



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **Kirkuk council, UNCHR discuss Syrian refugees status (Aswat al-Iraq)**

04 Feb 2013

KIRKUK/ Aswat al-Iraq: Chairman of Kirkuk Provincial Council discussed today with UNCHR office the status of the Syrian refugees in the province.

Provincial media sources said to Aswat al-Iraq that both sides discussed necessary legal matters related to the lodgings of the Syrian families.

- **Ministerial Committee achieves remarkable results in releasing prisoners, says Waili (alliraqnews)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The State of Law Coalition's MP Shirwan al-Waili assured that "The Ministerial Committee formed by the Government to follow up the demands of the demonstrators has achieved remarkable steps regarding releasing prisoners."

He stated to All Iraq News Agency Monday "The Committee achieved remarkable

steps in regard to releasing innocent prisoners."

"The Committee also succeeded to listen to demands of demonstrators on field and response to these demands in the form of resolutions issued by the Council of Ministers or law drafts to be reviewed by the Iraqi Parliament for endorsement," he added.

MP Waili demanded the Parliament to "amend the legislations according to constitution to keep the rights of the others."

- **Elaiwi announces initiative to smooth things, prepare for holding National Meeting, solve crisis (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from the National Alliance, Kareem Elaiwi, announced an initiative by political sides to solve the crisis and prepare for holding the National Meeting.

In a statement on Monday, Feb. 4, Elaiwi said that there are initiatives and meetings on the level of the Vice President, Khoda'yir al-Khuza'e, Speaker of Parliament, Usama al-Nijaifi, leader of the

National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jafari, and Secretary General of Badr Organization, Hadi al-Amiri, as well as others to prepare the environment for holding the National Meeting.

He added that the government has responded to some of the demonstrators' demands and that some laws, concerning the political process, have been enacted will have positive effect on the dialogue between parties, things are moving toward being solved, the National Meeting will be hold and the crisis to end.

Elaiwi pointed out that all sides have realized the critical situation the country is going through and the public became aware of the situation.

- **Iraqiya bloc will not withdraw from Iraqi politics, Alawi (Aswat al-Iraq)**

04 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc leader Iyad Alawi stressed that his bloc will not withdraw from Iraqi politics, rejecting early elections, dissolving the Parliament or abrogating the constitution.

In an interview with Iraqi Media Network he rejected any denominational or

religious inclinations that will affect the national path and leads to dividing the country.

He pointed out that the bloc "looks for real partnership in strategic decision making".

Alawi added that "there are regional pressures to incite violence in the country, utilizing the coming provincial elections.

"Dissolving the parliament is death blow against the Iraqi politics that will lead to new dictatorship".

He rejected naming the demonstration on denominational bases as Sunni and Shiite.

Alawi rejected Saudi and Qatari intervention in Iraqi politics, adding that "Premier Maliki does not represent Iran, but his visions in administering the state".

He disclosed that he has no differences with Premier Maliki, but "we differ in administering the country".

- **"False propaganda" charges against government, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

04 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi bloc MP stated that the Iraqi government is "trying to end the demonstrations by all means, including the use of false propaganda".

MP Khalid al-Alwani, in a statement today, added that the State of Law bloc MPs' announcements are "contradictory" because the charges were varied from Baath Party to Qaeda Organization.

Anbar province MP added that the ordinary citizen lost his confidence in the present government, "so it is important to activate the process of withdrawing confidence", according to the statement.

Earlier, Interior ministry undersecretary Adnan al-Asadi warned against the return of Qaeda and Baath organizations into Anbar province, in addition to plans to divide Iraq into three parts.

Chairman of Iraqi Sahwa (Awakening) Ahmed Abu Risha regarded Asadi's statement as "a prelude to attack the demonstrators".

- **Cleric Sadr agrees to take over Finance Ministry by interim (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad / NINA /--Cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr head of Sadrist trend agreed to take over the Finance Ministry by interim by his partisan Ministry of Planning Ali Yousef Shukri, .

The ministers of Iraqiya Slate coalition boycotted attending the meetings of the Council of Ministers, due to lack of implementation of the demonstrators demands , so PM ,Maliki decided to replace them by other ministers.

It is noteworthy to mention in this context that the Ministry of Interior had raided the end of last year, the Office of Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi, and his home arresting a number of his protection elements . The arrests resulted the breaking out of demonstrations demanding their release ,then demands evolved to abolish Article 4 terrorism, the law of accountability and justice , release of innocent detainees and still ongoing with popular sit-ins in several Iraqi provinces .

- **Iraqi parliament to vote on 2013 budget during Tuesday session, says MP (alliraqnews)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Noura al-Bajari of the Iraqiya Slate confirmed that "The Iraqi Parliament will vote on the financial budget of 2013 during the session of next Tuesday.

Bajari told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The Iraqi Parliament will hold the regular session on next Tuesday to discuss a number of law drafts," noting "The session will discuss possibility of increasing the retirement pensions as well."

- **MP rules out endorsing 2013 budget during Parliament Tuesday session (alliraqnews)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mudhir al-Janabi of the Iraqiya Slate ruled out the vote on the federal budget of 2013 during the next session of the Parliament, calling to increase the emergency financial allocations for the floods and the other natural disasters.

Janabi said "2013 budget needs many amendments and discussions as the parliamentary finance committee stated," stressing that "The delay in endorsing the budget was due to the improper classification of the general moneys of the

budget besides many objections on the budget's terms."

The Iraqi Parliament is scheduled to vote on 2013 budget during its regular session on next Tuesday.

- **National White bloc: increasing Diwaniya share, a condition to vote on 2013 budget (alliraqnews)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The parliamentary National White bloc announced that "The bloc's MPs will not vote on 2013 federal budget if it does not include an increase for the moneys and job opportunities allocated to Diwaniya province."

MP Aziz al-Mayahi cited that "Diwaniya is among the poor provinces which suffered marginalization and exclusion since the former regime till now, therefore we demand to distribute the state wealth equally on the Iraqi provinces."

The Iraqi Parliament is scheduled to vote on 2013 budget during its regular session on next Tuesday.

- **Parliamentary vote on Youth Minister tomorrow (Aswat al-Iraq)**

04 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi Parliament will hold its session tomorrow to vote on demoting minister of youth and sports Jassim Mohammed Jaffar and the federal budget for 2013.

It is expected that the session will vote the Higher Federal Court Law.

- **Sadr: Muzzling mouths evident in Iraq through threatening to arrest lawmaker Sabah al-Sa'edi (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the Sadrist Trend, Muqtada al-Sadr, pointed out that mouth muzzling became clear in Iraq through threatening to arrest lawmaker Sabah al-Sa'edi.

Sadr clarified that accepting to allow Minister of Planning to assume the post of Acting Finance Minister, is for national and popular necessity.

He pointed out to the statement by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki with regards to revoking the President, Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament is an

intervention in the works of the judiciary that must not be repeated; he described the law of being in the interest of Iraq and is not directed against Maliki in person.

- **Wisal Saleem: Raiding Sheikh al-Badran's house in Mosul is an act of provocation (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from Iraqiya slate, Wisal Saleem, described raiding the house of Barzan al-Badran, one of Niniveh province's tribal chiefs, to be an act of provocation.

Saleem told NINA on Monday, Feb. 4, "At a time we condemn and denounce the security forces' measures against demonstrators, we consider raiding the house of Sheikh Barzan al-Badran, one of Niniveh's tribal chiefs, who is taking part in the demonstrations to support their demands, an act of provocation. It is also a contradiction to the move by the ministerial committee, headed by Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein al-Shihristani, to implement the demonstrators' demands."

Saleem added, "Security agencies adopt measures that contradict the Constitution's clauses that guarantee the

citizens' right of expression, but security forces do not just disturb them but also carry out raids and arrests."

Earlier in the day, security force raided the house of sheikh Barzan al-Badran in Mosul.

- **Saadi reveals list of Saddamist and Baathist judges (Shafaq News)**

04 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / MP, Sabah al-Saadi revealed on Monday, a list of the judges said that they are "Saddamists" who are continuing in their work and gave two weeks as a deadline in order to apply special procedures on them or revealing their names explicit.

Saadi said in a news conference attended by "Shafaq News", that "We have documents that condemn a number of Saddamists judges who did crimes against the Iraqi people in the period of the former regime, and they are covered by the procedures of the accountability and justice committee."

He added that "the committee's procedures have not been applied against them so far."

Saadi said "We attach to the head of the accountability and justice committee, Falah Hassan Shanshal these documents containing the judge's names that were obedient tool in the hands of the President of the previous regime to oppress the Iraqi people."

He explained that "this group occupy important positions in the judiciary authority and dominate the prestigious institution on Iraq and holds the judiciary in the same horror and fear way toward the judges and staff, which was used by Saddamists."

He demanded "to apply De-Baathification law and accountability measures against them and remove them from public office in preparation for trial, especially , Medhat al-Mahmoud, who taught them the crime against Iraqis in which a letter was issued against him to include him with De-Baathification law on the fourth of December, 2006, No 812."

Then Saadi presented a set of documents relating to judges and their names and positions they have occupied at the time of the former regime and they are; judge,

Jafar Mohsin Ali / President of first Rusafa appeal court covered with De-Baathification law according to the letter 6288 in 28/09/2005.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/5040-saadi-reveals-list-of-saddamist-and-baathiist-judges.html>

- **Zebari affirms that Maliki will attend the Islamic Summit in Cairo (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Cairo (NINA) – Foreign Minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, affirmed that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki will attend the Islamic Summit in Cairo

In a statement to NINA on Monday, Feb. 4, Zebari said, "Iraq is a founding member of the Islamic Cooperation Organization; it is keen to attend the Organization's summits." Pointing out that the Prime Minister will deliver Iraq's speech in the Organization's 12th Summit.

Zebari added that Maliki will hold a number of bilateral meetings with heads of delegation and is expected to meet with Egpt's President, Mohammed Mersi.

The Foreign Minister arrived in Cairo on Sunday evening, heading an official delegation, and has participated in meeting of Islamic states' foreign ministers, held on Monday to prepare for the Summit, which due to open of Wednesday with the participation of 56 Islamic states, except Syria whose membership has been put on hold in last August's Mecca Extraordinary Summit.

- **Iran boasts a lot of cultural, artistic achievements: Iraqi official (IRNA)**

Tehran, Feb 4, IRNA – Head of the Shia Waqf Diwan in Iraq Saleh Al-Heidari said on Monday that Iran is a rich country in terms of cultural and artistic achievements, calling for transfer Iranian experience to his country.

In a meeting with the Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Mohammad Hosseini, he called for expansion of cultural and artistic ties.

Referring to numerous cultural common grounds between Iran and Iraq, he contended that culture serves as a strong means to develop bonds between the two nations.

AL-Heidari hailed Iran's support for his country and said that the Iraqi nation appreciates Iranian assistance.

Despite sanctions and threats by the West against Iran, Iran has managed to make remarkable achievements in various fields through reliance on domestic experts, he said.

Hosseini, for his part, expressed pleasure with exit of the alien forces from Iraq and appreciated Iraq for supporting the Syrian and Bahraini people.

He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to make available its experience to Iraq.

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/Iran-boasts-a-lot-of-cultural,-artistic-achievements,-Iraqi-official/80529322>

- **[Saudi] Relatives can visit prisoners in Iraq (Arab News)**

JEDDAH: ARAB NEWS, 5 February 2013

Saudi families will be permitted to visit their relatives in prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, said Prince Bandar bin Faisal, deputy director for

international affairs at the Saudi Red Crescent.

“The jails that permitted relatives’ visits include Soussa in Iraq, Bagram in Afghanistan and several prisons in Lebanon,” said the prince, adding that the visits will be made during this year.

There are 11 Saudi prisoners currently at Soussa prison in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, while 17 others have been shifted to other Iraqi prisons because of their alleged involvement in terror operations, the prince said. “The Red Crescent is waiting for a reply from Iraqi jail authorities on precisely when the families can visit the jails,” he said. The International Red Cross had dedicated three days to the Soussa jail visits, while the Red Crescent cut these short to 24 hours because of the security situation in that country.

Asharq Al-Awsat daily reported that there were only two Saudi detainees in Afghanistan’s Bagram jail. The Saudi Red Crescent has visited all nine prisoners in Lebanese jails to inspect their conditions. Some of the prisoners had expressed their desire to meet their relatives.

There are about 60 Saudi prisoners in Iraqi jails, while the number of Iraqi prisoners in the Kingdom is recorded at 100.

The charges against Saudi prisoners are mostly illegal entry to Iraq and alleged links to terror organizations.

Abdullah Al-Anzi is a Saudi ex-prisoner who was recently released and returned to the Kingdom after serving eight years in Iraqi prisons such as Soussa, Nasiriyah, Al-Taji and Abu Ghraib. He said Saudi prisoners were ill treated especially by Iranian Revolutionary Guard. He said prisoners were exposed to physical and psychological torture, and that he himself had been tortured. He also said the jails lacked medical care.

<http://arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/relatives-can-visit-prisoners-iraq>

- **Official: Iran, Iraq Agree on Investment in Petrochemical Sector (Fars News)**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Managing-Director of Iran's Arvand Free Trade Zone (FTZ) Mohebat Raeesi announced on Monday that Iran and Iraq have struck agreements

in several economic areas, including investment in the petrochemical sector.

He made the remarks on Monday after a meeting with director general of Iraq's free zones who visited Arvand FTZ in Southern Iran.

"Development of rail and sea transportations as well as investment in the industrial sector, specially in petrochemical and downstream industries are among issues agreed upon in the Iran-Iraq joint meeting," Raeesi said.

Earlier this month, an Iranian trade official said Iran and Iraq are top trade partners, and added that the value of financial interactions between the two neighboring countries has exceeded \$10bln in the current Iranian year (ends March 20, 2013).

Secretary-General of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Jahanbakhsh Sanjabi made the remarks at a seminar on trade and investment opportunities in the Iraqi Kurdistan region which was held in Isfahan Chamber of Commerce on Saturday.

"The financial interactions between Iranian and Iraqi businessmen have hit \$10.7bln now," he said.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141742>

- **Zebari participates in the preparatory meeting for the Islamic Summit in Cairo (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad / NINA /-- Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari participate in the upcoming Preparatory Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for the Islamic summit which it's 12th session is scheduled to be held in Cairo this month.

A statement by the Foreign Ministry, "said senior officials have agreed on the agenda of the summit of the Conference which will be held under the slogan / Muslim world: new challenges and growing opportunities.

The conference, would discuss the most important issues facing the Muslim world in addition to promoting solidarity, cooperation between its members and the fight against extremism , terrorism , the

phenomenon of Islam-phobia as well. also examines the situation of minorities and Muslim groups in a number of countries of the world, the Palestinian issue and Syrian crisis and the situation in Mali and the organization's future projects. /

- **Saadoun al-Dulaimi, looking with U.S. Ambassador ways to strengthen the strategic framework agreement (NINA)**

04 Feb 2013

Baghdad/ NINA /--Defense Minister by interim ,Saadoun Dulaimi discussed with U.S. Ambassador Robert Stephen Beecroft means to enhance the strategic framework agreement concluded between the two countries.

A statement by the Ministry of Defense said Dulaimi received Beecroft and discussed during the meeting, ways to strengthen the strategic framework agreement signed between the Iraqi government and the U.S..

- **Britain condemns attack in N. Iraq (KUNA)**

LONDON, Feb 4 (KUNA) -- Britain condemned Monday attacks on Iraqi

police and security forces in Kirkuk and calls on Iraq's leaders to send out a strong message against violence.

Commenting on the coordinated attacks on the police headquarters in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk which killed 30 people and wounded more than 70 others, a Foreign Office(FO) spokesperson said: "Yesterday's appalling attack in Kirkuk was perpetrated by extremists who have no regard for human life and Iraq's peace, stability and prosperity".

In a terse statement, the spokesperson said the UK is shocked by the loss of life, in this case including many civilians.

The UK pledged to continue standing by the Government of Iraq and all parties committed to Iraq's democratic and peaceful future.

It also called on all Iraq's leaders to send out a strong and united message condemning violence and supporting the rule of law.

- **Moscow Condemns Kirkuk Attack**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Moscow condemned the Kirkuk suicide blast killing at least 36 people and wounding 105 in Northern Iraq.

Russia's Foreign Ministry has also sent its condolences over the attack, Voice of Russia reported.

A suicide car bomber attacked the city's police headquarters on Sunday morning.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141912>

2. IRAN

- **President Ahmadinejad Stresses Iran's Support for Kyrgyzstan's Progress**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad underlined cultural commonalities of Iran and Kyrgyzstan, and stressed that Tehran supports the Central Asian state's move towards progress.

Speaking in a meeting with Kyrgyz Envoy to Tehran Madat Khan Shrimkolov on Monday evening, President Ahmadinejad said common cultural origin is the reason

behind the "sense of friendship" between the two countries.

He stressed the necessity for the further expansion of the relations between Iran and Kyrgyzstan, and noted, "We see Kyrgyzstan's progress and dignity as our own progress and dignity and we are sure that the nation and government of Kyrgyzstan have a similar feeling towards the Iranian nation and government."

"We are glad to see that Kyrgyzstan is calmly moving on the path of progress, and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be right beside you on this path."

During the meeting, Shrimkolov praised the Iranian government's determination to expand bilateral ties, and added that "good grounds" are ready for the further promotion of mutual cooperation.

In December 2012, Iranian Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi called on Iran and Kyrgyzstan to utilize their potentials for the further development of trade ties, adding that Tehran is interested in launching investment programs in Bishkek's economy.

Iran is ready to take "effective steps" to boost bilateral trade ties with Kyrgyzstan, Rahimi said in a meeting with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Zhantoro Satybaldiyev in Kyrgyz capital city of Bishkek at the time.

Rahimi added that Iran is willing to make investment in Kyrgyzstan to help the country's economic development.

Satybaldiyev, for his part, called for the further expansion of economic ties between Iran and Kyrgyzstan, and thanked Iran for its \$1 mln financial aid to Bishkek for building a sports complex in the Southern Osh City.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141902>

- **Commander Reiterates Army's Full Control over Iran's Borders**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian Army Ground Force enjoys full preparedness to defend the country's territory and borders, a high-ranking Army commander said, adding that any possible aggression by enemies will face Iranians' crushing response.

The ground forces of Iran army enjoy optimum readiness, Commander of the

Iranian Army Ground Force Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Pourdastan said on the sidelines of a ceremony to unveil two new home-made Tanks on Monday.

The commander stressed that no threat could ever cause any problem for the country.

He assured the Iranian nation that the army will turn to ashes any aggressors which would have even dream of endangering the Iranian borders.

The army ground forces are of the supreme capabilities to defend the country's borders, the commander noted.

Home-made Zolfaqar and Samsam tanks optimized by Iranian Army experts were unveiled by Pourdastan yesterday.

During the unveiling ceremony, which was attended by a group of army commanders and high-ranking military officials, advanced versions of Zolfaqar and Samsam tanks were unveiled.

The ceremony was held on the occasion of the Ten-Day Dawn celebrations (marking the Iranian revolution's victory over the

former Pahlavi regime) and the anniversary of historic return of the late Imam Khomeini to the country from exile on February 1, 1979 and ends with the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 11.

In mid-January, Pourdastan said Iran will start mass-production of Zolfaqar tank after the approval of the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces.

In January, Pourdastan also said all military exercises and trainings of the Iranian Armed Forces are merely meant to serve deterrent purposes.

"When the enemy observes that our Armed Forces are constantly in wargame zones and their fingers are kept on the trigger, it will not dare to invade the Islamic Iran's borders," Pourdastan said at the time, underlining the significance of military trainings for boosting the country's deterrent power.

As regards the Iranian Armed Forces' military exercises, Pourdastan described wargames as "very important" to the Iranian military, and said drills have provided the Iranian military forces,

including the Army Ground Force, with an opportunity to test its achievements and remove deficiencies for future missions.

The Iranian Armed Forces last staged drills on January 2. The wargames, codenamed Velayat 91, were conducted by the Iranian Navy in the country's Southern waters for 6 days.

'The Great Naval Wargames of Velayat 91' covered around one million square kilometers from the Strait of Hormuz to the waters up to the 18-degree latitude.

The naval drills were carried out in the Strait of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman, North of the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

During the exercises, the Navy test-fired various types of long-range missiles from coasts and navy vessels.

Different types of short and long-range coast-to-sea, surface-to-surface, surface-to-air missiles were also tested by Iranian troops and vessels. Iranian submarines also launched smart torpedoes during the drills.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141900>

• Iranian FM Leaves for Cairo

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi left Tehran for the Egyptian capital city of Cairo to take part in the summit meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is slated to be held on February 6-7 in Cairo. The OIC Summit is titled 'The Islamic world: new challenges and growing opportunities.'

Also on Tuesday President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad left Tehran for Cairo to attend the OIC Summit meeting.



Salehi said last night that "the relations with Egypt have consistently expanded since the popular revolution in that

country and this stems from the will of both peoples".

"Egypt is a very important country in the region and the Islamic Republic of Iran views it as a heavyweight in the Middle East and the Islamic world," he added.

Pointing out that he has visited Egypt five times since the success of the Egyptian revolution, Salehi reiterated Tehran's readiness to exchange ambassadors with Cairo.

He highlighted the good political ties between the two countries and that their cooperation on the international scene, such as the Syrian crisis.

Iran's chief diplomat also stressed Iran's full readiness for cooperation with Egypt in every possible field.

Earlier this month in a meeting in Cairo, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and Sheikh al-Tayyeb stressed unity among Muslim nations.

During the meeting, Salehi said enemies of Islam are trying to stir rift between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

"Enemies have made great efforts during recent years to cause a rift among Muslims and also to intensify it," the Iranian minister said, and called on Muslims to avoid conflicts and rely on commonalities instead.

Salehi invited the Sheikh of Al-Azhar to visit Iran to hold talks with Iranian clerics.

Sheikh Al-Azhar, too, urged Muslims to foster unity and said enemies should not be allowed to achieve their objectives to create conflicts in the Muslim world.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141870>

- **'Reformists will field a single candidate for presidential election'**

TEHRAN, Feb. 5 (MNA) – Tehran City Councilor Mohammad Ali Najafi, who has been mentioned as a possible pro-reform candidate for the June 14 presidential election, said on Monday that the reformists would certainly adopt a single strategy for their election campaign and would field a single candidate.

He also said that other pro-reform candidates who would not follow this

policy would not be endorsed by the reformists.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1809081>

- **Iran's nuclear sites impervious to any attack: Cmdr.**

Today, we have achieved the defense capability to make vital infrastructure, especially nuclear installations, completely impregnable and impenetrable.”

A senior Iranian commander says the nuclear facilities of the Islamic Republic are totally impervious to any potential attack by the US or the Israeli regime.

“Today, we have achieved the defense capability to make vital infrastructure, especially nuclear installations, completely impregnable and impenetrable,” Deputy Commander of Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base General Shahrokh Shahram said on Monday in an interview with Iran’s Arabic-language news channel, Al-Alam.

Iran has tested the impenetrability of its nuclear sites with various weapons and tactics in different military drills, the commander said, adding that it can now

be assured that the country has reached the capability to defend its sensitive sites with an indigenous defense system in the best possible way.

The US and Israel allege that Iran’s nuclear activities have been diverted towards non-civilian purposes and, based on the claim, have at times adopted an aggressive stance towards Iran, threatening to launch a military strike against the country.

Iran has categorically rejected the allegation, as the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has never found any evidence during its inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities to support the claims regarding Iran's nuclear energy program.

Iran has frequently declared that its nuclear energy program is solely civilian and made it clear that any aggression against the country will definitely face a crushing response.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/05/287365/irans-nuclear-sites-impervious-to-attack/>

- **Iran arrests former Tehran prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi**



Tehran's Public Prosecutor's Office has announced the arrest of Saeed Mortazavi, the caretaker of Iran's Social Security Organization and Tehran's former prosecutor.

Mortazavi has been taken to Tehran's Evin Prison. Tehran's Public Prosecutor's Office has given no reason for his arrest yet.

Mortazavi has been previously accused of involvement in the deaths of three detainees in Kahrizak Detention Center during the unrest following the 2009 presidential elections in Iran.

In December 2009, a statement from the Judicial Organization for the Armed Forces announced that, according to forensic information, three of those detained during the country's post-election events

died while being held at the Kahrizak facility.

On February 4, Iran's Majlis voted to dismiss Labor and Social Affairs Minister Abdolreza Sheikholeslami over his failure to remove Mortazavi from his post as the head of the Social Security Organization.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/05/287357/iran-arrests-exprosecutor-mortazavi/>

- **Israeli army chief in US to discuss Iran, Syria**

Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Benny Gantz (R) and his American counterpart Martin Dempsey at a military base in Tel Aviv on January 20, 2012.



Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Benny Gantz is on a five-day visit to the US to discuss the Middle East developments

with the American officials, with Iran and Syria reportedly on top of his agenda.

The Israeli army chief set off on his US visit on Sunday during which he plans to meet Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey and other American officials, the IDF said.

Gantz and Dempsey will hold “a series of work meetings together” to “discuss current security challenges, the regional security status in the Middle East and military cooperation,” the IDF added.

The visit comes a few days after the Syrian army said in a statement on January 30 that two people were killed and five others injured in an Israeli airstrike on a research center in Jamraya, located 25 kilometers (15 miles) northwest of Damascus.

Israel’s tension with Syria following the last-week attack and Tel Aviv’s military threats against Tehran over its nuclear energy program are expected to top the agenda of the discussions between the Israeli and US army chiefs.

In late summer 2012, when Israel intensified its previous military threats against Iran, Dempsey publicly announced that he would not want to be “complicit” in any such Israeli measure.

Israel has at times threatened to attack Iran's nuclear facilities based on the unfounded allegation that Iran's nuclear energy program has been diverted towards military purposes.

Iran has denied the allegation, promising a crushing response to any military strike against the country.

Gantz’s visit to the US also comes a week after Director of Israel’s Military Intelligence Major General Aviv Kochavi travelled to the US to meet with American officials.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/04/287291/israel-army-chief-in-us-to-discuss-iran/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Haniyeh: Hamas Will Never Give Up Right of Return**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Hamas will never give up the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said.

"Those who abandon the right of return are not part of us. I say that I am from Asqalan, and I will return to my hometown," Haniyeh said at an event to welcome solidarity activists to Gaza, Ma'an reported Monday.

"We will fight for the return of refugees."



Around 150 activists arrived in Gaza as part of the Miles of Smiles aid convoy, which Haniyeh said was evidence that Israel's blockade had been defeated.

Haniyeh said Israel besieged Gaza to cast the enclave into oblivion, but instead the siege became a bridge, bringing people to the enclave.

The premier listed Hamas' victories since taking control of the Gaza Strip in 2007. "Gaza triumphed in the war Israel waged against it in 2008, then another triumph was made in the prisoner swap deal," he said.

Meanwhile, Miles of Smiles coordinator Issam Yousif said more convoys would travel to Gaza, adding that activists from Bahrain, Algeria, Libya, Jordan, Sudan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Canada had joined the latest group.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107141898>

- **Saudi Arabia opens housing project in Gaza**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- A Saudi delegation on Monday opened the biggest housing project in the Gaza Strip and pledged further funding to support Palestinian refugees.

Saudi Arabia financed the 752-home neighborhood in Rafah for families whose homes were destroyed by the Israeli army. It features four schools, a market, a mosque, a clinic and a community center.

The delegation, headed by vice-chairman of the Saudi Development Fund Yousef al-Bassam, pledged a further \$34 million to restore 7,000 homes and \$54 million to build 1,100 homes and six schools as part of a program by the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The building of the Rafah neighborhood was overseen by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

"This project was implemented in difficult situations, but with UNRWA's efforts, the project was successful in record time and with high quality. This project also employed more than 400 workers, increased incomes, and revitalized the work of contractors," al-Bassam said at the inauguration.

UNRWA's director of operations in Gaza, Robert Turner, thanked Saudi Arabia for funding the project and said the opening of the new neighborhood marked the end of a difficult period for thousands of refugees who had been living in mobile homes.

The project was launched in 2005 but was delayed for several years by Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=562102>

- **Ahmadinejad 'wants to visit Gaza'**

BEIRUT (Reuters) -- Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is due to take part in a summit in Egypt this week, expressed his desire on Monday to visit the neighboring Gaza Strip.

Asked in an interview on the Al Mayadeen news channel whether he would visit Gaza while in Cairo next week or before his term as president expires in June, he replied: "My wish is bigger than this. I wish to pray in Jerusalem after complete liberation."

Iran does not recognize Israel.

"If they allow it, I would go to Gaza to visit the people," he said, without saying whose authority he would seek.

Egypt controls the crossing with Gaza and leaders of Qatar and Malaysia have both

visited the enclave from Egyptian territory in the last six months.

Ahmadinejad's visit to Cairo will be the first for an Iranian president since the 1979 Iranian revolution ruptured diplomatic ties between the two most populous countries in the Middle East.

He will head Iran's delegation to a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Cairo.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=562146>

- **PLO Condemns Israeli Arrest of Lawmakers**

RAMALLAH, February 4, 2013 (WAFA) – The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) condemned Monday in a statement Israeli arrest of West Bank lawmakers.

Israeli soldiers arrested early Monday three lawmakers from the Change and Reform Bloc in a wide arrest campaign that included more than 20 people. A total of 16 lawmakers are currently held in Israeli jails, mostly held in the illegal administrative detention policy.

PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi, herself a lawmaker, accused the Israeli government of breaching international law by arresting lawmakers.

“Israel is deliberately breaching international law and conventions relating to the immunity of democratically elected Palestinian officials,” she said.

Ashrawi accused Israel of attempting to undermine Palestinian reconciliation efforts with its incursions and arrests in the West Bank.

“It is apparent the Israeli government is implementing a policy of intimidation and power politics to meddle in Palestinian domestic affairs and to undermine reconciliation efforts,” she added.

“With such arbitrary arrests, Israel has violated international law and the most basic norms of human rights. Israel is not above the law,” she said.

“Therefore, we call on all parliaments – Arab, European and international – to hold Israel accountable and to ensure the release of Palestinian lawmakers. It is high time the international community put an

end to Israel's impunity and its illegal occupation of Palestine and the Palestinian people," concluded Ashrawi.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21614>

- **Reconciliation Talks to Resume on Wednesday**

RAMALLAH, February 4, 2013 (WAFA) – Reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas will resume on Wednesday in Cairo under Egyptian supervision, head of the Fatah team to the talks, Azzam Ahmad, said Monday.

He said the meeting will discuss what has been achieved so far in the reconciliation process since the last meeting and what remains to be implemented.

He also said the two sides will prepare the ground for a meeting scheduled for Friday in Cairo for the committee looking into revitalizing and restructuring the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Ahmad said consultations regarding forming the new government of technocrats, which will be headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, will start next

Monday when the elections commission is supposed to start actual registration of voters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in preparation for presidential and legislative elections.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21613>

- **120 members of 19th Knesset set to be sworn in**

By LAHAV HARKOV

Celebratory opening meeting overseen by Labor's Ben-Eliezer to welcome new Knesset, while social activists plan to accost MKs.

The 120 members of the 19th Knesset are to be sworn in on Tuesday, in a celebratory opening meeting, while social activists hope to remind them to faithfully represent the public.

Hundreds of activists from Green Course, the National Union of Israeli Students and other organizations plan to stand outside the Knesset as the MKs arrive and distribute flowers meant to represent cooperation between citizens and their representatives.



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STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION



The activists will also ask the MKs to pose for photographs with a sign reading “You are swearing to work for us.”

Over 1,000 people are expected to attend the 19th Knesset’s opening ceremony, over which Labor’s Binyamin Ben-Eliezer will preside, as he is the veteran MK, after 29 years as a lawmaker. He is also the oldest MK, at age 77, while Stav Shaffir, 27, also from Labor, will be the youngest after swearing in on Tuesday.

The ceremony will begin with President Shimon Peres laying flowers on the memorial for the fallen in wars, followed by a meeting between him, Ben-Eliezer and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Then, the members of the 19th Knesset will declare that they “commit to be

faithful to the State of Israel and faithfully fulfill my mission in the Knesset.”

Peres will speak, and parts of first prime minister David Ben- Gurion’s declaration of the State of Israel’s establishment will be played.

Media personality Jacky Levy is expected to read from psalms, and singer Kobi Aflalo will perform a song.

The ceremony will be followed by a toast to the new MKs

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302093>

- **Likud ready to overpay to bring Livni into coalition**

By GIL HOFFMAN, LAHAV HARKOV

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is prepared to make a substantial offer to bring Tzipi Livni's party into his coalition if negotiations with Yesh Atid do not bear fruit, according to senior Likud sources.

Binyamin Netanyahu and Tzipi Livni

Binyamin Netanyahu and Tzipi Livni Photo: Reuters

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is prepared to make a substantial offer to bring the Tzipi Livni Party into his coalition as a senior partner if negotiations with Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid do not bear fruit, senior Likud sources said following talks with Livni's associates on Monday.

When Netanyahu formed his coalition in 2009, he held direct talks that did not bear fruit with Livni on bringing Kadima's 28 MKs into the coalition. The portfolios Netanyahu intended to give Kadima instead went to Labor, which had 13 MKs, and remained with the Independence Party when it broke off, even though it had only five.

"We understand that in a situation where Lapid does not join, the price we will have to pay to enable Livni joining the coalition will be relatively high," a senior Likud official said.

The talk of overpaying Livni to enter the coalition despite her faction having only six MKs came after Yesh Atid issued demands that Likud officials called unrealistic. Likud sources said a likely scenario would be a 69-MK coalition with the Tzipi Livni Party, Kadima, Bayit Yehudi,

Shas, and United Torah Judaism. A Likud MK suggested that "it might be better to have Livni on her knees than Lapid on a horse." The MK said Lapid might speak more modestly and lower his price after "a year of drought in the desert of the opposition." Channel 2 reported Monday night that Netanyahu and his no. 2 on the joint Likud Yisrael Beytenu list Avigdor Liberman had maintained a direct connection with Livni since the January 22 election. The report said Netanyahu's recent statements on diplomatic issues were aimed at enticing Livni into the coalition.

An official response by Livni's spokeswoman called the report "rumors and political spin" and said there were direct connections since the election with leaders of many parties, not just Netanyahu. Livni's associates expressed concern that Netanyahu might have leaked the report in order to use Livni to lower the price of Lapid.



"For Tzipi, what matters is the essence of whether she will be given true freedom to advance the diplomatic process," a source close to her said.

"She has one issue, unlike Lapid who has many, but she won't join the government unless she deems Netanyahu's intentions on the peace process to be truly genuine. It's too soon to say concretely that Netanyahu is more serious than before. Maybe it's just camouflage and pyrotechnics."

Representatives of the Tzipi Livni Party came to Ramat Gan's Kfar Hamaccabiah for coalition talks on Monday. Source on Livni's negotiating team said after the meeting that they had an impression that Likud had a problem with Lapid and therefore would have to make gestures to Livni not on portfolios but on diplomatic progress and letting her lead peace talks with the Palestinians..

One way of proving Netanyahu's intentions could be in announcing steps toward the Palestinians when US Secretary of State John Kerry visits Israel in two weeks or when the prime minister is supposed to go to Washington the first week of March.

A senior party source explained that, with only six seats, the Livni Party must keep promises based on its central issue, or it will die in the next election. When asked whether this means the party is demanding Livni be Foreign Minister, her party's chief negotiator, former Prime Minister's Office director-general Yossi Kucik said they are not discussing portfolios yet.

"We won't be a fig leaf for a right-wing coalition," Kucik added.

Likud Beytenu negotiations team leader attorney David Shimron summed up two days of negotiations on Monday evening by saying he was instructed by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to build the widest coalition possible.

"There are many ways to do this, and we will work on it in the coming days," Shimron stated. "There are gaps, and we will work [to bridge them]." Likud Beytenu representatives also met Monday teams from Kadima and United Torah Judaism. Kadima MK Yisrael Hasson described the talks and the Likud Beytenu team as "pleasant," and said Kadima's position is essentially the same as it was when it joined the coalition last May, with an emphasis on equality in the burden of service and electoral reform.

UTJ leaders Deputy Health Minister Ya'acov Litzman and MK Moshe Gafni expressed optimism on their way out of talks.

"It was a good talk," Gafni said. "We were in the coalition with [Likud Beytenu] for four years, so we feel at home," adding that it's hard to know what will happen as talks continue.

"We're loyal coalition partners, who don't make problems, which is why we expect Likud Beytenu to deal with issues that are hard for them in order to keep us," Litzman added, in reference to issues of haredi enlistment.

A Bayit Yehudi official denied reports that his party had formed a bloc with Yesh Atid and would enter the coalition or opposition together. A source close to MK Uri Ariel, who is leading the Bayit Yehudi negotiating team, also called the report an exaggeration, saying "we're not going to the opposition just because Lapid doesn't get what he wants." Still, the source that the two parties coordinated stances on issues like lowering the number of ministers in the government, what should be cut in the upcoming budget and decreasing the benefit. In addition, the source explained, both sides hope to see more haredim enlist in the IDF or do national service, but have different ideas about how to go about it.

Ariel met with UTJ MK Meir Porush Monday night. No coalition talks are set for Tuesday due to the swearing-in ceremony for the 19th Knesset that will take place Tuesday afternoon. But informal talks will take place among the leaders of all the parties.

Netanyahu called the heads of Arab factions Monday and told them that even though none of them would join the

coalition, he still intended to help their constituencies. Hadash party leader MK Mohammed Barakeh said he was not impressed by the call.

"In light of the Hadash party's political, economic and social standing, we represent a political position opposite that of the government, and will therefore act as an actively fighting opposition," Barakeh said on the party's website.

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302133>

- **Labor MK says PA collapse could spell disaster for Israel**

Abbas and Fayyad government the 'only partner' for peace negotiations,' says Isaac Herzog in meeting in Ramallah

By Gabe Fisher

Labor MK Isaac Herzog told Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad that the collapse of the PA from financial pressures would be a catastrophe for Israel.

The two met in Ramallah on Monday for a discussion that reportedly focused on the financial crisis facing the PA, which

partially stems from Israel's holding of tax transfers to the Palestinians.

Fayyad expressed his concern regarding a possible economic collapse of the PA, according to an Israel Radio report, and warned of the dangers of the PA being too dependent on tax revenues transferred to the Palestinians by Israel.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/labor-mk-says-pa-collapse-could-spell-disaster-for-israel/>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Libya vows to improve security**

By Essam Mohamed in Tripoli and Mawassi Lahcen in Casablanca for Magharebia – 04/02/13

A United Nations building in Tripoli was hit by two homemade bombs last week amid continuing concerns about the security situation in Libya.

Two explosive devices were thrown at the unoccupied UN office in the Gurji area of Tripoli on January 29th. One exploded, while police dismantled the other one.

"A bomb blast caused minor damage to the building and broke several windows. A second bomb was found later, and successfully dismantled by Libyan police who arrived quickly and efficiently to the site," said Radhia Achouri, spokeswoman for the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

"The opposition of armed groups to the military intervention in Mali may aggravate the security situation in Libya, especially since there are still about 200,000 armed fighters in the rebel brigades in Libya," UNSMIL chief Tarek Mitri said.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Ashour Shuwail said the day following the attack that training for security forces was underway, with 26,000 applicants. He pointed out that training was progressing quickly despite the lack of infrastructure.

He explained that decent work opportunities would be found for rebel leaders and that surveillance cameras would be installed within a month in Tripoli as well as at the entrances of Sebha and Benghazi.

Shuwail also held a recent meeting in Tripoli with the military council and local councils, the Shura Council and rebel leaders during which an agreement was achieved to prepare a joint plan to secure the city of Tripoli and organise public activities.

"The plan includes a ban on carrying guns inside Tripoli as well as a ban on medium and heavy weapons and illegal organizations within the city," Interior Ministry spokesman Majdi al-Orfi said. "It will also activate the role of the traffic police and secure city entrances by manning checkpoints."

At a press conference last Wednesday, Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan touched on the Mali situation as well as the In Amenas terror attack, saying Libya co-operated with Algeria on security matters.

"I think that what happened in Algeria could happen anywhere else as well," the Libyan premier added. Zidan explained that the air force, the defence ministry forces and a number of former revolutionaries were now guarding the border.

"Libya is recovering now and it is inaccurate to say that security is lacking in Libya, but there is a partial security flaw that can occur even in other countries, which is natural," Zidan said.

For his part, Libyan businessman Sami Ramzi commented that violent jihadists were exploiting the situation and the devout nature of Libyans.

However, he said Libyan tribes "strongly reject the takfiri jihadist ideas of those militant groups". He specifically pointed to the reaction of residents in al-Bayda and Derna, where he said "jihadist quarters were attacked by the sons of these cities and expelled".

"The same scene took place in Benghazi after the events of the U.S. Embassy. All of the children of Benghazi attacked those battalions and took over their headquarters amid bloody events where the people of Benghazi prevailed," Ramzi said.

He attributed the on-going instability and the emergence of radical groups to "the

absence of a constitution and the delay in the formation of the army and police".

Meanwhile, Libyan academic researcher Mohamed Meftahi pointed to the recent arrest of Muhammad Jamal al-Kashif (a.k.a. Abu Ahmad) in Egypt as "an indication of the beginning of the war on al-Qaeda in Libya". Abu Ahmad was reportedly linked to the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi.

"The arrest reflects the commitment of the Libyan government to dry up the sources of terrorism and prevent al-Qaeda from controlling Libyan arms and smuggling them abroad," Meftahi said

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/04/feature-01

- **Maghreb economies confront terror fallout**

The Algerian gas site siege and the Mali crisis could end up hurting economic growth, analysts warn.

By Mouna Sadek in Algiers and Bakari Gueye in Nouakchott for Magharebia – 04/02/13

The gas field attack in Algeria and the war against terrorism in northern Mali are leading the countries to take a new look at economic policies.

The January siege by a former al-Qaeda emir on the In Anemas gas complex was aimed directly at the financial heart of Algeria.

For some in the business community, the attack should be seen as wake-up call.

There will be "a pre-In Amenas and a post-In Amenas", the head of Algeria juice giant NCA Rouiba told El Watan.

"Algerians now have to diversify their economy, whose vulnerability has been highlighted by In Amenas," Slim Athmani said.

The oil and gas sector account for 97% of Algeria's exports and two-thirds of its revenue. With an output of 78 billion cubic metres in 2011, Algeria is also the world's ninth-biggest producer of natural gas.

"A certain wariness has set in and it will take time for confidence to return," former Sonatrach executive, Hocine Malti said. From abroad, however, large companies have issued messages of reassurance.

"There is no question of French companies leaving Algeria", MEDEF (French employers' federation) chief Laurence Parisot told France 2.

The In Amenas attack will likely affect Algerian desert tourism, warned Hamdaoui Ahmed, president of the Association of Travel Agencies of Tamanrasset.

"Local agencies will pay a high price for this," he told Magharebia.

Neighbouring Mauritania is also facing the economic fallout of terrorism.

In the wake of the Algerian hostage crisis, Mauritanian authorities stepped up security at its mining sites. The military action to oust Islamist group Ansar al-Din and their al-Qaeda allies from northern Mali is also taking a toll on Mauritanian coffers.

"The war is having a tangible impact. Most of the traders who get their supplies in Mali have had to stop trading. In the transport sector, the situation is none too good. Buses which go to Mali are no longer traveling to their final destination, Bamako, due to a lack of customers," journalist Assan Disallo said.

The In Amenas siege and the war in Mali have also had repercussions on Mauritania's important tourism industry.

"These attacks have had disastrous effects on the sector just as it was beginning to take off", Mauritanian security analyst Ely Ould Maghlah told Magharebia.

"Tourism has been severely tested," he added. "Visitor numbers have fallen by more than 70 per cent."

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

- **Police brutality persists two years after Egypt revolution: Rights activists**

Egyptian activists release report detailing persistent police abuse, illegal detention

and torture; rights lawyers say police brutality remains widespread two years after Mubarak's ouster

Following the recent death of activist Mohamed El-Gendy, who allegedly died after being subject to torture by police, several Egyptian rights activists issued a report on Sunday detailing what they see as the persistence of oppressive police tactics employed by the state.

According to the report, 225 people have been detained from the vicinity of Cairo's Tahrir Square since the second anniversary of Egypt's January 25 Revolution, which coincided with mass rallies against the government and President Mohamed Morsi.

Those detained have included minors who were subject to torture and days-long incarceration at Central Security Forces (CSF) training camps, the report asserts. Detentions were officially said to have been "pending investigation," but according to the report's authors, detentions were generally employed as punishment and were unnecessary to investigations.

The report notes one case in particular in which 12 young people – including eight minors – were referred to the Abbasiya prosecutor's office. The young people had reportedly suffered injuries as a result of police torture and were therefore detained for four days "pending investigation."

Egypt's April 6 Youth Movement also released a statement on Sunday asserting that one of its members, Hossam El-Din Abdel-Hamid, had gone missing. The youth group alleged that Abdel-Hamid had been detained, suggesting that that the interior ministry had refrained from referring him to prosecutors – along with others who had been detained with him – in order to conceal the torture he had been subject to at the hands of police.

"Abdel-Hamid was brutally beaten and is suffering from a severe injury and has not been referred to the prosecution until this minute," April 6 stated. "When we asked about him we were told by a police officer that he had been moved to the Khalifa Police Station...but when we went there to ask about him we were told he was at the Qasr El-Nil Police Station and there they again denied his presence."

The rights activists' report echoed the youth group's allegations, stating that many of those reported missing were later found to have been illegally detained, mostly in the Gabal El-Ahmar and Tora CSF training camps. Unlike prisons or police stations, neither of these facilities represent official detention centres.

"Most of those arrested [estimated at more than 600 since 25 January] are now being detained in CSF camps that are not made or equipped for detention," Malek Adly, a rights lawyer and one of the report's authors, told Ahram Online. "Unlike prisons or police stations, these camps aren't equipped to provide prisoners with meals, so detainees are often left without food or water for long periods."

The report added that since detainees were not referred to prosecutors they lacked any access to family members or lawyers.

Only after the media had exposed cases of missing persons, the report continued, eight of them were finally referred to the Qasr El-Nil prosecutor's office on 30

January – following five days of illegal detention. Abdeen's criminal court later ordered their immediate release, arguing that the means by which they were detained had been illegal.

Another five detainees were also allowed to return to their homes after four days of being illegally held, the report added.

On Monday, thousands of protesters marched in the funeral of slain activist Mohamed El-Gendy, who allegedly died from torture sustained while in police custody. The young activist's death has reignited debate on police brutality, against which large swathes of the Egyptian public rose up in the revolution two years ago.



"While many have been shocked by El-Gendy's death, he is not the first to die of torture during Morsi's rule," human rights activist Hossam Bahgat said via Twitter.

"You only know his name because he's a political activist."

In January, the Cairo-based Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) – of which Bahgat is a founding member – released a report documenting 16 cases of police violence. The report noted that, since Morsi's assumption of the presidency last summer, 11 people had been killed and ten tortured inside Egyptian police stations.

"Police still use excessive force and torture is still systematic, just as it was under the Mubarak regime," the report stated.

In response to the EIPR's study, an interior ministry official – speaking anonymously – told AP that such claims were "untrue" and "full of exaggerations."

In response to El-Gendy's case, the presidency released a statement in which it insisted: "There has been no return to human rights abuses or violations of citizens' freedoms since the January 25 Revolution, especially now with the establishment of a constitutional state."

Nevertheless, a video has recently circulated online showing a man – later revealed to be 50-year-old Hamada Saber – being beaten and dragged naked by CSF personnel. The incident was filmed during Friday's clashes between anti-government protesters and security forces outside the Presidential Palace in Cairo.

The interior ministry has since issued an official apology, asserting that the incident had constituted an "individual act" and did not reflect ministry policy. Public prosecutors are currently investigating the case.

The presidency, too, has condemned the police violence depicted in the footage.

"We are awaiting the outcome of the investigation, which should be released with transparency in accordance with the objectives of the January 25 Revolution," the presidency declared in a statement.

The statement went on to assert that the presidency was currently working "for the enforcement of constitutional articles that prohibit torture, intimidation, or causing individuals physical or psychological harm."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/64051/Egypt/Politics-/Police-brutality-persists-two-years-after-Egypt-re.aspx>

- **Egypt to finish revised economy plan next week: Minister**

Finance Minister El-Mursi El-Sayed Hegazy says government's revised economic programme will be finalised next week, stresses IMF talks are proceeding 'smoothly'

Egypt's finance minister has said that the government would complete its revision of its economic reform plan next week, after which it planned to invite a delegation from the International Monetary Fund to visit Egypt, the finance ministry announced on its website on Monday.

In November, the Egyptian government signed a preliminary agreement for a \$4.8 billion IMF loan. The signing of the loan deal was delayed, however, after a fresh round of political turmoil forced it to postpone a handful of austerity measures that the loan agreement is conditional upon.

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

According to Finance Minister El-Mursi El-Sayed Hegazy, Egypt is currently "waiting for the final revisions of the economic and social reform programme in light of recent [political] developments... and a recent package of tax amendments."

Hegazy declared last week that talks between Egypt and the IMF were proceeding "smoothly," pointing out that the agreement was currently waiting on the government's review of the economic programme and the results of an ongoing "social dialogue" on the government's economic recovery plan.

IMF Africa and Middle East Director Masood Ahmed had previously announced that the IMF was in the process of assessing new budget-reduction procedures, which, he said, were now in the "final stages" of completion.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/64037/Business/Economy/Egypt-to-finish-revised-economy-plan-next-week-Min.aspx>

• Lebanon army warns will 'pursue' those who attack

Lebanon's army chief has warned that the military will "pursue" anyone who attacks it, after two troops were killed in a clash with Islamists in the country's east

"Any hand that aggresses the army will be cut off," Lebanon's army commander Jean Kahwaji told newspaper Al-Safir in an interview published on Monday.

"We will pursue the attackers wherever they are, and whatever party they are loyal to," Kahwaji added.

The army chief had on Sunday said that Friday's attack on an army patrol in the east Lebanon area of Aarsal, near the Syrian border, was "premeditated". Kahwaji also said the soldiers were killed in a "barbaric way".

"Methods were used that are against our Christian and Muslim beliefs," he said of the attack, in which two Lebanese soldiers, one a captain, were killed in the clash with militants.

Security officials have identified the attackers as radical Islamists.

A local official told AFP the soldiers were killed using axes and their corpses mutilated, adding that they had likely been tortured before their deaths.

The army has in the wake of the attacks launched an in-depth security operation in the area.

On Sunday, Kahwaji praised the army for "standing in the face of plans for our country to be consumed by regional chaos".

Lebanon has suffered a spillover of Syria's raging war, which the UN says has left 60,000 people dead in nearly two years.

Northern and eastern Lebanon have been struck by frequent cross-border shellings and clashes, while the Syrian regime has told Lebanon to better control its porous border to prevent the smuggling of fighters and arms.

According to Al-Safir newspaper, Friday's ambush "is an indicator of the risk posed

by (Islamist) cells that have been created on the frontline due to the Syrian crisis".

Lebanon was dominated politically and militarily by Syria for nearly 30 years.

The small Mediterranean country is sharply divided over the Syrian revolt, which erupted in March 2011.

Shiite movement Hezbollah and its allies back the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, while the Sunni-led Future movement and its allies support the revolt.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64024/World/Region/Lebanon-army-warns-will-pursue-those-who-attack.aspx>

- **Lebanon army urges supporters to end road blocks**

The Lebanese army issued a statement Monday calling on the country's citizens not to block highways in protest against the killing of two of soldiers last week in a Beqaa town.

"The Army Command thanks all the citizens who have expressed their... solidarity with [the army] regarding the

latest developments, but urges them to refrain from blocking roads and holding protests,” it said in a statement.

A number of highways in different regions across Lebanon were blocked over the past few days in protest against the murder of two Lebanese Armed Forces soldiers in Arsal.

These reactions aimed at expressing the Lebanese’s support for the LAF as well as their strong condemnation of the Arsal incident, which prompted the majority of the country’s political and religious figures to denounce it in the strongest of terms.

On Friday, two LAF members - Pierre Bachaalany and Ibrahim Zahraman - were killed when their patrol team pursued a wanted man, Khaled Hmayed, in Arsal. Hmayed’s family and friends surrounded the patrol force and opened fire, killing the two soldiers and injuring six others.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/lebanon_army_urges_supporters_to_end_road_blocks

- **Suleiman denies rejecting Orthodox draft to please Lebanon’s Muslims**

Lebanon President Michel Suleiman on Monday denied that he objected to the Orthodox draft electoral law to please the country’s Muslims.

The National News Agency Monday reported that the head of state considered allegations that he refused the Orthodox proposal in order to serve the Muslims’ interests as “lacking sufficient knowledge of the constitution.”

Suleiman also added that even “the Muslims are divided over this draft.”

The Orthodox draft law, which proposes citizens vote for candidates of their own sect, was endorsed by Lebanon’s four major Christian parties, including the opposition Lebanese Forces and Kataeb Party.

However, the Future Movement, Progressive Socialist Party and independent March 14 Christians opposed the draft, with the country’s president also voicing his objection to this proposal.

On Monday, the parliamentary sub-committee tasked to discuss the different electoral law proposals for the upcoming

elections resumed its sessions, in order to continue the discussions it started early January on the best draft to replace the 1960 electoral law.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/suleiman_denies_rejecting_orthodox_draft_to_please_lebanons_muslims

6. SYRIA

- **Syrian opposition leader renews call for dialogue**

TEHRAN, Feb. 5 (MNA) – A day after he met Iranian and Russian Foreign Ministers, the Head of the so-called Syrian National Council, Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib said on Monday his hand was extended for dialogue.

"The ball is now in the regime's court. They will either say yes or no," Khatib said on Monday, following up on his surprise announcement last week that he was ready to meet government officials.

"I say to Bashar al-Assad: look into the eyes of your children and try to find a solution ... We can help each other in the interest" of the people, Khatib added.

"The regime needs to take a clear position. We will extend our hands for the sake of the people, and in order to help the regime leave in peace," he said.

While some opposition figures immediately denounced Khatib's proposal as traitorous, he said on Monday he "rejected" the label.

"Our people are dying, and we will not allow that," Khatib said.

He had on Sunday held talks with Iran's Ali Akbar Salehi at a security conference in the southern German city of Munich, which the Iranian foreign minister on Monday said were to be continued.

"We had 45 (minutes) to an hour discussion which was very fruitful... and we committed ourselves to continue this discussion," Salehi told a foreign-policy think-tank in Berlin.

Khatib also held a meeting in Munich on Sunday with Russia's Sergei Lavrov, who while expressing an interest in "maintaining regular contact" with the opposition, also said the dissidents' insistence on Assad going was "the main

reason for the continuation of the Syrian tragedy."

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1809072>

- **Syria defence minister: Army will beat rebels**

Fahed al-Frej hints that Syrian army will not retaliate over an Israeli airstrike near Damascus last week.

Syria's defence minister said on Monday that the army would succeed against rebels trying to overthrow president Bashar al-Assad, and hinted that Syria would not respond to an Israeli airstrike near Damascus last week.

"This heroic Syrian Arab army proved to the world that it is a strong army, a trained army, an army that cannot be broken," Fahed al-Frej told state television.

He portrayed the air raid as a response to the failure of the rebels, who he described as "tools" of Israel.

Diplomats and security sources have said the strike targeted a convoy of weapons

destined for Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon. But Syria has said Israeli planes struck a military research centre at Jamraya, northwest of Damascus.

"Why does Syria not respond? It's the Israeli enemy which responded ... When the Israeli enemy saw that its tools were being pursued, and they did not achieve their results, it intervened," Freij said.

"It is a response to our military work against the armed gangs," he added, referring to the rebels.

'Gaps in radar coverage'

Syria protested last week to the United Nations over the Israeli raid, saying it considered the strike a violation of a military disengagement accord following their last major war in 1973.

Syria's ambassador to Lebanon also warned that Syria could decide on a "surprise" response to the attack.

Freij admitted that rebels have targeted Syrian air defences over the past few months, and said that the army leadership

has positioned them all in one safe place, leading to "gaps in radar coverage."

"These gaps became known to the armed gangs and the Israelis who undoubtedly coordinated together to target the research centre," he said.

He suggested that the army was overstretched and having difficulty retaining control over several positions across the country, adding they had to abandon some areas in order to minimise casualties.

Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak implied that his country was behind the raid but officials have otherwise maintained silence, just as they did when Israel bombed a suspected Syrian nuclear site in 2007.

That attack did not prompt military retaliation.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/02/201324224017277233.html>

- **Syria opposition presses Assad over dialogue**

National Coalition leader urges President Assad to take a clear stance on his initiative for dialogue.

Syrian opposition leader Mouaz al-Khatib has urged President Bashar al-Assad to take a clear stance on his initiative for dialogue, adding that it was aimed at ending the bloodshed and to "help the regime leave peacefully".

Al-Khatib, speaking to Al Jazeera after meeting Russian and US officials in Germany, said major powers had no vision for a solution to the war in Syria and only Syrians could decide on a way forward.



"The regime must take a clear stand [on dialogue] and we say we will extend our hand for the interest of people and to help the regime leave peacefully," he said.

"The ball is now in the regime's court. They will either say yes or no,"

Last week al-Khatib said he was ready to hold talks with Assad's representatives if the government released around 160,000 detainees and renew passports for Syrians stranded outside the country. But his call was met with criticism from within his own coalition, which refuses dialogue with Assad and says he must leave.

'Humanitarian' initiative

Al-Khatib, leader of the National Coalition, a bloc of exiled opposition groups, said his initiative was "humanitarian" in order to save Syrian lives and what remains of the country's infrastructure after nearly two years of conflict.

"The big powers have no vision [for a solution] ... Only the Syrian people can decide on the solution."

He also said that forming a transitional government with full powers was one of the options under discussion after the meeting in Munich. He did not elaborate.

"We will find a solution, there are many keys. If the regime wants to solve [the crisis] it can take part in it," he said.

"If it wants to get out and get the people out of this crisis we will all work together for the interest of the people and the departure of the regime."

Al-Khatib's comments came as Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran would continue talks with the Syrian opposition following a preliminary meeting at the weekend.

"We had 45 [minutes] to an hour discussion which was very fruitful... and we committed ourselves to continue this discussion," Salehi told a foreign-policy think-tank in Berlin.

Al-Khatib also held a meeting in Munich on Sunday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who while expressing an interest in "maintaining regular contact" with the opposition, also said the dissidents' insistence on Assad going was "the main reason for the continuation of the Syrian tragedy."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/02/201324141755692679.html>

- **Syria rebels tighten noose around key Idlib city**

In Syria's war-torn Idlib province, rowdy children leap around about a rifle-shot's distance away from a regime checkpoint, playing next to armed rebel fighters in green gardens.

Insurgents have tightened their noose around the city of Jisr al-Shughur, held by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, but refrain for now from staging further attacks, and an eerie calm prevails in surrounding villages.

In the hilltop hamlet of Ayni Seda, residents live as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. But below, trucks and troops pass over Jisr al-Shughur's Roman-era bridge that straddles the Orontes River.

Villagers come and go nonchalantly, in the line of sight of regime snipers and artillery gunners taking cover behind sandbags that dot the roofs of houses in the center of town.

"The soldiers told us that if one bullet is fired from here, they'll destroy the

village," says Radwan Haji, a local member of the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA).

The rebels therefore stay still.

Army snipers fire the occasional shot at a house "when they see unusual activity," a neighbor says.

Jisr al-Shughur and Idlib city, the provincial capital, are the two key urban areas in the Sunni-dominated region on the border with Turkey that remain under the control of the Damascus central government.

After six months of fierce fighting and heavy losses, the rebels have captured a string of army checkpoints, military bases and loyalist strongholds.

Some residents, exhausted by the bloodshed, say the rebel advance has been slow but the insurgents insist that Assad's troops cannot curb their progress.

Despite the relative calm that prevails east of Jisr al-Shughur, fierce clashes have raged in the north and west of the city.

"The city is surrounded by rebels in the north, the east and the west," Hassan, the

second-in-command of the FSA's Hurriya (Freedom) brigade, said.

"From each direction we are one kilometer (about a mile) from the city," he added.

Only the road from the south that leads into Idlib city remains rebel-free.

Hassan says the rebels are being prevented from advancing on that axis because of the presence of three to four villages home to Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam and the religious community from which Assad hails.

Rebels north of Jisr al-Shughur captured the towns of Darkush and Zarzur three months ago, and in recent days they seized the Christian villages of Al-Yaqubia and Janudia which dominate the Orontes valley.

Most of Al-Yaqubia's residents have fled, and the houses are shut and boarded up but some doors and shutters have been kicked in and rebels occupy several homes along the main street.

The black-clad fighters of the jihadist group the Al-Nusra Front, who are omnipresent elsewhere in the province, are not to be seen in and around Jisr al-Shughur, but the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham brigades are present.

The rebels plan to capture the city, Hassan says, but want to "spare the lives of the many civilians who are held hostage there by the army."

"They're using the population as a shield and have turned the city into an open-air prison."

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/syria_rebels_tighten_noose_around_key_idlib_city

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Bahrain rejects the settlement offer to MEK

TEHRAN, Feb. 4 (MNA) –Bahrain Foreign Minister has rejected the settlement offer to host MEK group in their territory.

According to the Bahrain News Agency, Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed

al-Khalifa has denied the reports regarding settlement offer to MEK group.

“This news is not true, and I have no information about this subject,” he added.

A few days ago, there was a report that a UN official in Iraq has said through the US ambassador in Manama that Bahrain is ready to accommodate MEK on its territory.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1808669>

- **Kuwait top court confirms jail for tweeter**

Kuwait's supreme court has confirmed a 10-year jail term for an activist convicted of using Twitter to insult the emir and call for the overthrow of the regime, a report said on Tuesday.

Al-Jarida newspaper said the verdict against Orance al-Rasheedi, who was also convicted of spreading false news about Kuwait to undermine the oil-rich country's image, is final and cannot be challenged.

Rasheedi was accused of using the social networking sites Twitter and YouTube to

publicly insult the emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who is protected against criticism by Kuwait's constitution.

The lower court meted out the sentence against Rasheedi in October 2011 and the court of appeals upheld it in May last year.

Kuwait has in the past few months intensified its clampdown on Internet activists who allegedly violate the country's laws, especially since the opposition began staging demonstrations to protest amendments to the electoral law.

The courts have already jailed several activists and many others are awaiting trial.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-top-court-confirms-jail-for-tweeter>

- **Bahrain to resume national dialogue February 10**

Bahrain's Justice Ministry announced Monday that national talks aimed to end the kingdom's political stalemate will resume on February 10 after an earlier round failed to bring the opposition onboard.

Justice Minister Khalid bin Ali al-Khalifa said that the dialogue will reconvene on Sunday, February 10, after he met representatives of the six opposition groups, as well as eight other associations that are on good terms with the government, BNA state news agency reported.

The opposition groups included Al-Wefaq, the largest formation in the Shiite-majority Gulf state that is ruled by the Sunni Al-Khalifa dynasty.

It was not clear if the government would participate in the dialogue as a party, or just preside over the talks.

King Hamad called in January for a new round of talks in a move cautiously welcomed by the opposition which had shunned earlier invitations, as protests continue in the kingdom despite a heavy-handed crackdown on demonstrations in March 2011.

The opposition has repeatedly said it is ready for a meaningful dialogue, but has stuck to its demands for a real

constitutional monarchy with an elected prime minister.

Al-Wefaq, which had pulled out of a similar round of talks in July 2011, said in December that it was ready for new dialogue.

Bahrain has been shaken by unrest since its forces crushed two years ago popular Shiite-led protests demanding greater rights and an end to what they said was discrimination by the Sunni royals.

The International Federation for Human Rights says 80 people have been killed since the start of the Arab Spring-inspired uprising on February 14, 2011.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/bahrain_to_resume_national_dialogue_february_10

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Afghan and Pakistani presidents hold talks in Britain

In a new bid to open a new channel of peace talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan, British PM Cameron hosts a summit near London with the

participation of political and security establishments from both the Asian countries

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari held peace talks with British Prime Minister David Cameron on Monday which for the first time featured top spy chiefs.

The summit at Cameron's Chequers country retreat near London is aimed at boosting cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, amid growing fears that a civil war could erupt when international troops leave Afghanistan in 2014.

"This trilateral process sends a very clear message to the Taliban -- now is the time for everyone to participate in a peaceful political process in Afghanistan," a British government spokeswoman said.

"For the first time, we will bring together the political and security establishments from both Afghanistan and Pakistan, with foreign ministers, chiefs of army staff, chiefs of intelligence and the chair of the Afghan High Peace Council attending the meeting."

Support from Pakistan, which backed Afghanistan's 1996-2001 Taliban regime, is seen as crucial to peace after NATO troops depart -- but relations between the neighbours remain uneasy despite some recent improvements.

Both Kabul and Washington have regularly accused Pakistan of helping to destabilise Afghanistan.

But Afghan peace negotiators have welcomed Pakistan's release of dozens of Taliban prisoners in recent months, a move they believe could help bring militants to the negotiating table.

Cameron hosted a private dinner for Karzai and Zardari at Chequers on Sunday evening, ahead of Monday's in-depth talks between the leaders and their officials.



Traffic on one of Britain's busiest motorways was slowed down on Sunday night as a motorcade accompanied by police cars with blue flashing lights took the dignitaries to Cameron's country residence, an AFP reporter saw.

These are the third trilateral talks in a year following meetings in Kabul in July and New York last September -- but they are the first in which Pakistani and Afghan army and intelligence chiefs will also take part.

In an interview with Britain's Guardian newspaper and ITV television station released late Sunday, Karzai said the biggest threat to peace in Afghanistan was not the Taliban, but meddling from foreign powers.

"Peace will only come when the external elements involved in creating instability and fighting, or lawlessness in Afghanistan, are involved in talks," he said, without naming any particular country.

The president also suggested Western troops had been "fighting in the wrong place" in Afghanistan, saying security in

the southern Helmand province was better before British troops arrived there.

A statement released by his office said the talks in Britain would be "focused on ways to accelerate the peace process in Afghanistan and further strengthen cooperations between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the fight against terrorism and extremism".

Karzai is also due to meet the heir to the British throne Prince Charles during his three-day trip to Britain, which began on Saturday.

Britain still has around 9,000 troops in Afghanistan ahead of a scheduled withdrawal in 2014.

Afghan soldiers and police are taking on responsibility for battling Taliban militants from the 100,000 NATO troops due to depart by the end of next year.

But more than 60 foreign soldiers were killed in 2012 in "insider attacks" by members of Afghanistan's security forces, which have bred mistrust and threatened to derail the training process.

Afghan forces are also increasingly being targeted by Taliban bombers as they take on a greater security role.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/64018/World/International/Afghan-and-Pakistani-presidents-hold-talks-in-Brit.aspx>

- **Pakistan plans 'amusement city' for bin Laden town**

Pakistan is planning to build a \$30 million amusement park with a zoo and adventure sports facilities in the town where Osama bin Laden was killed by US special forces, officials said Monday.

The 50-acre (20-hectare) riverside development on the edge of Abbottabad, where US Navy SEALs shot the Al-Qaeda leader dead on May 2, 2011, will include restaurants, a heritage centre and artificial waterfalls.

The government of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province hopes the project, announced as a public-private partnership, will boost tourism but denied it was intended to improve the town's image after the humiliation of the bin Laden raid.

"The amusement city will be built on 50 acres in the first phase but later will be extended to 500 acres," Syed Aqil Shah, the provincial minister for tourism and sports, told AFP.

"It will have a heritage park, wildlife zoo, food street, adventure and paragliding clubs, waterfalls and jogging tracks."



Work is due to begin in late February or early March, he said, and will take eight years to complete. Funds worth three billion rupees (\$30 million) have been allocated, he said.

Abbottabad, a quiet, leafy town nestling in the foothills of the Himalayas around 50 kilometres (30 miles) north of Islamabad, has long been a popular spot for well-heeled families from the capital to spend weekends away.

The town also houses Pakistan's elite military academy and the discovery of the world's most wanted man on its doorstep prompted allegations of incompetence or complicity between the armed forces and the 9/11 mastermind.

But Shah insisted the new development was simply about promoting tourism, not polishing the town's tarnished image.

"This project has nothing to do with Osama bin Laden," he told AFP.

"We are working to promote tourism and amusement facilities in the whole province and this project is one of those facilities."

The authorities demolished the compound where bin Laden hid with his wives and children last February, fearing it could become a shrine to Al-Qaeda followers.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/64010/World/International/Pakistan-plans-amusement-city-for-bin-Laden-town.aspx>

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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