



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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1. IRAQ

- **"No deal between Maliki and Mutlaq"
Haider al-Mulla says.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / the National Dialogue Front, headed by Saleh al-Mutlaq denied any deal between al-Mutlaq and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, describing the subject as "defamation and political targeting intended to divert the attention of people away from what this movement had achieved since its beginning as he put it.

The spokesman of the National Dialogue Front, Haider Mulla said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "We are, at the National Dialogue Front, and through its Secretary General Saleh al-Mutlaq, we are still the backbone of the Iraqiya List."

Mulla expressed his regret that some are still continuing to use political targeting style, calling: "to think in the interests of citizens and providing real reform programs, instead of wasting time in fabricating news used for defamation and political targeting."

Some media have talked about a deal between Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his deputy; Saleh al-Mutlaq, the last gets the Ministry of Finance to one his allies, and to withdraw from Iraqiya List and form a new political alliance, later joined by Saad al-Janabi, head of Republican assembly.

The media attributed its news to unnamed sources, but described it as informed source as saying: "The deal includes the return of the Minister of Education, Mohammad Tamim and Industry Minister, Ahmed Karbouli to Cabinet meetings tomorrow Tuesday.

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

- **Kurdish MP calls to review their
alliance with the National Alliance.**

Sulaymaniyah / NINA / A member of the Kurdistan Alliance, the MP, Leila Hassan called on the Kurds to review their alliance with the National Alliance.

She said, in a press statement that the number of the components of the National Alliance were with the Kurds and support them before the vote on the

budget, but they did not take any position in favor of the Kurds during the vote.

She explained that some parties resort to the Kurds during crises, but when they are in a position of power, we see how they are against the Kurds.

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

- **Kurds: Withdraw ministers and economic independence among the options.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / A member of the Kurdistan Alliance, Adel Berwari said: "withdraw Kurds' Ministers from the government and declaring the independence of Kurdistan economically is among the options that we hope not to use in response to the federal government's refusal to pay the dues of the oil companies operating in the region."

He explained in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "All options are currently before the province after passing the budget in the absence of the Kurdistan Alliance and the Iraqiya List," adding: "There are continued

meetings and dialogues between the Iraqiya List and the authority of the Kurdistan region, but so far we cannot be certain that the withdrawal of Kurdish Ministers from the federal government is the only option now, this talk is still premature. "

Berwari pointed out that among the options is declaring the independence of the region economically, since there are oil companies the government refuses to pay their dues, "noting:" There is a pressure card now in the hands of Kurdistan, and this card is largest than amount that the federal government rejects to pay to the oil companies operating in the region. "

He added: "The federal government could not impose an economic blockade on the region, but the opposite is true, since Abraham al-Khalil port towards Europe is in the hands of Kurdistan, as well as the border ports with Iran and others, and the oil wells, even in Kirkuk, within the control of Kurdistan, and we hope not to reach this extent to use these cards, we always seek to resolve things peacefully, and we hope economic differences not to be broader and deeper God forbid. "

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

- **Mahmoud Othman: Approving the budget in this way delayed Barzani's initiative.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The Kurdish independent MP, Mahmoud Othman considered approving the budget for the current year in such way has delayed the initiative of the President of the Kurdistan region to resolve the political crisis.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / "We have consulted with the state of law about vote on the budget in style of national consensus," noting that "approving the budget in this way is an evidence that they, unfortunately, did not response with us."

Othman added, "It was supposed that the President of the region's Office visits Baghdad for the current period to work on activating the initiative of the president of the region, but developments that happened, especially passing the budget delayed this visit."

It is mentioned that Kurdistan Alliance said that passing the federal budget, without the presence of any Kurdish lawmaker, is an indication of the end of the era of the national partnership.

The coalition spokesman MP, Mo'aid al-Tayyib said in a press statement that "the foundations of the political process, from the beginning, are compatibility, balance and partnership, and we started noting there is a clear breach in many of the critical and important issues," adding that "passing the budget, without the presence one Kurdish lawmaker is a serious indicator to the end of the era of national partnership, which is a fixed principle , not in the current Iraqi constitution, but even in the old constitutions of Iraq, which stipulated that Kurds and Arab are partners in the homeland. "

He added that "the cause, of what is going on, is prejudice to the foundations of partnership and balance, as well as the lack of confidence and respect for agreements with the Kurdistan Regional Government." He pointed out that "during the meeting, held by the President of the Kurdistan region with the representatives of the Kurdish blocs in the federal

government and the House of Representatives, yesterday a decision was taken to invite Kurdish Ministers and Deputy Prime Minister in the federal government to consult in order to make a crucial decision in the coming days.

The House of Representatives had voted on Thursday, in the presence of 168 deputies, on the state budget for the current year in a clear absence of Kurds MPs and some of Iraqiya MPs.

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

- **Maliki calls to endorse strict laws against terrorism agitators**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, called to endorse strict laws against the terrorism agitators.

While participating in the National Awareness and Legal Refinement Conference held in Baghdad on Sunday, Maliki said "There should be strict laws against those who attempt at dividing the society and conduct he terrorism according to the sect and nationality."

"We hope from this Conference to have the chance for the communication between the jurists and the legislative foundations to spread the national and legal awareness among the people and to make them aware of their rights to go on the building process," he added.

"The national and legal awareness is not limited to one side where its first step starts from eliminating the illiteracy to make the people aware of their duties and legal rights and then it goes on the security, military aspects where in Iraq, as a democratic country, we are adherent to having a well educated people in the military foundations who are aware of the people's rights," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29949:maliki-calls-to-endorse-strict-laws-against-terrorism-agitators&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

- **Mohammadawi calls Nijaifi to resign**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Secretary General of Sons of Iraq Alliance, Abbas al-Mohammadawi, called the parliament Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi, to resign due to

calling the ministers of the Iraqiya Slate to submit their resignations.

In a press statement received by AIN, he said "Nijaifi has to resign and leave the political process along with his brother, Athil al-Nijaifi, the Governor of Nineveh province after lying on the citizens of Nineveh province by assuring that they will make the Kurds leave the province and the disputed areas where the Kurds helped Nijaifi to have his post as the parliament Speaker."

"It is strange that Nijaifi calls the ministers of the IS to submit their resignations and he keeps his post," he added, noting that "It is better for Nijaifi and his brother to submit their resignations before others."

He called "Nijaifi not to participate in the next elections to preserve his fame and reputation in addition not to reveal the foreign sides supporting him."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29951:mohammadawi-calls-nijaifi-to-resign&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19

- **Musawi urges politicians to endorse delayed law drafts**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Salman al-Musawi, of the State of Law Coalition assured that the stance of MPs, who voted on the endorsement of the budget law while they belong to blocs that rejected its endorsement, is courageous.

Speaking to AIN, he called "The executive institutions to speed up activating the hindered issues due to the delay of the Budget endorsement."

He urged "The politicians to head towards the endorsement of the delayed laws and to stop the methods that oppose the interests of any one."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29942:musawi-urges-politicians-to-endorse-delayed-law-drafts&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19

- **Gunman killed in Mosul**

Nineveh, Mosul (AIN) –A security force killed a gunman during armed clashes that took place to the north of Mosul city.

Security source mentioned to AIN on Sunday "The Iraqi Army, 2nd Division, managed to kill a gunman who was involved in assassinating a civilian by silenced weapon in Siddiq neighborhood of northern Mosul."

"The gunman is also accused of attacking a security checkpoint of the Iraqi Army in the same area," the source added.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29989:gunman-killed-in-mosul&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51

- **Iraqiya Coalition condemns assassinations campaign for its members**

Baghdad (AIN) -The United National Iraqiya Coalition condemned on Sunday, the continuity of the targeting and marginalization against the Coalition's members.

A statement by the Coalition cited that "Unfortunately, the process of marginalizing and assassinating the Iraqiya Coalition is going on where this targeting

is also pointed to all the other national forces in Iraq."

"The brothers Nafa' Daoud and Rifa Daoud, the activists within the Coalition and members of the National Accord Movement were assassinated by an IED in Baghdad on last Saturday. While the three brothers Mithaq Ali Jiad, Hussein Ali Jiad and Yusif Ali Jiad, members of the Iraqiya Coalition were also assassinated on last Thursday, along with Ahmed Qasim and Kamal Abbas, members of the Iraqiya Coalition," the statement added.

"We would like to stress our perseverance towards adopting our approach despite the malicious schemes and intrigues which target the national project that would help move Iraq away from the sectarianism," the statement added.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29983:iraqiya-coalition-condemns-assassinations-campaign-for-its-members-&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51

- **Barzani discusses region's budget demands with Kurdish ministers**

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish region's presidency sources said that President Masoud Barzani is having discussions with the Kurdish ministers at the central government, in addition to Kurdish parliamentary blocs on the demands of the region in the federal budget of 2013.

The source told Aswat al-Iraq that the conferees will "discuss the final decision on the budget and its aftermath".

It is expected that a statement will be issued pointing Kurdish opinion on the endorsement of the budget despite the absence of the Kurdish and Iraqiya MPs.

Yesterday, the Kurdish regional government issued a statement saying that "the budget does not serve the interests of the Kurdish people".

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28tcb2sd55glersh45ug1c13mp%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152667&l=1

- **Kobler calls for "independent investigation in Mosul incident"**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: UN representative to Iraq Martin Kobler called that the use "mortal force" should be

avoided, calling for "independent investigation" in Mosul incident.

In a statement issued here today, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, he denounced killing and injuring the demonstrators in Mosul yesterday.

He called the Iraqi government to resort to the utmost "self-restraint" in dealing with the demonstrators.

On the other hand, he called the demonstrators to "peacefully" express their demands during their activities.

He pointed out that "this grave incident should remind us that the constructive dialogue is the main way to solve crises".

Aswat al-Iraq correspondent reported, yesterday, that the violent actions of yesterday, Friday, resulted in one killing and 8 wounded.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28tcb2sd55glersh45ug1c13mp%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152661&l=1

- **Kuwait charged of acquisition Iraqi territories in Um Qasr**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Free Iraqiya MP Alia Nsaif charged Kuwait today to control Iraqi territories in Um Qasr, south Basra.

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, she added that Kuwait will control the site of 250 houses, calling Iraqi masses to reject such move.

Nsaif pointed out that Kuwait utilized the UN Chapter VII when demarcating the borders, but remained silent on the matter in 1993.

She pointed out that "this farce is continuing under UN observation and the blessings of its representative in Iraq".

"It is painful that most of Iraqi politicians are occupied with their endless differences, while Kuwait is gaining more of Iraqi lands", she confirmed.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28tcb2s_d55glersh45ug1c13mp%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152665&l=1

- **Call to endorse General Amnesty Law, MP**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc MP Itab al-Douri urged the parliament today to endorse the General Amnesty Law,

following the adoption of the federal budget law.

She warned against the desires of some MPs not to endorse the laws demanded by the demonstrators.

Douri expressed astonishment for "shy governmental moves in implementing the legitimate demands of the demonstrators that cover north and south parts of the country.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28tcb2s_d55glersh45ug1c13mp%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152658&l=1

- **Car bomb explosion in Kirkuk**

Shafaq News / A source in Kirkuk police said on Monday, that a number of people, including security personnel have been killed while others have been wounded in a suicide bombing in Debes district , northwest of Kirkuk.

The source said in an interview with "Shafaq News" that "The suicide bomber was driving a car bomb and targeted a mall shop near a police station and a fuel station in Debes district in the north-west

of Kirkuk, killing two people, one of them is a policeman and wounded eight people."

The source, who asked not to be named, said that "the security forces cordoned off the scene and opened an investigation about it, while ambulances rushed to transfer the wounded people to the hospital for treatment and the dead people to the forensic medicine department."

<http://www.shafaag.com/en/news/5488-urgent-car-bomb-explosion-in-kirkuk.html>

2. IRAN

- **Interior Minister to Represent Iran in Paris Pact Conference**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar is due to attend the ministerial conference of the Paris Pact Partners on Combating Illicit Traffic supported by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna on Tuesday.

The Paris Pact is one of the most important frameworks in the fight against opiates originating in Afghanistan.

It is aimed at reducing illicit traffic in opiates including opium poppy cultivation, production and global consumption of heroin and other opiates, and at establishing a broad international coalition to combat illicit traffic in opiates. It relies on the commitments and ambitions of its partner-countries working in consultation with the UNODC and in full conformity with the three international drug control conventions and the Political Declaration and Plan of Action adopted by the High-level Segment of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2009.

According to the UNODC, these days, 93% of the world's opium is produced in the neighboring Afghanistan, 60% of which is destined for the EU and specially US markets. And the main transit route is Iran, where the country's dedicated police squad risk their lives to make the most discoveries of drug cargoes, disband drug-trafficking gangs and organizations and much more in a bid to rescue not only the Iranian youth but also all those living in Europe and the US.

According to the statistical figures released by the UN, Iran ranks first among

the world countries in preventing entry of drugs and decreasing demand for narcotics.

The United Nations credits Iran with the seizure of 89% of the opium netted around the world.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian police have lost more than 3700 of their personnel in the country's combat against narcotics.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107151926>

- **Spokesman: Iran-Oman Ties President Model for Regional Cooperation**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast lauded the close ties and cooperation between Iran and Oman, and stated that the friendly relations between the two sides set a role model for cooperation among the regional states.

Speaking at a meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi in Muscat on Sunday, Mehman-Parast said the relations between Tehran and Muscat are "friendly and brotherly" and are based on abundant

commonalities and shared views of the two sides.

Thus, he said, these relations present a role model for regional cooperation.

Mehman-Parast further pointed to the sensitivity of the Persian Gulf and the Middle-East region, and said "regional stability and security" sets a priority for the Islamic Republic.

He underlined the necessity for cooperation and interaction among the regional states to maintain stability and security in the region.

Alawi, for his part, pointed to Iran's key position in the region, and asked for continued cooperation and interaction among the regional states, including Iran and Oman, to resolve the regional problems.

Also during the meeting, the two sides discussed the latest regional developments including the crisis in Syria.

Iran and Oman have expanded cooperation in a variety of areas such as economy and defense since Iran's

President Ahmadinejad took office in 2005. The two countries signed a security agreement in August 2009.

In August 2010, Iran and Oman signed an agreement to further boost mutual cooperation in the field of defense.

In December 2010, the Iranian parliament approved a bill that allows Tehran to implement an agreement on security cooperation and coordination with Oman.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107151806>

- **Omani FM Pleased with Iran-G5+1 Talks in Almaty**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi expressed pleasure in the positive atmosphere dominating the recent talks between Iran and the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and expressed the hope that the future rounds of talks between the two sides would yield better results.

The last round of the talks between Tehran and the six world powers was held in Almaty on February 26-27.

During the talks Iran and the world powers agreed to hold an experts meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, on March 17-18 and then continue their talks at the level of their top negotiators in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on April 5-6.

Speaking at a meeting with visiting Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast in Muscat on Sunday, Alawi said Oman supports talks and negotiations and is strongly opposed to the use of force and pressure.

He praised the positive atmosphere reigning in the Almaty talks, and hoped that Iran and the sextet could attain "desirable and fruitful" results in their upcoming talks.

Before Almaty, Iran and the G5+1 had held three rounds of negotiations in Geneva, two rounds in Istanbul, one round in Baghdad and one round in Moscow. But the latest round of talks was different as it was the only meeting in which the West

started recognizing Iran's nuclear rights, including uranium enrichment.



Following the talks, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said the revised proposal presented by the Group 5+1 to Iran in Almaty talks also included Iran's offer.

Speaking to reporters at a press conference at the end of the talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Ashton said that the G5+1 have offered a "revised and constructive" proposal to the Iranian side, adding that the proposal also reflects the concerns of the international community.

"Iran's proposals have been included in the revised plan," she said, but at the same time refused to provide further details about the revised offer.

Ashton said experts should discuss and study the plan and Iran will have the time to study the plan as well.

She stated that the G5+1 member states are united and want to be "positive towards confidence-building", and added, "The Iranian side had a positive view and this makes me hopeful. We strove much on behalf of the UN to reach tangible results and build confidence."

"Mr. Jalili has a positive view, but we should look to see what experts' view will be," she added.

Iran's lead negotiator Saeed Jalili, for his part, announced that the Group 5+1 have in Almaty talks proposed that both Iran and the world powers take certain tangible steps to build each other's confidence more.

"The Group 5+1 (the US, Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany) proposed that some tangible steps be taken in the next 6 months to build confidence, and certain proposals were presented in this regard," Jalili said at the press conference in Almaty after two days of talks with the world powers.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107151802>

- **Iran resolved to enhance ties with all independent states: Ahmadinejad**

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's determination to expand its relations with all the independent states across the globe.



“The Islamic Republic of Iran will steadfastly pursue the expansion of its ties with independent countries, including Benin, and considers that to be to the benefit of the two nations as well as all sovereign states,” said Ahmadinejad during a Sunday meeting with Benin's Foreign Minister Nassirou Bako-Arifari in the Iranian capital city, Tehran.

The Iranian chief executive also described the relations between Tehran and Porto-Novo as “brotherly and expanding.”

Bako-Arifari, for his part, expressed satisfaction with the pace of the

implementation of mutual agreements between Iran and Benin and noted that the January visit by Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi to the West African country remarkably facilitated the process.

Benin's foreign Minister, whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the African Union, also hailed the positive atmosphere of Iran's comprehensive negotiations with the P5+1 group (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) in the Kazakh city of Almaty on February 26 and 27.

Bako-Arifari expressed optimism that Iran's nuclear energy rights would be fully recognized.

During the meeting, the two sides also extended their condolences over the death of late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez last Tuesday.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/11/292973/iran-to-expand-ties-with-independent-states/>

- **Iran's Army to test-fire new indigenous missile systems: Cmdr.**

Iran successfully tested Ya Zahra 3 indigenous missile system during the third day of a massive drill on Wednesday, November 14, 2012.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defense capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

A senior Iranian commander says the Army Ground Forces plan to test-fire new indigenously-manufactured missile systems in an upcoming military exercise due to be held by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2013).



“New systems manufactured by [Iran’s] Defense Industries [Organization] have been delivered to the Army’s Ground Forces and these systems will be tested in the upcoming [missile] drills,” Commander of the Iranian Army Ground Forces

Brigadier General Ahmad-Reza Pourdastan said on Sunday.

The Iranian commander said that the maneuver is aimed at maintaining the preparedness and enhancing the defensive capabilities of the forces’ rocket-launching and missile units.

Commenting on the ongoing three-day military exercises in the country’s southwestern Khuzestan Province, Pourdastan said all objectives were achieved during the drill.

Iran’s Army Ground Forces launched the drill, codenamed Khatam al-Anbia, on Saturday, with the participation of tanks, artillery and mechanized units.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defense capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially its neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, stating that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/11/292952/iran-army-to-test-new-missile-systems/>

- **AL statement on three Persian Gulf islands, illegal: Mehmanparast**

Iran says the recent Arab League resolution on the three Persian Gulf islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa lacks legal and political credibility.



On Sunday evening, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast rejected the latest statement of the Cairo-based organization about the three Iranian islands.

Mehmanparast described the statement as a sign of the bloc's inability to assess regional issues correctly and to adopt a logical approach towards the ongoing crises in the Arab world, including in Syria,

Bahrain and the Palestinian occupied territories.

He said Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa islands are an inseparable part of Iran, adding that safeguarding security and stability of the Persian Gulf is the responsibility of all regional states.

The Iranian diplomat expressed hope that AL members would respect Tehran's sovereignty over the three Persian Gulf islands and focus instead on resolving other regional problems.

During the Arab League foreign ministerial meeting in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, the members objected to the presence of Iranians on the three islands and called for an end to it.

The United Arab Emirates has repeatedly made baseless claims over Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa islands.

However, the islands have always been part of Iran, proof of which can be found in and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/10/292902/al-statement-on-pg-islands-illegal/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• Dozens of settlers visit Nablus tomb

NABLUS (Ma'an) -- Dozens of settlers visited Joseph's tomb in Nablus early Monday, locals said.

More than 10 buses carrying the settlers were seen by the tomb amid a heavy Israeli military presence.



Israeli soldiers entered the city at 1 a.m. to provide security for the worshipers. Some local youth threw stones at the buses, witnesses said.

Under the 1993 Oslo Accords, the site was to remain under Israeli control. But the Israeli army evacuated the premises in October 2000 shortly after the start of the second intifada, or uprising, and it was immediately destroyed and burnt by the Palestinians.

The restoration of the tomb was completed recently, and following improved security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, the army allows Jewish worshipers to make monthly nocturnal pilgrimages to the site.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=573739>

• Party heads set to hash out final coalition details

Likud, Yesh Atid and Jewish Home said to agree on severe personal sanctions on ultra-Orthodox who dodge IDF service

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Yisrael Beytenu head Avigdor Liberman, Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid and Jewish Home chief Naftali Bennett were scheduled to reconvene at noon on Monday for further coalition talks, after a weekend of marathon negotiations that

didn't entirely patch up final disagreements between the various sides.

The potential coalition partners agreed on Sunday on a general outline of "severe personal sanctions" against Haredim who fail to sign up for IDF or national service, Ma'ariv reported. Reportedly, those who do not enlist will not face criminal charges, but will be prohibited from leaving the country and won't be eligible for welfare and tax benefits (including social security payments for large families), among other penalties.

In addition, religious educational institutions that encourage their students to dodge the draft, like some ultra-Orthodox yeshivas, will face a "significant" reduction in funding from the state.

The party leaders met for almost two hours on Sunday, but Yesh Atid said large gaps still remained, and Likud-Beytenu accused Lapid of stalling talks over demands for new universal draft legislation.

Netanyahu has until March 16 to form a governing coalition. If he fails, President Shimon Peres could ask another party

leader to try to form a government, or call for new general elections.

While most issues were said to have been resolved, the sides still needed to work out the final distribution of ministerial posts, among other issues, with Yesh Atid and Likud both apparently aiming to hold the education portfolio.

Likud was reportedly determined to see party member and current Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar maintain his position, while Yesh Atid would like the post to go to MK Rabbi Shai Piron.

Hopes have run high in the last several days for a new government to be sworn in by mid-week.

Speaking to members of his Yisrael Beytenu faction Sunday afternoon, MK Avigdor Liberman said he was certain a new government would be sworn in by week's end.

Another of the final sticking points appeared to be a disagreement between the largely secular Yesh Atid and the religious-hardline Jewish Home regarding an initiative to provide public

transportation on Saturday. One more issue that was holding up a deal was said to be Bennett's demand for the Public Diplomacy Ministry in addition to the position of industry, trade and labor minister.

Lapid, who had hoped to become foreign minister, will instead serve as finance minister. The Foreign Ministry post will be kept open for former FM Liberman, who resigned in December to fight corruption charges and hopes to clear his name and return quickly to the post.

The defense minister will likely be former IDF chief of the General Staff Moshe Ya'alon (Likud); Housing could well go to Jewish Home's Uri Ariel, while the same party's Eli Ben Dahan could take Religious Affairs; and Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz could become minister of welfare.

The coalition will likely comprise Netanyahu's Likud-Beytenu (31 seats), Yesh Atid (19), Jewish Home (12), Hatnua (6) and Kadima (2), for a total of 70. Labor (15) will lead an opposition that will also include the two ultra-Orthodox parties, Shas (11) and United Torah Judaism (7).

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/party-heads-set-to-hash-out-final-coalition-details/>

- **PA official: Gaza to export furniture to Egypt**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Gaza will export wooden furniture to Egypt on Monday, a Palestinian Authority crossings official said.

Raed Fattouh told Ma'an that 350 trucks with commercial and agricultural goods will enter the Gaza Strip via the Kerem Shalom crossing, while two truckloads of wooden furniture will leave for Egypt.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=573702>

- **PA: 50,000 drug addicts in East Jerusalem, West Bank**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The Palestinian Authority minister of health said Sunday that there are an estimated 50,000 drug addicts in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank.

Hani Abdin told Ma'an that the figures have encouraged the ministry to exert

efforts to raise awareness about drug addiction and work with partner organizations to fight drug use.

Director of public health, Dr. Asad Ramlawi, told Ma'an that a plan is being prepared by the ministry to support civil society groups tackling drug use and a hospital, expected to be completed in 2015, is being built in Ramallah to treat drug addicts.

Last year, anti-drugs campaigner Abdul Jabbar Yaraqan told Ma'an that figures for drug addiction in Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem are hard to estimate accurately.

In Shufat refugee camp, an area beyond the Palestinian Authority's reach, Palestinian drug addicts even say Israeli authorities have abandoned the problem on purpose, Yaraqan said.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=573708>

- **'Abbas was ready to compromise on right of return'**

PA president showed willingness to sign a deal that would severely limit the number of refugees allowed into Israel, New

Republic claims, but talks were cut short by Olmert's resignation

In 2008, Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas was close to accepting a peace agreement that would include only a symbolic Israeli concession to the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees, the New Republic reported on Monday.

According to the magazine's cover story by Ben Birnbaum, during peace talks between Abbas and then-Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, Olmert proposed allowing the relocation of a symbolic number of Palestinian refugees (5,000 over the course of five years) within Israeli borders, while offering compensation and resettlement for the rest.

"I would've compromised a little," Olmert is quoted as telling Birnbaum.

"Highly knowledgeable sources" quoted in the story claimed that Abbas told then-US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice that he would be willing to accept a deal wherein Israel would accept somewhere between 40,000 and 60,000 refugees.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) definitions, there are 30,000-50,000 living refugees of the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. That number grows to nearly five million when expanded to include the original refugees' patrilineal descendants.

"Our reading was that there was a deal to be done on [the refugee issue]," Stephen Hadley, then-US president George W. Bush's national security adviser, was quoted as saying.

Abbas agreed to consider the more limited proposal and said he had no intentions of undermining Israeli sovereignty, the report said.

"I can tell you one thing," Olmert quotes Abbas as saying. "We are not aspiring to change the nature of your country."

The New Republic also reported that over the course of Olmert and Abbas's talks, the two men agreed to divide Jerusalem largely along ethnic lines, similar to a proposal put forth by Bill Clinton in 2000, with both leaders agreeing that the most religiously sensitive areas in the Old City

be placed under the control of a five-nation consortium.

The pair reportedly also sought to identify a mutually agreeable set of land swaps, in which Israel would annex certain settlements and give the Palestinians equivalent chunks of land in exchange.

Olmert proposed that Israel annex some 6.3 percent of the West Bank and Gaza and compensate the Palestinians with a corresponding 5.8% of the size of the West Bank within Israeli territory, plus a corridor linking Gaza to the West Bank. The Palestinians reportedly countered with a proposal for a smaller, 1.9% land swap.

Olmert's offer would require Israel to evacuate 70,000 settlers, while the Palestinian proposal would mean the removal of some 160,000 people.

According to the report, in September 2008, Olmert showed Abbas a map of a Palestinian state comprising the territorial equivalent of 100% of the West Bank and Gaza, with its capital in East Jerusalem, to which Abbas responded, "This is quite serious. I have to admit, this is very

serious,” and promised to think about it. Olmert reportedly then retorted, “Don’t think about it. Sign it now. I want to tell you one thing: In the next 50 years, there will be no prime minister in Israel who will propose to you something similar to this.”

The discussions ended up going nowhere, the report said, in large part because Abbas believed that Olmert, who had announced that he planned to resign in order to fight corruption allegations, did not have the political clout to see the deal through.

According to Hadley, Bush felt the same way, and during a 2008 meeting with then-foreign minister and prospective Kadima head Tzipi Livni, the US president urged her to strike a deal with Abbas.

“The argument [was] the same for both sides: It’s, ‘Tzipi, you’ll never get to the right of [Benjamin] Netanyahu, so you might as well run to his left with something to run on.’ And to Abbas, it’s: ‘Look, Hamas is gonna to kill you. You can’t be tougher on this process than Hamas, so you ought to do what actually the Palestinian people want you to do, which is to reach an agreement, and you

each ought to run on that agreement, and if you do and show leadership and boldness, you’ll win.’” said Hadley.

Livni, who failed to heed Bush’s advice, went on to win 28 seats in the 2009 elections — one more than Netanyahu’s Likud party — but failed to form a coalition, landing Netanyahu in the prime minister’s seat. Livni, currently the head of the Hatnua party, recently joined Netanyahu’s emergent government, based, among other things, on a promise that she will oversee negotiations with the Palestinians.

During an interview with Channel 2 News in early November, Abbas took a notably moderate position on the refugee issue, and explicitly said that the Palestinians have no territorial demands on Israel in its pre-1967 lines.

When asked what he considered to be Palestine, Abbas responded, “Palestine now for me is the ‘67 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This is now and forever... This is Palestine for me. I am [a] refugee, but I am living in Ramallah.”



Interviewer Udi Segal cut in: “Sometimes your official television... speak[s] about Acre and Ramle and Jaffa [all cities within sovereign Israel] as ‘Palestine.’”

“I believe that [the] West Bank and Gaza is Palestine,” said Abbas, “and the other parts [are] Israel.”

Noting that he himself had been born in Safed, in what since 1948 has been northern Israel, Abbas said he had visited the town and would like to see it again, but not to make his home there. “It’s my right to see it, but not to live there,” he said.

Nimer Hammad, a political adviser to Abbas, later backtracked, claiming Abbas had merely referred hypothetically to what would occur when a Palestinian state is established.

“What was said is what is going to happen when the state of Palestine is established

alongside Israel,” said Hammad, “and therefore the president never mentioned the word giving up the ‘right of return.’”

Hammad said earlier that Abbas was being “realistic,” noting, “He knows he can’t bring back five-and-a-half million Palestinian refugees to Israel.”

Last November, despite stark opposition by both Israel and the US, Abbas led a successful Palestinian effort to be recognized as a nonmember observer state at the UN General Assembly.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-was-willing-to-compromise-on-right-of-return/>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Larayedh unveils new Tunisia government**

Tunisia's democratic transition is moving forward, with the Constituent Assembly set to vote on the country's latest cabinet line-up.

By Yasmin Najjar in Tunis for Magharebia
– 10/03/13

Tunisian Prime Minister-designate Ali Larayedh on Friday (March 8th) announced the composition of a new government after more than two weeks of consultations.

The National Constituent Assembly will vote Tuesday on whether or not to approve the new cabinet line-up, AFP reported. According to parliamentary spokesperson Karima Souid, the assembly will vote on the legislative's body agenda on Monday and then set dates for a vote on the new constitution as well as parliamentary and presidential elections.

"We reached, after marathon negotiations, an agreement on a government, as well as features of a programme that defines principles and priorities of a mission that will not exceed the end of this year," Larayedh explained at a Saturday press conference.

According to the prime-minister designate, "the next election will be held in November 2013 at the latest."

"Our country needs work, discipline and national unity," Larayedh said.

"We will face in strict terms anyone who violates the state and the laws," he emphasised. "You must be patient. The road to democracy is long."

The government's announcement comes after weeks of consultations involving six parties, before three withdrew leaving a coalition limited to the same one behind the previous government: Ennahda, the Congress for the Republic, and Ettakatol.

The new cabinet leaves four of the most prominent portfolios in the hands of independents. Former Kasserine prosecutor Lotfi Ben Jeddou will become interior minister, while veteran diplomat Othman Jarandi will become foreign minister. University professor Rachid Sabagh will head the defence ministry and former judge Nadhir Ben Ammou is set to become the new justice minister.

In the event the Constituent Assembly turns down the new cabinet, the President Moncef Marzouki will select a new prime minister-designate to form another government.

In a statement, opposition party al-Aridha al-Chaabia (Popular Petition) said that the

new government was a distorted version of the failed former government led by Hamadi Jebali. According to the same statement, the party's MPs will not give a vote of confidence when the new cabinet is presented to the National Constituent Assembly.

"CPR and Ettakatol enabled for the second time Ennahda to rule Tunisia and tighten its grip on the state and the Tunisian administration in return for formal positions and powers that are worthless on the ground," said Nizar Nsibi, chairman of the political affairs department within al-Aridha al-Chaabia.

Ettakatol Secretary-General and Constituent Assembly Speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar said Saturday that "the second stage of the democratic transition requires a clear calendar and the setting of a deadline for elections, and a national dialogue and consensus before the Constitution."

"Reaching a consensus during the consultations and especially depoliticising the ministries of sovereignty was achieved thanks to the efforts of all parties, particularly Ettakatol," Ben Jaafar added.

He noted, "Prime Minister Ali Larayedh played a valuable role during the consultations by seeking to unite all parties and trying to listen to their demands."

"Some made the same demands as Ettakatol and expressed the same goals, but when the demands materialised they refused to join the government and this is their right," Ben Jaafar said.

On the Tunisian street, where many were waiting impatiently for the new government, citizens welcomed the political progress.

"Despite economic and social losses, we finally lined up a government whose main objective is to move from this stage of transitions to elections that are fair in order to get the country out of this state of instability," observed Monia Betayeb.

She added, "Despite everything, I am optimistic that Tunisia will recover its health and lustre."

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/10/feature-01

- **Algeria gets serious about corruption**

Algeria will be better prepared to tackle fraud and embezzlement, politicians said following the inauguration of the anti-corruption office headquarters.

By Fidet Mansour in Algiers for Magharebia – 08/03/13

Algerian politicians on Monday (March 4th) responded to the inauguration of the headquarters of the Central Office to Combat Corruption (OCRC).

Finance Minister Karim Djoudi at Sunday's opening expressed the state's commitment to "stop at nothing to fight corruption or any other type of economic crime".

The office's headquarters came at a time where the Algerian press has exposed several financial scandals, the most significant case being state energy giant Sonatrach.

OCRC President Abdelmalek Sayeh said that his organisation was there "to rectify the issue".

"Since big corruption cases are a proven nuisance to the national economy, they will be a priority for the office," Sayeh said in a press release.

OCRC is an operational tool to combat the embezzlement of public funds. It was set up in 2011 as a central criminal investigation department responsible for searching and reporting offenses to their relevant jurisdictions.

The office "addresses cases passed down by official authorities, in addition to denunciation letters from the people", Sayeh said.

The office can refer the case to itself "when cases are exposed by the press and have become international matters", he added.

National Council President Abdelkader Bensalah emphasised the need "to get to the bottom of corruption".

"It tarnishes the image of Algeria and overlooks the country's massive accomplishments in multiple areas," he added.

Workers' Party (PT) leader Louisa Hanoune on Saturday pointed out the need to take firm and "coercive measures against the individuals implicated in corruption and the need to initiate an urgent political reform to shed the light on the handling of public funds".

"It was inconceivable to overlook information that addressed scandals and embezzlement of public funds," National Republican Alliance head Belkacem Sahli said on Saturday calling on public authorities to "be present in these matters in order to face corruption".

"The state with all its institutions is facing... many challenges that represent urgent demands," People's National Assembly (APN) President Mohamed Larbi Ould Khelifa said on Monday.

"There is a great majority of wholesome men and women in Algeria who hold many important positions and who make

sure that public funds are protected," he added.

For his part, accusing everyone could challenge the credibility of all the institutions as well as their leaders and weaken co-operation with Algeria.

Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) head Bouguerra Soltani shed more light on the issue during a recent press conference, saying that it was a complex, international problem.

"Corruption has spread to the point that it's structured and has become international. Certainly it's our money that's been stolen but the crime scene is abroad. And the perpetrator has another citizenship, which makes prosecuting difficult."

"Algerians are demanding that sanctions be imposed on individuals involved in these corruption matters. It's not enough to get a news story, you need to go further and judge all the people responsible for the embezzlement of public funds," customs worker Nadjet Merabet told Magharebia.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/08/feature-02

- **Morocco by-election bolsters majority**

By Siham Ali in Rabat for Magharebia – 08/03/13

Moroccan voters just sent a strong message to the opposition by awarding all five seats up for grabs to the ruling coalition.

After the 2011 legislative elections, results for eleven parliamentary seats were declared invalid. The 4-party ruling coalition, which claimed four of the disputed seats in earlier by-elections, gained five more on February 28th.

The Istiqlal party won three seats, while the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) and the Justice and Development Party (PJD) each added one. The Popular Movement (MP) gained no new seats.

The opposition has been relentlessly fierce in its criticism of the government and has accused the coalition of losing its popularity.

Popular Movement leader Mohamed Moubdiaa said that the recent results were a clear sign of the public's confidence in the government, despite the critical remarks levelled at it from all directions.

He also said that this situation should spur the governing coalition to satisfy the public's many demands.

Big challenges await the coalition, which has been dogged by internal conflicts over the past few months, political analyst Hamid Sendoussi said.

"The coalition parties would do well to pull together to deal with the economic and social challenges," he noted.



"Recently they have engaged in tussles which are harming the coalition's image and give the impression that they are not

acting in the public interest. Despite that, their candidates have managed to rally voters in their favour," he said.

The government will play this card against the opposition, he added.

Meanwhile, the opposition said that the government should not be complacent, since by-elections are not an indicator of the electoral weight of the different parties.

The by-elections were more about local issues than politics, according to Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) parliamentarian Mehdi Mezouari.

"I don't think it was the government's decisions that spurred people to vote for the coalition's candidates. In addition, irregularities were even announced by the coalition parties, including with regard to the use of money and local authority intervention," he said.

The opposition also highlighted the profile of voters and claims that the government failed to rally the middle class, which usually refrains from voting.

Many Moroccans say they are not interested in conflicts between the coalition and the opposition, but in the steps that need to be taken to improve the socio-economic situation.

The verbal exchanges between politicians in parliament or in the media do nothing to improve the daily lives of thousands of people, student Ahmed Chenbi said.

"The government is delighted with its victory in the elections. That is its right. But now it needs to get to work and focus less on talk which does not help to resolve thorny issues such as employment and pensions," he said.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/08/feature-03

- **FJP member recommends law allowing private firms to assume police duties**

Amid Egypt's ongoing police strike, member of Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom & Justice Party proposes draft law allowing use of private security firms to maintain public order

The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) is currently mulling draft legislation aimed at allowing the state to use private security firms for domestic policing duties, prominent FJP leader Saber Abul-Fotouh said on Saturday.

The proposal comes within the context of an ongoing nationwide strike by large numbers of Egyptian police officers.

According to Abul-Fotouh, who served as head of the labour committee in the People's Assembly (the now-dissolved lower house of Egypt's parliament), the legislation would give privately-owned security companies the right to carry arms and make arrests.

The proposed law – which Abul-Fotouh wants referred to the Shura Council (the upper house of Egypt's parliament, currently endowed with legislative powers) for ratification – is ostensibly meant to fill the security vacuum resulting from the ongoing police officers' strike.

"I'm calling for a draft law to be submitted to the Shura Council, and put before a popular referendum, to allow private

security firms to safeguard the state," Abul-Fotouh told Ahram Online.

"I also recommend the formation of popular committees tasked with safeguarding the citizenry and state institutions in the event that police continue their strike action," he added.

The twin calls come against the backdrop of what Abul-Fotouh describes as "the blackmail of the interior ministry by former regime loyalists who are spearheading a counter-revolution, which is to blame for Egypt's current state of turmoil."

Critics, however, argue that the proposals will simply serve to alienate the public and stir up further unrest.

Zakareya Abdel-Aziz, a former head of the Egyptian Judges Club, slammed the notion as "utterly absurd," warning that such moves – if they were put into effect – could potentially lead to civil war.

"Such a move [the employment of private security firms] would mean the replacement of institutionalised security operations with popular, non-technical

[security] operations," Abdel-Aziz asserted.

Abul-Fotouh, for his part, insisted the proposal was his own and had "nothing to do with the FJP," stressing that the move was not intended to serve the interests of any particular individuals or groups.

Meanwhile, the proposal was met with outrage by a number of rights activists and political figures, some of whom said it was meant to consolidate the Muslim Brotherhood's grip on state institutions and effectively legalise Brotherhood-formed militias.

Ahmed Fawzi, a rights lawyer and member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, described the move as "a continuation of the Islamist group's ongoing endeavours to monopolise power in all of its forms, whether it be police, army or judiciary."

Fawzi also dismissed proposals to form 'popular committees' to maintain public security along the lines of those seen during Egypt's 18-day Tahrir Square uprising following the countrywide withdrawal of police.

"We didn't have a state at the time [during the uprising]," he said. "If they [the FJP] think we're now at a similar juncture, then we should simply revolt all over again and re-build the state."

Ashraf Abdel-Latif of Egypt's ultra-conservative Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya also appeared to take issue with Abul-Fotouh's initiative, despite similar proposals recently voiced by his group.

"Such committees shouldn't be armed unless they're affiliated with the interior ministry," said Abdel-Latif.

On Friday, Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya announced plans to establish "security militias" tasked with securing the Upper Egyptian city of Assiut in the event that striking police failed to return to work.

Five police stations in Assiut joined the strike on Friday.

"We have called for setting up security committees – answerable to the interior ministry – tasked with combating thuggery and vandalism," Abdel-Latif clarified. "The people themselves should safeguard the

state rather than mandating private firms with maintaining security."

In a related development on Sunday, the office of Prosecutor-General Talaat Ibrahim called on members of the public to exercise their legal right to make citizen's arrests to stop those found committing acts of vandalism.

Last week, discontent within the ranks of Egypt's police apparatus boiled over, culminating in a nationwide strike.

Police personnel in several Egyptian governorates – including Cairo and Alexandria – have since joined the strike to demand the dismissal of the interior minister and a halt to what they see as their being used as pawns in the country's ongoing political stalemate.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/66570/Egypt/Politics-/FJP-member-recommends-law-allowing-private-firms-t.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Saudi Arabia not aiming to economically punish Lebanon, report says**

Saudi Deputy Prime Minister Muqrin bin Abdulaziz denied that his country was taking punitive economic action against Lebanon during a meeting with a delegation headed by former Lebanese minister Adnan Kassar.

"The Kingdom is keen on the presence of Lebanese nationals and they are always appreciated by the country's leadership," Al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper quoted him as saying during the Sunday gathering in Riyadh.

"The 600,000 Lebanese working in the Gulf cannot be held accountable for Hezbollah's reckless acts," he also reportedly said, in reference to allegations that the Shiite party is fighting against rebels in the Homs province.

The Saudi prince also reportedly said that there are no plans for Riyadh or private Saudi investors to withdraw their deposits from Lebanese banks.

The top Gulf kingdom official reportedly voiced Riyadh's support for Lebanon, saying that "the Kingdom's policy toward Lebanon will not change."

A delegation of Gulf Cooperation Council envoys met last week with Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, who assured them that Beirut would continue to maintain its official position of impartiality regarding the Syria crisis.

The president's comments came in response to a letter from the GCC voicing hope Lebanon would "commit in word and deed to the disassociation policy [in order to] avoid anything that would jeopardize Lebanon's security and stability."

Lebanese media outlets have reported that Gulf countries are upset over Hezbollah's alleged involvement in Syria have threatened to deport Lebanese workers.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/saudi-arabia-not-aiming-to-economically-punish-lebanon-report-says>

- **Iraq's Sadr in Beirut, report says**

Iraqi Shiite political figure Moqtada al-Sadr is on a visit to Lebanon, well-informed sources told As-Safir newspaper in an article published Monday.

The report said that the controversial cleric is leading a delegation of his Sadrist Movement on a tour of Beirut to meet with top Lebanese figures to discuss the situation in Iraq and Syria.

Sadr rose to prominence after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, leading a populist party that holds 40 seats in the Iraqi parliament.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/iraqs-sadr-in-beirut-report-says>

- **PSP leader says talks underway on mixed-electoral law**

The leader of Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party said that talks are underway between multiple Lebanese parties on a mixed-electoral law, but added that he is not in contact with the Free Patriotic Movement.

“Consultations are occurring in several directions... The Future Movement is in contact with the Lebanese Forces, while I am in contact with Speaker Nabih Berri and channels are open with Hezbollah,” MP Walid Jumblatt said in comments published Monday in As-Safir newspaper.

“However, there are no [contacts] between me and Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun,” he added.

Jumblatt said that the discussions are centering on reaching a draft law acceptable to the Future Movement and its March 8 foes the Amal Movement and Hezbollah.

He added that the results of the talks will become more clear in the coming days as more consultations will be held on an electoral law.

Lebanese Premier Najib Miqati and President Michel Suleiman last week signed off on a decree to hold the elections on June 9, a move that would have the elections held according to the current 1960 law if the country’s political parties fail to reach a consensus on a new electoral law.

March 8’s Change and Reform bloc party has called for the Orthodox law—which the LF and Kataeb backed—to be brought up for a vote in a general session of the parliament, but Speaker Nabih Berri has said that he would not convene the legislature until consensus can be reached on a law.

Sources told NOW last week that the mixed electoral law the Future Movement and PSP have reached consensus on is based on majoritarian voting in 26 electoral districts and proportional voting in 9 other constituencies.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonews/psp-leader-says-talks-underway-on-mixed-electoral-law>

6. SYRIA

- **Qaeda claims killing of 48 Syrian soldiers in Iraq**

In a move that threatens to entangle Iraq in the Syrian conflict, Al-Qaeda in Iraq claims responsibility of killing 48 Syrian soldiers while receiving medical treatment in Iraq

Al-Qaeda's Iraqi front group claimed an attack on a convoy in west Iraq that killed 48 Syrian soldiers and nine Iraqi guards, in a statement posted on jihadist forums on Monday.

The soldiers had entered Iraq for medical treatment and were being transported through the western province of Anbar on their way back to Syria when the attack took place on March 4, according to the Iraqi defence ministry.

Islamic State of Iraq fighters were able to destroy a column of "the Safavid army with its associated vehicles" carrying "members of the Nusairi army and Syrian regime 'shabiha'," the statement said.

Safavid is a word implying Shiites are under Iranian control, while Nusairi is a derogatory term for Alawites, the sect to which Syrian President Bashar al-Assad belongs, and shabiha is a name used for pro-regime militia forces.

Baghdad has consistently avoided joining calls for the departure of Assad, whom rebels are battling to overthrow, instead saying it opposes arming either side and urging an end to the violence that has

ravaged Syria for the past two years, leaving at least 70,000 people dead.

But the deadly ambush in its territory threatens to entangle Iraq in the conflict.

Baghdad is caught between conflicting pressures over Syria -- its powerful eastern neighbour, Shiite Iran, backs Assad, while the United States and many Arab states want Assad to bow to opposition demands and step down

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66582/World/Region/Qaeda-claims-killing-of--Syrian-soldiers-in-Iraq.aspx>

- **Syrian refugee numbers may double or triple this year: UN**

The number of Syrian refugees, which just passed the million mark, could double or triple by the end of the year if no solution is found to the conflict, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said Sunday.

"Now if this escalation goes on and nothing happens to solve the problem we might have in the end of the year a much larger number of refugees: twice or three

times the present level," he told reporters in Ankara.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66549/World/Region/Syrian-refugee-numbers-may-double-or-triple-this-y.aspx>

- **Top Syria opposition official meets Russia's Lavrov**

A top Syrian opposition official met Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Monday in a bid to reverse Moscow's refusal to back calls on President Bashar al-Assad to step down.

Haytham Manna of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change -- Syria's second-largest anti-Assad group -- said he thought the road to peace in Syria ran through Moscow.

"We have always said that a peaceful political solution goes through Moscow," Manna told Lavrov in opening remarks of their meeting at the Russian foreign ministry.

"A military solution is still being enforced on the ground. But the predominant majority of Syrians are convinced that a

political solution is desirable, that it will save us, and that it stands a real chance."

Russia has vetoed three UN resolutions sanctioning Assad for the violence and has said it viewed pressure on him to step down as undue foreign interference.

Lavrov gave no sign on Monday that Moscow was ready to ease its stance in regard to its traditional Arab ally two years into the conflict.

"The most important thing is that all the questions be decided by the Syrians themselves, without pressure from abroad, so that the Syrians themselves decide their own fate and the fate of individual politicians," Lavrov told Manna.

"The situation in Syria is not getting any better, even though all the sides agree that there should be an end to violence and the start of dialogue.

"But there are many of those who are trying to prevent this, including some outside sponsors of the so-called 'irreconcilable opposition'," Lavrov said in reference to Arab and Western states.

Russia has long accused regional and Western powers of using double standards by helping the armed opposition with financial support used to purchase weapons while at the same time calling for talks.

Lavrov said he hoped that the more moderate opposition voices could unite in an effort to get negotiations underway with Assad -- talks that some opposition forces say are impossible with him still in power.

"Uniting the patriotic opposition for a dialogue will go a long way to achieving the goals we want," said Lavrov.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/russian-fm-sergei-lavrov-says-foreign-backers-of-rebels-blocking-syria-resolution-russia-today-reports>

- **Assad “will fight to the end” despite setbacks**

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad comes across as a remorseless autocrat ready to go to any lengths to stay in power, despite military setbacks and growing ever more isolated from much of the world, observers found.

"He appears relaxed and confident, and certainly doesn't give the impression of being about to quit," said Hala Jaber, a Sunday Times reporter who recently interviewed Assad.

An eye doctor by training, Assad became his father Hafez's heir only after his older brother Bassel died in a car accident.

He became president in 2002 and has made it clear that he will not leave power before his mandate ends in 2014.

In rare speeches and interviews, he projects a confident image that is occasionally tarnished by nervous laughter.

Two years into Syria's revolt, Assad's previously shy, clumsy and unspontaneous persona has hardened, his previously reformist, modern image morphing into that of an unpitied chief.

He refused to condemn members of the security forces who savagely tortured children who scrawled anti-regime slogans on their school walls in the southern province of Daraa.

Their imprisonment became the spark that lit Syria's uprising.

While demonstrators called for reform rather than Assad's fall at the start of the revolt, the brutal repression of peaceful protest turned him into a hated man among dissidents, though a section of the population continues to support him.

"Now he is much more the 'boss' than before, though he of course could not do without his military and security supporters," Nikolaos van Dam, a Dutch diplomat and leading expert on Syria, told AFP.

"He will fight until death if necessary," said van Dam, author of "The struggle for power in Syria."

"There is too much at stake here, not only for him, but for his Alawite followers and the Alawite community as well." The Alawites are an offshoot of Shiite Islam, while the rebels in Syria are mostly Sunni.

"The future may hold a long and ferocious civil war," van Dam added.

Despite the loss of army control over large swathes of territory in northern and eastern Syria, Assad is certain he will emerge victorious from a war that the United Nations estimates has already left more than 70,000 people dead.

"He seems both more erratic and more delusional, still convinced he can win militarily," said Berlin-based Volker Perthes, who heads the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

Steeped in the "anti-imperialist" ideology of the Baath party which has ruled for 50 years, Assad believes Syria is the target of a foreign conspiracy because his government supports movements fighting Israel, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah.

He also believes that control over Syria's main cities -- chiefly Damascus -- and the west of the country will give him cards to play in any future negotiations led by the United States and Russia.

Assad has the unwavering backing of the leadership of the army and security forces, although they are suffering increasing difficulties in their efforts to parry rebel advances.

A pro-Damascus Lebanese former minister who recently met Assad said the Syrian leader appears "sad, though his conscience is clear."

"He is sad for Syria because many things he and his father built are being destroyed before his eyes; but he is calm because he knows he cannot be defeated," Wiam Wahhab told AFP.

"He hasn't changed. Every day, he does sport, he checks the news on the Internet and reads the reports he receives. Last time I saw him, he was relaxed."

"Of course there are things he can't do for security reasons, such as going to a restaurant or driving his children to school," Wahhab added.

According to Perthes, the Syrian president will not change his stance, despite international talk of dialogue between the regime and the opposition aimed at setting up a transitional government.

"I don't think Assad would negotiate his own departure and future," Perthes said.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/assad-will-fight-to-the-end-despite-setbacks>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Qatar discovers new reserves of natural gas

Key gas exporter Qatar has discovered additional reserves of 2.5 trillion cubic feet (68 billion cubic meters) of natural gas in a northern offshore field, media reported on Monday.

The discovery was made in Block 4 North, in North Field at a water depth of around 70 meters, newspapers said.

The gas discovery was "made after four years of intensive exploration activities, including the drilling of two exploration wells," The Peninsula daily quoted Qatar's energy minister, Mohammed al-Sada, as saying.

The field is operated by Qatar Petroleum and its German partner Wintershall, as well as Japan's Mitsui Gas Development Qatar.

North Field was discovered in 1971 and contains 900 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas.

Local daily Gulf Times quoted Sada as describing it as "an important gas discovery for Qatar" -- the world's fourth biggest natural gas exporter.

The tiny Gulf peninsula holds the world's third-largest gas reserves and produces roughly 77 million tons of liquefied natural gas per year, making it the world's largest supplier.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/qatar-discovers-new-reserves-of-natural-gas>

- **Bahrain dialogue participants expect tough talks**

Action group fails to agree on full agenda for next round

Manama: Participants in Bahrain's national dialogue are bracing themselves for one of the most difficult rounds when they meet for the seventh time on Wednesday.

The magnitude of the challenge became obvious on Sunday evening when an eight-member committee set up to draft the agenda of the talks faced serious difficulties in agreeing on the points to be raised at the expanded meeting of the 27 participants, eight from the coalition of the opposition, eight from Al Fateh coalition, eight independent parliamentarians and three government ministers, in three days.

"The government has not agreed to include the issue of having a representative of the king at the talks in the agenda," Majeed Milad, a member of the coalition of the opposition, said. "Therefore, we refused to sign the minutes of the session. We see that refusing to include this point deprives our coalition of one of its rights," he said as he left the hall where the action group met for four hours.

The opposition has been pushing for including a representative of the king at the talks "to accelerate the process and reach agreements that will put an end to the current crisis in the country".

However, the government and Al Fateh coalition have consistently rejected having a king's representative at the table.

"We refuse the principle of having a representative of the ruler at the dialogue," Ahmad Sanad Al Binali, a member of Al Fateh coalition, said. "To us, the ruler oversees the dialogue and we turn to him to implement our agreements because he is the guarantor. There is no standoff between the people and the ruler," he said.

Last week, the royal court said that the king stood equidistant from all participants and components at the dialogue.

However, the opposition has made the issue a major demand and its representatives have refused to back down, prompting accusations that they were stalling the possibility of moving forward with the talks.

Al Binali said that the session proceeded smoothly until it was marred by the divergences.

"It had an excellent beginning, but after two hours, it slid into problems when the coalition of the opposition insisted on raising the issue of a king's representative instead of having delegates for the government. It seems that there is a tendency to stall, prolong or undermine the dialogue and then blame others for the failure," he said.

Al Binali added that Al Fateh coalition, an umbrella for ten political formations, made compromises.

"We were not ready to have the issue of a referendum on the agenda, but we eventually agreed. The other coalition refuses to make any concession," he said.

The opposition had called for submitting the results of the dialogue to a popular referendum for endorsement instead of referring them to the parliament.

Milad , a senior member of Al Wefaq society, confirmed that the referendum issue would be on the agenda of the debates on Wednesday.

“We have reached an agreement on two issues and on the implementation of the results of the dialogue,” he said.

Under an agreement reached by the participants last week, the agenda is not binding and is used to facilitate the talks.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-dialogue-participants-expect-tough-talks-1.1156636>

- **Liberals to strengthen movement**

To present an alternative to promote national unity against sectarianism

Manama: Bahrain’s liberals are looking at ways to strengthen their movement and present it as the inclusive and unifying alternative to the exclusive and divisive sectarianist tendencies that have emerged in the country.

“Our main objective is to strengthen the democratic movement as the force that brings together all people,” Abdul Nabi Salman, head of the Democratic Progressive Tribune, has said. “The movement will be the viable option to replace the ugly sectarian discourse

dominating the landscape. It is time for us to overcome this situation and to expose sectarianism,” he said in remarks published by local Arabic daily Al Ayam.

Liberals will use their experience and their status in their comprehensive and inclusive national movement towards democracy and human rights, he said.

“We will work closely with all patriotic forces and patriots who share this importance of this alternative and who are ready to work towards its goals,” he said.

Liberals in Bahrain have come under heavy criticism in recent years for their inability to work together to promote secularism and resist the emergence and the dominance of sectarianism.

“As we celebrate the March 1965 uprising, we will work on regaining the unity of the country,” Abdul Nabi said. “The leaders of the democratic movement want to lay down robust foundations for this movement to ensure its sustainability and its ability to promote national solidarity and the protection of all the components of the society,” he said.

In March 1965, leftists spearheaded a popular movement that included workers, students and intellectuals across religious sects calling for the end of the British colonisation of Bahrain. Several activists were killed in the clashes and hundreds lost their jobs.

The tragedy has been regularly commemorated by the left in Bahrain, but liberals wanted to give it a special significance this year as the country is still trying to heal the scars left by deep divergences over the merit of the events that unfolded in February 2011.

Liberals from the Progressive Tribune, the National Democratic Action Society “Waad” and the Nationalist Rally, the major secular societies in the country, hope to help push the country away from sectarianism and regain its unity.

Bahrain has 21 licensed political formations, but Islamists from the Shiite and Sunni sects dominate politically and socially.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/liberals-to-strengthen-movement-1.1156248>

- **Saudi activist speaks up for domestic helpers**

Transfer of sponsorship without consent no different from trafficking, Al Fakhri says

Manama: A Saudi human rights activist has called upon the Labour Ministry to consider as traffickers those transferring domestic helpers to new sponsors, often without the knowledge or express consent of the person who is traded to a new employer.

“We see classifieds in the print and social media in which people advertise that they have domestic helpers to transfer,” Khalid Al Fakhri, a legal consultant with the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), said. “These are traffickers and should be held legally accountable. Moving someone from one family to another should happen only under specific criteria. Several domestic helpers are transferred from their sponsor to another sponsor and they are not even consulted or informed about it. There is a huge difference between people and commodities,” he said in

remarks published by local Arabic daily Al Watan on Monday.

The activist also called for action to put an end to the exploitation of children who are forced to sell things near traffic lights or in popular markets. “This is another facet of trafficking in people and it is a blatant violation of Saudi Arabia’s laws and international covenants,” Al Fakhri said. “Such a despicable exploitation of children deprives them of their right to education and to enjoy the various stages of their childhood.”

Al Fakhri also pushed for action to help women who initiated ‘khale’ divorce to end unhappy marriages but were forced to pay exorbitant amounts of money to their husbands to get them to agree on the separation.

“In some cases, husbands ask for huge amounts of money from their wives to accept the divorce. These amounts are often much higher than what the husbands paid in dowry for the marriage. Unfortunately, most of the time, the women do not have evidence about the men asking for high amounts,” he said.

Another example of trafficking in people, Al Fakhri said, was when men refused to allow their daughters to get married. “The judge should impose punitive measures against a father who does not respond to the request of his daughter and does not allow her to get married when there is no religious ground for the rejection of the groom,” he said.

Al Fakhri said that prostitution was the ugliest aspect of trafficking in people, “especially when the exploited are children who are not aware of the dangers associated with what they are doing”.

Under an anti-trafficking law adopted by Saudi Arabia in July 2009, people found guilty of exploitation are jailed for up to 15 years and fined up to 1 million Saudi riyals (Dh977,820). The definition of trafficking adopted by the Saudi cabinet includes holding a person under one’s control for sexual abuse, forced labour, involuntary begging, slavery or slavery-like practices and enforced organ removal or medical experimentation.

The law calls for tougher punitive action if the crime is committed against a child, a woman, or a person with special needs, or

if the person involved in the crime is the victim's husband, close relative or anyone using a position in law enforcement to keep other people in bondage.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-activist-speaks-up-for-domestic-helpers-1.1156617>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Hagel, Karzai Press Conference in Kabul Cancelled**

U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel

VOA News

March 10, 2013

U.S. officials say security concerns forced the cancellation of a scheduled news conference Sunday in Kabul with U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Authorities did not elaborate on the security issues, but a day earlier, two suicide bombings -- one in Kabul and the other in Khost -- killed 19 people. The bombing in Kabul targeted the Afghan Defense Ministry as Hagel was visiting the capital.

The press conference cancellation is the latest event to mark Hagel's first visit to Afghanistan as the new Pentagon chief.

Earlier Sunday, President Karzai accused the Taliban of being "at the service of America" by using attacks like the ones on Saturday to frighten Afghans into wanting foreign forces to remain in Afghanistan beyond the 2014 deadline.

The top U.S. general in Afghanistan General Joseph Dunford sharply rebuked the president's comments by saying, "we have fought too hard over the past 12 years... shed too much blood... to ever think that violence or instability would be to our advantage."

The Karzai government also alleged that U.S.-led forces working alongside Afghans were abusing and arresting university students.

Hagel comes to Afghanistan as it struggles with the United States over control of detention facilities and the pace for foreign troop withdrawal. A ceremony to transfer U.S. control of a main detention facility to Afghanistan Saturday also was

cancelled as a deal struck between the two governments broke down.

Last month, Hagel's predecessor, Leon Panetta, said that NATO allies were considering leaving between 8,000 and 12,000 international troops in Afghanistan after 2014. Currently, there are about 100,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan.

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

- **Karzai: U.S., Taliban Holding 'Daily' Talks**

March 10, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said that representatives of the Taliban have been holding talks "on a daily basis" with the U.S. government.

Karzai said the talks have taken place in "European and Gulf countries," despite the fact that the Taliban reportedly broke off contacts with the United States last year.

Karzai added that the Taliban continues to carry out attacks across Afghanistan "to show their power to the United States."

He said two suicide bombings that killed 19 people on March 9 -- one outside the Afghan Defense Ministry and the other near a police checkpoint in eastern Khost Province -- show the Taliban is conducting attacks to demonstrate that international forces will still be needed to keep the peace after their current combat mission ends in 2014.

"The bombing that took place yesterday and was carried out in the name of the Taliban -- these actions, in fact, show that the Taliban are serving the foreigners and are not against the foreigners," Karzai said. "These bombings show that the Taliban want the longer presence of foreigners, not their departure from Afghanistan."

The United States has not responded to Karzai's statements.

Washington has said it remains committed to political reconciliation involving talks with the Taliban but that progress would require agreement between the Afghan government and the militant group.

The Taliban's spokesman in Afghanistan, Zabihullah Mujahid, also denied that

negotiations with the United States had resumed and said no progress had been made since they were suspended.

'Abusing' Students

Karzai on March 10 also alleged that U.S.-led forces and Afghans working with them were abusing and arresting university students and urged them to stop.

He issued a decree instructing the Interior Ministry and the intelligence agency to prevent troops from entering universities and other educational institutions.

Karzai said the ban also applied to the troops' "illegal Afghan colleagues," in a reference to militias supported by Washington, whom he said "arrested and annoyed a number of "students."

His comments came as a news conference with Karzai and visiting U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel scheduled for March 10 was canceled amid security concerns.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly,

would not provide details on the security concerns.

They said Karzai and Hagel were expected to meet in private.

Pentagon press secretary George Little said the cancellation of the press conference was not due to Karzai's comments about the Taliban.

With reporting by dpa, Reuters, and AP
<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **NATO commander and US embassy reject Karzai's remarks**

By Sajad - 10 Mar 2013, 9:16 pm

Khaama Press

NATO-led International Security Assistance Force commander Gen. Joseph Dunford and the US embassy in Afghanistan rejected president Hamid Karzai's remarks and called it incorrect.

President Hamid Karzai on Saturday said US officials and Taliban group representatives are hold talks on daily basis in Gulf and European states.

Gen. Joseph Dunford said president Karzai's remarks are completely incorrect and insisted that president Karzai has never shared the ongoing talks between Taliban and United States.

NATO commander also said that he met president Karzai on Saturday and hopes that his claims are not true. He also added that he does not know the motive behind president Hamid Karzai's remarks

In the meantime US embassy in Kabul denied president Karzai's remarks and emphasized that the only US role in Afghan talks is to support an Afghan-led reconciliation process.

In response to president Karzai's remarks, US embassy in Kabul issued a statement and said that the Taliban group halted peace talks with the US government last March.

The statement also added that the two leaders agreed to open a liaison office for the Taliban group in Qatar and emphasized that the Afghan talks should be limited to Afghan high peace council and official representatives of the Taliban group.

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

- **Afghan pres. bans US-led forces from entering university campuses**

Press TV

March 10, 2013

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has banned the US-led foreign forces from entering university premises and detaining students.

On Sunday, Karzai also denounced the arrest of a university student by CIA operatives a day earlier, saying that he wants the operatives arrested.

Earlier in the day, Afghanistan's Council of Ministers also issued a statement saying, "We notify the international coalition force's leadership to avoid such acts which are against Afghanistan's national sovereignty."

Last month, Karzai ordered the US Special Forces out of the volatile provinces of Wardak and Logar.

The Afghan President has long been criticizing the US-led forces for harassing locals and fueling insecurity. He has also

accused Washington of double standards for holding reconciliation talks with the Taliban.

“Taliban leaders and representatives are talking with the US abroad every day,” Karzai said.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of fighting terrorism. While the war removed the Taliban from power, insecurity continues to be high across the country.

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

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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.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar*