



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

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1. IRAQ

- **Barazani, Lavrov discuss bilateral relations**

Erbil (NINA) – President of Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barazani, discussed with Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, the relations between Kurdistan Region and Russia.

A statement issued on Thursday, Feb. 21, by the Presidency of Kurdistan Region said that Barazani met in Moscow with Lavrov stressing the importance to consolidate friendly relations between the Russian and Kurdish people.

It added that the two discussed, during their meeting, a number of important issues, especially the relations between Iraq and Russia, including the relations between Kurdistan Region and Russia, stressing the necessity to develop and consolidate them.

The statement pointed out that Barazani extended his thanks and gratitude to the Russian people for hosting Mulla Mustafa Barazani for twelve years; affirming President Putin's words on the necessity to consolidate friendly relations between

Russia and Iraq, including Kurdistan Region.

The two also discussed the role of Russian firms in the field of energy and providing electricity in Iraq, in addition to the situation in Syria and its effect of Kurdistan, as well as on Iraq.

Barazani pointed out that there are about 75 thousand Syrian refugees in Kurdistan Region, stating that in addition to providing help to the refugees, it also provide humanitarian aid to the people inside Syria.

Barazani stressed the necessity for the Syrian people to decide their future, as well as dealing with the Kurdish issue in Syria through recognizing the Kurdish people rights.

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

- **Army release demonstrators' spokesman of Hawija.**

Kirkuk / NINA /-- Demonstrators's sokesman Hameed al'Joburi of Hawija district / 55 km west of Kirkuk / was

released few hours after being arrest by the army today.

Joburi said in a telephone interview that he was arrested last night without arrest warrant , because he repeatedly being supported and demanded to meet the demonstrator's legitimated rights.

A statement issued today by the Popular Committees warning of harassment of symbols and personalities of the demonstrations "Otherwise their will be another stand."

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

- **Yassin Majeed calls on all MPs to boycott parliament sessions on the background of remarks made Nujaiifi**

Baghdad/ NINA /-- Yassin Majeed a leading member for the State of Law coalition headed by PM.Nuri al-Maliki call on all MPs to boycott the parliament sessions, only those headed by Speaker Osama Najafi.

Majeed added in a press conference today that the reason behind this call is the repercussions of the latest statement,

issued by Nujaiifi office which described politicians and MPs in inappropriate .terms pointing out that Speaker nujaifi disregard and does not take in consideration their objections of any act.

Speaker office gave yesterday in a statement an advice to those devoted their efforts to critics Najafi recent visit to Qatar and his remarks made in an interview in Aljazeera channel which hosted him in a special invitation to a top rank state official saying : " It is much more worthy to find the appropriate answers to the demands of oppressed people rather than sneaking miserable opportunities to undermine the partners of the political process, he said.

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

- **Barzani, Russian Gas Prom Co.'s head discuss cooperation in oil, gas sector**

Baghdad (AIN) -The President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, who visits Russia currently since last Tuesday, met with the head of Russian Gas prom Company, Alexei Miller.

According to a statement by the Russian Company "Barzani discussed with Miller during their meeting on last Wednesday the opportunities to develop the bilateral relations in oil and gas field where they reviewed, in particular, the prospects of Gas Prom's cooperation with the oil and gas companies in Kurdistan Region in field of geological survey and upgrading and operating the oil and gas fields there."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28916:barzani-russian-gas-prom-cos-head-discuss-cooperation-in-oil-gas-sector-&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51

- **KRG denies Maliki's invitation to PM of KR to visit Baghdad**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Kurdistan Regional Government denied inviting the Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Nijervan Barzani to visit Baghdad by the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki."

The spokesperson of the KRG, Safin Daza, stated in a press statement received by AIN "Barzani did not receive any invitation by Maliki to visit Baghdad, but he is ready to visit it whenever required."

"There are some exerted efforts to settle the pending issues between the two sides," he added, noting that "It is normal for Barzani to visit Baghdad or receive a governmental delegation from Baghdad."

"The best settlement to the pending issues is to adhere to the dialogue," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28932:kr-denies-maliki's-invitation-to-pm-of-kr-to-visit-baghdad&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51

- **Iraq calls UN to expel Mujahidi Khalq org.**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Premier's media advisor called the United Nations to implement the agreement on expelling anti-Iranian Mujahidi Khalq organization from Iraq.

Ali al-Mussawi, in a press statement, added that "the presence of Mujahidi Khalq in Iraq is illegal, for it is a terrorist organization and the Iraqi constitution prevents its presence in the country".

He called the United States to cooperate with Iraq in this request and denied the news that the Iraqi government does not protect the anti-Iranian organization.

Yesterday, some US congressmen charged the Iraqi government with the responsibility of attacking members of Mujahidi Khalq organization.

Last week, the Liberty Camp, where the organization is situated, was attacked by a rocket, but no details were given.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28sujn5jidezu5py55of0df42z%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152477&l=1

- **Egypt Premier to visit Baghdad next March**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Informed Egyptian sources said that Premier Hisham Qandeel is considering visiting Iraq next March to enhance bilateral relation.

Egyptian Industry Minister Hatem Saleh, in a press conference, said that he contracted Iraqi trade minister Kheiralla Hassan Babakr to discuss the stoppage of Iraqi imports of Egyptian dairies for the

last few months, which resulted in grave losses to Egyptian companies.

Earlier, Egyptian ambassador to Baghdad Shareef Shaheen announced the intention of President Mohammed Mursi to visit Iraq to activate bilateral relations.

Premier Nouri al-Maliki visited Cairo on 6 March instant to participate in the Islamic Summit, where he met President Mursi and discussed enhancing mutual ties.

Both sides agreed on a visit to Egyptian oil delegation to Baghdad soon.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28sujn5jidezu5py55of0df42z%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152471&l=1

- **Government response to demonstrators nominal, Islamic Party**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: The Islamic Party regarded the response of the Iraqi government to the demands of the demonstrators are "nominal" because it tackled only few cases, calling to "eradicate injustice from its roots".

Secretary General Iyad al-Samarra'I, in a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq,

said that "the demonstrations were not pre-arranged, thus it spread to other provinces".

"The response of the government was weak, with remarks that there are no intentions to implement these reforms", he confirmed.

He called to solve the roots of the problems, "otherwise these will remain and erupt again after a certain period of time".

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28sujn5jidezu5py55of0df42z%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152470&l=1

- **Maliki invites Njirvan Barzani to Baghdad, spokesman**

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish Alliance spokesman Mu'ayad al-Tayyip disclosed that Iraqi premier Nouri al-Maliki extended an invitation to Kurdish premier Njirvan Barzani to visit Baghdad to resume the suspended negotiation between the two sides, according to Saudi al-Sharq al-Awsat.

In a statement, published today, he added that the recent Kurdish meetings were

"for uniting the Kurdish ranks and to discuss a national conference to be held in Arbil".

Time of the visit will be decided later, or whether he will go or send his representative, he added.

The conflicting issues between Baghdad and Arbil on oil contracts and the disputed areas are expected to be discussed in the coming visit.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28sujn5jidezu5py55of0df42z%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152469&l=1

- **Breaking news: killing of Seven members of Awakening councils east Tikrit**

Shafaq News/ Seven members belong to Awakening councils –Sahwa- have been killed by gunmen attack on a security checkpoint east Tikrit, a security source reported.

The source told "Shafaq News" on condition of anonymity that the gunmen expected to belong to Qaeda organization, saying that the raid took place in Tozkhormato town to the east of Tikrit.

The source explained that the attack carried out using "rifles"

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5271-breaking-news-killing-of-seven-members-of-awakening-councils-east-tikrit.html>

- **Alawi expects a failure to Erbil meeting**

Shafaq News/The independent parliament member and the Iraqi thinker Hasan al-Alawi predicted the failure of Erbil meeting which supposed to be hold among the country's political powers at the end of this month.

Alawi told "Shafaq News" "I do not think the meeting will succeed in spite of the good intents behind it" attributing the reasons to the absence of State of Law.

"State of Law will not attend", he said.

Alawi explained that the only attendants will be the opposition powers this is why he believed it would not been hold.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5270-alawi-expects-a-failure-to-erbil-meeting.html>

2. IRAN

- **DM: Iran to Unveil New Defense Achievements**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi announced on Thursday that Tehran would display several home-made defense achievements in the near future.

Vahidi said that air-to-air and surface-to-air missiles and new bombs are a number of the new achievements to be unveiled in the near future, adding that unveiling of the latest defense achievements will pave the way for new developments in defense technology sector in the country.

As for the special capabilities of the new bombs, he said they enjoy enhanced power of effectiveness and could be launched by several types of helicopters.

Vahidi also said that a new warship and a new submarine constructed by Iranian experts will be launched in near future as well.

Iran has also taken wide strides in designing and manufacturing different types of light, semi-heavy and heavy

weapons, military tools and equipment. Tehran launched an arms development program during the 1980-88 Iraqi imposed war on Iran to compensate for a US weapons embargo. Since 1992, Iran has produced its own tanks, armored personnel carriers, missiles and fighter planes.

Yet, Iranian officials have always stressed that the country's military and arms programs serve defensive purposes and should not be perceived as a threat to any other country.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107146496>

- **Iran to Build Oil Refinery in Pakistan**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Pakistani officials announced that Islamabad and Tehran have reached an agreement upon which Iran will help Pakistan build an oil refinery.

Pakistan's Advisor to Prime Minister on Petroleum and Natural Resources, Dr. Asim Hussain, said Wednesday that Iran with the cooperation of Pakistan's State Oil (PSO) will set up an oil refinery in the Southwestern city of Gwadar.

Talking to reporters after holding a meeting with Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi, he said that the refinery would refine 400,000 barrels of oil per day.

He added that President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari would soon visit Iran to finalize the agreement on establishment of oil refinery.

Qassemi and Managing Director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Javad Oji arrived in Pakistan on Wednesday to hold the final talks on the IP gas pipeline construction.

The Iranian oil minister and his accompanying delegation agreed with their Pakistani counterpart to set up a joint contracting company between the two countries in a bid to complete the construction of the IP gas pipeline in next 15 months. The mega project will come on stream in December 2014.

Apart from it, both countries also discussed the finances involved in the project. The interest rate for Iran's 500-million-dollar loan to Pakistan and the date for the start of the repayment of the

loan by Pakistan were among other topics in the discussions.

Last week, Tehran and Islamabad discussed the scope of work under the mega project of \$1.5 billion IP gas line.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari underlined his support for the completion of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline which will help soothe Pakistan's energy crisis.

Zardari said that Pakistan attaches great importance to early completion of Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline project in view of the energy crisis in the country, and called for stepped up efforts for early completion of all Pak-Iran bilateral projects.

The IP gas pipeline stretches from Iran-Pakistan border to Navabshah region in Pakistan and it covers 781 km of the total 1,881 km of the pipeline.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107146492>

- **Iranian, Pakistani Officials Discuss Ways to Develop Relations**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi and Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf in a meeting in Islamabad explored avenues for the further expansion of bilateral ties between the two countries.

During the meeting, Ashraf also informed the Iranian minister about handing over of Pakistani port in the Southwestern Balouchistan province to China.

Yesterday, Iranian and Pakistani oil ministers inaugurated construction of the 781-kilometer-long Pakistani side of the IP gas pipeline which is due to take Iran's rich gas reserves to the energy-hungry South Asian nation.

An Iranian-Pakistani joint contractor has been commissioned to begin construction of the IP gas pipeline.

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<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107146470>

- **Iran committed to cooperation with IAEA: Iranian envoy**

The Iranian ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has once again expressed Iran's commitment to resolving issues pertaining to its nuclear energy program with the UN agency.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh said on Thursday that Iran was committed to the continuation of talks with the IAEA to resolve the outstanding issues.

He made the remarks after IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano issued the agency's latest report on the Iranian nuclear energy program.

Soltanieh, however, called for a calm atmosphere without political propaganda

in order for Iran and the IAEA to successfully address the issues.

Iran and the IAEA wrapped up their latest round of talks on the Iranian nuclear energy program in Tehran on February 13.

After the talks, Soltanieh, who headed the Iranian negotiating team, said Tehran and the agency had resolved some differences and reached an agreement on certain issues.

The Iranian envoy to the IAEA also stated on Thursday that the IAEA had been constantly inspecting Iran's nuclear facilities for ten years, and that the main message of the UN agency's report was that Iran had not deviated from civilian to military purposes in its nuclear energy program.

The IAEA report says the enrichment of 20-percent uranium is done merely to supply fuel for Tehran Research Reactor to produce radio-medicine for hospitals, Soltanieh said.

In December 2012, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Fereydoun Abbasi said Tehran will continue the

enrichment of uranium to the 20-percent degree "as long and as much as" necessary.

The United States, the Israeli regime and some of their allies accuse Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program. Iran categorically rejects the allegations.

The IAEA report was issued ahead of a new round of talks between Tehran and the P5+1 group, scheduled to be held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on February 26.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/22/290231/iran-committed-to-cooperation-with-iaea/>

- **'Russia counting on progress in P5+1 talks'**

A Russian deputy foreign minister says he counts on progress in the forthcoming round of talks between Iran and the P5+1 group in Kazakhstan next week.

"We are counting on some developments in the forthcoming round," Reuters quoted Sergei Ryabkov as saying on Thursday.

Iran and the P5+1 -- United States, France, Britain, Russia, China, and Germany -- are scheduled to hold talks in Almaty, Kazakhshtan, on February 26.

The Russian official underscored the need for “movement forward, progress” in the next round of talks.

“Progress is slow and expectations are not very high, but it shows that we are not moving in the wrong direction,” he stated.

Also on Thursday, Vice Speaker of the Russian State Duma Sergey Baburin slammed the US unilateral sanctions against Iran as Washington’s tactic to sabotage the upcoming talks.

Baburin noted that the US stance on Iran totally runs counter to the objectives of the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group.

Iran has said if the group of six major world powers recognizes the Islamic Republic’s rights, Tehran will remove their concerns over the country’s nuclear energy program.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegations, 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.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran’s civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/21/290181/russia-counting-on-progress-in-p51-talks/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Jewish Home holding coalition talks with Likud-Beytenu**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, center, shakes hands with Jewish Home leader Naftali Bennett at the opening

session of the Knesset earlier this month, as President Shimon Peres looks on.

The Jewish Home party's coalition brokers are currently meeting with Likud-Beytenu's team, as talks continue more than a month after Knesset elections were held.

Representatives of Naftali Bennett's Jewish Home party are expected to demand the revocation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's agreement with Hatnua chief Tzipi Livni, whereby Livni joins a Likud-led coalition in exchange for the Justice Ministry portfolio and heading peace talks with the Palestinians.

Bennett has been an outspoken critic of such negotiations, and his party represents a cross-section of voters that are largely opposed to a two-state solution along pre-1967 lines.

On Wednesday, Bennett attacked Livni's past role in negotiations with the Palestinians, including her purported willingness to divide Jerusalem and hand the West Bank city of Ariel to the Palestinians. (Livni denies both assertions.)

Also on Wednesday, the Jewish Home made it clear that an alliance formed with Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party, according to which both parties would either join the government together or join the opposition, remains firm.

"The pact with Lapid is iron-clad," party sources said. "We would rather have new elections than join the government without him."

Talk of new elections has been hovering over coalition negotiations this week, with threats reportedly coming from Likud-Beytenu, as well.

Moshe Klughaft, a member of Jewish Home's negotiating team, responded to those threats on Friday, urging the largest faction in the Knesset to fulfill the will of the electorate.

Instead of making empty threats about new elections, it is necessary to start talking about fulfilling the will of the people in these elections, he told Israel Radio.

Klughaft emphasized that the entry of Jewish Home and Yesh Atid into a Netanyahu-led coalition would be based on negotiated principles and not on the handing out of government portfolios.

Representatives of Likud-Beytenu are scheduled to meet with representatives of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party on Friday afternoon. Lapid has previously stated that he will not join a coalition that includes Shas.

A Knesset Channel poll published Thursday found that if Netanyahu ultimately fails to assemble a coalition, and new elections are subsequently called, Yesh Atid would win a staggering 30 seats, overtaking Netanyahu's freefalling Likud-Beytenu as the Knesset's largest faction.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-home-to-hold-coalition-talks-with-likud-beytenu/>

- **Fatah official: No negotiations without settlement freeze**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Senior Fatah official Mohammad Shtayyeh said Friday that the Palestinian leadership is ready to

negotiate if Israel stops building illegal settlements and releases Palestinian prisoners.

Shtayyeh told Ma'an an end to settlement activity and the release of prisoners were necessary for successful talks.

The Fatah central committee member's comments came in response to a report on Israel's Channel 10 that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu planned to resume talks with the PLO within three months of forming a new government.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=567887>

- **Gaza crossing closed until Monday**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Israeli authorities on Friday closed the Kerem Shalom crossing on Gaza's border until Monday, a crossings official said.

Israel usually closes the border on Fridays and Saturdays for the weekend, but it will remain shut for an extra day for the Jewish holiday of Purim, Palestinian Authority official Raed Fattouh told Ma'an.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=567885>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Tunisia boosts protection for journalists, politicians**

By Monia Ghanmi in Tunis for Magharebia
– 21/02/13

Tunisia's interior ministry last week began to provide protection to journalists and political figures targeted by militants.

Opposition leader Chokri Belaid was not the only high profile leader that faced threats from extremists. Political figures and journalists also received death threats from religious radicals in recent weeks.

The measures included added security to homes as well as bodyguards for high profile figures, tunisienumerique.com reported on February 14th.

UNESCO released a statement the same day announcing a multi-week training for security forces on the safety of journalists. The statement came one day after the completion of its first class.

Facebook pages and websites considered close to salafist militants called for the elimination of a number of Tunisian personalities whom they described as "secular, infidel and anti-Islamic".

They were singled out on a black list that included many names, such as journalist and Ennahda opponent Taoufik Ben Brik, journalist Moez Ben Gharbia, writer Olfa Youssef, blogger Olfa Riahi and media figure Naoufel Ouertani.

Most death threats were directed at media figures who saw this move as another attempt to subdue the media and to shackle it.

A monitoring unit affiliated with the Tunis Centre for Press Freedom warned about violations against journalists. In a statement, it listed the assault and death threats suffered by journalists and photographers.

The unit documenting violations against Tunisian media mentioned in its February 11th statement that Mosaïque FM received numerous threats targeting its journalists Naoufel Ouertani and Haythem El Mekki.

The threats come against the backdrop of their media reporting, which is apparently disliked by some hard-line parties, Naoufel Ouertani said in a press statement.

For his part, El Mekki confirmed that for a while now he has received a continuous flow of clear and explicit death threats and that they increased after Chokri Belaid's assassination.

These threats prove that journalists have become a target by virtue of the nature of their work and that their physical safety is at risk, El Mekki said.

He added that this would not make him change his positions. Even politicians and trade unionists did not escape from the hard-liners' threats.

Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) Secretary-General Hussein Abbasi received similar threats from unidentified elements following Belaid's assassination and the announcement of the general strike.

These elements are in possession of weapons, financing and previous terrorist

experience, and have the ability to kill professionally, union spokesman Sami Tahiri said.

Opposition politician Ahmed Nejib Chebbi was assaulted after returning from Belaid's funeral. He also escaped an attempt on his life last year in the southern city of Zarzis that was called for by a salafist sheikh.

The Arab Network for Human Rights condemned the escalating and systematic violence against the Tunisian opposition in a February 10th statement.

"If the government of Ennahda wants to continue working and achieve its program, it has to support political tolerance in the country and renounce hate speech which has become widespread among opponents," the group said.

"Widespread video evidence can be seen on internet pages where a group of salafist leaders vow to shed the blood of Belaid and Chebbi," the statement added. In light of this reality, Tunisians warned against the persistence of militant threats and incitement against political and media figures in the country.

The Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights warned against religious calls and invitations that are contrary to human rights – as well as against their promotion in the media, social networks, mosques and public meetings.

The organisation further warned against the continuing threat of the assassination of political opposition figures.

"The continuing the policy of death threats confirms the growing influence of radical elements in the country," 42-year-old Tunis resident Chokri Louati told Magharebia.

"These elements use violence and religious extremism as a way to achieve their goals and eliminate their opponents and the government needs to protect the country's targeted elite," he added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/21/feature-01

- **Libya to grant thwar benefits**

Libyan leaders say they are working to meet the demands of former revolutionaries.

Libyan lawmakers are moving ahead with a compensation plan for former revolutionaries.

The General National Congress (GNC) approved the first reading of the pension bill on February 13th, more than a week after wounded fighters stormed the assembly. The legislation aims to provide healthcare and pensions for the injured thwar, including those who lost limbs in the war, Libya Herald reported.

The proposed law now heads to committee, where a detailed draft will be prepared.

The issue was brought to the forefront on February 3rd when a number of former revolutionaries from Ajdabiya stormed the GNC headquarters to demand authorities pay their medical bills.

The standoff eventually ended two days later, but not before forcing congress to find an alternative venue to carry out the country's business.

More than 30 people stormed congress, GNC President Mohamed Magarief said at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Ali Zidan on February 5th.

"They advanced to the middle of the parliament hall, and some representatives and I sat with them," Magarief said.

"We listened to their demands, although they often spoke in an unsuitable way," he added.

He noted that some of them were carrying guns and that two or three of them pointed their guns more than once at one congressman after they said he spoke in an inappropriate way about them.

On Libya's state-run television, which was airing the GNC session, people saw the drama play out live.

"Nonetheless, we were keen to deal quietly with them because we understand their sufferings and feelings," Magarief said in describing the attack on parliament. "We suspended the session and the parliament stopped its deliberations."

He added that pointing guns at others was a crime and entering the GNC hall was an assault that shouldn't have taken place.

"We rejected any intervention to remove them by force although I have already sat down with them twice in Tripoli and Benghazi and have referred their file to the government," the president added.

As far as the wounded people were concerned, Zidan said they were treated in America, Canada and Germany and prosthetic limbs were installed for them.

"There were 16 passports for them at the embassy before they stormed the parliament, and we've already contacted the German ambassador to add more passports," he said.

Zidan added that the behaviour of some wounded people in foreign countries when they staged sit-ins and stormed embassies had affected the issue of visas.

A decision was issued by the prime minister's office approving salaries for wounded people and amputees for a

certain period of time until their health conditions improved.

"They demanded salaries, and we gave them salaries, but they refused," Zidan said. "After that, they demanded housing, cars, high quality treatment, compensations in addition to salaries, travelling to perform pilgrimage with their parents.

"In an attempt from our side to solve the problem, we did what we thought was our duty and we met the demands that we could meet," he added.

Journalist Miftah Belaid said that the wounded should "make their demands through their representatives in the GNC or by going to court or resorting to other communication channels, not by storming the GNC headquarters to waste their rights in this way".

"I think that they lost people's sympathy when they stopped GNC sessions because this is chaos in a country that seeks to build itself," Belaid said.

The wounded, especially amputees, should receive their rights, primary school teacher Mahasen Bachir said.

"They paid a price for us in the war, and right now we're now enjoying freedom. They have the right to receive suitable treatment, but not by storming the parliament," Bachir added.

University student Ala Fathi also agreed that Libyans should avoid disrupting government functions.

"We were hoping that the government would deal with the file of wounded people to avoid sit-ins or attempts to storm facilities... they have to be patient, as the country is now moving towards statehood," Fathi said.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/21/feature-02

- **Algeria to involve public in securing borders**

Last month's hostage crisis at the In Amenas gas plant in southern Algeria led authorities to work on a new approach

toward fighting regionally active terrorist groups.

The Algerian government now is trying to enlist the support of people living in border towns and communities that might be vulnerable to terrorist activity.

During a Thursday (February 14th) visit to Illizi, a town near the Libyan border, Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablia invited the public to become more involved in the Algerian army's war on terrorism.

"People living here have a role to play in stabilising border security," the minister said. The people living in the southern wilayas responded favourably to his appeal.

"If the state had worked with us, the terrorist group who held the gas complex at Tiguentourine hostage would never have been able to get in among us," said former MP Ahmed Zegri. "We're experts on the geography of this region. We know everyone. It would be easier for us to detect suspicious foreigners."

Abbas Bouaâmama, a key figure in the region and senator for the wilaya of Illizi, explained: "Even if we were to mobilise the entire Algerian army in Illizi, it would still be difficult to control the borders" with Libya.

Proof of that came less than a month after the Tiguentourine attack, when "a 4x4 was stolen in the region by an armed group. We do not know where the thief went", he said.

"New mechanisms need to be introduced in the region, better suited to the situation on the ground," Bouaâmama said. "The army's presence is essential, but the real battle is one of information."

To win that battle, "the involvement of the people living in Illizi is essential," he told Magharebia. "No terrorist will dare set foot in Illizi if he sees that the population is involved in this war on terror."

Bouaâmama suggested that Meharists, a system of patrols used during the colonial period, be revived: "You could replace the camels with 4x4 vehicles and recruit

volunteers who know the region, including guides, to patrol the borders in brigades."

The senator highlighted the need for co-operation from people living in the Libyan towns of Ghadamès and Ghat, who "stand fully ready" to help Algerian authorities secure the border and fight terrorism.

Under the government's new approach, the anti-terrorism fight also involves a government strategy to develop border areas.

To that end, a number of socioeconomic development projects already are under way in the southern wilayas, including Illizi. These projects should be completed by the end of the third five-year term (2010-2014), according to the interior minister.

The government has also committed to developing parts of the country's south.

Tourism in the south is experiencing a crisis due to the unstable situation in the Sahel region, Tourism Minister Mohamed Benmeradi stated on February 19th.

However, the minister is still optimistic, considering that the south "is still the most attractive [destination] in the country".

According to the minister, "the security aspect is not putting people off: a number of groups of foreign tourists (50 to 100 people) will visit the south of the country with travel agencies next April".

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/21/feature-03

- **Sahel states must share intel, African expert warns**

Zakaria Ousmane of the Centre for Peace, Security and Sustainable Development in Chad was among the security experts from 50 countries who recently met in Morocco to discuss the post-Arab Spring spike in extremism, terrorism and crime.

Magharebia met with Ousmane on the sidelines of the Marrakech Security Forum to get a Central African perspective on the radicalisation of the Sahel region.

Magharebia: How did radical Islamist movements arise in the Sahel?

Zakaria Ousmane: The Sahel is a strip of land running from the Atlantic coast to the Red Sea and covering 15 countries. These countries were colonised by France, Great Britain or Italy. So they have different systems of government and operate differently. They share the region's arid conditions and are similar in terms of population.

Having said that, you have to recognise that except for Eritrea and Ethiopia, the majority of these countries are Muslim-dominated. This is Sufi Islam with Malikite traditions. This is an Islam made up of very ancient brotherhoods, a form of Islam which has adapted to the region.

Over the past 20 years, we've started to see the Wahhabites making inroads into the region... Out of the ashes of Wahhabism, a number of new ideologies have sprung up, such as Salafism.

Magharebia: What's the source of the salafist strain?

Ousmane: It was exported to North Africa. The point of entry was Algeria. From there it found fertile ground. Violent Islam was

used to fight the colonists, but as it advanced over time it changed sides. But the model of violence remained the same.

This is how the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) came about, as well as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). It gave rise to Boko Haram, a Wahhabite movement, which went on to become radicalised. The same happened with Ansar al-Din, the Movement of Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and less significant groups that do not constitute a real threat.

Over by the Red Sea, you had Al-Ittihad, which emerged and evolved to set up Islamic courts. Fifteen unions were formed, giving rise to the Union of Islamic Courts, which itself changed after being defeated and went on to become al-Shabab ... That's a broad outline of jihadist movements in the Sahel.

Magharebia: What percentage of the population is claimed by these movements?

Ousmane: All in all, they represent somewhere between 10% and 15%, no

more than that. The vast majority are still Sufi Muslims. However, salafists, just like the Wahhabites, have power and money, and they're well-organised.

They're making headway, because they started at just 1% in 1960 but had grown to 15% in 2012. In 50 years, they'd grown to 15%. That's slow, but it's still growth.

Magharebia: What do you foresee for the region's security?

Ousmane: Actually, you have to see the crises affecting the region as challenges to be overcome. By establishing a space for regional and international co-operation, the countries in the region will be able to develop a strike force to reduce terrorist activities.

As for completely eradicating them ... I don't think that's possible or feasible, because it's impossible to tell how far they've penetrated.

But you can make sure that they won't be a danger or a threat.

Magharebia: There's been a call for Maghreb and Sahel countries to exchange

intelligence. Can such security partnerships stem terror activity?

Ousmane: Necessity is the mother of invention. If such co-operation did not exist, you would be obliged to invent it. The situation today is that everyone is threatened to some degree, because it's a threat that extends across borders. So we're obliged to work together if we're to deal with all these challenges once and for all.

Magharebia: Could the various terror groups ever establish a united front?

Ousmane: Indeed, all scenarios are possible. However, I'm firmly convinced that given the international community's determination and the region's own realisation of the situation, they will make sure that the terrorists' efforts are in vain, or at least hindered.

We shall return to a system, which will guarantee peace and make room for development and investment. I don't think that can happen without security. I think we've almost achieved that goal.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/21/feature-04

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Berri: There's no time limit for electoral law talks**

Lebanese speaker Nabih Berri said that he did not give a time limit for negotiations aiming at reaching an electoral law consensus.

"I did not give a one-week, two-week, nor even a 70-day deadline for the plenary body of parliament," Berri said in remarks published on Friday by An-Nahar newspaper.

"There's still space for more negotiations in order to reach an agreement on a new electoral law."

Berri's comments came after it was reported that he had given the country's political sides a further week to reach consensus over a new electoral law before calling for a plenary session to ratify the Orthodox law.

The law was approved on Tuesday by the legislative house's joint commissions after weeks of negotiations between parliamentarians.

The Orthodox law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines, was backed by the majority of Christian parties and opposed by the Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party, the National Liberal Party, and numerous independent Christian MPs.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/berri-theres-no-time-limit-for-electoral-law-talks>

- **LF MP underscores strong ties with March 14**

Lebanese Forces bloc MP Joseph Maalouf underscored the strong links with the March 14 opposition coalition despite differences over the electoral law issue.

"What brings March 14 together is stronger than the differences in points of view regarding the electoral law," Maalouf told Future television on Friday.

"The contacts with the Future Movement and its supporters are ongoing."

The LF MP also said that his party was open to other consensual electoral law proposals despite its support for the Orthodox law.

In recent months, Lebanon has been gripped by a crisis centered around the seeking of a new electoral law that will lay the groundwork for this year's upcoming parliamentary elections.

On Tuesday, the parliament's joint commissions approved the controversial Orthodox law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

However differences emerged within the opposition over support for the Orthodox law, which was backed by the majority of Christian parties - including March 14's LF and Kataeb Party - and opposed by the Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party, the National Liberal Party, and numerous independent Christian MPs.

These differences were underscored by Future bloc MP Nohad al-Mashnuq, who said on Thursday that his party's relationship with their March 14 allies will

not be the same as it used to be, given the fact that they backed the Orthodox law.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/lf-mp-underscores-strong-ties-with-march-14>

- **Opposition MP: Orthodox law not 'definite solution'**

Lebanese Forces bloc MP Antoine Zahra said that the Orthodox law recently approved by the parliament's commissions was not "the definite solution" to the electoral law issue.

"Had the Orthodox law been the definite solution, there wouldn't have been opportunities for more discussions and the Bkirki meeting wouldn't have taken place," Zahra told Voice of Lebanon (93.3) on Friday.

"The parliament's joint commissions session is not the end of the road, but just another step toward reaching a new electoral law."

Lebanese political figures representing all of the country's Christian parties met in Bkirki on Friday, the seat of the Maronite

patriarchate, to further discuss the contentious electoral law issue.

Meanwhile, An-Nahar newspaper reported on Friday that President Michel Suleiman informed Maronite Patriarch Beshara Boutros al-Rai that he will object “until the end” to the Orthodox law.

The report added that Suleiman considered the newly-approved law as a cause for division, since it is rejected by “two essential groups,” the Sunnis and the Druze.

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<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonews/lf-mp-orthodox-law-not-definite-solution>

6. SYRIA

• Syrian Foreign Ministry condemns Damascus bombing

The Syrian Foreign Ministry sent identical letters on Thursday to both the United Nations Security Council and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon condemning the “terrorist” Damascus bombing attack.

“The credibility of the international community is now at stake and those who fail to condemn these terrorist acts will [be seen as illegitimate], both on humane and moral grounds,” the National News Agency quoted the Syrian Foreign Ministry as saying in its letters.

Earlier Thursday, a powerful car bomb exploded near the offices of Syria's ruling Baath party in central Damascus, killing at least 53 people, wounding dozens and shattering buildings, Syrian state media said.

Syria is witnessing a violent uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has so far killed more than 70,000 people since its outbreak in March 2011, according to figures released by the United Nations.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syrian-foreign-ministry-condemns-damascus-bombing>

- **FSA claims strike on Hezbollah**

The Free Syrian Army announced that it had hit a Hezbollah position in Lebanon and warned of further escalation, although a rebel battalion denied the claims to NOW as did Lebanese security sources.

Free Syrian Army spokesperson Louay Almkdad said in a statement that the rebel army launched two separate attacks against the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

“An FSA brigade launched two consecutive attacks at 12:30 pm on Thursday, the first of which targeted a group of Hezbollah fighters in the Syrian southern Qusayr district, killing and wounding all of its

members,” Almkdad said in his statement.

“In the second attack, a group of FSA brigades targeted a Hezbollah arsenal outpost inside Lebanese territory in Hosh al-Sayyed Ali with rockets and achieved direct hits.”

The statement also reiterated the call for the residents of the northern Lebanese border town of Hermel to “stay away from the military and security outposts manned by Hezbollah.”

It warned that their attacks will escalate in the coming hours.

However, Syria’s Homs Military Council denied media reports claiming that rebels shelled Hezbollah headquarters on Lebanese territory.

“The strike was limited to the shelling a Hezbollah gathering in Syria’s Zeeta town with rocket launchers in response to an attempt made [by the Shiite group] to sneak into Qusayr,” Military Council Chief and Qusayr Brigade Commander Lieutenant Mohyi ed-Dine el-Zein told NOW on Thursday.

Zein held the Lebanese Armed Forces and the country's government "accountable for allowing Hezbollah members to enter Syrian territory."

Also, Lebanese media outlets, including Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio and MTV cited security sources as saying that no Syrian rebel rockets had hit targets in Lebanon on Thursday.

Meanwhile, FSA chief of staff General Selim Idriss issued a direct threat to Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

"You are not far from Free Syrian [Army] military strikes, as we know [how to get] you," he warned.

On Wednesday, the rebel Free Syrian Army threatened to hit back at Hezbollah, the powerful Lebanese group that backs Assad, unless it stops its alleged of shelling FSA-held territory from across the border.

Idriss told AFP the rebels were giving Hezbollah a 48-hour deadline to stop the attacks and "as soon as the ultimatum ends, we will start responding to the sources of fire."

As the Lebanese-Syrian border situation escalated, a bombing Thursday in Damascus killed nearly 60 people and causing widespread destruction in the Syrian capital's deadliest attack since the civil war erupted.

Police said the bomb exploded at 16 November Square near the Baath party's head offices, and Russian news agencies reported the windows of Moscow's embassy were blown out, although no staff were hurt.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the blast killed at least 59 people, including 15 soldiers, and wounded more than 200, making it the deadliest suck attack in Damascus since the start of the Syrian uprising.

The bombing was followed by a mortar attack on a military headquarters, state television and the Observatory reported without giving information on casualties.

The Observatory also said two other car bombs exploded next to security posts in the north Damascus district of Barzeh,

with five soldiers among eight people killed.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/fsa-claims-strike-on-hezbollah>

- **Dozens dead in central Damascus bombing**

State media says 53 people are killed in car bombing near headquarters of ruling Baath Party and Russian embassy.

At least 53 people, most of them civilians, have been killed and 237 others injured in a powerful car bomb near the ruling Baath Party headquarters in central Damascus, state media says.

Syrian Television described Thursday's blast in the capital's central Mazraa neighbourhood as a "terrorist attack".

Opposition activists also reported the explosion, with the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) saying that at least 42 people had been killed. It said nine of the dead were members of government forces while the rest were civilians.

SOHR said that dozens of the wounded were in critical condition.

The main opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, also denounced those responsible as "terrorists", saying that the opposition was not responsible for the bombing.

The pro-government TV station Al Ikhbariya showed images of what appeared to be at least four dead bodies on the ground and cars on fire.

The footage shows firefighters trying to douse cars on fire and lifeless bodies lying on the grass of a public garden.

Witnesses at the scene said a car had exploded at a security checkpoint between the Russian embassy and the central headquarters of the ruling Baath Party of President Bashar al-Assad.

Ambulances went to the scene of the blast, which also shattered windows and sent up a huge cloud of smoke visible throughout much of the city, witnesses said.

"It was huge, everything in the shop turned upside down," one local resident said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution for speaking with foreign media.

In a statement posted on Facebook, the Syrian National Coalition stressed that "any acts targeting civilians with murder or human rights violations are criminal acts that must be condemned, regardless of the perpetrator or the justification".

Al Jazeera's Rula Amin, reporting from Beirut in neighbouring Lebanon, said the explosion took place in a heavily fortified area.

"The city is under very strict restrictions. People who have come out of Damascus have been telling us about how many checkpoints are there within the city limits, inside the neighbourhoods and between different areas; especially around the headquarters of the Baath Party, the security installations and the presidential palace," she said.

"So it seems that whoever was behind the attack had managed to go through many

checkpoints until they got to the point where they can explode the car."

The explosion comes amid reports of fierce clashes over the past few days between the opposition and government forces around Damascus, as rebels tried to make advances in the city.

The car bombing was followed soon after by a mortar attack on a military headquarters, both government-sponsored media and opposition activists reported, without giving information on casualties.

A security official reported another blast in Damascus' northeastern Barzeh neighbourhood.

He had no other information and spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief the media.

Thursday's blasts followed two mortar attacks in as many days on Damascus and came as anti-government activists reported that air attacks in the southern city of Deraa had killed at least 18 people.

On Wednesday, two mortar shells exploded near a football stadium in Damascus, killing one player.

UN Humanitarian Affairs Chief Valerie Amos speaks to Al Jazeera about the impact of the Syrian crisis on citizens

The day before, two mortar shells went off near one of Assad's three palaces in the city, causing only material damage.

Damascus has so far mostly avoided the large-scale violence that has destroyed other Syrian cities, though deadly car bombings have targeted government buildings in the capital.

The latest development came as a major opposition meeting was under way in Cairo, the Egyptian capital.

In a communique drafted for Thursday's meeting, the Syrian National Coalition said it was willing to negotiate a peace deal to end the conflict in Syria but that Assad cannot be a party to any settlement.

The document, seen by Reuters news agency, said Assad and his cohorts must be held accountable for bloodshed and

that any peace deal must be under the auspices of the US and Russia.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/02/20132219435123731.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Opposition refuses to condemn violence**

Al Wefaq official argues that violence from police should also be condemned

Manama: Heading into the National Dialogue talks on Wednesday evening, Jameel Kadhem, the opposition Al Wefaq representative and the spokesman for the main opposition societies, refused to explicitly condemn the street violence, as demanded by pro-government societies.

“We say that all violence from all parties needs to be condemned,” he said, referring to opposition demands that police and security forces rein in their tactics used against the protesters.

Five societies taking part in the talks refused to endorse an anti-violence

document. Two Sunni alliances boycotted the talks on Wednesday night to protest against the street violence.

Speaking to Gulf News on Wednesday evening during the National Dialogue talks, MP Lateefa Al Gaood said the violence had to stop and all political societies and participants needed to send a strong message that it needed to end.

“To the parents of those children and teens on [the] street I would say this: ‘Bring your children home and stop them from criminal acts. We cannot continue in an atmosphere of intimidation,” she said.

And she said that the recently uncovered terrorist cell allegedly headed by four Iranians was a worrying development.

“We need to work on our own problems ourselves,” she said. “Iran cannot and must not meddle in our affairs. These [arrested terror cell members] were plotting to overthrow the government. This is a very serious development and I will be raising it at the talks.”

Meanwhile, a Bahraini rights watchdog has condemned the publication of the

names and pictures of alleged terror suspects, saying that it violated the country’s constitution.

“We totally reject the publication in official and private media of the names and pictures of suspects in the terror cell case,” the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) said.

“All media should abide by the constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain and Article 20c that stipulates that a suspect is innocent until charged by a court of law. They should also comply with Article 83 of Law By Decree 46/2002 on investigations,” the NIHR said in a statement published on its website.

The watchdog said that the decision to publish the names and photos was also against international covenants.

Bahrain on Tuesday said that it busted a 12-member terror cell masterminded by a member of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard codenamed Abu Nasser.

Major General Tareq Al Hassan, the head of Public Security, said that the cell members, eight Bahrainis and four

foreigners, were recruited by a Bahraini who collaborated with two Bahrainis living in the Iranian holy city of Qum.

The cell targets in Bahrain included attacks on civilian and military installations as well as public figures, taking pictures and collecting information about sensitive areas and sites, setting up armed groups to fight and attack security staff and mobilising people to join the groups.

The names and pictures of the cell members were printed by most of the local dailies.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/opposition-refuses-to-condemn-violence-1.1149393>

- **Dialogue resumes, but street violence continues**

Bahrain's national dialogue resumed on Wednesday, but the opposition in the street says it doesn't represent it

Manama: The latest round of National Dialogue talks continued on Wednesday night, with a bloc of pro-government political societies and MPs adamant that the opposition publicly declare their

condemnation of continuing street violence.

That street violence flared last weekend on the second anniversary of the political schism that has divided this island kingdom since then.

Anti-government demonstrators are demanding greater political rights and better social and economic prospects.

The government is trying to build consensus on the future of the kingdom, but argues that violence has to be quelled first, fearing the influence of Iran is stoking the agitators. Earlier this week, it revealed that a Revolutionary Guard and three others from Iran had set up a sophisticated terrorist cell in Bahrain, luring in eight locals to subvert the kingdom.

Last week's street violence claimed the life of a 24-year-old Pakistani policeman, who along with three injured colleagues, was caught in a fusillade of petrol bombs hurled by teens.

A rioting 16-year-old boy also died when he was hit by a blast of shotgun pellets on a street corner in the village of Diah.

For the politicians trying to reach a consensus at a hotel retreat near the Formula One Circuit, quelling the violence is a primary and immediate objective. But it's not going to be an easy task, given the entrenched attitudes among anti-government protesters and their commitment to carrying on the street violence.

At a trucking company office in Diah, adjacent to the spot in the street where 16-year-old Hussain Ali Al Jazeeri died last weekend, his father, brother and uncle sit and reflect on the week's events.

"I always knew my son was going to die as a martyr," Ali Ahmad Al Jazeeri tells Gulf News. "Every time he went out, he wore white, hoping that it would be his death shroud."

But as a father, couldn't he prevent his son from rioting in the streets?

"No one could have stopped him," he says. "He was at Pearl Roundabout right

from the start. He wanted to do his part," he said referring to the monument that served as a symbol of the protest movement until it was removed by the government.

According to his father, Hussain was hit at close range by a blast of bird shot pellets to his lower right torso. And as he was dying, he says his son was struck a second time.

Hussain was part of a violent opposition street group that lobbed anything they could — and petrol bombs — at police on the main street of the village.

And he was also a teen seasoned in dealing with police — he had been arrested and jailed earlier for riotous behaviour.

"He couldn't be stopped," his father says. "He and all of his friends, all they wanted to do was protest."

The protesting cost Hussain his life. His brother, 11-year-old Mohammad, wants to follow in his dead brother's footsteps. He fidgets with a crumpled chocolate bar wrapper as the adults talk. But when

asked, he answers; “I want to be like Hussain.”

His father says that with Hussain’s death, he will have two more sons to replace him so that they can continue their struggle.

But what about negotiating and ending the cycle of violence?

“This National Dialogue is just talk for the politicians,” Ali Ahmad says. “But we need to continue the violence until we get our rights.”

Ali Ahmad’s brother, Saeed, owns the trucking and cargo company. He had hoped his son would join him, but that’s not an option for the next decade. Maktar Saeed, who is 18, will be spending the next 10 years behind bars for rioting and street violence. He was convicted on Tuesday and also ordered to pay restitution of 15,000 Bahraini dinars (Dh146,000).

“No father wants to see his son in jail,” Saeed says. “It’s a waste of the next ten years. And for what?”

Outside on the street, burnt palm tree trunks and broken bricks lay, ready to be moved into position come the evening riotous behaviour.

For those meeting twice a week at the National Dialogue talks, reaching an agreement is one thing, but trying to sell it to families like the Al Jazeera’s is another. Ali Ahmad’s other teen son is taking to the streets, and his father can’t — or won’t — stop him.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/dialogue-resumes-but-street-violence-continues-1.1149382>

- **Hunger strike by Oman activists continues**

Qaboos names new members of the human rights commission

Muscat: The hunger strike by 23 activists continued contrary to statements given during a radio show on Wednesday, Gulf News was informed by Khawla Bint Salem Al Hashmi, wife of writer and human rights activists, Saeed Al Hashmi, who is also on hunger strike.

“It is a lie, they never broke fast and as of now hunger strike continues,” she reiterated.

She also revealed that, contrary to earlier claims, Al Hashmi was not taken straight to the high-security Central Prison in Sumayil from the Royal Hospital. “Initially we had no idea where he was but then we came to know that he was at the Royal Oman Police Headquarters in Qurum,” she said.

Khawala and Saeed’s brother then paid a visit to the detained activist at the headquarters. “We saw him but could not talk so we kind of screamed and asked him if he was still not eating and he confirmed that his fast continued,” she revealed.

Later on Wednesday, Al Hashmi was moved to the Central Prison in Sumayil. “I can confirm that he is back in Sumayil prison but I am not sure if he is in solitary confinement or lodged with the other activists,” Khawala Al Hashmi added.

Jihad Bin Abdullah Bin Mohammad Al Taei, President of the Bar Association and member of the National Human Rights

Commission (NHRC), said during a live programme on Al Wisal radio that Al Hashmi and other activists had agreed to end the fast.

Meanwhile, six of the commission’s members have been replaced, including the Vice-President, for a three-year-term.

Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed on Wednesday issued a Royal Decree reappointing Mohammad Bin Abdullah Bin Masoud Al Riyami as the President for another three-year-term.

Oman Journalists Association Chairman Awadh Bin Saeed Bin Ali BaQuwair is among the new inductees. Amer Bin Hamad Bin Mohammad Al Hajri has replaced Ali Salim Masood Al Mamari as the Vice-President of the NHRC.

Ahamd Bin Saif Bin Ahmad Al Barwani, Majidah Bint Shekhan Bin Majid Al Maamari, Dr Nasser Bin Saif Bin Nasser Al Shamsi and Dr Mohammad Bin Sulaiman Bin Abdullah Al Rashdi are the newly appointed members of the NHRC.

Besides the President, those retained in the 14-member NHRC committee are

Hussain Jawad Mohammad Abdulrasool, Saud Ali Abdullah Al Jabri, Jihad Abdullah Mohammad Al Taie, Shaikh Muhanna Saleh Saud Al Mawali, Fahad Ahmad Hamad Al Jabri, Saad Suhail Bahwan and Zakiya Hamdan Rashid Al Farsi

The outgoing members are Dr Rashid Hamad Humaid Al Balushi, Jehan Abdullah Mohammad Al Lamki, Diena Hamzah Abdullah Al Asfoor, Shaikh Sultan Matar Salim Al Azizi and Saleh Ayael Khamis Al Amiri.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/hungary-strike-by-oman-activists-continues-1.1149236>

- **Shura members pledge to elevate status of women**

Divorcées, widows, social victims to be given special attention

Manama: The personal status law and the full rights of divorcées and widows will top the list of concerns, the women members of the Saudi Shura have said.

Hours after they were sworn in by King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud who made history by appointing 30 women to the

150-member advisory council, the members said that they were “fully aware of the plight of divorced women and the women who are deprived of their rights to inheritance due to customs and traditions that have nothing to do with Islam.”

“We are also conscious of the suffering of battered women and of the need to activate the laws on the civil rights of Saudi women,” they said in remarks published by Saudi daily Al Madinah on Thursday.

“It is a formidable task and a huge responsibility, especially after we swore to God to assume it to the best of our capabilities,” Dr Ferdous Bint Saud Al Saleh, said. “We hope to be up to the pledges and expectations and we certainly need prayers and support,” she said, quoted by the daily.

Dr Haya Al Manee said that there was not yet a specific agenda, but insisted that social issues would figure high on the members’ action plans.

“I strongly feel about the plight of divorcées and women who are deprived of their inheritance rights as they are the

helpless victims of traditions and customs that have nothing to do with our religion,” she said. “There is also an urgent need to address the issues of concern to young men and women. They are the assets of our future and do deserve our attention. The women members of the Shura will not be confined in their work to the status of women. However, their presence in the Council will certainly help to widen the look at the legislation that needs to be enhanced to make it compatible with the new features and character of modern times,” she said.

Dr Salwa Al Hazza said that she would focus on the personal status of women and on the conditions of divorcées and widows.

“They deserve to have their full rights,” she said.

The women appointed to the Shura Council are among the country’s elite with 27 holding PhD degrees. Two are princesses from the royal family well known for their work with charity foundations.

Following the appointment of the women, Saudi Arabia jumped from the 184th rank on the world’s list of the percentage of women in parliament to the 80th place, well ahead of the US, Ireland, Russia, India and Brazil.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/shura-members-pledge-to-elevate-status-of-women-1.1149106>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• **Kabul Mayor says road construction a top priority**

By UNAMA Kabul

21 February 2013 - The Mayor of Kabul City, Engineer Mohammad Younas Khairandesh, said yesterday that construction and rehabilitation of road and footpath was the top priority of the Kabul Municipality and during year 1391 (2012-2013) a total of 42.1 kilometres of road and 106,299 square metres of footpath were constructed.

While briefing journalists in Kabul about achievements of the Municipality during last one year, he said that 31.1 kilometres

of road was ready for asphalt-, work on which will commence in the spring.

“We constructed 70.3 kilometres of road, six canals with the length of 2.97 kilometres, 138.2 kilometres of sanitation water channels, 172 small bridges, 2.4 kilometres of protection wall along the river basins and installed 518 square metres of railing along footpath,” said Engineer Khairandesh.

He said under the European Union-funded project, 35,328 kilometres of streets were black-topped and 224 shelters were constructed besides development of culverts and small bridges in some parts of Kabul City.

Similarly, he said under Kabul Solidarity Programme (KSP), 29.3 kilometres of streets were concreted in district 11, 12 and 16 of Kabul City in addition to the construction of 46.3 kilometres culverts and 21,219 square metres of footpath.

Engineer Khairandesh said that Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) had recently provided US\$ 5 million for KSP programme.

Referring to the Kabul Greenery project, he said, as a result of the Municipality’s “effective programme”, the level of dust particles in the atmosphere of Kabul City had dropped from 250 microgram to 190 microgram.

“We planted over one million saplings during last year’s spring season and cultivated greenery over 35,000 square metres of area in Kabul City,” said Engineer Khairandesh.

In addition, he said that 14 parks had been completed in Kabul with installation of necessary equipment for children’s recreation.

Similarly, electric poles that are connected to Light-Emitting Diode (LED) system were installed along 42.5 kilometres road to illuminate the City at night while another 442 solar-powered electric poles were installed, he added.

Engineer Khairandesh told the media representatives that the income of the Municipality was over US\$ 40 million during 1391 while it received US\$ 23.2 million from the Ministry of Finance in development budget.

Referring to future programme, the Kabul Mayor said the World Bank (WB) announced US\$ 100 million for Kabul Development Programme (KDP). He said that WB had also promised another US\$ 60 million for construction of road in the Afghan capital.

In addition, he said a plan to construct two tunnels is underway. One of the tunnels would be specific to public transportation and the other would be for common traffic, he added. He also mentioned that the WB had agreed to fund for the feasibility study and design of this project. WB has also agreed to fund 20 million dollars for purchase of different machineries for KM, he added.

The Major said 70 per cent of Kabul was unplanned development, which would need decades of consistent work to bring them under proper system of services.

He said that a national campaign of plantation would start on 17 of Hoot (7 March) this year under which over a million saplings and plants would be planted. He called on residents of Kabul to

take active part in the plantation campaign.

The Mayor of Kabul said complicated system of procurement, confiscation of lands by powerholders, unplanned constructed and development in Kabul City, lack of canalization, lack of city transport system and increasing number of traffic were among the key challenges the Kabul Municipality faced.

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

- **NATO may hold summit to mark Afghan security transition**

By Meena Haseeb - 21 Feb 2013, 12:50 pm

Khaama Press

NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen on Wednesday said NATO is considering holding a summit in mid-2013 to mark a milestone in the handover of security responsibilities in Afghanistan to local forces.

This comes as Afghan security forces are expected to take full security lead from the NATO-led coalition security forces by spring this year, almost 2 years after the

United States invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban government harboring Osama bin Laden, the al Qaeda leader who masterminded the September 11 attacks on U.S. cities.

Rasmussen in an interview with the Reuters said, “No decision has been made but it is an idea that is being considered.”

He said the summit will possibly be organized in June this year.

“A summit in mid-2013 could be a good idea to mark the milestone in Afghanistan, the fact that we will have handed over lead responsibility to the Afghans all over Afghanistan,” he said.

NATO diplomats say there is talk of organizing a one-day summit in Brussels, possibly around the time that U.S. President Barack Obama travels to Northern Ireland for the G8 summit in June, but say no decision has been taken.

Obama announced last week that 34,000 troops, about half the U.S. force in Afghanistan, would withdraw by early 2014, bringing the United States close to wrapping up the costly, unpopular war.

The international force plans to hand over full responsibility for security to the Afghans by the end of 2014, with most international combat forces being withdrawn, leaving a smaller mission to train Afghan soldiers.

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

- **Taliban dismiss UN report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan**

By Mirwais Adeel - 21 Feb 2013, 1:09 pm

Khaama Press

Taliban militants group following a letter to United Nations dismissed its recent report on civilians casualties and called it baseless.

This comes as United Nations following a report announced that the civilians casualties had dropped by 12% in 2012.

According to UN at least 2,754 civilians were killed and 4,805 others were injured where militants were blamed for 81% of the civilians casualties.

UN in its report said only 8% of the casualties were incurred during the security forces operations while 11% other civilian casualties were unknown.

According to the report militants caused around 2,179 civilian deaths and injured 3,952 others due to improvised explosive device attacks which shows an increase of 9% as compared to 2011.

In the meantime UN in its report blamed security forces for 316 civilian deaths and 271 injuries of the civilians during the operations which shows a decrease of 46%.

Taliban group spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid criticized United Nations for its report and blamed UN for not disclosing further information to prove its claims.

Zabiullah Mujahid blaming majority of the civilian casualties to Afghan and NATO troops operations and airstrikes said majority of the roadside bombs were planted by Afghan security forces in a bid to defame the Taliban group.

<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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