducting talks with Likud quietly, "without press briefings and political spin."

Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich started preparing for the possibility that Yesh Atid would not be part of the government on Monday. She met Arab MKs and asked for their support if there is a race in the Knesset for head of the opposition between her and Lapid.

Yacimovich took pains to deny a rumor that she would agree to bring Labor into

the government if she was offered the Finance Ministry.

“There is no truth to the rumors that if I am given the Finance portfolio, we will sit in the government,” Yacimovich wrote on Facebook.

“We will not return to being the contractors of Netanyahu. It will not happen.

Whoever insists on making this a debate on portfolios is making a mistake ethically and politically,” she said.

“It is not about portfolios,” she added.

“It is about our path. The portfolios that are most dear to our hearts are the ones that someone intends to use to bankrupt our economy, with dangerous policies that are being crafted as we speak.”

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302969>

- **'Israel to allow Turkey to build Gaza hospital'**

Israel has authorized Turkey to transport construction materials into the Gaza Strip

in order to build a Turkish-funded hospital in the coastal territory, Turkish daily Hurriyet reported on Monday.

According to the report, the hospital will be inaugurated within a year's time, and the ceremony will be attended by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Israeli government gave the authorization earlier this month after studying a list of materials the Turks were asking to import to Gaza. Hurriyet stated that Israel gave permission to transport the construction materials to Gaza as a gesture of goodwill toward Turkey.

Turkey has long opposed Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip and relations between the countries deteriorated in the aftermath of the IDF's raid of the Gaza-bound Mavi Marmara vessel in May 2010, in which nine Turkish pro-Palestinian activists were killed.

The hospital is slated to contain 150 beds, making it Gaza's biggest hospital, Hurriyet reported.

In addition to serving as a goodwill gesture to Ankara, the Israeli move was also

described by Hurriyet as part of Israel's softening of the Gaza blockade in the aftermath of Operation Pillar of Defense.

Turkey has called for the lifting of the Gaza blockade, as well as an apology to Turkey for the Mavi Marmara raid and compensation for the families of those killed, as conditions to normalize relations between the countries.

Hurriyet quoted diplomatic sources in Ankara as saying the January 22 Knesset election in Israel could provide a new opportunity to pacify relations between the countries.

“Although I do not want to seem too optimistic over reconciliation between the two countries, I see a window of opportunity in light of the election results,” the sources told Hurriyet.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302913>

- **Israeli forces arrest Hamas-affiliates across West Bank**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces launched multiple arrest raids overnight

Monday against Hamas affiliates in the West Bank, Hamas sources and locals said.

Hamas leader Rafat Jamil Nasif, 45, was detained in Tulkarem in an arrest raid on his home, sources in the Islamist movement said. Nasif's family were forced to stand outside in the cold while sniffer dogs searched his home.

Musab al-Ashqar, Abdullah Ismail al-Khalil and Ammar Jihad Ameir, students at al-Khadouri university, were also arrested in Tulkarem, together with the local Imam's son Qitad Amar Bidawi.

In Nablus, Israeli forces detained a local Islamist student leader Mathni Jamil Eshtayeh and students Osama Khalid Yamin and Walid Gamal Asida from An-Najah university, locals said.

Mousa Ahmad Yamin and Abed al-Ghani Ayeshe Samara were also detained in nearby villages.

Four people were arrested in Qalandia refugee camp in Ramallah, including two ex-prisoners, and in Hebron two other students were detained.

An Israeli army spokeswoman said that 13 people were detained overnight, including four in Nablus, five in Tulkarem, three in Bethlehem and one in Hebron.

The latest detentions follow a sweep of arrests of Hamas-affiliated officials in the West Bank over the past week.

Last Tuesday, Israeli forces arrested 12 people including at least three Hamas-affiliates.

A day earlier, Israeli soldiers arrested 23 members of Hamas, including three lawmakers -- Ahmed Attoun in al-Bireh, Hatem Qafisha in Hebron and Mohammed al-Tal in al-Dhahiriyya.

Hamas condemned the arrests as a "criminal act."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=564448>

- **Fatah, Hamas to meet in Cairo Feb. 19, official says**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Fatah and Hamas will meet in Cairo on Feb. 19 to continue reconciliation talks, a Fatah official said Tuesday.

Sakhr Bseiso told Ma'an that the factions will meet under Egypt-mediation a day after the Central Elections Commission has finished updating the election register in Gaza.

The rival factions met in Cairo to discuss reconciliation over the weekend, but reached no agreement on the formation of a unity government or on a revision of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"The Cairo talks did not achieve the breakthrough that we had hoped for, but they did not collapse," said Haniyeh.

A Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine official said Sunday that neither Fatah or Hamas have any real will to end the division.

The voter registration process is due to be completed by Feb. 18 and, in theory, an election could then be called three months later.

The last parliamentary vote was held in 2006, when Hamas swept to power, ending the dominance of Fatah. The

following civil war split Palestinians both geographically and politically.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=564417>

- **Gaza ministry denies Egypt closed tunnels**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Gaza's Ministry of Interior on Tuesday denied reports that Egypt had closed several smuggling tunnels a day earlier, a spokesman said.

Islam Shahwan said in a statement that a network of tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border are operating as normal, with the Interior Ministry briefly closing tunnels last week due to adverse weather conditions.

Egyptian security officials said Monday that they had arrested 10 suspected smugglers in Rafah and shut two tunnels used to smuggle goods to the Gaza Strip.

Last November, Egyptian security services said they were planning an "extraordinary" crackdown on smuggling tunnels under the Gaza border.

An official said that the campaign to end smuggling was part of a truce agreement brokered by Cairo to end cross-border violence, which began when Israel assassinated Hamas military commander Ahmed Jabari.

www.maananews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=564383

- **Obama "to arrive in Jerusalem on March 20"**

US President Barack Obama is expected to arrive in Jerusalem on March 20 for a three-day trip which will also take him to the West Bank city of Ramallah, media reports and a Palestinian official said.

According to a draft itinerary published in Israel's top-selling Yediot Aharonot, Obama will begin his first-ever visit to Israel as president on March 20.

He was expected to land at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv then hold talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later in the day.

The next day, he would spend the morning holding talks with Palestinian president

Mahmud Abbas at his West Bank headquarters in Ramallah.

A Palestinian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, concurred.

"President Obama will visit our area for two days. He will be in Israel on March 20 and March 21 in Palestine," he told AFP.

Yediot said that after the Ramallah talks Obama would return to Jerusalem and address the Israeli public.

"The Americans have asked that at least 1,000 Israelis be present as an audience," it said.

It said Obama would also hold a breakfast meeting with Netanyahu on March 22 and join him on a visit to an Iron Dome missile defense battery before leaving for neighboring Jordan.

The White House confirmed the visit last week but did not give dates for the trip, which it said would include stops in the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

It has kept expectations deliberately low about the possible outcome of the visit,

saying Obama has no plans to use the trip to push new proposals to break the more than two-year deadlock in peace talks.

On Sunday, Netanyahu said his talks with Obama would focus on three issues: Iran's nuclear program, the conflict in Syria and the diplomatic process with the Palestinians.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/obama-to-arrive-in-jerusalem-on-march-20>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt cleric to be questioned over murder call**

Egypt's state prosecutor on Monday ordered an Islamic cleric to be brought in for questioning on suspicion that he called for the murder of opposition leaders, a judicial source said.

The cleric, Mahmud Shaaban, sparked a backlash from opposition leaders and the Islamist government itself after he said the opposition activists deserved to be executed in line with Islamic law.

His comments coincided with the assassination in Tunisia of a secular

dissident, casting a shadow over the increasingly bitter power struggle in Egypt between the opposition and the ruling Islamists.

The government denounced his comments and assigned guards for some opposition leaders.

"What many don't know is that God's law stipulates the killing of the leadership of the [opposition] National Salvation Front who are clearly seeking power," Shaaban said on an Islamic television channel.

He singled out two of the opposition coalition's leaders, Nobel Peace laureate Mohamed ElBaradei and failed presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi.

Two years after the overthrow of veteran president Hosni Mubarak, Egypt has become increasingly divided between Islamists and liberal opponents who accuse the fundamentalists of trying to monopolize power.

Protesters clashed again with police on Monday outside the palace of President Mohamed Morsi, who ran on the Muslim

Brotherhood's ticket in the June presidential election.

Morsi sparked mass protests led by ElBaradei's coalition when he adopted sweeping powers last November that allowed the Islamists to rush a conservatively-worded constitution to referendum, in which it was passed.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/egypt-cleric-to-be-questioned-over-murder-call>

- **Egypt police clash with protesters at Morsi's palace**

Egyptian police fired water cannon at stone-throwing protesters outside the presidential palace on Monday as the opposition held rallies to mark the second anniversary of Hosni Mubarak's overthrow.

The clashes broke out after several hundred protesters marched to the palace, the site of increasingly frequent clashes, on a day of marches against Egypt's new Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi.

Opposition groups called for the protests to demand that Morsi fulfill the goals of the revolution which brought him to power along with his long-banned Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Among their key demands are a new unity government, amendments to a controversial Islamist-drafted constitution and the sacking of Egypt's prosecutor general.

Activists are also furious that no one has been held accountable for the deaths of dozens of protesters in past months in clashes with police.

"Down with Brotherhood rule," the protesters chanted as they made their way to downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square, the symbolic heart of protests that toppled Mubarak. Other marches converged on the palace.

Earlier, protesters briefly blocked a major bridge as well as trains in a central Cairo metro station, scuffling with passengers and metro police, witnesses and state media reported.

Two years ago, Egyptians poured onto the streets to celebrate after an aide to Mubarak announced the veteran president's resignation, buoyant that democratic change was within reach.

The 84-year-old's spectacular fall from grace on February 11, 2011 after an 18-day popular revolt sent shock waves across the Middle East and beyond.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/egypt-police-clash-with-protesters-at-morsis-palace>

- **Libyan leaders visit Benghazi**

The second largest Libyan city has turned into a "hotbed of tension", local residents say, amid local concerns about the government's ability to effectively police Benghazi on its own.

By Essam Mohamed for Magharebia in Tripoli – 11/02/13

Amid mounting concerns about the Tripoli government's ability to restore order, Libyan General National Congress President Mohamed Magarief and Prime

Minister Ali Zidan visited Benghazi on Friday (February 8th).

The national leaders met local councillors, who voiced frustration at the pace of economic and security improvements in Libya's second largest city.

A number of civil society organisations plan to march this Friday (February 15th) to push for greater federalism, as well as the formation of a 60-member constitution drafting committee.

Activists are also calling for stepping up security, activating the army and police and holding previous governments accountable.

In Benghazi, people are demanding that corporations once based in the city but transferred to Tripoli under Kadhafi – including the National Oil Corporation, Brega Oil Company and Libyan Airways – be returned to the east.

On Saturday, a number of Benghazi political parties issued a joint statement criticising the GNC for mismanagement and inaction, and demanding that the government improve security.

Signatories to the statement included the Justice and Construction Party, the Party of Change, the Islamist al-Wattan Party and the National Front.

"Libya needs assistance and expertise in the field of security, since this is one of the biggest challenges facing it at the current stage, agreed Benghazi native Hussein Elmsallati, a 39-year-old anchor for Libya FM Channel.

"I think also that we should co-ordinate with the United Nations in terms of consultations and programmes on national reconciliation and mechanisms of action for the committees drafting the constitution," Elmsallati added.

Meanwhile, residents of Benghazi said they hoped that the visit by Zidan and Magarief could lead to change.

"This is a visit to the city where the first spark of the revolution erupted," Nahla Bashir said. "Now, this city is a hotbed of tension."

She added that the meeting with the people of the city and eastern region reassured her.

Youssef al-Oreibi, another citizen from Benghazi, said: "This unexpected visit...comes at a time when the street in Benghazi is very tense. I hope that it will be a starting point to realise tangible things for the benefit of Libya."

Engineering student Tansim al-Zubair said he thought the Benghazi visit was a "good step that will put an end to discord, federalism and centralisation".

"We hope that the general budget will be released and approved, and that the government will start working to solve many problems, overcome difficulties, open projects to revitalise economy, and in this way building will start and armed manifestations will disappear," al-Zubair added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/11/feature-01

- **Civilians caught between Mali terrorists, troops**

Refugees at the M'Bera camp in south-eastern Mauritania hope that the deployment of UN peacekeepers will allow them to return to their homeland swiftly and without fear.

By Jemal Oumar for Magharebia in Nouakchott – 11/02/13

Al-Qaeda-linked Islamists launched a new attack on the northern Malian city of Gao on Sunday (February 10th), leading to an hours-long gunfight with Malian and French troops.

The skirmish left at least two Islamists and three civilians dead, AFP reported. Fifteen civilians and two Malian soldiers were also injured in the attack.

The Movement for Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) claimed credit for the assault, as well as two failed suicide bombings over the weekend. On Monday, French forces launched airstrikes to repel the jihadists.

The latest flare up raised fresh fears for the hundreds of thousands of refugees forced from their homes by the Islamist-led violence.

Many of the Malian refugees are now living at the M'Bera camp but news of a proposal for UN peacekeepers has many hopeful they could soon return home.

On Wednesday (February 6th), France made a formal request to the Security Council to prepare UN peacekeepers for deployment to northern Mali, once French military operations in the region end.

French Ambassador to the UN Gérard Araud called for the world body to accelerate the deployment of peacekeepers in order to protect civilians from potential human rights abuses.

However, Radio France International reported on February 7th that the deployment may only happen in March or April.

A number of Malian refugees have reported witnessing atrocities against civilians committed by Mali's jihadist rebels. Refugees fleeing the war in Mali saw summary executions and amputations committed by the rebels, who sought to impose Sharia law in areas their forces controlled, Al Jazeera reported.

Nearly 150,000 people have crossed borders to flee the war, while the war has uprooted and internally displaced another 230,000, AFP reported on January 20th, citing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Zakiyatou Oualett Halatine, spokeswoman for the Association of Refugees and Victims of Repression in Azawad (ARVRA), welcomed the news of France's call for UN peacekeepers.

"I think that what the Malian refugees in Mauritania need is the provision of appropriate conditions for the return to their country, land and normal lives without fear. If the peacekeeping forces will ensure that, then they will go back to their homes," she told Magharebia.

"UN peacekeeping forces are present in all areas that have experienced a conflict," she added. "What refugees need as a substitute for their suffering is to be enabled to run their own lives."

Ibrahim Ag Bibi, a Malian who fled the war and is now living at M'Bera refugee camp,

said he was encouraged by the peacekeeper proposal.

"This step is very important and welcomed, because sending those troops would spread security in the hearts of refugees who are fearful of reprisals," he said.

Ag Bibi would not rule out returning to his home in northern Mali once the region is cleared of hard line terrorist who kill people and whip women.

"There is no doubt that armed terrorist groups are the cause of so many of us leaving our homes and fleeing to Mauritania, for fear of killing and harassment," he added.

Mohamed Ould Oubeida Sharif, a journalist who covers the plight of refugees at the M'Bera camp, cautiously welcomed word of the potential arrival of UN Peacekeepers.

"There is no doubt that sending international troops to northern Mali may relatively contribute to the return of refugees to their homes," he told Magharebia. "Yet their presence should be

large and well-armed in order to confront suicide operations expected to be conducted by some terrorists."

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/11/feature-02

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Lebanese judge issues arrest warrant in Harb assassination case**

A Lebanese judge issued an arrest warrant for a suspect linked to the assassination case of opposition MP Boutros Harb.

Military Investigative Judge Fadi Sawan issued an arrest warrant in absentia for Mahmoud al-Hayek, the National News Agency reported on Tuesday.

It added that the suspect remains at large.

Earlier in February, Public Prosecutor Hatem Madi requested lifting the immunity off Harb "for slanderous remarks made against the judiciary and the president," after the lawmaker had criticized the belated judiciary decision to indict the Hezbollah-affiliated suspect in his attempted murder.

In July of last year, Harb was targeted in an apparent assassination bid after an “intruder” wielding a knife was apprehended by security guards in the MP’s office. That same day, two explosives detonators were found in the building Harb’s office is in.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/judge-issues-arrest-warrant-against-mahmoud-al-hayek-in-assassination-case-against-mp-boutros-harb>

- **Lebanese lawmaker accuses energy minister of supporting Syrian regime**

Future bloc MP Kazem al-Kheir slammed Energy Minister Gebran Bassil for allegedly providing fuel to Syria.

“There are attempts being made to strengthen the Syrian regime by supplying it with vital resources... and Bassil is [helping to prop up] this regime without taking Lebanon’s interest into consideration,” Kheir told Free Lebanon radio station on Tuesday.

The MP also criticized the national government, saying that it should “pay more attention to the cost of fuel in the

country” instead of providing its neighbor Syria with it.

He also warned that the international community may now be prone to take “certain” measures to respond to Lebanon’s “violation of sanctions against Syria.”

In turn, Future bloc MP Khaled Zahraman told Ash-Sharq radio station that the issue of “diesel smuggling to Syria” should be discussed with the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement with which the energy minister is affiliated.

“This case should be referred to MP Michel Aoun who, yesterday, took to the [political] stage to preach about honesty and transparency.”

On Monday, Aoun announced the release of a book entitled “The Impossible Exoneration” in which he claims that the opposing political party in Lebanon was embezzling state funds.

Media outlets recently reported that a big number of Syrian registered trucks were filling their tanks with diesel fuel in Beirut before heading to Syria.

Lebanon's political landscape is currently split between supporters of the Syrian regime and Western-backed forces, to which the Future bloc is affiliated.

The Lebanese government has meanwhile continuously stated that it has adopted a stance of neutrality on Syria, where an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad has so far killed more than 60,000 people, according to figures released by the United Nations.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese-lawmaker-accuses-energy-minister-of-supporting-syrian-regime>

- **Lebanese MP: Supplying Syria with fuel "a scandal"**

Lebanon's Future bloc MP Ahmad Fatfat denounced his country's efforts to supply Syria with fuel.

"This is a great scandal, a direct violation of previous UN Security Council decisions, and a contravention of the policy of dissociation adopted by the [Lebanese] government," Fatfat told Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio station on Tuesday.

"This is an indication of [Lebanese] support provided to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad."

Meanwhile, the radio station reported that Syrian registered trucks were preparing to fill their tanks with diesel fuel near Dora in East Beirut. This news came amid reports that a number of Syrian registered trucks are en route to Syria with Lebanese diesel fuel supplies.

Lebanon's political landscape is currently split between supporters of the Syrian regime and the Western-backed forces, to which the Future bloc is affiliated.

The Lebanese government has meanwhile continuously stated that it has adopted a neutral stance with regard to the troubles taking place in neighboring Syria.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/opposition-mp-supplying-syria-with-fuel-a-scandal>

6. SYRIA

- **Turkish PM says car blast on Syria border was bomb attack**

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday that a powerful blast in a minibus on the Syrian border which killed 14 people was a bomb attack.

"A vehicle loaded with bombs was able to reach our customs gate because the customs gate on the Syrian side is not working and is not being controlled," Erdogan told parliament after Monday's incident.

Erdogan said the vehicle exploded in the buffer zone between Turkey's Cilvegözü border crossing and Syria's Bab al-Hawa post, which was seized by Syrian rebels in July.

"What we see in the footage that it is a crowded parking lot filled with pedestrians... Anybody can see the death toll would be heavy," Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin told reporters earlier.

"So we believe civilians are the clear targets," Ergin added. "I curse this act of terror."

The Cilvegözü crossing is one of seven functioning border posts along Turkey's

910 kilometer (560 mile) frontier with Syria.

It is a major gateway into Syria, with hundreds of trucks lining up every day to take humanitarian aid into the war-torn nation.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/turkish-pm-says-car-blast-on-syria-border-was-bomb-attack>

- **UN chief appeals to Syria as Assad vows to fight on**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to accept an opposition offer of peace talks, hours after Assad himself vowed to fight on.

Ban referred to an offer for talks by National Coalition leader Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib as "an opportunity we should not miss -- a chance to switch from a devastating military logic to a promising political approach."

"This was a courageous offer by Mr. al-Khatib," he said in a speech Monday at the Council on Foreign Relations, urging both

the Syrian government and the Security Council to "respond positively."

Earlier Monday, however, Assad said he would not bow to mounting pressure and "plots," state news agency SANA reported.

"Syria will remain the beating heart of the Arab world and will not give up its principles despite the intensifying pressure and diversifying plots not only targeting Syria, but all Arabs," Assad said.

He was speaking almost two years into the deadly revolt in Syria, which the United Nations says has cost more than 60,000 lives since it broke out in mid-March 2011.

National Coalition chief Khatib, head of the umbrella opposition group recognized by several Arab and Western nations, meanwhile said he had received "no clear response" from Damascus over his offer of dialogue.

He said in late January he was prepared to hold direct talks with regime representatives without "blood on their hands," on condition the talks focus on replacing Assad.

The Assad regime has said it is open to talks but without preconditions.

Khatib, speaking to reporters in Cairo, proposed that direct talks with regime representatives could take place in "liberated areas" of rebel-dominated northern Syria.

The efforts to get the opposing sides around the table came as at least 13 people were killed when a car exploded on the border between northern Syria and southeastern Turkey.

The blast, just inside Turkey, wounded dozens of others, Turkish officials said.

"We have unfortunately lost 13 people: three of them Turks and rest Syrians," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

The powerful blast was caused by explosives, and "all possibilities are on the table, including political motives," Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said after a cabinet meeting.

The explosion coincided with the planned time of arrival of an opposition delegation at the frontier, said Abdel Basset Sayda, a

top official of the opposition Syrian National Council.

The delegation's arrival had been delayed, he added.

Rebels on Monday seized control of the largest dam in Syria, a vital barrier along the Euphrates River in the northern province of Raqa that generates 880 megawatts of power, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"This is the biggest economic loss for the regime since the start of the revolution," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

Rebels from the jihadist Al-Nusra Front and the Aways al-Qurani and Ahrar al-Tabqa battalions met little resistance in the area, as loyalist security chiefs fled on board military helicopters, he said.

The capture of the dam is the latest in a string of key rebel victories in northern and eastern Syria, but the insurgents have yet to take over a major city in the war-ravaged country.

The uprising began as a series of peaceful demonstrations inspired by the so-called Arab Spring, but grew increasingly militarized after government forces opened fire on demonstrators and soon escalated into a civil war.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/un-chief-appeals-to-syria-as-assad-vows-to-fight-on>

- **Syrian minister willing to meet opposition chief abroad**

A Syrian minister said on Monday that he was ready to meet with National Coalition leader Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib who in late January said he is prepared to hold direct talks with regime representatives without "blood on their hands," on condition the talks focus on replacing Assad.

"I am willing to meet Mr. Khatib in any foreign city where I can go in order to discuss preparations for a national dialogue," Minister of National Reconciliation Ali Haidar told The Guardian.

Haidar is a leader of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and has been a minister

since 2011. He is one of two opposition candidates granted a ministerial post.

Asked what the aim of national dialogue is, Haidar said he wished for authentic competition in Syrian politics. The end result of healthy competition is to establish a multiparty parliament as well as secure a new president when Assad's term ends in 2014.

"The dialogue is a means to provide a mechanism for reaching free parliamentary and presidential elections. This is one of the subjects which will be discussed at the table. Such a thing could be the result of negotiations, but not a precondition," he said. "We reject a dialogue that is just to hand power from one side to another."

Last month, Syrian President Bashar al Assad announced he was ready for talks with the opposition but ruled out meeting groups such as Khatib's National Coalition, which backs armed rebels seeking to overthrow his regime.

Khatib's initiative came three weeks after Assad's announcement. It sparked a

controversy amid opposition circles who some described as traitorous.

Haidar also noted that due to sanctions, he, like other Syrian ministers, is banned from the EU. He added however that Geneva is a possible location for holding the first round of talks.

"But we insist that the actual national dialogue take place on Syrian soil because it is a matter of Syrian dignity," he stated.

Commenting on some exiled politician's concerns of being arrested if they go to Syria, Haidar said: "The ministry of the interior has agreed to relax its policies and give them all the necessary documents to return and let them in even if they don't have any. I don't want to close the door to any opposition people who have concerns. I personally invite anyone to return and guarantee their safe entry and departure, if that's what they want."

He added that Khatib's altered policy, the military deadlock and the change in the regional and international climate are what gave momentum to the possibility of negotiations.

“There are hardliners on both sides but 80% on each side now realize that no military victory is possible. I'm in contact by phone with some leaders of the Free Syrian Army and they used to say, “we'll be in Damascus in a few days' time, but today they say, we've found out that the international community is playing games with us and working for their own interests only so we realize we can't defeat the Syrian army,” he said.

On whether U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi's mission has ended, Haidar said it has not, adding, however, that the envoy has not been frank.

“In his discussions here it was Brahimi who said it was a bit early to form a government. His point was that it's not possible because there are so many opposition factions in exile who are not yet ready to participate. Unfortunately, when he left Syria we heard something else from him,” Haidar said.

“There were contradictions in his statements which weakened his position of being equidistant from all Syrians. We wouldn't say his mission has completely

failed but he has to regain his previous position of equidistance.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/12/265871.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Yemenis celebrate uprising's second anniversary

Tens of thousands of Yemenis gathered Monday in Sanaa to celebrate the second anniversary of the launch of nationwide protests that pushed president Ali Abdullah Saleh out of power after 33 years in office.

Jubilant Yemenis gathered in the Sita street, a capital artery that was scene of frequent protests and confrontations between anti-regime demonstrators and police and militamen backing the former leader.

The rally was organized by the committee of the Youth Revolution, which considers February 11, 2011 the day the uprising against Saleh's rule erupted, though demonstrations had begun in January

2011 taking cue from protests in Tunisia and Egypt.

"Hold your head up, you are a free Yemeni," chanted the crowds gathered in Sitin, evoking a slogan chanted during the protests against Saleh, an AFP correspondent reported.

"February 11 is a day that Yemenis will always celebrate," said a statement released by the organizing committee.

The statement urged the government, in which the former opposition now holds 50 percent of the seats, to look after the families of the "martyrs" and "complete the treatment for the wounded."

It also called for a "trial for the killers of the youths, and a return of the people's funds that were stolen."

Saleh agreed in November 2011 to step down as per a Gulf-brokered and UN-backed initiative which stipulated presidential elections in February 2012 that brought Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, Saleh's then deputy, as an interim president for two years.

The initiative granted Saleh and his aides immunity from prosecution but it demanded a complete restructuring of the military and security forces and a national dialogue to draft a new constitution and electoral law for general polls in 2014.

Hadi last week set March 18 as the date for the much-anticipated dialogue.

The committee organising Monday's rally in Sanaa welcomed the dialogue.

"We announce from here that we welcome setting March 18 as the date for dialogue between Yemenis," the head of the committee, Mohammed al-Sabri told demonstrators, implying that they will take part in the talks.

A similar rally was held in Taz, Yemen's second city, which was also scene to large anti-Saleh protests, as well as bloody confrontations, during the uprising.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/yemenis-celebrate-uprisings-second-anniversary>

- **Revolts happened because 'smart' Arabs do not believe lies: UAE's PM**

“Lies” do not work with Arab nations as they are “smart” enough to examine their realities, UAE’s prime minister told hundreds of state officials on Monday during a forum to discuss his economic policies.

“[Arab] nations are smart. [Leaders] can lie for one or two years, but not for 40 years,” Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum said in reference to ousted dictators in all of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen.

“Arab nations are smart and with the availability of the social media, they found out and discovered. They were patient but later they exploded.”

Sheikh Maktoum said he previously advised toppled leaders to listen to their people but no avail.

“I visited Arab leaders and I confessed to some of them - some were offended and others said “no,” that they had reports to prove otherwise. I told them that I had no boundaries with them, and I had no greedy interests in their countries. I gave my advice for their people’s interests.”

The prime minister said “revolutions happened for the Arab nation’s interests,” as the toppled leaders either took some of their nation's money, sent it abroad or gave it to other states. He added that some bluntly said that they had no money.

Unlike many other Arab countries, UAE is seen as benevolent government that shares its oil-resources with its people.

The prime minister said finding jobs for UAE citizens is one of the government’s top priorities.

The unusual event underlined the urgency with which leaders in the UAE and other oil-rich Gulf states are trying to boost employment among their citizens, to avert political discontent and prepare for any future downturn in oil prices.

Sheikh Maktoum, addressed some 1,700 government employees at the two-hour forum, pacing the stage and sometimes calling on ministers to respond to particular points.

Reuters cited him as saying that the UAE government was working on a project to employ 120,000 UAE nationals, but did

not give details. He also urged private companies to hire more UAE citizens, but did not announce new incentives or requirements for them to do so.

Special thanks to Egyptians

Meanwhile, the leader gave Egypt special attention when he openly thanked the Egyptian community for helping to develop the UAE.

“I wish the great Egyptian nation happiness, stability and prosperity... and not to forget that the Egyptian community in the UAE has helped in developing this country.”

He said that “Egypt is the heart of the Arab world and with god's willing it will do great.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/12/265774.html>

- **U.S. names UAE as largest trading partner in Arab region: ambassador**

The American ambassador to the UAE said the country is the United States' largest trading in the Middle East, reported Dubai based Gulf News on Monday.

Ambassador Michael H. Corbin stated this during a visit to the Abu Dhabi Customs Institute and further noted that the UAE is on its way to becoming a focused hub for trade, tourism and other important economic activities.

Trade between the two countries in growing at a fast rate.

“In fact, the USA's exports to UAE reached \$22.5 billion in 2012, a 40 per cent increase from 2011. Trade between the USA and UAE is even larger than our export relationship with India,” said Corbin.

The ambassador also commented on the increasing focus by international airlines on the UAE, major carriers have made the country a base for their business.

Khalifa port, one of the largest in the region, is deemed just one of many reasons to ensure “continuous cooperation with the UAE, the leader in the development of trade infrastructure, in order to enhance the exchange of knowledge and information,” he said.

“This visit is an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of cooperation between the

two countries since the UAE has become home to many important projects such as the Khalifa port, Abu Dhabi International Airport, Dubai International Airport and the new Etihad Railway network," added Corbin.

One Emirati official said that the visit enforced the good relations between the UAE's General Administration of Customs and the U.S.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/12/265826.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Afghan Panel Says Prison Torture Not Systematic**

February 11, 2013
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

An Afghan government panel confirms it has found evidence of torture of detainees, but it denied systematic abuse of prisoners.

The panel was tasked by Afghan President Hamid Karzai last month to investigate UN claims that prisoners in government

custody were being tortured and sexually abused.

The panel said on February 11 that almost half the inmates it interviewed claimed being tortured.

Sixty-six percent of the inmates said they don't have access to legal services.

The panel said it spoke to some 140 inmates in Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat jails.

In a report issued in January, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said that "torture persists and remains a serious concern in numerous detention facilities across Afghanistan."

The report said such practices continue despite efforts by the United Nations and international forces.

Based on reporting by AP and dpa
<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **US hinders reconciliation efforts across Afghanistan: Sasha Knezev**

Interview with Sasha Knezev

Press TV
February 11, 2013

The United States policy in Afghanistan seeks to fracture relationships between the government and tribal forces in the region, an author tells Press TV.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said that the United States has stopped fighting against the Taliban, adding that the greatest threat to Afghanistan is not the Taliban but the interference by foreign powers.

Press TV has conducted an interview with Sasha Knezev, an author and filmmaker from Los Angeles. The following is a rough transcription of the interview.

Press TV: The US went into Afghanistan because of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Now, Afghan President Hamid Karzai is saying the US is no longer fighting the Taliban. Doesn't this question the whole reason for invading and occupying Afghanistan?

Knezev: I think we have to look at this in the context of the history of the Taliban. We obviously know that the Taliban was

created by Zbigniew Brzezinski. This was all illustrated in his book "The Grand Chessboard".

I think we also need to look into the history of Karzai. Remember, Karzai initially did support the Taliban in the 90s although he did believe they were being used by the ISI which was the Pakistani intelligence; but, he did initially. Then of course he changed his mind after siding with the UK and the United States. They used Karzai for other US interests that was just to enhance the fracturing and fragmentation of the area.

I think that the entire purpose of Karzai's administration, which was also illustrated perfectly by US Army General Martin Dempsey who as recently as a couple of weeks ago stated that the United States was going to stay in Afghanistan until at least the end of 2014, that this will coincide with the beginning of the next election cycle of the United States.

This continued rupturing of the area and fragmentation between the Taliban and the Karzai administration is what the United States does, and its Western allies.

We have to remember that when the United States military goes into foreign occupying land they don't leave. We still have troops in Kosovo. We still have troops in Japan. We see no ending to the troops in, obviously, Iraq and so on and so forth.

I think we should also look into the fact that in October of this year it will mark the 12 years of this war in Afghanistan.

Now, the war in Vietnam lasted approximately 15, 16 years. We're almost at that point but the difference is that the United States as an industrial capacity was much more stronger in the 50s, 60s and early 70s in Vietnam.

We cannot afford this, economically. It's time to bring our troops home. I think this is going to spell a catastrophe for the United States in terms of foreign policy and most specifically the economy.

Press TV: What now? What should we expect to see in the ties between the US and Afghanistan as well as the Taliban?

Knezev: Again, I go back to Zbigniew Brzezinski's book "The Grand Chessboard"

where this was all illustrated perfectly. I think the entire pre-occupation of that area is to surround the area of Eurasia which was ultimately to put a stranglehold on Russia and on China.

This preceded the PNAC report, the Project for the New American Century, which was drafted prior to 9/11 and prior to the US troops going into Afghanistan and into Iraq. This strategy, this grand strategy of foreign policy and neo-American imperialism, again, was drafted a long time ago.

Again, this was perfectly illustrated in Zbigniew Brzezinski's book, who created openly and admittedly the Taliban.

I think ultimately the goal is to stay in Afghanistan, perpetuate this war in the Middle East and go onto the ultimate goal of surrounding the Eurasian area of Russia and China.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **18 Taliban rebels surrender in E. Afghanistan**

ASADABAD, Afghanistan, Feb. 11 (Xinhua)
-- Up to 18 Taliban rebels renounced

violence and surrendered in eastern Afghan province of Kunar on Monday, authorities said.

"An 18-member group of Taliban including their commander named Heydari laid down their arms and joined the government-initiated peace and reintegration process in Kunar earlier Monday," the provincial governor Seyyed Fazlullah Wahidi told Xinhua.

With the former insurgents' surrender, peace and stability would be further strengthened in several parts of the province with Asadabad city as its capital 185 km east of Kabul, Wahidi added.

The Afghan government set up a 70-member High Peace Council in the summer 2010 to encourage Taliban to disarm and give up militancy against the government.

Taliban militants fighting Afghan and NATO-led troops have not made any comment yet.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Roadside bomb strikes Afghan army van, kills 1, wounds 1**

JALALABAD, Afghanistan, Feb. 11 (Xinhua)-
- Roadside bomb hit a vehicle of Afghan army in the eastern Nangarhar province 120 km east of Kabul on Monday, leaving one person dead and injuring another, a local official said.

"A mine planted by militants on a road in Khogyani district, struck a vehicle of national army in Mimla village at around 10:00 a.m. local time today killing a soldier and injuring another," a security official Hazrat Hussain Mashriqiwal told Xinhua.

Meantime, Zabihullah Mujahid who claims to speak for the Taliban outfit in talks with media via telephone from unknown location claimed of responsibility, stressing three soldiers were killed in the blast.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghan investors to shift 80 factories from Pakistan to Kandahar**

By Sayed Jawad - 11 Feb 2013, 1:22 pm

Khaama Press

Afghan private sector investors are due to shift around 80 factories from Pakistan to southern Kandahar province of Afghanistan, officials announced.

Provincial private sector officials said also urged the Afghan government to provide better investment opportunities including electricity and land for the merchants in this province.

Deputy industrial chief for Kandahar province Faiz-ul-haq Mashwani said Afghan businessmen are facing lack of electricity in Kandahar province which prevents them for investment.

He said employment opportunities for almost 3000 people will be provided if the factories are shifted from Pakistan in Kandahar province.

Afghanistan's industries were left inoperative due to decades of civil strife and war. Still in an early stage of growth before the outbreak of war, industry's development has been stunted since; those few industries that have continued production remain limited to processing of local materials.

However the government and international community encouraged the growth of a private sector, the groundwork was laid for revival of Afghanistan's factories and industries in 2005.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar. 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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