



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

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

26 FEBRUARY 2013

NO: 1558

1. IRAQ.....	3
• MP calls for protesters to expel sectarian preachers and advocates of the division from sit-ins squares.	3
• Money, allocated to the Russian arms deal, is still owned by the Ministry of Defense.	3
• Kirkuk's Arabs rejects Tayfur's remarks.....	4
• Hakeem, Nijaif stress necessity for promoting national unity	5
• Emir of Dulaim Tribes: Agendas behind demonstrations “Scandalized”	5
• Mess to take place in case not responding to demonstrators' demands, says IS MP	6
• IS waits other side to approve amending laws called for by demonstrators, says MP.....	7
• Hakim, Nijaifi stress necessity of respecting constitution, political process.....	7
• Kurdish visit to Israel denied	8
• Harb: I won't sue Saadi.....	8
• 16 wanted arrested in Mosul	9
• Source: Qaeda preparing to strike Kathimiya, Najaf, Karbala and Samarra shrines	10
2. IRAN	11
• Iran's Deputy Chief Negotiator Meets Chinese Envoy before Talks in Almaty	11
• Official Stresses Iran's Petrochem Capacity in Meeting Domestic Needs, Hitting Int'l Markets.....	13
• Salehi says Iran is attentive to Persian Gulf states' security issues.....	13
• P5+1 to offer Iran easing sanctions: report.....	14
• Iran to present new proposals at P5+1 talks.....	15
• P5+1 to present Iran with 'updated and good' offer: EU official	16
• Ahmadinejad to inaugurate two onshore oilfields.....	17
• Russia urges 'Political will' ahead of Iran-P5+1 Almaty talks	18
• US senators call on EU to tighten Iran sanctions on eve of talks	19
• Iran's top negotiator meets Kazakh president before nuclear talks	20
• Tondar, Tosan missiles fired during IRGC war games	21
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	22
• UN adviser missing on Israel-Syria border reportedly Canadian	22
• Gaza rocket fired at south Israel amid West Bank tensions.....	23
• PA not behind demonstrations, official says.....	25
• Likud, Jewish Home said to be nearing coalition deal.....	27
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	29
• Larayedh to form new Tunisia government	29
• Libya seeks help in securing borders.....	31
• Egypt govt announces economic reform measures to clinch IMF loan	32
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	34
• Lebanese MP voices rejection of “conspiracy” against Tripoli.....	34
• Berri calls on political forces to counter kidnappings	35
• LF not committed to Orthodox proposal, MP says	36



6. SYRIA.....	36
• Rights group says 140 killed in Aleppo shelling.....	36
• Kerry: US committed to helping Syrian rebels	37
• Russia: Extremists in Syria opposition blocking dialogue.....	38
• Syria opposition to attend Rome summit	40
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	41
• Martin Luther King III tells Sharjah forum ‘No one can tell a nation what it should do’.....	41
• National dialogue session yields no agreement.....	43
• Supreme Court rejects appeal of Oman activists	45
• Qatar conference to focus on security, integrity	46
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	47
• NATO: No Evidence For Afghan Claims Of Misconduct.....	47
• ISAF to investigate alleged U.S. forces misconduct in Afghan province	48
• 4 civilians killed in blast in Afghan Helmand province	49
• Taliban describe Pakistani interior minister as ‘comedian’	50

1. IRAQ

- **MP calls for protesters to expel sectarian preachers and advocates of the division from sit-ins squares.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The MP, of the Ahrar Parliamentary Bloc, Ali al-Timimi called for protesters to "expel sectarian preachers and advocates of division from sit-ins' squares in Anbar and Mosul, to maintain the legitimacy of demonstrations, public opinion and the unity of Iraq."

He said in a statement today 26, Feb that "those will damage the demonstrators and weaken the legitimacy of the demonstrations," stressing that "there are those who seek to pass sectarian and political projects through the gate of the demonstrators, taking advantage of spontaneous of the demonstrations."

Timimi warned from "the sectarianism voices among demonstrators, because it result in the loss of legitimacy and cause quick termination for these demonstrations."

It is noteworthy that "The cleric Muqtada al-Sadr had earlier called for protesters in some of Iraq's provinces to obey their

leaders and scholars and their sheikhs to maintain the unity of Iraq and not to divide the country and abandon sectarian chants that keep them away from their people."

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

- **Money, allocated to the Russian arms deal, is still owned by the Ministry of Defense.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / A member of the parliamentary Commission on Security and Defense Juma al-Matuti confirmed that the money allocated to the Russian arms deal is still owned by the Ministry of Defense.

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today 26, Feb that " the money, allocated for the purchase of Russian weapons, is still owned by the Ministry of Defense, but the Russian deal may not be done and may go to another country to arm the army."

He added: "Some political blocs wondered, during the budget discussion, about the money and why it is not back to the budget? We explained to them that

the money is still with the Ministry of Defense until a deal to buy weapons."

It is mentioned that the arms deal between Iraq and Russia raised doubts of financial corruption for intermediaries and Iraqi, Russian and other figures, while the security and defense Commission announced cancellation of the deal by the Russian side.

The deal is worth 2.4 billion dollars and includes armed helicopters Mi-28 and surface-to-air missile systems Pantsir

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

- **Kirkuk's Arabs rejects Tayfur's remarks.**

Kirkuk / NINA / The MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Omar al-Jubouri rejected the accusations made by Arif Tayfur Deputy Speaker, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party against the Kirkuk's Arabs MPs.

Jubouri said in a press statement: "The people of the Arab component in Kirkuk do not need Arif Tayfur to defend them

and he has to stop harming then the Kirkuk's Arabs will be Okay."

He added: "The sovereign Federal position that Tayfur occupied, do not give him the right to attack members of the House of Representatives, whether they are from Kirkuk's Arabs or MPs from other provinces, for partisan political reasons."

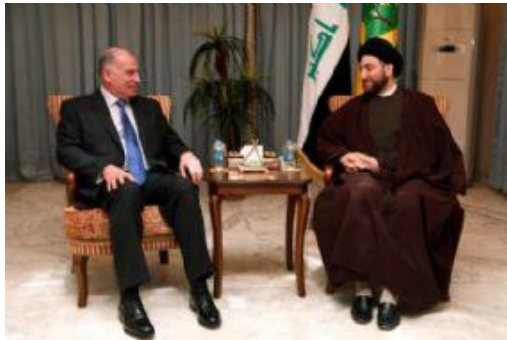
He explained: "The calm attitude of Kirkuk's Arabs MPs in this period was in response to a request of their leaders in Iraqiya coalition and in line with the demands of the demonstrators specifically in Hawija and Kirkuk in general, in order to avoid confusion and in order not to mix the trenches.

The Deputy Speaker Arif Tayfur accused Kirkuk's Arabs MPs of failing to represent their masses, describing them as: "they have become far from the aspirations of the masses in Kirkuk, and they are busy with their personal interests, putting themselves in labyrinths and political conflicts implementing others agendas who do not want to Iraq any good ", as he put it.

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

- **Hakeem, Nijaif stress necessity for promoting national unity**

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, stressed the importance of national unity.



In his meeting with Speaker of Parliament, Usama al-Nijaifi, on Monday, Feb. 25, Hakeem stressed the necessity the importance of showing full support to the political process, considering the Constitution as a base that must not be amended except through the mechanism it stipulated.

Hakeem stressed the importance to prepare for the upcoming election in an objective atmosphere to enable it expresses the voters' genuine opinion,

pointing out the necessity to enact and amend laws that help fulfilling the protestors demands, whether from the southern or western provinces, pointing out that all legitimate demands are welcomed.

For his part, Nijaifi praised Hakeem's role, as well as the role of all other patriotic forces toward solving political crisis, expressing his support to Hakeem's calls for joint work.

Nijaifi stressed support to the Constitution and the political process, rejecting the calls for toppling it, considering it a mean to solve problems. He stressed the necessity to send messages to the public affirming that the Iraqis are one nation capable of solving its own problems.

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

- **Emir of Dulaim Tribes: Agendas behind demonstrations “Scandalized”**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Emir of Dulaim Tribes, Majid al-Ali al-Suleiman, assured that the numbers of the demonstrators are decreased because the intentions and the agendas behind the demonstrations that

work to arouse sectarianism are scandalized.

The News Center of Iraqi Media Network quoted him as saying “Thousands of Anbar citizens withdrew from the demonstrations when they realized the Governmental intention to implement their demands that come under its responsibility.”

“They also knew that there are plans plotted behind the scenes away from their demands,” he added.

“Those who conduct the Friday ceremonies have not relations with Islam as long as they work on agitating the sectarian seditions,” he mentioned.

“Some sides within the demonstrators are implementing foreign agendas as they receive money for doing this,” he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29190:emir-of-dulaim-tribes-agendas-behind-demonstrations-scandalized&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Mess to take place in case not responding to demonstrators' demands, says IS MP**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Mohammed Iqbal, of the Iraqiya Slate expected a mess to take place in case not responding to the demonstrators' demands.

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "If the government does not respond to the demonstrators' demands, a mess might take place where it is a real diagnosis to the current situation."

"We are worried about the current crisis that must be settled early, but the settlement cannot be achieved without responding to the demonstrators' demands through the constitutional institutions such as the parliament, the government and the Executive Authority because these demands are related to the three authorities," he added.

"All the options are available and we cannot state which one of them where the options of forming regions and the civil disobedience are discussed or even the withdrawal from the government and the parliament," he pointed out.

"These options are according to the demands of the masses and whenever the government responded to the demands, it would be good for all sides," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29189:mess-to-take-place-in-case-not-responding-to-demonstrators-demands-says-is-mp&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **IS waits other side to approve amending laws called for by demonstrators, says MP**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Wisal Salim, of the Iraqiya Slate stated that the Iraqiya Slate is waiting the other side to approve amending the laws called for by the demonstrators.

Speaking to All Iraq News Agency (AIN), she said "The issue of amending some laws called for by the demonstrators was discussed in the meetings of the ministerial committee tasked to discuss the demonstrators' demands."

"We are still waiting the other side to respond to this issue and settle these laws," she concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29188:is-waits-other-side-to-approve-amending-laws-called-for-by-demonstrators-says-mp&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Hakim, Nijaifi stress necessity of respecting constitution, political process**

Baghdad (AIN) –The head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, and the parliament Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi, stressed the necessity of respecting the constitution and adhering to the political process.

A statement by the SIIC received by AIN cited "Hakim, while receiving Nijaifi at his office in Baghdad, stressed the necessity of supporting the political process by all sides," noting that "the constitution is the basis of the new Iraq and cannot be amended only through the constitutional mechanisms set by the constitution itself."

"He also stressed the necessity of preparing for the next elections in a good atmosphere to show the real will of the Iraqi voters," the statement added,

pointing out "Hakim assured that the laws that help in supporting the demonstrators must be amended, stressing that the legitimate demands are welcomed."

"For his part, Nijaifi appreciated Hakim's role in settling the crises, expressing his support to Hakim's calls for working together to achieve the interests of the Iraqi people," the statement added.

"Nijaifi rejected the calls for toppling the political process, considering it as the best way to settle the crisis," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29187:hakim-nijaifi-stress-necessity-of-respecting-constitution-political-process&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Kurdish visit to Israel denied**

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish government spokesman Sifin De'za'i denied a report published by an Israeli paper that a Kurdish delegation visited Tel Aviv to discuss Israeli investment projects in Kurdistan, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Yedioth Ahronot daily reported that deputy premier Imad Ahmed, accompanied by agriculture minister, visited Israel to discuss possible agricultural projects.

He pointed out that there were mistakes in the names and positions of the supposed Kurdish delegation, "furthermore, the Kurdish region has no diplomatic relations with Israel".

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28kxggoi45rtjxpiyqvqf1eb45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152520&l=1

- **Harb: I won't sue Saadi**

Shafaq News / The legal expert, Tareq Harb expressed on Tuesday, his unwillingness to resort to the judiciary against MP, Sabah al-Saadi on the background of his accusations to him on Monday.

Tariq Harb said in an interview with "Shafaq News" that "I will not sue al-Saadi on his statements as freedom allows him to say whatever he wants, "adding that " he is not afraid from these accusations. "

The independent MP, Sabah al-Saadi announced yesterday, in a press conference held in the parliament building banning the "lawyer" of Prime Minister, Tariq Harb from travelling outside the country after accusing him of what he called as "crimes against humanity".

Saadi revealed in his conference on the content of documents that refer to the signing of " lieutenant colonel " Tariq Harb in 1984 for the implementation of death penalty on 1037 fugitive soldiers in that period; and the second in 1987 as a member of the Committee, which recommends treating the "fugitive" who exceed his escape a year and arrested after that to be treated as a fugitive for more than once and let the party organizations execute him.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5323-harb-i-wont-sue-saadi-.html>

- **16 wanted arrested in Mosul**



Shafaq News / The leadership of the Second Infantry Division of the Iraqi army in Mosul revealed on Tuesday, arresting 16 wanted in accordance with Article Four terrorism , seized explosive belts, roadside bombs and explosive devices in Mosul.

The commander of the Second Infantry Division of the Iraqi army , Ali al-Furajji said in an interview for "Shafaq News" that "the forces have managed to arrest 16 wanted to the security in accordance with Article 4 terrorism in Mosul."

Nineveh province is considered of the unstable province in security that is witnessing armed attacks by Al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the remnants of the former regime that targets the security forces , government departments , institutions and some national and religious components in the province, according to official security reports.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/5322-16-wanted-arrested-in-mosul.html>

- **Source: Qaeda preparing to strike Kathimiya, Najaf, Karbala and Samarra shrines**

Shafaq News / A security source revealed on Tuesday, that al-Qaeda organization has moved the fifth generation of its sleeper cells in Iraq in the process of carrying out attacks to target important religious shrines in Iraq.

The source, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of information, told "Shafaq News", that "al-Qaeda started actually in training its components in the areas adjacent to the Iraqi border from Syria part and ordered for the migration of some of its leaders to enter Iraq."

He explained that "the organization has divided these groups into three states, namely North , South and the capital Baghdad, as this elite trains the organization cells and develop its capabilities, this generation is called the fifth generation which is an Iraqi Arab formation of a high security capacity that

is difficult for the Iraqi security forces to reveal it".

He added that "the fifth generation is now working on specific plans and specific purpose of striking targets depending on military equipment similar to what the Iraqi army has to carry out attacks targeting the security services mainly."

The source added that followed targeting the Awakening forces and quality bombings that will target the religious shrines in Samarra, Baghdad, Karbala and Najaf, and this scheme is supported regionally. "

The source pointed out that "the organization is now working on the implementation of these plans with escalating protests, as well as the preoccupation of security services in many of these provinces with the demonstrators."

According to observers, al-Qaeda started to be active again in the areas north of Babel and in Nineveh , Diyala, Salahuddin and Kirkuk areas, in addition to the presence of sleeper cells, according to Iraqi security sources in southern Iraq that

implement armed attacks from time to time.

Despite the low rate of violence in the country, but the most deadly attacks, which targeted government installations and Shiite Muslims had been adopted by al-Qaeda.

Islamic State of Iraq organization has threatened recently to carry out more bombings, and said that it would continue its operations until achieving "victory" and apply what it called as the law of God.

Al -Qaeda with its "Islamic State of Iraq" wing adopted most of the attacks carried out against foreign troops in Iraq before 2011, under the pretext of " occupation forces presence in the Muslims lands," but the organization and after carrying out armed attacks after the U.S. forces

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/5321-source-qaeda-preparing-to-strike-kathimiya-najaf-karbala-and-samarra-shrines.html>

2. IRAN

• Iran's Deputy Chief Negotiator Meets Chinese Envoy before Talks in Almaty

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's deputy chief negotiator Ali Baqeri held a meeting with China's envoy to the talks between Tehran and the world powers in Almaty, Kazakhstan on Tuesday.



During the meeting, the two sides discussed issues related to the talks between Iran and the Group 5+1 (the US, Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany) which started today and will likely continue for two days.

The new round of talks between Iran and the G5+1 started in Almaty's Rixos Hotel at 13:30 local time (0730 GMT) today, and sources in Almaty told FNA that the talks might continue until Wednesday.

Iran's lead negotiator Saeed Jalili arrived in Almaty at the head of a team of negotiators on Sunday to attend the new round of talks with the six world powers.

Prior to his departure to Almaty, Jalili called on the Group 5+1 not to repeat previous mistakes in the next round of talks with Iran, and start negotiations based on a new strategy.

"If the group has returned to the talks, they should enter this round of negotiations with a new strategy free from previous mistakes," Jalili said at the annual conference of the managers of Iran's nuclear industry here in Tehran on Saturday.

Iran and the Group 5+1 have already held three rounds of talks in Geneva, two rounds in Istanbul, one round in Baghdad and one round in Moscow. The last round of talks between Iran and the Group 5+1 was held in Moscow in June.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to

substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

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

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions 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 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107147726>

- **Official Stresses Iran's Petrochem Capacity in Meeting Domestic Needs, Hitting Int'l Markets**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The National Petrochemical Company (NPC) is able to meet Iran's market needs to petrochemicals, NPC officials said, adding that the company is also able to export its products to the international markets.

"There is no doubt that meeting domestic needs is our priority and exports of the surplus will come after meeting those needs," Director of Production Department of NPC Ali Mohammad Bosaghzadeh said.

Issuance of exports permission for petrochemicals is necessary to enable petrochemical plants to export their surplus products to the other states' markets.

The annual output of Iran's petrochemical plants has reached 57 million tons after commissioning Mehr Mandegar (Lasting Kindness) projects in the petrochemical sector, Head of the National

Petrochemical Company (NPC) Abdolhossein Bayat said in January.

Bayat made the remarks at the opening ceremony of Kermanshah polymer plant in Western Iran last month.

He noted that Kermanshah polymer plant has increased Iran's annual polymer output to 6.3mln tons, adding that the country's overall petrochemical production capacity now stands at 57mln tons per year.

Bayat said that the private sector has supplied Kermanshah polymer plant with 73 percent of the total \$4.24bln investment required for launching the plant.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107147716>

- **Salehi says Iran is attentive to Persian Gulf states' security issues**

TEHRAN, Feb. 26 (MNA) – Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi reiterated Tehran's position that Iran seeks a deepening of ties with the Persian Gulf Arab countries and considers security in the Persian Gulf Arab states as its own.

Salehi made the remarks in a speech to the High Council of the Persian Gulf attended by Iranian ambassadors in the Persian Gulf states, governors of provinces bordering the Persian Gulf and number of officials from ministries and state bodies.

The senior diplomat said the enemies and ill-wishers are trying hard to damage Iran's ties with and the Persian Gulf Arab states by raising baseless allegations against Tehran.

He went on to say, "Any insecurity and instability in the region will hurt the stability, security and economic development of all regional countries and therefore the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on the principle of mutual respect and non-interference in the in the internal affairs of others, has been seeking to deepen inclusive ties with neighboring countries and believes that regional security should be provided within the framework of collective security by regional countries."

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817873>

- **P5+1 to offer Iran easing sanctions: report**

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Iran

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Iran's chief negotiator Saeed Jalili attend a meeting in Istanbul on April 14, 2012.

A report says the group of six major world powers plans to present Iran with an offer to ease gold, petrochemicals banking sanctions in Kazakhstan talks.



The Al Monitor reported that the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany) plans to present Iran with an offer to ease sanctions on the "gold trade, petrochemical industry, and some small-scale banking sanctions."

Meanwhile, Michael Mann, the spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, said on Tuesday that, "We have prepared a good and updated offer for the talks, which we believe is balanced and a fair basis for constructive talks."

"The offer addresses international concerns... on the nature of the Iranian nuclear program, but is also responsive to Iranian ideas," Michael Mann added.

The negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 began in southeastern Kazakh city of Almaty earlier today.

Secretary of Iran Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili is heading the Islamic Republic's negotiating delegation. The P5+1 representatives are led by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

Iran and the P5+1 group have held several rounds of talks with the main focus on Iran's nuclear energy program. The last round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group was held in Moscow in June 2012.

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

Over the false allegation, Washington and the European Union have imposed several rounds of illegal unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran refutes the allegation and argues that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is entitled to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/26/290887/p51-to-offer-easing-iran-sanctions/>

- **Iran to present new proposals at P5+1 talks**

The Islamic Republic says it will present a new comprehensive package of proposals at talks with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/26/290886/iran-to-offer-new-proposals-at-talks/>

- **P5+1 to present Iran with ‘updated and good’ offer: EU official**

A senior EU official says the group of major world powers known as the P5+1 plans to offer Tehran an “updated and good” proposal during talks in Kazakhstan.



"We have prepared a good and updated offer for the talks, which we believe is balanced and a fair basis for constructive talks," Michael Mann, the spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, said on Tuesday.

"The offer addresses international concerns... on the nature of the Iranian nuclear program, but is also responsive to Iranian ideas," Michael Mann added.

The negotiations began in southeastern Kazakh city of Almaty on Tuesday with the presence of representatives from Iran and the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany).

Secretary of Iran Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili is heading the Islamic Republic’s negotiating delegation. The P5+1 representatives are led by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

In a meeting with Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Almaty on Monday, Jalili said, “The international community expects the P5+1 group’s constructive, logical and reliable answers to Iran’s comprehensive proposals [presented] during the Moscow meeting.”

He added that powers should know that by relying on nuclear weapons and exerting various pressures on the Iranian nation, they would not be able to dissuade the Islamic Republic from achieving its nuclear rights.

Iran and the P5+1 group have held several rounds of talks with the main focus on Iran’s nuclear energy program. The last round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group was held in Moscow in June 2012.

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

Over the false allegation, Washington and the European Union have imposed several rounds of illegal unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran refutes the allegation and argues that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is entitled to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/26/290880/p51-to-present-iran-with-updated-offer/>

- **Ahmadinejad to inaugurate two onshore oilfields**

Iran is set to inaugurate two onshore oilfields with a production capacity of 15,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) in the south of the country.

Sarvestan and Sa'adatabad oilfields as well as Shiraz Hafiz Gas Power Plant will be inaugurated in a ceremony attended by

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the southern province of Fars on Tuesday.

Iran is estimated to earn USD 1.5 million per day in revenues from the fields.

The development plan of the fields has created job opportunities for 1,500 people.

Sarvestan oilfield is located 150 kilometers southeast of the city of Shiraz. Sa'adatabad oilfield is located twenty kilometers to the north of Sarvestan oilfield. Covering an area of 242 square kilometers, both fields are estimated to hold 1.402 billion barrels of in-place oil.

Iran's total in-place oil reserves have been estimated to be more than 560 billion barrels, with about 140 billion barrels of recoverable oil.

Moreover, heavy and extra-heavy varieties of crude oil account for roughly 70-100 billion barrels of the total reserves.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/26/290862/iran-set-to-launch-two-onshore-oilfields/>

- **Russia urges 'Political will' ahead of Iran-P5+1 Almaty talks**



Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov says the success of the negotiations between Iran and the six major world powers (the P5+1 group), depends on “political will” from both sides.

"If bargaining is to begin, firstly, political will must be demonstrated, as well as the inner resolve to move into this stage," Ryabkov said on Monday.

Next round of talks between Iran and P5+1 -- comprising the US, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China - is set to begin in Almaty, Kazakhstan on Tuesday.

Ryabkov, who is leading the Russian delegation in Almaty, called on the negotiating sides to “stop wasting any more time.”

Iran and the P5+1 group have held several rounds of talks with the main focus on Iran’s nuclear energy program. The last round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group was held in Moscow in June 2012.

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/2013/02/26/290855/russia-urges-political-will-in-iran-talks/>

- **US senators call on EU to tighten Iran sanctions on eve of talks**

As Iran and the group of six major world powers prepare to hold another round of talks, a group of US senators have urged the European Union to cut off Iran's access to its euro foreign exchange reserves.



In a letter to President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy on Monday, 36 US senators urged the union to close “a significant loophole in US-EU sanctions policy” in order to increase pressure on Iran.

“We strongly urge you to take all the necessary measures to cut off Iran's ability to use its foreign-held euros,” the

Financial Times quoted the letter as saying.

The senators called on the EU to deny Iran access to Target2, Trans-European Automated Real-time Gross settlement Express Transfer system operated by the European Central Bank, which allegedly is being used to facilitate Iranian trade transactions.

The request was made on the eve of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany) which is set to begin in southeastern Kazakh city of Almaty on Tuesday.

Iran and the P5+1 group have held several rounds of talks with the main focus on Iran's nuclear energy program. The last round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group was held in Moscow in June 2012.

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

Over the false allegation, Washington and the European Union have imposed several rounds of illegal unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/26/290849/us-urges-eu-to-tighten-iran-sanctions/>

- **Iran's top negotiator meets Kazakh president before nuclear talks**

TEHRAN – Iranian top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili held a meeting with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev a day before nuclear talks between Iran and six major powers.

Today, Iran is scheduled to hold talks with the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, over its nuclear program.

During the meeting, Jalili said the world community is looking to receive “logical” and “credible” responses from the 5+1 group to Iran's proposals, which were presented in the last meeting between the two sides in Moscow in June 2012.

The core of the package presented by Iran during the Moscow talks was that the negotiating partners recognize Iran's right to uranium enrichment under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and no obligations should be imposed on the country beyond the NPT.

For his part, Nazarbayev underlined that all signatories to the NPT must be allowed to exercise their right to a peaceful nuclear energy.

Jalili meets Kazakh foreign minister

On Monday, Jalili also met with Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrisov and discussed a number of issues.

During the meeting, Jalili said regional countries can ensure peace and security in the region if they actively try to counter common threats and prevent foreigners from interfering in regional security issues.

Certain powers say they are making efforts to boost regional security, but the fact that they are pressuring and imposing sanctions on others, in line with their illogical goals, gives the lie to this claim, he noted.

He also said that the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kazakhstan, which both have expertise in the area of civilian nuclear energy, are opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

He added that security cooperation among regional countries will leave no space for the presence of foreigners in the region.

Idrisov, for his part, stated that all countries in the region and beyond acknowledge the undeniable role of Iran in maintaining peace and security in the region.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/105961-irans-top-negotiator-meets-kazakh-president-before-nuclear-talks>

- **Tondar, Tosan missiles fired during IRGC war games**

Domestically manufactured Tondar and Tosan missiles were successfully fired at mock enemy targets in the final stage of the Great Prophet 8 war games.

The three-day exercise of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground

Forces started on Saturday in the southeastern Iranian province of Kerman.

On Monday, T-72 battle tanks fired Tondar missiles and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles fired Tosan missiles at the designated targets.



The Tondar missile is able to hit targets at a distance of 4 kilometers and the Tosan missile is able to destroy targets at a distance of 4.5 kilometers.

In the final stage of the maneuvers, IRGC air defense units also repelled missile and aerial attacks by mock enemy forces, and heliborne troops conducted a special operation.

In addition, unmanned aerial vehicles took part in the exercise and carried out operations.

IRGC Ground Forces Commander Mohammad Pakpour told the Persian service of the Mehr News Agency on Monday that the war games were held to increase IRGC forces' combat capabilities and preparedness and provide them with an opportunity to practice defensive plans which had been devised to deal with possible military threats against the country.

"We managed to achieve all the intended purposes of the exercise," Brigadier General Pakpour added.

The IRGC held a three-day missile exercise, entitled the Great Prophet 7, in the heart of the Semnan desert in north central Iran in July 2012.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/105954-tondar-tosan-missiles-fired-during-irgc-war-games>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **UN adviser missing on Israel-Syria border reportedly Canadian**

Sources familiar with man identify him as legal adviser to peacekeeping force in the Golan Heights

By Ilan Ben Zion

The UN staffer who disappeared several days ago is a Canadian citizen working with the UN peacekeeping mission in the Golan Heights, sources familiar with the missing man told The Times of Israel.

Carl Campeau, a Canadian legal adviser, was stationed at the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force base on the Syrian side of the demilitarized zone separating Israel and Syria until he went missing several days ago. Attempts by The Times of Israel to contact Campeau on his cell phone and at his office were unsuccessful.

The UNDOF spokesperson refused to respond to inquiries by The Times of Israel concerning the missing staff person.

The Canadian Embassy in Israel responded to an inquiry regarding Campeau saying, "We are pursuing all appropriate channels to seek further information."

They would not officially confirm that Campeau was the missing UN staffer.

Canada officially withdrew its contingent from the peacekeeping force on the Syrian border in September 2012.

The United Nations confirmed Monday that a member of the UNDOF staff was not accounted for and that the UN was “in touch with the relevant parties to determine what has happened.”

It didn't reveal any further information about the individual's identity.

The Times of Israel earlier Monday quoted a rebel activist reporting that President Bashar Assad's army has fled the Golan Heights area bordering Israel, and that rebel forces are in control there.

The UN force, UNDOF, was established in 1974, following the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967 and Syria has agitated to have the land returned.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has warned of escalating military activity along the Israeli-Syrian border as a result of the intensifying Syrian conflict, which has gone on for two years and cost more than 70,000 lives.

In December, Ban accused the Syrian government of serious violations of the 1974 separation agreement and called on both countries to halt firing across the cease-fire line. He also cited numerous clashes between Syrian security forces and opposition fighters in the disengagement zone.

In response, he said, UNDOF has adopted a number of security measures.

The Israel Defense Forces declined to comment.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-adviser-missing-on-israel-syria-border-reportedly-canadian/>

- **Gaza rocket fired at south Israel amid West Bank tensions**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- A rocket was fired at southern Israel on Tuesday from the Gaza Strip, Israel's army said.



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط لدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION



"An explosion was heard in the Ashkelon region, experts searched the area and found one rocket that struck, damaging a road but causing no injuries," Rosenfeld said.

No Gaza faction has claimed responsibility for the rocket.

The incident comes as tensions in the West Bank continued for a second day on Monday following the death of Arafat Jadarat in Israeli prison custody.

A 13-year-old boy was seriously injured during protests in Bethlehem after being shot with live ammunition, and underwent surgery in Beit Jala hospital, his family said.

Another teenager, Odai Sirkhan, 16, was shot in the head with a rubber-coated steel bullet in Bethlehem and taken to

Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem, where he is said to be in a critical condition.

The bullet penetrated his head and he is due to undergo surgery, Israeli media reported.

Dozens of people were injured by rubber bullets and tear gas across the West Bank as hundreds of people demonstrated to express anger at the death of Palestinian prisoner Arafat Jadarat, who PA officials say died after being tortured by Israeli interrogators.

Thousands of people had earlier attended his funeral in the Hebron village of Sair.

Robert Serry, the UN coordinator for the Middle East peace process, on Monday called for "an independent and transparent investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Jaradat's death, the results of which should be made public as soon as possible".

The rocket fired at southern Israel is the first such attack from the Gaza Strip since a ceasefire agreement signed in November last year.

In the same time period, Israeli forces have shot and killed three people in the Gaza Strip and injured at least 40.

In the West Bank, soldiers shot and killed Samir Ahmad Abdul-Rahim, 17, in the village of Budrus on Jan. 15.

He sustained four bullet wounds to his head, chest and leg and died shortly after arriving at the Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah.

Days later, 15-year-old Salih al-Amarin from Azza refugee camp was shot in the head by Israeli soldiers and died in a Beit Jala hospital.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=569212>

- **PA not behind demonstrations, official says**

IDF believes wave of unrest in West Bank has peaked day after funeral for inmate draws thousands into streets

The Palestinian Authority is not behind the recent West Bank demonstrations and is not interested in an escalation of the situation ahead of the March 20 visit by

US President Barack Obama, chief PA negotiation Saeb Erekat said on Tuesday.

At the same time, Israel believes the worst of the violence in the West Bank has passed, after days of officials warning that the protests could turn into a third intifada, or mass uprising.



Erekat told Israel Radio that the PA was not involved in organizing demonstrations and said that “the Palestinian leadership wants to give the new administration in the United States every possible opportunity to make peace, and the last thing we want is to see our children die.”

He said that the PA is attempting to defuse the wave of violent clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and IDF forces in recent days, but said that “you can’t control the people by remote control.” Erekat called for a release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel jails as a measure to reduce tensions.

A statement from the Palestinian president's office said President Mahmoud Abbas instructed Palestinian security officials Monday night to preserve security and order in the West Bank, but placed the blame on Israel for "dragging the area into violence and chaos."

Adnan Damiri, the spokesman of the Palestinian security apparatus, said Palestinian officials were committed to prevent fighting, saying that his forces had recently detained members of the militant Hamas group who were planning "violent confrontations."

"The only one(s) seeking violence in West Bank is Netanyahu and Hamas, but we will not be dragged to that," said Damiri. "Our struggle will always be peaceful."

The clashes come weeks before Obama is scheduled to arrive in Israel and the West Bank, his first presidential visit to the region. US State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said the US has asked Israeli and Palestinian officials to exercise "maximum restraint" at this time of high tension in the West Bank.

Also on Tuesday, a military source told Maariv that the IDF believes the wave of clashes peaked with the funeral of Arafat Jaradat, who died under disputed circumstances while in IDF custody.

The funeral was attended by at least 10,000 people, and marked a show of force by Fatah; masked Fatah gunmen fired volleys of gunfire into the air from rooftops as the funeral proceeded.

The Fatah Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade published a leaflet urging a harsh response against Israel for Jaradat's death, but violence surrounding the funeral was markedly milder than the Israeli security forces had feared, with clashes at several locales but no reports of serious injury.

Still, Tuesday saw a Grad rocket fired from the Gaza Strip at Ashkelon, marking the possible opening up of a second front with the Palestinians. There were no injuries, but some damage from the attack, which was the first since November.

No group claimed responsibility.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-not-behind-demonstrations-official-says/>

- **Likud, Jewish Home said to be nearing coalition deal**

As the two parties move toward compromise on Haredi conscription, Shas is told it won't retain ministries of interior and housing

The Likud and Jewish Home parties looked poised to strike a deal that would enable the national-religious slate to enter Benjamin Netanyahu's future coalition after concluding their third meeting in four days on Monday.

Representatives of both parties claimed they were nearing an agreement on the thorniest issue dominating coalition talks, the universal draft legislation, under which the sides would agree to enlist ultra-Orthodox men into military or national service at the age of 21. The Likud's conscription plan originally set the age of enlistment at 24, while the Jewish Home had backed its ally Yesh Atid's plan, which set the age of enlistment at 18, the same as for the general population.

According to sources quoted in Maariv, Jewish Home also speaks for Yesh Atid on the matter.

Both Jewish Home and Yesh Atid were opposed to the higher age requirement originally proposed by the Likud, reasoning that enlisting soldiers at such an age would mean they wouldn't be eligible for combat units, their cost to the army would be substantially higher, and they would only serve two years as opposed to the mandatory three for others.

If this issue has indeed now been resolved, the next likely sticking point will be mediating between the Likud's plan to install rather noncommittal "enlistment targets," versus Yesh Atid's call for strict quotas for the enlistment of Yeshiva students.

"Recent talks have been positive," a source from the Jewish Home told Maariv Monday night. "We are receiving indications from Likud that they are no longer trying to break up our alliance with [Yesh Atid leader Yair] Lapid and are instead attempting to work with it."

On Sunday, Jewish Home leader Naftali Bennett charged that his party's alliance with Yesh Atid emerged as a result of the Likud-Beytenu efforts to keep him out of the coalition.

“Without this coordination [with Yesh Atid], the government would consist of Likud, Hatnua, Kadima, Shas, and Yesh Atid — without the religious Zionist movement, without the Jewish Home,” Bennett wrote on his Facebook page. “This government’s racing along [Hatnua head Tzipi] Livni’s political line — giving up on Jerusalem, giving up on [the West Bank city of] Ariel, and being obsessed with the PLO. That’s a fact.”

Bennett, whose party won 12 seats in the elections, has come under fire from some of his party’s members over the past few days for hitching his wagon to Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid. Some Jewish Home faithful charge that Bennett has abandoned the party’s religious nationalist principles and risked blocking the creation of a right-wing government.

Members of the Likud-Beytenu’s negotiating team said they were already conducting coalition talks as if Jewish Home and Yesh Atid were a single body.

A further indication that the talks between Likud and Jewish Home were on track was the Likud’s reported notice to the religious

Shas party that it would not retain control of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Housing. Shas commanded both of the powerful ministries in the outgoing Cabinet, but the Likud is reportedly interested in keeping one or both of the portfolios for itself.

So far the only party to join Netanyahu’s coalition aside from Yisrael Beytenu — which ran together with the Likud on the same list in the January 22 election — is Tzipi Livni’s Hatnua. The centrist party signed a coalition agreement, giving it control of the Justice and Environmental Protection ministries, last week.

If Netanyahu is unable to sign coalition agreements with other parties before the end of the week, he will have to go to President Shimon Peres and ask him for a two-week extension on Saturday night. In the unlikely event that he or other party heads prove incapable of forming a coalition, Israelis will once again be asked to cast their votes in general elections.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/likud-jewish-home-said-to-be-nearing-deal/>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Larayedh to form new Tunisia government**

Ennahda is tapping Tunisia's controversial interior minister to head up the next government.

By Yasmine Najjar for Magharebia in Tunis
– 25/02/13

Tunisia's ruling Islamist party on Friday (February 22nd) named Interior Minister Ali Larayedh as its candidate for the next prime minister.

"I feel the weight of this responsibility; I was nominated for this and I hope that I find acceptance among Tunisians, men and women," Larayedh said in his first speech after being nominated.

"I hope the government will be the government of all Tunisians, men and women, and receives the support of all," he added.

The new prime minister is expected to announce the composition of the new cabinet in the coming days, before submitting it to the Constituent Assembly

for approval. The new government needs to secure an outright majority (109 votes), a number that is already available to Ennahda and its allies.

Outgoing Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali in his farewell speech apologised for not accepting the new assignment.

He pointed to the difficulty of his task as a result of the continued tug-of-war, and his attachment to the initiative he had put forward to compose a government of technocrats, an initiative that was opposed by Ennahda.

A number of opposition parties announced their refusal to support the new government if Jebali were not re-nominated. They also asked for the setting of elections, the elimination of violence and the dismantling of the Leagues for Protection of the Revolution.

Although Larayedh is a prominent leader in the Islamist Ennahda Movement, the opposition criticised his performance as interior minister.

They pointed to a number of security failures, including the attack on the US

Embassy in Tunis, the violence in Siliana and the assassination of leftist leader Chokri Belaid.

But Congress for the Republic (CPR) leader Abdelwaheb Maatar, one of the pillars of the ruling troika, was more optimistic, saying: "Ali Larayedh's appointment is the right decision, as it falls under the logic of the change of government."



The third party of the ruling troika, Ettakatol, announced Saturday that they would decide whether to join the new government after meeting with Larayedh. The party had supported Hamadi Jebali's plan.

Meanwhile, some of the 3,000 or so Tunisians who rallied Saturday in Tunis to demand arrests in the Belaid killing took the opportunity to criticize the government change.

"We are here in the street to demand a faster probe to nab those who assassinated Chokri Belaid," said Naouel Bettayeb. "Unfortunately, the person we are asking was one reason for the growth of the phenomenon of political violence in Tunisia. Now, they promoted him from interior minister to prime minister."

"What cabinet change are they talking about? Larayedh was one of the reasons for the failure of the previous government," commented Mouldi Belhaj. "He is not able to move the country positively during this sensitive period."

Others, however, expressed their support for the new prime minister.

"Ali Larayedh is a leader and activist in the movement of Ennahda and made major efforts at the Ministry of Interior that prevented the introduction of the country into a cycle of violence," Ahmed Chebbi told Magharebia.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/25/feature-01

- **Libya seeks help in securing borders**

Libyan authorities seek international assistance in an effort to establish security and the rule of law.

By Essam Mohamed for Magharebia in Tripoli – 25/02/13

Libya wants to secure its borders, build a national army and set up a police force. Now the country's leaders are looking for outside help to make it happen.

Italy, France, the United States, Britain, and India have put forth proposals to help Libya secure its borders and maintain order, Prime Minister Ali Zidan said on Thursday (February 21st). Libya and Turkey were already co-operating in terms of training, defence and security equipment.

"We're committed to reaching the best," the premier said.

With its 3,000 kilometres of land borders, Libya is determined to thwart traffickers and terrorists from taking advantage of the country's terrain.

Libya will be working with other countries to co-ordinate ways to secure its southern borders, as agreed upon during the February 16th Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) summit, Zidan said.

"We have discussed... border security with the French President," Prime Minister Zidan told reporters after meeting with Francois Hollande in Paris on February 13th.

Meanwhile, the Friends of Libya met in Paris on February 12th and pledged security support to the country's nascent democratic government.

"Much has already been achieved but issues remain," French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said in his opening address to the gathering.



International partners should send "experts to train Libyan security forces and police, and help to rebuild the army, navy and air force", he added.

The partners confirmed their full support for the interim government in its determination to implement a plan to enhance national security, boost justice and rule of law, and build a democratic, prosperous and stable state.

Libya's Foreign Minister Mohammed Abdel Aziz told the Paris event that Libya did not need troops, but training.

"What we're asking of our international partners is to help us with training and rehabilitation, and the transfer of advanced technology to protect our long borders and shores," he said.

The Friends of Libya welcomed the EU decision to send a civil mission from the European Common Security and Defence Policy by June 2013 to help manage the border.

"Controlling the border will spare Libya a lot of problems, especially arms smuggling and the smuggling of Africans to Europe,

which Kadhafi was using to pressure Europe," journalist Miftah Belaid said.

"We're suffering from these border-related problems, especially from the entry of drugs... The assistance from the West to is a step to help build the new, free Libya," civil servant Kamela Ali said.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/25/feature-02

- **Egypt gov't announces economic reform measures to clinch IMF loan**

Government unveils modified economic recovery programme that aims to meet IMF's pre-conditions for proposed \$4.8 billion loan to Egypt

The government has revealed 24 new measures as part of an economic reform programme aimed at kick-starting Egypt's struggling economy, which will be presented to the International Monetary Fund in order to obtain approval of a badly needed \$4.8 billion loan.

Ahram Online has obtained a copy of the economic programme, which was drafted following an 'economic initiative'

conference in late December launched by the Egyptian Cabinet, in cooperation with private-sector representatives and economy experts.

The following are the most significant measures to be implemented according to the new programme.

Tax reform

The programme raises the minimum monthly salary eligible for income tax exemptions from LE9000 to LE12,000 as of October 2013.

The first bracket of the new income tax structure, which will pay 10 percent in income tax, will be extended to LE30,000 per month from a previous LE20,000.

"The increase means that employees whose monthly salaries range between LE20,000 and LE30,000 will only pay 10 percent in taxes, compared to the previous 15 percent," Assistant Finance Minister Hani Kadry told Ahram Online.

The increase, according to Kadry, will be implemented once Egypt's Shura Council

(the upper house of parliament) approves it.

Additionally, a 0.001 percent tax will be imposed on all stock market transactions, while a corporate tax will be standardized at 25 percent for all companies.

As it currently stands, Egypt's corporate tax ranges between 20 and 25 percent, based on respective companies' financial situations.

Social justice

The reform programme will also raise the total number of beneficiaries of monthly social security pensions (LE300) to 1.5 million people by June of this year and 2 million people by June 2014.

The reform programme also calls for the government to adopt an emergency plan to develop Egypt's railway system at a cost of some LE1.2 billion during the current and coming fiscal years.

It also calls for developing 68 shantytowns nationwide at a total cost of some LE600 million during the 2012/13 and 2013/14 fiscal years.

The economic recovery measures also call for raising the local price of one ardeb (198 kg) of wheat by LE20 to LE400 in order to boost local production.

Foreign reserves & GDP

The Egyptian government forecasts that successful implementation of its economic recovery programme would lower Egypt's budget deficit by the end of the 2014/15 fiscal year to LE183 billion, constituting almost 7.7 percent of GDP – compared to the 10.9 percent forecast for the current fiscal year.

Egypt's current budget deficit stands at LE170 billion, approximately 10.8 percent of the country's GDP.

If the programme is successfully implemented, Egypt's foreign currency reserves – which currently stand at an alarming \$13.6 billion – are expected to rise to \$22 billion by the end of the current fiscal year.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/65602/Business/Economy/Egypt->

[govt-announces-economic-reform-measures-to-c.aspx](#)

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Lebanese MP voices rejection of “conspiracy” against Tripoli

Lebanon's Future MP Mohammad Kabbara voiced his rejection of the “conspiracy” against the country's northern city of Tripoli.

“We reject the conspiracy against Tripoli. We reject the acts being practiced by armed men which are distorting the city's image and reputation,” the National News Agency quoted Kabbara as saying in a press conference held on Tuesday.

The opposition MP condemned the “chaotic” arms proliferation and held “the government and security agencies responsible because they are not dealing with Tripoli seriously.”

Kabbara called on President Michel Suleiman “to take the appropriate measures to prohibit all acts aimed at violating security and terrorizing citizens.”

“The dissociation policy that the government claims to have adopted has turned into a policy of sacrifice in defense of [Syrian President Bashar] al-Assad’s regime which is shelling Lebanese border areas and committing the ugliest of crimes against his people,” he added.

Last week, a group of armed men stormed a Tripoli hospital and freed a man detained for his alleged involvement in the attack against Youth and Sports Minister Faisal Karami’s motorcade convoy last month.

Meanwhile, Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen have been hosts to frequent episodes of fighting. These violent instances have served to reflect a current rift in Lebanon's political scene, in which opposition parties back the revolt in Syria while the ruling coalition, led by Hezbollah, supports the Damascus regime.

Also, Lebanon’s border regions with Syria have experienced regular border violations, including shelling and gunfire as well as limited incursions by Syrian troops.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese-mp-voices-refusal-of-conspiracy-against-tripoli>

- **Berri calls on political forces to counter kidnappings**

Lebanon’s Speaker of Parliament called on the country’s political forces to counter the recurrent kidnappings phenomenon.

“All Lebanese [political parties] must join forces to counter the kidnappings in the country and eliminate this phenomenon which is harming Lebanon’s image,” Berri told An-Nahar newspaper in remarks published Tuesday.

Berri also called on everyone “to confront these kidnapping gangs, which represent neither a sect nor a political party, and support the Lebanese Army and security forces.”

Berri’s remarks came after a meeting with the parents of Mohammad Nibal Awada, a boy who was released on Monday for a \$130,000 ransom after he had been abducted last week in Beirut’s Ramlet al-Bayda area.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/berri-calls-on-political-forces-to-counter-kidnappings>

- **LF not committed to Orthodox proposal, MP says**

Lebanese Forces bloc MP Fadi Karam said that his party is not committed to the Orthodox proposal even if it was put to a vote.

“The call of [Lebanese Forces leader Samir] Geagea for re-drafting a new law which everyone agrees on means that the LF is not committed to the Orthodox proposal even if it was put to a vote,” Karam told Kuwaiti newspaper As-Siyasa in remarks published Tuesday.

“Any mixed law that combines political forces is better [than the Orthodox proposal] provided it secures the rights of Christians and parity between the Lebanese,” the LF MP added.

Karam also said that “the March 14 coalition is still coherent and consistent in its journey because its alliance is stronger than any electoral law.”

Lebanon’s political circles are currently debating prospective electoral law proposals that may be adopted for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Disagreement over the issue has caused tension to emerge within the March 14 alliance, after its main political party, the Future Movement, voiced its opposition to electoral laws based on proportional voting. This point was made while Lebanon’s four major Christian parties—Future Movement’s allies the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb—have expressed support for the Orthodox Gathering law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lf-not-committed-to-orthodox-proposal-mp-says>

6. SYRIA

- **Rights group says 140 killed in Aleppo shelling**

Human Rights Watch accuses Assad regime of shooting four ballistic missiles at residential areas in northern city

BEIRUT (AP) — An international human rights organization says the Syrian military fired at least four ballistic missiles into the embattled northern city of Aleppo over the past week, killing more than 140 people, including 70 children.

Human Rights Watch says the attacks by the regime of President Bashar Assad on residential areas of Aleppo mark an “escalation of unlawful attacks against Syria’s civilian population.”

A researcher with the US-based group, who visited Aleppo last week to inspect the targeted sites, said up to 20 buildings were destroyed in each area hit by a missile. There were no signs of any military targets in the residential districts, located in rebel-held parts of Aleppo, the group said in a report Tuesday.

“Just when you think things can’t get any worse, the Syrian government finds ways to escalate its killing tactics,” wrote Ole Solvang, a researcher with HRW.

Aleppo has seen some of the heaviest fighting in Syria’s nearly 2-year-old conflict.

Rebels have claimed several Scud attacks on the city in the last week, publishing videos showing swaths of neighborhoods reduced to rubble.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/rights-group-says-140-killed-in-aleppo-shelling/>

- **Kerry: US committed to helping Syrian rebels**

Secretary of State John Kerry says Washington won't leave Syrian rebels 'dangling in the wind'; says US evaluating steps to help protect Syrian civilians

WASHINGTON – The United States is willing to step up its assistance to the Syrian rebels trying to topple President Bashar Assad's tyrannical regime.

US Secretary of State John Kerry urged Syria's opposition on Monday to attend a planned international meeting in Rome this week, saying that President Barack Obama was evaluating further steps required in order to help protect Syrian civilians.

"Today we were discussing various options and I'm not going to go into what they may or not be at this point in time,"

he told reporters on a visit to London where he met British officials.

"I want our friends in the Syrian opposition council to know we are not coming to Rome simply to talk. We're coming to Rome to make the decision about next steps and perhaps even other options that may or not be discussed further after that."

The administration, Kerry added, has been considering new steps to increase support for the Syrian opposition and hasten Assad's departure.

"We are determined that the Syrian opposition is not going to be dangling in the wind wondering where the support is or if it's coming," Kerry said. "And we are determined to change the calculation on the ground for President Assad."

The Syrian opposition said that it might boycott the Rome conference, in protest of what it sees as lacking help from the West.

Both US Vice President Joe Biden and Kerry urged Syrian opposition leader Moaz

al-Khatib to attend it, saying the opportunity was too vital to miss.

On Monday, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said that "Syrian authorities are ready for a dialogue with anyone who's willing, even with those who carry arms."

It was the first time that a high-ranking Syrian official signaled that the regime in open to negotiations with the rebels.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4349460,00.html>

- **Russia: Extremists in Syria opposition blocking dialogue**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Tuesday slammed "extremists" within the Syrian opposition who he said were blocking the start of dialogue in the war-torn country by making unrealistic demands.

Speaking hours before meeting new US Secretary of State John Kerry for the first time in Berlin, Lavrov said that recent faint hopes that dialogue was possible between the opposition and the regime of Bashar al-Assad had dissipated.

"Several days ago we thought that the conditions had become more clear for the sides to sit at the negotiating table and begin discussing the future of their country," Lavrov told reporters after meeting with counterpart from the Netherlands Frans Timmermans.

"There emerged voices in favor of urgently starting such dialogue, without prerequisite conditions."

However these voices were later silenced, he added. "Blood continues to be shed and statements are being made which move away the prospect of starting dialogue."

"It seems that extremists who bet on an armed solution to the Syrian problem have prevailed in the ranks of the opposition at this time, including the so-called [Syrian] National Coalition, blocking all initiatives that could lead to the start of dialogue," Lavrov said.

Other countries with leverage over the Syrian problem seem to "increasingly understand the need to influence both the government and the opposition, to

convince them not to put forward unrealistic demands as prerequisites for starting dialogue," Lavrov said.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem had said in Moscow on Monday that the authorities in Damascus were ready to talk to armed rebels.

"We are ready for dialogue with all who want dialogue, including those who are carrying arms," Muallem said, the first time a senior official of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime has made such a proposal.

But the rebel Free Syrian Army's chief of staff Selim Idriss dismissed Muallem's offer.

Kerry flew into Berlin for a visit that will include talks on Tuesday with Lavrov to try to agree on a way to end the crisis, over which the two countries are deeply divided.

Rebels have been fighting the Assad regime since an uprising against his rule in March 2011 and now control large parts of the country, especially in the north.

According to the UN, the fighting has claimed 70,000 lives.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/russia-extremists-in-syria-opposition-blocking-dialogue>

- **Syria opposition to attend Rome summit**

Syrian National Coalition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib said Monday that the Syrian opposition will attend the Friends of Syria conference in Rome this week, after an earlier decision to boycott the meeting.

In a statement on his Facebook page Khatib said his group will go to Rome for Thursday's meeting after US Secretary of State John Kerry and British Foreign Secretary William Hague "promised specific aid to alleviate the suffering of our people."

Their "complete rejection of the savagery carried out by the regime" of President Bashar al-Assad was another key factor in the decision by opposition leaders to attend the Rome talks, Khatib said.

He said he was determined to see "what possibilities and openings for support for the Syrian people can come out of this meeting."

The Rome talks, he said, "will be used as a practical way to reassess relations between the Syrian opposition and international parties."

The Coalition had announced on Saturday its intention to withdraw from the 11-nation meeting in Rome and to cancel planned visits to Washington and Moscow in protest at the "international silence" over "crimes committed against the Syrian people."

Earlier in Cairo the Coalition chief had said that opposition leaders would be meeting to decide if they should go to Rome after having received promises of support from key nations.

And in London on Monday, the new US secretary of state had urged the opposition to attend the Rome talks.

"I want our friends in the Syrian opposition council to know that we are not coming to Rome simply to talk. We are

coming to Rome to make a decision on next steps," Kerry said after talks with Hague.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-opposition-to-attend-rome-summit>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Martin Luther King III tells Sharjah forum 'No one can tell a nation what it should do'**

'No one can tell a nation what it should do' says human rights activist Martin Luther King III

Martin Luther King III, human rights advocate and community activist, during an interview with Mona Al Shatheli, presenter at MBC Egypt, on the second day of the Government Communication Forum in Sharjah on Monday.

Sharjah: Martin Luther King III, human rights advocate and community activist, said that no one can tell a nation what it should do as people can find a course of action suitable for them.

He was responding to a comment of one of the audience members, at the Government Communication Forum in Sharjah, who said that dignity, not democracy, is the priority of Arab nations.

King, who is the son of Martin Luther King Jr, leader of the US Civil Rights movement from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968, also spoke about his father, non-violent protests, frustration of the masses when not heard and its dangers, as well as the importance of dialogue.

The two-day forum concluded yesterday at the Sharjah Expo Centre and saw many esteemed speakers and guests from around the world including Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and former secretary general of the Arab League, Amr Mousa.



"No one in the planet can ever tell anyone else what they should do. For example, I

do not go around the world trying to say somebody needs to be democratic. If that is what people want to do, then I think the US has a democratic structure and a lot of countries do too and we can say, ‘here is a model to consider’,” King said.

He added that he believes that there are portions of the civil rights movement that his father led that might be applicable to any society. “And how that applies is the people of a particular region must say that this is how we think this applies to our community or our nation and that there are aspects of it that we can use.”

Related Links

King said that he believes that one of the most important things is indeed dignity — noting that dignity might mean different things to different cultures, “but overall, I think dignity is what many are striving for”.

“No one can tell any nation what it should want. The nation should determine what they want and how to make their nation become as best as it can become — all of us want our nations to be the best of what they can become, for our children.” King said

Non-violent protest

King said that said that his father thought that “if people do not have a forum to voice their point of view, they often become angry and that could lead to violence and so what he did was that he and his team could utilise a non-violent method of protest.”

His father and his team, King said, put a strategic plan in place to knock down barriers in a non-violent way. “Had dad chosen to use violence he would have been immediately annihilated,” he added. His father, he said, used a method of non-violent resistance and found a way to communicate his message.

Non-violent protest and rallying for a cause are important, King said, but it is very important that there is also an actual dialogue between those people and the government.

King said, “What we have still not learned is how to treat our fellow human beings... We have to find a way to coexist without doing harm to one another and that is whether it’s in the United States or in the

Middle East or in the African continent or in Asia or anywhere on the planet.”

Talking about the the differences or similarities between his and his father’s work, King said that the basic foundation was similar, but the issues are more complicated.

On collective leadership vs a leadership of one

King was asked whether people needed a collective leadership or an individual inspirational leadership for their causes. He said that he did not know if he can say whether it should be one or the other, “it ultimately becomes whatever force will bring about the change; sometimes that is collective, sometimes that is one.” He said that he would like to think that it is ideal to have a collective leadership “but this might not always be the case”.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/government/martin-luther-king-iii-tells-sharjah-forum-no-one-can-tell-a-nation-what-it-should-do-1.1150964>

- **National dialogue session yields no agreement**

Divergent views on procedures stall progress of talks

Manama: The fourth session of national talks launched to break a political deadlock in Bahrain has failed to yield new agreements with sides exchanging accusations of holding up progress or eroding robust foundations.

Participants said that they were surprised by the insistence of the coalition of the opposition societies to push for an official representative of King Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa being present at the talks.

The demand was flatly rejected by Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa, the justice minister, who argued that the participants had agreed at the second session that the government was the official side and that it would be represented by three ministers at the talks.

Shaikh Khalid charged that the coalition of the opposition attempted to re-launch issues that had been settled.



“The government is an active participant at the dialogue,” he said. “The government is officially represented and we are serious in our commitment and we want others to be serious in their commitment as well,” he told the media.

However, Sayyed Jameel Kadhem, spokesperson for the coalition of the opposition, said that the move aimed “to ensure a robust platform for the dialogue through correct measures and procedures”.

“We tabled the concept of a representative of His Majesty the King because we wanted to know in what capacity the justice minister would refer the results of the dialogue to His Majesty the king,” he told the media at the end of the session. “If the minister is a participant like all of us and he is not representing the king, then how can he refer the results to him? We need to sort everything out first

before we proceed with the dialogue,” he said.

The spokesperson said that the coalition would insist on a representative of the king and not just representatives from the government.

Three ministers are taking part in the dialogue, alongside eight delegates from the coalition of six opposition societies, eight delegates from a coalition of ten other political societies and eight independent parliamentarians.

Ahmad Juma, spokesperson for the coalition of ten societies, said that “there should be no review of past agreements in order to keep moving forward”.

Dalal Al Zayed, one of the four parliamentarians representing the Shura Council, the upper chamber of the bicameral parliament, accused the opposition of stalling the talks.

“We were upset by the opposition demand to have a representative of the king after we reached an agreement on the participants at the dialogue,” she said. “It is obvious that the opposition wants to

hold us back and whatever is being raised at the table now is not good for the country and might have negative consequences on the progress of the talks. We do respect the right to raise points freely, but we do hope there is a strong sense of responsibility and we do anticipate bold steps from the opposition,” she said.

The next session is scheduled for Wednesday afternoon.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/national-dialogue-session-yields-no-agreement-1.1150920>

- **Supreme Court rejects appeal of Oman activists**

Two women activists decide not to challenge Appeal court verdict

Muscat: Oman’s Supreme Court on Monday rejected the appeal of five Netizens against the Muscat Appeal Court verdict in the case of insulting Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed and violating the country’s cyber laws.

Activist Khlafan Al Badwawi informed Gulf News that the Supreme Court upheld the

one-year prison term slapped by the Appeal Court on Ali Bin Hilal Al Muqabali, Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Habsi, Abdullah Bin Salem Al Siyabi, Abdullah Al Abdali and Hilal Bin Salim Al Busaidi.

The Appeal Court had suspended the sentence of Al Abdali, who is a medical student, until the end of his current semester, following a request from his parents.

“Now on March 4, the Supreme Court will take up the appeal of activists sentenced in the case of wrongful gathering,” Al Badwawi, who is awaiting a primacy Court verdict against him, told Gulf News on Tuesday.

He also added that lawyer and human rights activist Basma Al Kiyumi and media person Baasma Rajhi had decided against challenging the Appeal court judgement in the case of wrongful gathering in which 11 activists were sentenced to one year in prison and fined 200 Omani riyals (Dh1,902).

“They told me that they didn’t have much faith in the appeal, therefore they decided not to challenge the verdict,” he added.

Saeed Al Hashemi, Mukhtar Al Hinai, Nasser Al Ghilani, Mohammad Al Sazari, Mahmoud Al Rawahi, Khalid Al Nobli, Badar Al Jabri, Mohammad Al Janadi and Abdullah Al Ghilani are the other nine spending time in prison after being convicted for wrongful gathering.

The 11 were part of a group that demonstrated in May 2012, demanding release of three activists — Habiba Al Hinai, Esmail Al Muqbalı and Yaqoub Al Kharusi — held incommunicado after they were picked up in Fahud when they went to the oil field to express solidarity with striking Omani employees.

Meanwhile, the Primary Court will on Wednesday hear cases against Sultan Al Sa'adi, Hatem Al Maliki, Khalid Al Nofli, Khalfan Al Badwawi and Mohammed Sazari. All five are facing charges of insulting the Sultan and violating Oman's cyber laws.

However, all five have claimed that their accounts on social media website Facebook were hacked. The case has been delayed for a long time due to non-

availability of a technical expert to verify the defence claims.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/supreme-court-rejects-appeal-of-oman-activists-1.1151100>

- **Qatar conference to focus on security, integrity**

Plan to highlight media engagement, utilising social media

Manama: Ways to improve knowledge and best practices in safety, security and integrity will be discussed at an international conference to be held in Qatar.

The conference, under the theme of “advancing the security and integrity of sport to safeguard the future” will be held on March 18-19 in Doha and will bring together 400 international experts and stakeholders, the Doha-based International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS) said.

Wilfried Lemke, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on Sport for Development and Peace, will

speak at the conference, Securing Sport 2013.

Lemke who leads and coordinates the efforts of the UN to promote understanding and support for sport as an instrument for development and peace will deliver a keynote speech on the power of sport to erase discrimination.

William Gaillard, Senior Adviser to the Uefa President, will take part in the panel session, Securing Your Media Plan, that will explore how media planning can make or break the security plan for an event and examine how to engage effectively with the media and utilise social media.

“I look forward to welcoming organisations from around the world,” Mohammad Hanzab, President of the ICSS, said. “These include leading international governing bodies, mega-event experts and world-class international athletes, to what I am sure will be an important platform for sharing information and exploring best practice in the field of sport, safety, security and integrity.”

The ICSS leader said that he was confident that Lemke’s United Nations experience in sports development and Gaillard’s expertise in international football would provide delegates with a first-hand account of how the power of sport has the ability to improve lives through development programmes and the media.

Qatar has emerged as a centre for international sporting events and has hosted the 2006 Asian Games, the 2011 Asian Cup and the 2011 Pan Arab Games. It will become the first Arab and Muslim country to host the finals of the football World Cup in 2022.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qatar-conference-to-focus-on-security-integrity-1.1151104>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• NATO: No Evidence For Afghan Claims Of Misconduct

February 25, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

A spokesman for NATO-led coalition troops in Afghanistan says no evidence has been found so far to support Afghan

allegations of misconduct by U.S. special forces in Wardak Province, west of Kabul.

General Gunter Katz's statement comes a day after President Hamid Karzai ordered all U.S. Special Forces to leave Wardak within 14 days because of allegations that Afghans working with them were torturing and abusing other Afghans.

Katz said that NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will work with the government to respond to its concerns.

But he added that ISAF cannot comment further until NATO meets to discuss the issue with the Afghan government.

Katz also praised the Afghan security forces, which he said "are fighting well."

With reporting by AP

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

- **ISAF to investigate alleged U.S. forces misconduct in Afghan province**

KABUL, Feb. 25 (Xinhua) -- The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will take on all allegations of

misconduct of coalition forces in an eastern Afghan province, said an ISAF spokesman on Monday.

"ISAF is aware of the decision made at the (Afghan) National Security Council yesterday. We take all allegations of misconduct seriously and go to great lengths to determine the facts surrounding them," spokesman Brigadier General Gunter Katz told reporters at a weekly press briefing.

In a meeting of Afghanistan's National Security Council chaired by President Hamid Karzai on Sunday which discussed the security situation in the provinces of Wardak and neighboring Logar province, the president had tasked the Afghan Defense Ministry to make sure the U.S. special forces leave Wardak province within two weeks, according to a statement of the presidential palace said.

The statement said a team assigned by president Karzai found armed individuals named as U.S. special forces were engaged in "harassing, annoying, torturing and even murdering innocent people."

The presidential statement also said that "effective from February 24, 2013 onward, the ISAF has to stop all its special force operations in Wardak province."

Over the past few weeks there have been various allegations of U.S. special forces conducting themselves in an unprofessional manner in Wardak, Katz said, adding, "So far we could not find evidence that would support these allegations."

However, he said that ISAF will work with representatives of the Afghan government to find a solution to the concerns of the citizens in the province 35 km west of capital Kabul.

"We regard the situation in Wardak as very serious and we will resolve it in full cooperation with our Afghan partners," the ISAF spokesman noted.

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

- **4 civilians killed in blast in Afghan Helmand province**

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan, Feb. 25 (Xinhua) -- Four Afghan civilians were killed and two others were wounded in

explosion in the country's southern province of Helmand on Monday morning, police said.

"A civilian car was running along a road in Sharsharak area of Marja district at about 9 a.m. local time but the ill-fated vehicle touched off an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and the explosion claimed the lives of four civilians and wounded two others," the provincial police department said in a statement issued here.

The injured people were shifted to a district hospital in the province 555 km south of Afghan capital of Kabul, it said, adding no woman or children was among the victims.

Taliban militants fighting Afghan forces and NATO-led troops often target security forces with IEDs or roadside bombs but the lethal weapons also inflict casualties on civilians.

A total of 2,754 civilians were killed and 4,805 injured in conflict-related violence in 2012, a 12 percent drop in overall civilian casualties compared to 2011, according to a UN report released in Kabul earlier this month.

The IEDs were the single largest killer of civilians in 2012, leaving 868 people dead and 1,663 injured, according to the report.

The UN report attributed 81 percent of the civilian deaths to the attacks by Taliban and other armed groups opposing the government, another eight percent of the deaths were attributed to Afghan and NATO-led forces and 11 percent were unattributed.

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

- **Taliban describe Pakistani interior minister as ‘comedian’**

By Mirwais Adeel - 25 Feb 2013, 1:42 pm

Khaama Press

Taliban militants group in Pakistan called upon the government to replace interior minister Rehman Malik with a ‘serious person’ for peace dialogue after mocking him as a ‘comedian’.

Ehsanullah Ehsan spokesman for the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on Sunday said, his ultraorthodox

militia did not take Malik’s statements seriously.

While speaking in a telephone interview, Ehsanullah Ehsan told Pakistan’s The Express Tribune, “Our Central Shura (consultative council) believes that if Rehman Malik keeps on churning out statements about our offer, it’ll indicate the government is not serious in pursuing peace talks.”

This comes as Pakistan interior Rehman Malik on Saturday asked the Taliban group to name a team of ‘serious negotiator’ if they wanted to make peace.

He also said that the Taliban group start talks about peace dialogue when they become weak.

In the meantime Taliban spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan said, “If the government replaces Rehman Malik with a serious person to deal with the dialogue issue, we will come up with an immediate, positive and civilised response in the best interests of Pakistan and its people.”

Ehsan said he has been stopped from commenting on Malik’s statements

because the Taliban and “even many in Pakistan don’t trust him (Malik)”.

He also compared Malik with a Pashtu comedian, Ismail Shahid.

TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan also denied to comment regarding the upcoming all-party conference convened by JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman later this month to discuss the peace prospects in the tribal regions.

He said, “The Taliban are fighting for the existence of the tribal people as many tribesmen have been killed and displaced [by fighting in the region] and now they should have a better life,” he added.

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

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM’ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*

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.*