



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

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Peace Process

Barıő Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dıő Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İliőkiler



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1. IRAQ

- **Barazani, Chalabi stress necessity to work our current problems through the Constitution**

Baghdad (NINA) – President of Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barazani, discussed with the leader of Iraqi National Conference (INC), Ahmed al-Chalabi, latest political developments in Iraq.

A statement issued on Thursday, Feb. 14, by the Presidency of Kurdistan Region said that in their meeting the two stressed the necessity to solve current problems, Iraq is facing, in accordance with the Constitution and agreements concluded between political sides, pointing out that democracy and genuine partnership are the base for solving all of Iraq's problems.

The two considered current tension do not serve any of the political sides, rather it harms the political process.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGEJEM

- **Barazani, British Minister discuss bilateral relations, Iraq's political crisis**

Baghdad (NINA) – President of Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barazani, discussed with British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Alistair Burt, means to consolidate relations between Kurdistan Region and Britain in the fields of economic traded, investment and education.

A statement issued on Thursday, Feb. 14, by the Presidency of Kurdistan Region said that Barazani met on Thursday with Burt, accompanied by the British Ambassador to Iraq, Simon Collis, and the British Consular General in Kurdistan Region, discussing Iraq's political crisis and the obstacles hindering its political process. They also discussed the situation in the area, in addition to the situation in Syria.

The statement quoted Burt thanking Barazani and Kurdistan Region for the care and facilities provided to British companies, pointing out that his current visit to the Region is to show his country's interests toward expanding bilateral relations.

Burt also praised Kurdistan Region for providing shelter to Syrian refugees and offering needed aid and assistance.

For his part, Barzani said that the Region's doors are quite open before British firms, renewing the Region's readiness to facilitate their works.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGEJDM

- **Barzani and Chalabi emphasize the need to resolve the current problems and in accordance with the Constitution.**

Baghdad/ NINA /-- Kurdistan region president Massoud Barzani and Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmed Chalabi, discussed in a meeting held today the latest political developments in Iraq.

A statement by the presidency of Kurdistan region, said : " The two sides stressed during the meeting the need to resolve the current problems faced by Iraq in accordance with the constitution and political agreements reached between the parties, noting that the establishment of real democracy and true partnership based on the resolve of all outstanding problems in Iraq.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGEILK

- **Mayahi describes head of Federal Court as victim of pressures, agenda of some blocs**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Aziz Shareef al-Mayahi, of the White bloc stressed that the involving the head of the Federal Court, Midhat al-Mahmoud, in the procedures of the Justice and Accountability Commission is a part of the political game that some blocs attempt to impose on the political process.

He stated to AIN “The White bloc warned for many times from involving the Iraqi judiciary in the political debates and disputes as we called the political blocs to solve their disputes away from the judiciary.”

“Before one month, the JAC confirmed not involving Mahmoud in its procedures but it seems that the political attempts targeted even the leaders of the judicial authority,” he continued.

He called Mahmoud to “Appeal the decision of the JAC to the Cassation Court.”

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28538:mayahi-describes-head-of-federal-court-as-victim-of-pressures-agenda-of-some-blocs&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Demands that harm others not to be implemented, says Maliki**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Adil al-Maliki, of the State of Law Coalition stressed the necessity of not implementing the demands that harm the interests of others.

He stated to AIN “Canceling the Justice and Accountability Commission n law is the demand of the politicians who exploited the demonstrations where many provinces rejected such demand especially in central and southern Iraqi province which were extremely subject to the injustice of the former regime.”

“There two contradicted interests in respect the JAC law represented by the victims of the former regime and supporters of the former regime so there must be a balance between the two sides,” he added.

“Amending the JAC law must not affect the essence of the law,” he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28537:demands-that-harm-others-not-to-be-implemented-says-maliki&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Kurdish MP rules out amending Article 4 of Anti-terrorism law**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Lateef Mustafa, of Taghyeer Kurdish bloc ruled out amending the Article 4 of Anti-Terrorism law.

He stated to AIN “There is no intention to amend Article 4 but the current proposal is to amend the Justice and Accountability law and this proposal was submitted to the parliament Chairmanship for approval.”

“It is not among the authorities of the parliament to settle the disputes but some blocs want to hold the parliament responsible of the current crisis to create confusion,” he added.

“Parliament role is weak and the Government managed to marginalize its

supervisory role but the demonstrations restored its role,” he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28536:kurdish-mp-rules-out-amending-article-4-of-anti-terrorism-law&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Al-Maliki says Iraq seeks strategic relations with Britain**

BAGHDAD / Aswat all-Iraq: Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki welcomed on Wednesday any initiative that aims to develop Iraqi-British relations and expands cooperation in various domains.

“Al-Maliki received at his office in Baghdad a British delegation led by Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Alistair Burt, with whom he expressed hope to bolster strategic relations,” al-Maliki’s office said in a statement received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

Talks also dwelt with the latest developments in the region, mainly the Syria crisis.

They agreed to form a ministerial committee to facilitate all difficulties facing the development of bilateral relations.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%285idp3orwaa2n0g2j3abfpm55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152421&l=1

- **Iraqi-British trade cooperation committee holds meeting in Baghdad**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The Iraqi - British Joint ministerial Committee for Trade Cooperation held its first meeting in Baghdad on Tuesday.



The Iraqi side was headed by Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, while the British side was headed by British Minister of State for Middle East Affairs, Alistair Burt, and attended by a number of senior officials and ministers from both

countries, the foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

The Iraqi side was also represented by Deputy Prime Minister for Economy Affairs, Rose Nouri Shaways, Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs, Salih Al Mutlaq, and the ministers of trade and transport, Chairman of the Investment Commission, representative of the Advisers Commission and Cabinet General Secretariat, Deputy Chief of Army Staff, representatives of the Ministries of Municipalities, Public Works, Higher Education, and Oil.

The British side was represented by, UK Ambassador to Iraq, Simon Collis, Strategic Director in the Ministry of Trade and Investment, Edward Oakden, Senior Adviser at the Defense Department, General Simon Mayal, Manager of the Iraqi - Britain Business Council, Baroness Emma Nicholson, and representatives of British companies and trade bodies.

The two sides agreed on holding biannual meetings of the Ministerial Committee in both countries and discussed opportunities in the Iraqi market and to focus on specific sectors such as education,

cultural exchange, infrastructure, aviation, and Defense sales.

The Committee also discussed ways to overcome the obstacles that hinder cooperation in the areas of visas, movement of goods and people, and direct Airways.

At the end of the meeting, the Iraqi Foreign Minister and British Secretary of State signed an agreement to establish the Iraqi - British Ministerial Council for business cooperation.

They also agreed on holding regular meetings with the participation of a larger number of representatives of the two countries to remove obstacles facing the development of bilateral relations.

The two sides held a joint press conference at the Foreign Ministry building, attended by Arab and foreign news agencies and satellite channels.

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%285idp3orwaa2n0g2j3abfpm55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152420&l=1

- **Al-Nujaifi orders lawmakers to continue attending until approving budget**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraq's Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi ordered parliamentarians to keep attending sessions until approving the 2013 budget.

The parliament's chairmanship adjourned the regular session two days ago, until drafting the 2013 federal budget draft law, a media source said.

The bill had been delayed several times for the lack of consensus among parliamentary blocs.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28idp3orwaa2n0g2j3abfpm55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152418&l=1

- **500 Shabak policemen are training to protect their areas**



Shafaq News/More than 500 policemen - belong to Shabak minority- are trained in order to be able to protect their areas in the province of Nineveh, a security source reported.

The source told "Shafaq News" on condition of anonymity that those will be responsible of "protecting their areas against terrorists".

The source explained that the unit will be supervised by federal ministry of interior.

"They train in a camp in the province", said the source.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5169-500-shabak-policemen-are-training-to-protect-their-areas.html>

- **White-Iraqia hold Allawi's bloc responsible for Qatar over-saying at Iraq**

Shafaq News/The white-Iraqiya bloc described the leaders of Iraqiya list as agents for Saudi, Qatar and Turkey saying that they aimed at implementing the plan of those states in the country.

Jamal al-Battekh, General-secretary of White-Iraqia bloc told "Shafaq News" that the three states of "Turkey, Saudi and Qatar aimed at implementing the same once-failed in Syria plan in Iraq".

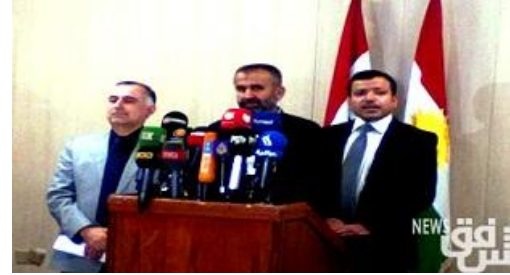


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Al-Battekh criticized the visit paid by the Iraqi speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi to Qatar, saying that "the leaders of Iraqiya list turn to agents" for those three states and gave them a pretext to interfere in Iraq's affairs.

In accordance to the speakership, Nujaifi's visit to Qatar made due to an invitation made by al-Jazeera Satellite Channel of in order to be interviewed.

State of Low members strongly criticized Nujaifi's visit demanding him to state the reasons behind it.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5167-white-iraqia-hold-allawis-bloc-responsible-for-qatar-over-saying-at-iraq.html>

- **Opposition submits eight reform points in Kurdistan**

Shafaq News / A leading figure in the Islamic Union of Kurdistan revealed on Thursday, that a meeting of Kurdish opposition blocs in Sulaymaniyah resulted today in eight points that represent a reform paper to be submitted to the Presidency of Kurdistan Region.

Abu Bakr Ali told "Shafaq News", that "the points were about discussing all political and crucial issues within Kurdistan Parliament and return a draft of the constitution to the parliament for approval."

"The other points emphasized on returning the national projects , discussing them and agreeing on them as well as forming a National Commission for the elections in Kurdistan , hold elections on its scheduled date , find political strategy and give preliminary on the disputed areas and reject any attempt to influence on them."

He stressed that it was confirmed at the meeting, the refusal to participate in the current government.

<http://www.shafaag.com/en/news/5165-opposition-submits-eight-reform-points-in-kurdistan.html>

2. IRAN

- **Envoy: Iran, IAEA to Continue Talks**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Residing Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency Ali Asqar Soltaniyeh said that during the Wednesday talks in Tehran between Iran and the IAEA the two sides succeeded in obviating some differences and agreed to continue their negotiations in future.

Some differences of opinion were solved, some modality articles were approved, and it was decided that new proposals made would be surveyed and results would be reported at next session, Soltaniyeh said on Wednesday night.



"Expert level negotiations with the eight-member IAEA delegation, headed by deputy agency secretary general on the modality, which is a framework for final solving of the claims made about the Iranian nuclear program were done today in Tehran," he added.

The date for next round of talks between the two sides has not being set yet.

The International Atomic Energy Agency team, headed by Deputy Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Herman Nackaerts, arrived in the Iranian capital, Tehran, in the early hours of Wednesday.

The IAEA experts discussed issues pertaining to Tehran's nuclear energy program with Iranian officials.

Soltaniyeh headed the Iranian negotiating team.

Nackaerts said on Thursday that the representatives of Iran and the IAEA in their Wednesday meeting in Tehran exchanged views on a modality plan about Tehran's nuclear program.

He added that the IAEA is committed to continue talks with Iran on the country's nuclear program.

Speaking to reporters at Vienna airport after returning from Tehran, he said during talks with Iranian officials the two sides exchanged views on Modality plan but they did not reach any final agreement to this end.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107144514>

- **Iran Favors Constructive, Positive Atmosphere for Continued Talks with World Powers**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mohammad Khazayee underlined that Tehran will attend talks with the world powers if a constructive and positive atmosphere prevails over the negotiations between the two sides.



No talks could be successful, unless it was held in a constructive and positive atmosphere which would lead to cooperation, Khazayee said in a letter sent to the rotating chairman of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Wednesday.

He also criticized taking unreasonable actions against Iran, stressing that imposing further threats or sanctions on the country would inactivate diplomatic efforts.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, he said, has always been serious during talks with the sextet including the US, UK, France, China and Russia plus Germany and expected the other side to be serious and realistic too.

Khazayee further stressed Iran's legitimate right to have nuclear fuel cycle, underlining Tehran's readiness to hold

negotiations based on mutual respect and understanding.

Commenting on some hostile remarks and unfounded claims made Wednesday by certain members of the UNSC about Iran's peaceful nuclear program, he reiterated Tehran's commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as the country's determination to continue its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the basis of safeguards agreements.

Recognition of Iran's legitimate right to enrich uranium and have nuclear fuel cycle based on the NPT is an evident and transparent issue, noted the envoy.

He stressed Iranian officials have repeatedly announced that pursuing a double standard approach - putting pressure on Iran on one hand and voicing readiness to hold talks on the other - was meaningless and would derail diplomatic efforts.

The United States and Iran broke diplomatic relations in April 1980, after Iranian students seized the United States' espionage center at its embassy in Tehran.

The two countries have had tense relations ever since, but have shown willingness to attend talks to help resolve regional issues, including security in Iraq. Yet, the two countries have avoided talks on bilateral issues for the last thirty years.

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 NPT entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions and the western embargos 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 the IAEA's questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107144508>

- **Larijani Stresses Closer Cooperation among ECO Members**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani underlined the necessity for continued and expanded cooperation among the members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

Speaking to reporters after returning from Pakistan where he attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) in Islamabad, Larijani expressed the hope that the ECO Parliamentary Conference's Executive Secretariat would see into expanded cooperation among the

ECO member countries, and particularly among their parliaments.

The ECO is an intergovernmental organization involving seven Asian and three Eurasian nations, part of the South-central Asian Union. It provides a platform to discuss ways to improve development and promote trade, and investment opportunities. The ECO is an ad hoc organization under the United Nations Charter (Chap. VIII). The common objective is to establish a single market for goods and services, much like the European Union.

ECO's secretariat and cultural department are located in Tehran, its economic bureau is in Turkey and its scientific bureau is situated in Pakistan. The organization's population is 416,046,863 and the area is 8,620,697 km². The organization was founded by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.

The ECO has 10 member-states at present time. Turkey, Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are member-states of ECO.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107144500>

- **Algeria Eager to Further Reinvigorate Ties with Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in a message to his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stressed his country's enthusiasm for the further enhancement of the relations with Tehran.



Bouteflika in his message congratulated President Ahmadinejad on the 34th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and called for expansion of Iran-Algeria ties.

He also expressed his determination to broaden bilateral ties.

President Ahmadinejad's administration has striven hard to maximize relations with the African continent.

Iran is also an observing member of the AU and has shown an active presence in previous AU summit meetings.

The country is considered as one of the AU's strategic partners along with India, Japan, China, several South American states and Turkey, while Tehran is also believed to be prioritizing promotion of its economic and political ties with the African states.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107144486>

- **Iran running oil, gas projects despite restrictions: Oil Minister**

Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi addresses the inauguration ceremony of the largest associated petroleum gas plant in the Persian Gulf in Siri, February 14, 2013.

Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi addresses the inauguration ceremony of the largest associated petroleum gas plant in the Persian Gulf in Siri, February 14, 2013.

Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi says the Islamic Republic is implementing all its oil

and gas projects despite restrictions imposed on Iran.



In an address on Thursday to the inauguration ceremony of the largest associated petroleum gas (APG) plant in the Persian Gulf, built on the southern Iranian island of Siri, Qasemi said the development and completion of oil and gas fields projects were the main priority of Iran's oil industry.

The plant in Siri, which went on stream on Thursday, will produce natural gas liquids (NGL), and when fully operational, it would on average collect 100 to 104 million cubic feet per day (mcfpd) of dry gas, thus preventing associated petroleum gas from being flared.

The NGL plant will also produce 1,500 barrels per day (bpd) of pentane, 4,000 bpd of butane, 1,400 bpd of gas condensate, and 8,000 bpd of propane.

Qasemi also stated that Iran planned to build NGL plants in the southern coastal provinces to prevent "40 million cubic meters of gas mixed with oil" from going to waste.

Qasemi said in spite of sanctions imposed by 27 member countries of the European Union, some Asian and European states have expressed readiness to purchase condensate and natural gas liquids produced in Siri.

On October 15, 2012, the European Union announced a package of sanctions against Iran, which focuses on Iranian banks, trade, and gas exports.

In addition, the US Senate approved new sanctions against Iran's energy, port, shipping, and shipbuilding sectors on November 30, 2012, in a bid to mount economic pressure on the Islamic Republic.

The illegal US-engineered sanctions have been imposed based on the false allegation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/15/289043/irans-oil-gas-projects-continue/>

- **Iranian FM discusses Syria with Turkish, Egyptian counterparts**

Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has exchanged views with his Egyptian and Turkish counterparts on the latest developments in the region.

Salehi held separate telephone conversations with Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amron and his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu on Thursday.

The major topic of the telephone conversations was the issue of the crisis in Syria, which began nearly two years ago. Many people, including large numbers of Syrian security forces, have been killed in the turmoil.

On Wednesday, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called on the UN Security Council to take action on the situation in Syria. "It is essential for the Security Council to overcome the deadlock and find the unity that will make meaningful action possible."

Ban also stated that the international community must make efforts to bring about a political solution in Syria.

Iran has always stressed the importance of resolving the unrest through political channels.

In addition, the Islamic Republic has repeatedly rejected any foreign interference in Syria and denounced the support of certain countries for militant groups that are involved in terrorist activities in the country.

The Iranian foreign minister also held a telephone conversation with his Venezuelan counterpart Elias Jaua and discussed ways to strengthen ties between Tehran and Caracas.

Salehi wished for the immediate recovery of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who has undergone a fourth round of cancer surgery.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/15/289031/iran-discusses-syria-with-turkey-egypt/>

- **Iran launches largest NGL plant in Persian Gulf**

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seen at the inauguration ceremony of the associated petroleum gas (APG) plant on Siri Island on Thursday, February 15, 2013

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seen at the inauguration ceremony of the associated petroleum gas (APG) plant on Siri Island on Thursday, February 15, 2013

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has inaugurated the largest associated petroleum gas (APG) plant in the Persian Gulf, built on the southern Iranian island of Siri to produce condensate and gather associated gas.

"Oil and gas are national wealth and we should make the optimum use of this blessing in order to develop the country,"

Ahmadinejad said in the inauguration ceremony in Siri Island on Thursday.

The Iranian president added that because of its advantageous location, the Siri Island would turn into a center for exporting gas.



Praising the progress of the country's oil industry, Ahmadinejad said Iran must reach a point where it can design and implement international projects.

The plant, which went onstream on Thursday, will produce natural gas liquids (NGL) and when fully operational, would on average collect 100 to 104 million cubic feet per day (mcfpd) of dry gas, thus preventing associated petroleum gas from being flared.

The NGL plant will also produce 1,500 barrels per day (bpd) of pentane, 4,000 bpd of butane, 1,400 bpd of gas condensate, and 8,000 bpd of propane.

Several Asian and European countries have expressed readiness to purchase condensate and gas liquids from the Siri plant, despite oil and gas sanctions against Iran.

On October 15, 2012, the European Union announced a package of sanctions against Iran, which focuses on Iranian banks, trade, and gas exports.

The US Senate also approved new sanctions against Iran's energy, port, shipping, and shipbuilding sectors on November 30, 2012, in a bid to mount economic pressure on the Islamic Republic.

The illegal US-engineered sanctions have been imposed based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/14/288981/iran-launches-largest-ngl-plant-in-pg/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Newspapers Review: Abbas on Government, Elections Focus of Dailies**

RAMALLAH, February 14, 2013 (Wafa) – The three Palestinian dailies Thursday highlighted President Mahmoud Abbas reaffirming that conducting elections is a requirement to form the new government.

Al-Hayat al-Jadida reported on Abbas saying, during his meeting with the elected heads of local councils, that the Palestinian leadership aspires to end the internal division and achieve reconciliation because it is the Palestinian concern.

It quoted Abbas saying that Hamas does not wish to hold elections during the timeframe agreed on in Doha.

Al-Ayyam's front page headline quoted Abbas saying that he anticipating a US move to break the stalemate in the peace process.

Al-Hayat al-Jadida said prisoners held in Israeli jails will launch a one-day hunger strike in solidarity with the prisoners who have been on a long hunger strike.

Al-Ayyam printed a photo of Gaza borders with Egypt of Egyptian security forces shutting down tunnels with Rafah by flooding them with water.

It reported on Minister of Finance Nabeel Kassis saying that PA will pay part of the January salary in the next 10 days.

Al-Hayat al-Jadida said the new US Secretary of State John Kerry has affirmed the US remains an essential party in the peace process.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21685>

- **Prisoners Strike in Solidarity with Hunger Strikers**

RAMALLAH, February 14, 2013 (WAFA) – Some 360 prisoners held in Israeli jails, mainly from the Islamic Jihad, Thursday began a one-day hunger strike in solidarity with the four prisoners who have been on

a long hunger strike, said a Prisoners' Club statement.

It said the prisoners refused to accept meals as they began their hunger strike.

The prisoners plan a broader hunger strike on Tuesday that will include all Israeli jails in solidarity with the striking prisoners.

Samer Issawi has been on hunger strike for 205 days, Jafar Izzeddin and Tariq Qadan have been striking for 79 days and Ayman Sharawneh has been on strike for about 142 days.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21683>

- **'Bulgaria security forces raid, expel Hamas delegation'**

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Raid on residences of visiting Hamas delegation allegedly prompted by Israeli, US, British pressure; Bulgarian government denies meeting with Hamas, says Palestinians were in Sofia on "private visitation."

Bulgarian security forces on Friday raided the temporary residences of a visiting

Hamas delegation in Sofia, and then expelled the officials from the country, Palestinian news agency Ma'an reported.

The Hamas delegation arrived in Bulgaria on Wednesday to present the "Palestinian narrative and expose the false Israeli narrative on the Palestinians and Hamas." The visit was the first of its kind by Hamas officials to a member of the EU.

Ma'an quoted a statement released by Hamas' Change and Reform parliamentary list as saying the that the Bulgarian move was at least in part prompted by Israeli, US and British pressure.

On Thursday, the Bulgarian government flatly rejected reports that meetings between official representatives of the government and Hamas officials took place.

Ismail al-Ashkar, head of the Hamas parliamentary list, led the delegation. Hamas legislators Salah Bardaweel and Mushir al-Masri, who is also a spokesman for the Islamist movement in the Gaza Strip, accompanied him.

Bulgarian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Vessela Tcherneva told The Jerusalem Post on Thursday that "Bulgaria is part of the EU politics as listing Hamas as a terror organization."

She added that the Hamas representatives are "on a private visitation of an NGO" in Sofia.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=303392>

- **'Israel offered to lay pipeline through Turkey'**

By ARIEL BEN SOLOMON, JPOST.COM STAFF

Istanbul reluctant to accept Israeli offer for natural gas pipeline because of political tension, Turkish minister says.

Leviathan holds 453 billion cu.m. of gas [file]

Leviathan holds 453 billion cu.m. of gas [file] Photo: Courtesy of Albatross

Israel has offered to lay a natural gas pipeline through Turkey, but Istanbul is reluctant to accept due to ongoing bilateral tension, Hurriyet quoted a

Turkish energy ministry official as saying Friday.

“Israel has made a bid to build a pipeline to Turkey within the last two weeks,” the Hurriyet quoted the official as saying. “But we have a policy regarding Israel and the claims that Turkey leans towards this idea is not true.”

The pipeline would allow Israel to sell gas to Europe, but the Turkish government has not given a response because of the tensions between the countries.

This follows reports from Yediot Ahronot that two Israelis held two meetings in Turkey with the country's energy ministry officials in order to present the offer. The story was reported in the Turkish daily Vatan on Thursday, according to the report.

Israel recently allowed Turkey to bring materials into Gaza in order to build a hospital. The Hurriyet noted that this relates to one of the three conditions that Turkey presented to Israel for overcoming tensions, which is lifting the seige on Gaza.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=303396>

- **Israelis, Egyptians discuss security in Cairo**

Delegation meets Egyptian officials on Cairo runway, discuss Sinai security, Syria, Palestinians, according to Arab media.

An Israeli delegation departed from Cairo on Thursday evening after meeting Egyptian officials to discuss security issues in Sinai, the alleged Israeli strike in Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Egyptian website Al-Shorouk reported Friday.

According to the al-Masreyoon website, an Israeli delegation composed of four officials arrived in Cairo on Thursday on an Israeli military plane. The Israelis met with members of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service while the plane waited on the runway. Sources reported that the talks were headed by the Egyptian intelligence chief Raafat Shehata. The talks were said to have covered the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the reported Israeli attack on Syria, according to the sources.

The Egyptian website, al-Masry al-Youm also reported about the story on Thursday, saying that the meeting was planned to last several hours, according to unidentified sources.

The meeting was also said to concern the security situation in the Sinai and border smuggling issues, according to the same sources. The Egyptians and Israeli officials also were said to have discussed a possible prisoner swap, which could include the Israeli citizen, Andre Pshenichnikov, who was caught crossing into Egypt a couple of months ago, for a number of Egyptian prisoners.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=303394>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Ennahda vows unity as Tunisia impasse lingers**

The political crisis in Tunisia is highlighting a rift in the ruling Islamist party's senior leadership.

By Monia Ghanmi for Magharebia in Tunis
– 14/02/13

Tunisia's ruling Islamist party and three of its allies on Wednesday (February 13th) reiterated their support for a cabinet composed of politicians.

Ennahda, the Congress for the Republic (CPR), Wafa Movement and the Liberty and Dignity bloc issued a joint statement rejecting Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali's proposal for a non-partisan cabinet of technocrats.

"The current stage requires a coalition government open onto parties and independent figures with a large parliamentary, political and popular support," TAP quoted the joint declaration as saying.

The stance directly contradicts a proposal by Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, himself a member of Ennahda. Jebali has threatened to resign if his proposal for a technocrat government is rejected. He originally floated the idea to end the political crisis following the assassination of leftist leader Chokri Belaid.

In view of the growing tensions and disputes within Ennahda, observers believe that the unity of the Islamist party,

which withstood shocks under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, is now at risk.

Samir Bettaib, spokesperson for al-Massar Social Democratic Party, said that the dispute between the hard-line wing in Ennahda, represented by Ghannouchi, and the moderate wing led by Jebali and Interior Minister Ali Larayedh, was currently witnessing a truce.

He claimed that this was due to Ghannouchi's interference in the government's work and his obstruction of its activities; something that caused disputes between him and Prime Minister Jebali.

Despite the conflict, Ennahda leaders have vowed to maintain party unity.

"There are always differences and different viewpoints in any democratic movement," Jebali said. "This is what is happening right now in our movement."

For his part, party leader Rachid Ghannouchi said divisions were unlikely in the movement. "God willing, there won't be any splits in Ennahda," he said.

"Ennahda is committed to its institutions and is firm about its unity. However, there is a flow of opinions within it; all opinions are expressed freely and, therefore, I don't believe that Ennahda's unity is threatened," Ghannouchi added.

Internal conflicts have begun to appear within Ennahda since it came to power, according to Riadh Sidaoui, director of the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Analysis.

The most prominent of these conflicts are those between Ennahda leaders in Tunisia and their colleagues overseas, and the provincial conflicts between Ennahda members in southern and inland areas and leaders in coastal areas, the analyst said.

He added that the other conflict that is threatening Ennahda was the division between leaders who lived in Tunisia under Ben Ali's regime and those who lived in exile.

"It seems that Hamadi Jebali is in a strong and weak position at the same time; he's strong because many parties, including Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda's major rivals,

have shown sympathy with his proposal, which seems to have won international support. At the same time, he is weak before Ennahda's broad bases that insist on having the sovereign ministries," Sidaoui said.

Meanwhile, Nidaa Tounes leader Béji Caid Essebsi warned against a division in the ruling party in an interview with Algeria's El Khabar daily published on Monday.

"A division in Ennahda at this particular time is a very negative indicator and won't help fix the situation Tunisia is now in," Caid Essebsi said.

"With all political responsibility, I say if this happens, it'll be dangerous," he continued. "Tunisia will not benefit from a split in the ruling party. The current circumstances are critical and would require everyone to be quite, prudent and not to rush things. Tunisia needs unity rather than splits."

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/14/feature-01

- **Algeria, US tackle nuclear material trafficking**

Algeria and the United States will work together to prevent terrorists and criminals from acquiring black market nuclear material, officials from both countries agreed this week in Algiers.

"Cross-border organised crime poses a threat to the security of the states in the region," Foreign Ministry Director-General for Political Affairs and International Security Taous Feroukhi said Monday (February 11th) at the conclusion of the 2-day forum.

Participants at the meeting expressed concern that nuclear material "could cross the Algerian border, and that the [nuclear material]stocks from Moamer Kadhafi's regime are within the reach of armed Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) groups", Algerie1.com reported.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary Simon Limage and other American officials discussed "best practices in border security, and strategic trade controls...to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and illicit

transfers of conventional weapons," the US State Department said.

Both parties "exchanged views and shared information on current smuggling threats and trends ", it added.

"These discussions pave the way for future co-operation between the United States and Algeria to strengthen national, international and regional capabilities to counter illicit trafficking of nuclear and radioactive materials," the communiqué said.

"Border surveillance and control measures in the south-west of the country have been strengthened and adjusted in line with the new demands of the fight against trafficking networks and other forms of crime," Colonel Djamel Abdessalem Z'ghida announced on Tuesday.

These measures "are supported by daily aerial surveillance of these borders, which is currently being conducted by the air force of the National People's Army (NPA)", he said.

For both Algerian officials and citizens, the al-Qaeda attack last month on the In

Amenas gas complex made the issue of border control a priority.

Illizi Senator Abbas Bouamama said it was essential "to involve the local population in the fight against terrorism".

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/14/feature-02

- **Young Moroccans restless for political change**

Young people were vocal in the Arab Spring and the creation of Morocco's constitution, but many are dissatisfied with the on-going failure of political parties to meet their needs.

By Siham Ali for Magharebia in Rabat – 14/02/13

Young Moroccans say they want a louder voice in politics and the shaping of the kingdom's new democracy.

They seemingly have little faith in politicians in power.

While young voters played an active role in the 2011 Morocco elections and the

referendum on the Morocco constitution, only 1% of young people in the kingdom officially belonged to a political party, the High Commission of Planning reported last year.

Many now agreed that politicians could do a better job of representing young men and women in government, as well as delivering on their bread-and-butter needs, such as jobs and education.

"Parties must implement democracy internally, above all. That way, the most deserving will make it to the top, whether they are young or less young. Although some parties have recently undergone changes, on the whole they have not been favourable to young people," 22-year-old law student Hamid Bekkali told Magharebia.



"Many of my peers have shown interest in politics and want to enter the fray, but the conditions aren't right," he said.

Some Moroccans are also growing weary of politicians' inefficiency.

"There are big issues to be resolved, and officials are wasting time discussing side-issues," 23-year-old Samira El Chaouni told Magharebia.

"Sometimes, you get the impression that politics is practised not for the benefit of society, but for something else," she added.

One politician who appears to be heeding what young people are saying is Mohamed Grine, a member of the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS).

"Contrary to what people say, young people are not shunning politics; rather, politics is shunning young people. Young people have become increasingly interested in politics since 2011," Grine said.

He added that parties used outdated methods and must break the mould of

being dominated by men and older people.

"They are structured in such a way as to exclude young people and women. Parties need to develop in order to incorporate young people," Grine said.

The Young People's Advisory Council, a provision which was written into the constitution, should come into being without further delay, political analyst Jamal Rihani said.

That way, young Moroccans can become more involved in politics and have a greater say in issues of importance to them, he added.

Parties are increasingly opening their doors to young people by allocating quotas for them within decision-making bodies, Rihani noted. However, much work remains in persuading young people that political activity can help spur social change.

Politicians cannot wait much longer to solve the country's deep-seated problems, which directly affect young people. Prolonging this failure only will turn off

youngsters from politics and drive away their potential votes, former People's Movement MP Fatima Moustaghfir said.

"It is social issues that spur young people to love or hate politics. Young people want high-quality education and jobs. At the moment, the problem of unemployment is haunting young Moroccans," she said.

The importance of solving these issues at the root of young people's social discontent is closely tied to an urgent need to complete the democratic process by implementing the constitution's text, Mohamed Grine said.

"With the Arab spring, there was a reform acceleration which resulted in a new constitution," he said. "The building of democracy can actually only happen concurrently to economic and social aspirations, especially when it comes to young people and employment."

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/14/feature-03

- **Calls for Friday rally against political violence divide Egypt's Islamists**

Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya calls for Friday demo – 'Together against violence' – at which Brotherhood says it will have 'symbolic presence'; Secular groups, meanwhile, call for yet more anti-Morsi rallies, marches

Egypt opposition to mark 2nd anniversary of Mubarak ouster with anti-govt rallies Amid calls by Egypt's Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya and its political wing, the Construction and Development Party, for Friday mass rallies condemning political violence, Islamist parties appear at odds as to whether or not to participate.

The Muslim Brotherhood, for its part, Egypt's largest Islamist movement, has declared that it would take part in Friday's 'Together against violence' demonstration with a "symbolic presence."

"Egyptians have always been builders of civilisation, culture and values, while the ongoing violence, sabotage and subversion – carried out under flimsy political cover and with the gleeful incitement of the media – are not even remotely related to Egyptian patriotism," the group asserted in a Wednesday

statement. "Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood has decided to participate in this Friday's events with only a symbolic presence."

However, a number of other Islamist parties and groups – including the Salafist Nour Party, the Salafist Watan Party and the moderate-Islamist Wasat Party – voiced reluctance to take part in Friday's planned rally, fearing "further eruptions of [political] violence."

Earlier this month, the Brotherhood refrained from taking part in nationwide protests dubbed the 'Friday of deliverance,' saying that it "will not be dragged into any confrontations or provocations."

Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya had called for mass protests last Friday, but had to call off the event after other Islamist parties rejected the call. The group therefore postponed the planned demonstrations by one week so as to give itself more time to mobilise the public in advance of the event.

On Monday, the group issued calls for a peaceful million-man rally on Friday, 15 February outside Cairo University in the

capital's sprawling Giza district to denounce acts of violence and sabotage.

According to Khaled Sherif, spokesman for the group's Constructional and Development Party, several mass marches are slated to converge outside the university on Friday. Meeting points for the planned marches include the Rahma Mosque in Haram, the Istiqama Mosque in Giza, the Salah El-Din Mosque in Manial and the Asad Ibn Al-Forat Mosque in Dokki.

Sherif added that the party was mobilising the public in Cairo and other governorates for Friday's planned protest. He said that security committees would be stationed at Cairo University and in surrounding streets in order to ensure protesters' safety.

"Friday's protests will adopt the slogans of 'Together against violence that leads to turmoil,' which is exercised by elements backed by the [opposition] National Salvation Front (NSF); 'Together against the weakness of the government,' which could lead to the collapse of the state; and 'Together against poverty,' which affects the lives of all Egyptians," said Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya leader Essam Derbala.

Derbala went on to say, in reference to the NSF, that "no popular revolution can be created through television talk shows. The only way to tackle the country's current malaise is through dialogue without preconditions."

Several non-Islamist protest groups, meanwhile, are calling for yet another round of demonstrations against President Mohamed Morsi outside the presidential palace in Cairo.

"We will push forward with protests until the demands of the revolution are fulfilled," read a Thursday statement issued by opposition forces. "We will chase the president, who is totally isolated from the legitimacy of the people, from one palace to another; we will never back down despite mounting police brutality and the president's obstinacy."

Political parties and groups to have endorsed the planned anti-Morsi rallies include the Socialist Popular Alliance, the Youth for Justice and Freedom Movement, the Constitution Party, the Popular Movement for the Independence of Al-Azhar, the Karama Party, the Free Front

for Peaceful Change, the Maspero Youth Union, the Arab Revolution Youth Movement, the Revolutionary Socialists, the Egyptian Popular Current, the Egypt Freedom Party, the National Association for Change and the Kefaya movement.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/64811/Egypt/Politics-/Calls-for-Friday-rally-against-political-violence-.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Trial of al Qaeda plot suspects begins in Jordan**

The Jordanian prosecution says the supporters of al Qaeda targeted major shopping malls in the capital and was planning a bombing campaign in the capital's affluent Abdoun neighbourhood

Jordan PM submits resignation after vote
Eleven men went on trial on Thursday in a Jordanian military court accused of plotting to carry out suicide attacks in the capital, including on shopping malls and the U.S. Embassy, judicial sources said.

The Jordanian defendants, all suspected supporters of al Qaeda, pleaded not guilty to charges of "possession of explosives

and plotting to undertake terror attacks and infiltration across borders", the sources said.

The prosecution said the cell had targeted major shopping malls in the capital and was planning a bombing campaign in the capital's affluent Abdoun neighbourhood, where many foreign embassies are located.

The indictment said the group planned to attack the embassy with mortar rounds and then blast its way inside with suicide bombs, but gave no further details.

Security officials initially said when they announced they foiled the plot in October that the members of the militant group had spent some time in Syria, without saying when they had returned to Jordan.

Jordanian authorities have arrested scores of hardline Islamists in recent months along its northern border with Syria as they were about to cross the frontier to join jihadist groups fighting to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Jordan regularly arrests Islamist suspects and puts them on trial in military courts

that human rights groups say are illegal and lack proper legal safeguards. Many civil society groups say many of the Islamist cases are politically motivated.

In 2005, al Qaeda claimed responsibility for three suicide bombings that ripped through luxury hotels in Jordan's capital, killing dozens of people.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64812/World/Region/Trial-of-al-Qaeda-plot-suspects-begins-in-Jordan.aspx>

- **Hariri vows electoral battle**

Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri on Thursday vowed to fight an electoral battle for Lebanon's future as fellow March 14 figures stressed the bloc's unity. Meanwhile, the parliamentary committee on the electoral law is set to meet again Friday.

"We will run in the parliamentary elections alongside our March 14 allies and the Lebanese who believe in a civil state," he said in an address to the March 14 rally commemorating the 8th

anniversary of his father, Rafiq Hariri's, death.

"I will be at your side for the upcoming electoral battle no matter what law is adopted," Hariri, who currently resides in France due to security threats, declared.

"I promise to achieve the principles of the Cedar Revolution."

The March 14 leader launched a broadside against his March 8 foe Hezbollah, saying the party's weapons—along with other arms—"are the mother of all problems in Lebanon."

"Hezbollah refuses to admit this reality and is willing to [politically] bribe PM [Najib Miqati] to make him cover up for their arms," he added.

Meanwhile, March 14 General Secretariat coordinator Fares Soueid said in the commemoration that the alliance is strong in its unity.

"Some people are betting on the fragmentation of March 14 but we have learned through experience that we can move mountains if we unite."

The March 14 alliance has been divided over what electoral to adopt for the elections. The Future Movement voiced its opposition to laws based on proportional voting, while the Future Movement's allies the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb Party have expressed support for the Orthodox Gathering law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

A parliamentarian in the Kataeb Party said that the ceremony showed the strength of the coalition.

"The importance of commemorating the 8th anniversary of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination comes as a confirmation of the alliance which began in 2005," Saadeh told NOW on Thursday.

He added that the March 14 coalition "marched on the road of freedom, sovereignty, independence, building a country and facing the illegal arms [in reference to Hezbollah's weapons]."

As the March 14 alliance geared up for the electoral battle, an MP told NOW on condition of anonymity that the

parliamentary elections would be postponed.

"The parliamentary elections will take place in 2013 but not on its legal date of June 9," he said.

"I think that the parliament will adopt a law for the elections to be held in November or December of 2013."

The parliamentary subcommittee on electoral laws was set to meet on Friday before its mandate to discuss mixed-majoritarian and proportional laws ends on Sunday. The joint parliamentary commissions will convene Monday to hash out the committee's work.

Future Movement MP Ahmad Fatfat said that his bloc will boycott the joint parliamentary committees' session on the electoral law next Monday if government representatives attend the meeting.

As for the subcommittee meetings, Hezbollah MP MP Ali Fayyad said Thursday that the Kataeb electoral law proposal presented by MP Sami Gemayel in the committee does not provide fair representation.

“The proposal gives Christians 53 parliamentary seats and not 58, and it does not provide political balance since it gives 63 seats to the March 14 forces and 57 seats to March 8,” Fayyad told LBC television

Gemayel presented on Wednesday his party’s draft which proposes joining majority rule and proportional representation. It also calls for increasing the number of MPs to 134 so all minorities are represented in the parliament.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/hariri-vows-electoral-battle>

- **Hezbollah MP: New electoral law cannot undermine resistance**

Loyalty to the Resistance bloc leader MP Mohammad Raad said that any electoral law that produces a majority government aims at undermining the resistance.



“If what is being sought is an electoral law that produces a majority-led government that eliminates the minimum requirements for the preservation of the resistance... than this [electoral] law will be produced by those who want to preserve the enemy’s plan,” Raad was quoted as saying on Thursday by the National News Agency during a meeting in South Lebanon.

“The current government is holding on to fundamental principles in order to preserve the resistance against the hostile plans generated in Washington and Tel Aviv.”

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in 2013, but the country's political circles are divided over the electoral law issue.

The main Christian parties, including Hezbollah’s ally the Free Patriotic

Movement, endorsed the Orthodox law that proposes that citizens vote in one electoral district along proportional lines for candidates of their own religious sect.

The Shiite group, which is part of the current government, advocated the adoption of proportional representation and turning Lebanon into one electoral district.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/hezbollah-mp-new-electoral-law-cannot-undermine-resistance>

6. SYRIA

- **Turkey fires back after Syrian shell hits: report**

Turkey strikes back at Syria near the border at the town of Yayladag; no casualties were reported

Turkish artillery struck back on Friday after a shell fired from neighbouring Syria ploughed into Turkish territory without causing any casualties, the state-run news agency reported.

The shell fell near the town of Yayladag in Hatay province near the border with Syria

and Turkish forces retaliated immediately, Anatolia said.

Since Syrian fire killed five Turks on October 3, Turkey has systematically retaliated to every cross-border shelling.

On Monday, 14 people were killed when a minibus packed with explosives blew up in a buffer zone between Syria's and Turkey's border.

One-time allies Turkey and Syria fell out after Ankara joined Arab and Western countries in pressing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to halt his violent crackdown on the popular uprising that erupted in March 2011 and has now turned into a civil war.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64846/World/Region/Turkey-fires-back-after-Syrian-shell-hits-report.aspx>

- **Fresh blows for under-pressure Syrian regime**

The killing of an Iranian official and the seizure of the town of Shadadeh near the Iraqi border prove growing military successes for Syrian rebels over regime troops

Gunmen have killed an Iranian commander in Syria as rebels shot down two fighter jets and overran a town, dealing further setbacks for forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

The ambush on Thursday that killed the Revolutionary Guards commander, the downing of the aircraft in the northwest and the seizure of the town of Shadadeh near the Iraqi border amounted to four straight days of battlefield successes for the rebellion.

The insurgents overran a military air base in Aleppo province on Tuesday, after taking control of Syria's largest dam in the neighbouring province of Raqa the day before.

The latest setbacks came after US Secretary of State John Kerry said Assad needed to abandon hopes of riding out the war and accept the "inevitability" of his departure.

On Thursday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said one of its commanders, Hassan Shateri, was "martyred... at the hands of Zionist regime mercenaries and backers"

while travelling by road between Damascus and Beirut.

The Guards said he had also headed the Iranian Committee for the Reconstruction of Lebanon, and the Iranian embassy in Beirut gave a similar account.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi strongly condemned the killing as a "terrorist act" and paid tribute to "this commander of Islam and his tireless efforts in reconstruction."

A strong ally of the Damascus regime, Tehran often refers to rebels fighting Assad's troops as "terrorists" with ties to arch-foe Israel.

Syria's rebellion flared after Assad's forces launched a bloody crackdown on peaceful democracy protests that erupted in March 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings, but it has become increasingly dominated by Islamist groups.

In London, British Foreign Secretary William Hague warned that Islamist militants from Western countries who had gone to fight in Syria could launch terrorist attacks when they return.

Hague said Syria had become the "number one destination" for jihadists worldwide.

One of the most prominent radical Islamist groups, the Al-Nusra Front, took the town of Shadadeh in the oil-rich northeastern province of Hasakeh on Thursday.

"After three days of fierce battles against the army, Al-Nusra Front fighters have seized control of Shadadeh," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Fighting and car bombings by the jihadists killed more than 100 troops in three days, during which 30 Al-Nusra Front fighters also died, five of whom were from Kuwait, said the Observatory.

Elsewhere, the army made its own advances, taking a district in the central city of Homs after weeks of heavy clashes.

The victory comes a week after the army took control of Kafraya on the southwestern outskirts of Homs, a city opposition activists refer as "the capital of the revolution."



In Washington, Kerry said the death toll from the conflict may have reached 90,000, citing figures provided by his Saudi counterpart Prince Saud al-Faisal -- sharply up on recent UN estimates of nearly 70,000 people killed.

Kerry had earlier suggested taking renewed steps to urge Syrian ally Russia to bring more pressure on Assad to quit, after Moscow insisted it was ready to host talks with both sides.

Syria welcomed Russia's invitation, while stressing its foreign minister would not meet Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, the opposition chief who has offered to hold peace talks with regime officials without blood on their hands.

Meanwhile the United Nations denied reports that new peace plan is being drawn up for Syria involving the creation of a senate to oversee a power transition.

Saudi newspaper Asharq al-Awsat reported that it had obtained a copy of a plan aimed at ending Syria's 23-month conflict, saying that it had been drafted "under UN supervision."

Members of Syria-based opposition groups tolerated by the regime of President Bashar al-Assad helped draft the plan, the paper added.

But the United Nations said in a statement that "neither the secretary-general nor the joint special representative (international envoy Lakhdar Brahimi) have any knowledge of the so-called plan."

"However, Mr Brahimi and his team continue to work with all stakeholders toward a peaceful settlement of the Syrian conflict."

The world body also noted that Ban and Brahimi support opposition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib's offer to hold peace talks with regime officials without blood on their hands.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64837/World/Region/Fresh-blows-for-underpressure-Syrian-regime.aspx>

- **Gunmen kidnap more than 100 civilians in Syria**

More than 100 civilians have been abducted by armed groups in the Syrian province of Idlib in separate incidents, a watchdog said on Friday, expressing alarm over what it said were "sectarian kidnappings".

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the kidnappings in the northwestern province occurred on Thursday in two separate incidents.

A group of some 70 men and women passengers on four mini-buses were abducted near an army checkpoint when travelling towards the provincial capital, also Idlib, by pro-regime armed men, said the Britain-based Observatory.

It said the kidnappers were from the Shiite-majority villages of Al-Fua and Kafraya, while the passengers hailed from the mostly Sunni villages of Saraqeb, Sarmin and Binnish.

Hours before their abduction, in the same area, another armed group kidnapped at least 40 other civilians, mostly women and children, the Observatory said.

They had been travelling on a bus from Al-Fua and Kafraya villages, it said.

Most Syrian rebels fighting troops loyal to President Bashar al-Assad are Sunni, while the president's clan belongs to an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

"I fear a rise in sectarian kidnappings," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said. "Such acts are detrimental to the revolution."

The United Nations says almost 70,000 people have been killed so far in the Syrian conflict, which first erupted 23 months ago on March 15, 2011.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/gunmen-kidnap-more-than-100-civilians-in-syria>

- **Syrian defected former PM won't quit on Assad ouster**

By Al Arabiya with AFP

Riad Hijab, Syria's defected former prime minister, confirms that the Syrian opposition will not compromise on President Assad's departure in an interview with Al Arabiya news.

He went on to highlight the opposition's rejection of any peace initiative issued behind closed doors. Hijab spoke in reference to a reported attempt to solve the Syrian crisis under the auspices of the United Nations.

When asked if opposition leader Moaz al-Khatib was behind the initiative, Hijab said the matter would be discussed at a political meeting in Cairo, held on Thursday.

The defector went on to reject any outcome that does not respect the revolution's principles.

He believes a transitional government has become a national necessity, and it will be formed as soon as a consensus is reached between the different factions of the Syrian opposition.

Furthermore, he denied that Assad would respond to any initiative, indicating that

the Syrian president did not respond to social demands so he most likely will not respond to political ones.

He stated his opinion that Assad would not leave peacefully and alleged that Iran is ruling Syria at the moment.

The Asharq al-Awsat Newspaper has published a draft document about the aforementioned peace agreement in Syria.

The document sanctions the formation of a dialogue table composed of 140 members, of which 102 are elected under U.N. supervision, while the regime, the opposition and the religious leaders can choose 30.

This assembly will be called the Senate and will be at the heart of the Second Republic of Syria. The council will be headed by the Syrian Vice President.

Upon the ratification of the document, the cease-fire should immediately enter into effect and the troops shall withdraw within 30 days. The agreement considers canceling the national, religious and political sectarianism, an essential national goal.

Mounting death toll

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Thursday the death toll in Syria may have reached 90,000, citing figures given to him by his Saudi counterpart Prince Saud al-Faisal.

“I had occasion ... to speak this morning with the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia. The first thing he mentioned to me was in his estimate perhaps as many as 90,000 people who have been killed in Syria,” Kerry told reporters.

The figure is much higher than estimates given this week by U.N. rights chief Navi Pillay who said the death toll from the civil war was “nearing 70,000.”

The newly appointed top U.S. diplomat said the “desperate humanitarian situation” in Syria would be one of the issues topping a packed agenda for his first meeting at the State Department with U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon.

Kerry said Wednesday after talks with Jordan's Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh that Washington and Jordan could take renewed steps to urge Syrian ally Russia to

bring more pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to quit.

“I want to learn from the secretary general what he thinks we can do... to try to change President Assad’s calculations, to stop the bloodshed and begin a peaceful political transition towards a democratic future,” Kerry said.

The “vast numbers of refugees” fleeing the 23-month conflict pose a huge burden for Syria’s neighbors, Kerry warned.

U.N. and U.S. estimates say more than 750,000 people have fled the country, while a further 2.5 million are displaced internally.

Al Arabiya’s “Lion’s Den” info-graphic gallery tracks defections within the Syrian regime, for latest updates on the major visit the gallery here.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/14/266314.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Bahrain policeman killed in clashes with protesters

Bahrain's interior ministry says a police officer was killed after he was hit by a patrol bomb during clashes with anti-regime Shiite protesters

A police officer was killed near the Bahraini capital Manama in fresh overnight clashes with protesters marking the second anniversary of a Shiite-led uprising, the interior ministry said Friday.



The officer died after he was hit by a petrol bomb during clashes in a Shiite village near the capital.

A teenager was shot dead on Thursday when the protests to mark the 2011 uprising against the Gulf kingdom's Sunni rulers turned violent.

"Police officer Mohamed Atef, hit by an incendiary device which seriously injured him, died soon after he was admitted to hospital," public security chief Major-General Tariq al-Hassan said in an interior ministry statement.

Protesters were hurling petrol bombs, iron bars and stones at police in the Shiite-populated village of Al-Sahla when the incident occurred, Hassan said.

On Thursday, a teenager was shot dead in another Shiite village on the outskirts of Manama during clashes that erupted when hundreds took to the streets to mark the anniversary.

Those demonstrations turned violent when police fired shotguns and tear gas to disperse the crowds, wounding several people, witnesses said.

Opposition groups had called for strikes and nationwide protests on Thursday and Friday to mark the Arab Spring-inspired uprising on February 14, 2011, which was crushed by the security forces about a month later.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64834/World/Region/Bahrain-policeman-killed-in-clashes-with-protester.aspx>

- **Gulf monarchies reject 'provocative' Iran talks idea**

The head of the GCC rejects Iran's proposition to discuss the crisis in both Bahrain and Syria in upcoming talks on Tehran's nuclear programme as provocative interference in the internal affairs of Arab states

The Gulf monarchies on Thursday rejected as a provocation an Iranian proposal to include the Syria crisis and the situation in Bahrain on the agenda of upcoming talks on Tehran's nuclear programme.

The head of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Abdellatif Zayani, announced the "total rejection" of the Iranian proposition, calling it "a provocation" and "interference in the internal affairs of Arab states."

He was reacting to comments by Iran's deputy minister for Asian affairs, Abbas Araghchi, who was cited by the Mehr news agency on Tuesday as saying Tehran

had "proposed that the crises in Syria and Bahrain be the subject of talks with the Western powers in Kazakhstan."

It was a way of "mixing up the cards", which reflected "Iran's procrastination and lack of seriousness in reaching a settlement that puts an end to regional and international concerns over its nuclear programme," Zayani said in a statement.

Iran's charge d'affaires was summoned on Thursday by Bahrain's foreign ministry, where he was handed a note of protest, the official BNA news agency reported.

The Iranian proposal was "an interference in Bahrain's internal affairs and a violation of sovereignty," which "stirs regional tensions and instability," the agency added.

The comments by the Gulf states come less than two weeks before Iran and the so-called P5+1 -- Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany -- are due to resume discussions in Kazakhstan, eight months after they were suspended.

The talks aim to address a key Western concern about Iran's capacity to enrich uranium to fissile purities of 20 percent, a process that can be used for peaceful atomic purposes as well as for making the core of a nuclear bomb.

Relations between Iran and the GCC have plunged to a new low, with Tehran suspected of supporting Shiite opposition protests in Bahrain against the Sunni monarchy.

The Islamic Republic is also a staunch ally of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, while the Gulf monarchies are key backers of the rebels in the conflict that has raged for almost two years and cost tens of thousands of lives.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64824/World/Region/Gulf-monarchies-reject-provocative-Iran-talks-idea.aspx>

- **The Saudi-Iraqi committee continues its meetings to implement prisoner swaps**

Even though two years are left of his 10-year prison sentence, former Saudi prisoner in Iraq Jamal al-Gharawi was able

to return to his homeland and reunite with his family after life in an Iraqi prison.

He spent eight years in the prison and was placed there on charges of illegal entry into the country.

Once Jamal arrived in the Kingdom he refused to be interviewed. However, his mother, who had been patient throughout his imprisonment, thanked everyone who took part in his release.

“I hope all prisoners will be freed like my son. The government did its best and I am very thankful. This is their son and they treated him with the utmost generosity. They followed up on his case since he left the country and till now. They have been following up on the case all this time.”

The father, who had lost his memory, seemed to get it back when he saw his son. Even the children were happy about his return.

Some of the younger family members such as his three-year-old niece only know him through his old pictures or have heard about him from family conversations.

“We did not notice anything odd about him. He was a normal person and was loved by all his neighbors. He was optimistic and had dreams for the future. We were taken by surprise when we found out he was there... in Iraq and when we heard about the verdict from the papers,” said one relative.

“He is my brother. I only know him through news, I hear about him and I knew he was in Iraq. I know about him from the pictures we have of him at home,” said Gharawi’s younger brother.

There are still 57 Saudis who are waiting to return to their home country. The Saudi-Iraqi security committee is still holding meetings about implementing prisoner swap agreements.

In January of this year twenty Saudi detainees were tortured in Iraqi prisons following Iraq’s national team’s loss at the Gulf Cup football tournament. They were beaten by the UAE in a match supervised by a Saudi referee, according to Thamer Balheed, head of the Saudi detainees in Iraq.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/14/266328.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Karzai Summons ISAF Commander Over Air Strike**

February 14, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has summoned the commander of NATO-led forces in his country to explain an air strike that Afghan officials say killed 10 civilians.

Several Taliban fighters also reportedly died in the February 13 air strike in eastern Kunar Province.

A statement from Karzai's office quoted the president as saying "such incidents must strictly be avoided in future."

The statement said U.S. General Joseph Dunford expressed regret over the incident and pledged that NATO's International Security Assistance Force will "avoid carrying out operations and bombings in residential areas."

Dunford assumed command of NATO-led forces in Afghanistan on February 10 and will oversee the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces through 2014.

Civilian casualties inflicted by NATO forces are a highly sensitive issue and are regularly condemned by Karzai.

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

- **U.S. Inspector Warns On Afghan Reconstruction Aid**

February 14, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

The watchdog who monitors U.S. spending on reconstruction projects in Afghanistan has recommended that Washington reconsider how much it is spending because of security and corruption concerns.

John Sopko, the special inspector-general for Afghan reconstruction, told the House of Representatives' Oversight Committee that the U.S. government has approved – but not yet spent – \$20 billion for reconstruction projects in Afghanistan.

Sopko said that as U.S. forces begin to withdraw from Afghanistan in the next

two years, it will become more difficult for U.S. inspectors to check insecure areas to ensure that reconstruction funds are being spent appropriately.

Sopko has also raised concerns about corruption among Afghan authorities and the capability of the Afghan government to responsibly handle large sums of aid money.

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

- **Afghanistan dismiss US Audit Watchdog's remarks**

By Sayed Jawad - 14 Feb 2013, 3:03 pm

Khaama Press

Afghan government officials confirm corruption in governmental departments however the officials insist that the institutions have the capabilities to spend international aid properly and in a transparent way.

Afghan finance ministry denied remarks by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and

said the government of Afghanistan is able to properly use the international aid.

A spokesman for the Afghan finance ministry Wahidullah Tawhidi on Thursday said the government's transparency and effectiveness in spending the foreign aid has been more than the other organizations who are spending the foreign aid in the country.

He said, "We deny the report since various reports by World Bank and other international organizations shows that around 85% of the aid spent by the Afghan government has been appropriate and transparent while the foreign aid spent independently and by non-governmental organizations had only 15% effectiveness and in some cases corruption has been noted in those institutions activities."

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said Billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars are being wasted in Afghanistan on fruitless reconstruction projects that are awash in corruption and have little government oversight.

“The Afghan government does not appear to have the capacity to manage the amount of funding envisioned in the international community’s pledges of direct assistance,” Sopko told a House Committee in testimony prepared for a House of Representatives hearing.

In the meantime Mohammad Yasin Osmani member of the committee for oversight and anti-corruption department of Afghanistan said John Sopko’s remarks are acceptable somehow however he said that he does not agree with all his comments.

He said that the capacity of the Afghan government to spend foreign aid has increased but still there some issues within the Afghan government that needs to be resolved.

This comes as Afghanistan and United States during president Hamid Karzai’s visit agreed to spend 50% of the foreign aid through the Afghan government.

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

- **Netherlands to end police training mission in Afghanistan**

THE HAGUE, Feb. 14 (Xinhua) -- In July, the Netherlands will hand over the Afghan police training center it has been running together with Germany to the Afghan authorities, Dutch television station NOS reported Thursday.

The Netherlands and Germany will remain involved in the center that is located in the northern Kunduz region, but will no longer provide trainings to Afghan police officers, NOS said.

Justice Minister Ivo Opstelten and senior police officers visited Kunduz and Kabul to meet the 50 Dutch police officers there.

"I told them that they are doing an unbelievably good job in difficult circumstances. The cabinet is proud of them," Opstelten said.

The Netherlands agreed to send trainers to Afghanistan in 2011, on condition they worked in the northern province Kunduz and only undertook civilian tasks.

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

- **25 killed or injured following traffic incident in Ghazni**

By Mirwais Adeel - 14 Feb 2013, 12:18 pm

Khaama Press

According to local authorities in eastern Ghazni province of Afghanistan, at least 25 people were killed or injured following

a deadly traffic incident on Ghazni-Kandahar highway.

Provincial security chief Gen. Mohammad Hussain said the incident took place in Qarabagh district killing at least 16 people and injuring 9 others.

He said the incident took place around 4 am local time on Thursday after a civilian bus struck with a truck.

The wounded individuals have been taken to hospital, Gen. Mohammad Hussain said adding that a number of the wounded individuals are in critical health condition.

Ghazni-Kandahar highway is one of the busiest highways of Afghanistan where majority of road accidents are taking place.

In the meantime Ghazni traffic department chief Abdullah Ahmadi said at

last 18 people were killed and 23 others were injured following the incident.

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

- **Poppy-free Afghan provinces to receive \$18.2 million**

By Meena Haseeb - 14 Feb 2013, 10:38 am

Khaama Press

Afghanistan's Minister for Counter Narcotics Zarar Moqbel Osmani and U.S. Embassy's Coordinating Director for Rule of Law and Law Enforcement Ambassador Stephen G. McFarland announced \$18.2 million in Good Performers Initiative (GPI) awards, US Department of State announced following a press release.

The source further added, GPI awards are given to provinces that achieved or retained poppy-free status, reduced net poppy cultivation by more than 10 percent over the previous year, or made other exceptional counternarcotics efforts during the cultivation season. Twenty-one of Afghanistan's 34 provinces received GPI awards, including 17 provinces that earned \$1 million awards for being poppy-free.

President Karzai launched the Good Performers Initiative in 2007 to deliver timely, high-impact development assistance to provinces leading the fight against poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. GPI projects help build infrastructure, employ local citizens, and give tangible recognition to governors who demonstrate strong leadership in reducing and eliminating poppy cultivation in their provinces.

To date, the GPI program has supported more than 100 development projects, including roads, schools, clinics, and other infrastructure projects, the statement added.

The Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs funds GPI, and Afghanistan's Ministry of Counter Narcotics works with each province to design and implement development projects using GPI funds.

GPI awards are calculated based on final poppy cultivation figures from the annual Afghanistan Opium Survey published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Around 90% of the world's opium, the raw source of heroin, comes from Afghanistan. According to Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, a fellow at the Brookings Institution and a leading expert on drug interdiction efforts and counterinsurgency, opium production accounts for at least 20% of Afghanistan's GDP. It is one of the largest sources of economic activity, along with foreign aid. If foreign aid decreases significantly in 2014 when U.S. troops are expected to withdraw, opium production will be "a very important driver of economic activity."

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanriverdi 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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ORTADOĐU STRATEJİK ARAŐTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŐÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

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