



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

**The Restructuring Procees of Iraq**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Vote in full on the state budget bill.**

Baghdad / NINA /-- MP,Sadiq Allabban for the State of Law coalition announced that Parliament voted in full approving the general state budget for 2013.

The source added in a statement to NINA :  
" House of Representatives voted on all the outstanding paragraphs of the budget for this year.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGIJLH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGIJLH)

- **Jaafari discuss with U.N. Deputy Ambassador course of discussions conducted with the political blocs.**

Baghdad/ NINA /-- Head of the National Alliance Ibrahim al-Jaafari discussed with George Posten Deputy Ambassador of the United Nations in Iraq process of discussions guided by the government and the un with different political blocs.

A statement by Jaafari's office said : "  
Talks between the two sides emphasized during the meeting the importance of intensifying efforts to accelerate meeting

of the legitimate demands of the demonstrators, and the need for the upcoming elections on its scheduled date , and thwart the efforts of those who want to postpone these elections .

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGIJLH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGIJLH)

- **The House of Representatives resumes its meeting to vote on the budget.**

Baghdad / NINA /--The House of Representatives resumed its today's session afternoon a postponement of half an hour for lack of quorum.

A parliamentary source said to NINA : " As quorum became completed wit the presence of 163 deputies the hearing resumed to vote on the outstanding paragraphs of the budget law that have not been vote on on yesterday's hearing .

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGIJKM](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGIJKM)

- **Nujaifi looking with a delegation of clerics and Christian figures from Lebanon and Syria the situation of Christians citizens in Iraq.**

Baghdad/ NINA /--Parliament Speaker Osama Nujaifi discussed with a delegation of clerics and Christian figures from Lebanon and Syria, the conditions of Christian citizens in Iraq and the Middle East , as well as the possibility of repatriating those who forcibly immigrated Iraq or those who experienced duress and being displaced from their country.

A statement by Speaker office said : " Nujaifi stressed during a meeting with the delegation on the historical and cultural as well as the importance of the inherent and deep-rooted Christian component pointing out his strong support for all efforts that support the return of migrants and the protection of Christians who still in their homeland.

For their part, the visiting delegation members expressed their happiness for Nujaifi's sensed stand of supporting of his Christian compatriots . "

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGIJHJ](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGIJHJ)

- **State Budget 2013 to focus on energy, municipality projects, says Shukri**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Minister of Planning, Ali al-Shukri, assured "The 2013 State Budget focuses on projects of energy and municipalities."

The Minister reported in statement to AIN on Thursday "The State Budget of 2013 is limited because of the many continuous investment projects and thus there will be few number of new projects."

"The new projects will focus on ministries of Oil, Electricity and Municipalities," he added, pointing out that "The lack of projects and its limitations is an unfortunate matter."

The Council of Ministers has endorsed the law project of the State Budget 2013 which reached (138) trillion on October 2012.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29826:state-budget-2013-to-focus-on-energy-municipality-projects-says-mop&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29826:state-budget-2013-to-focus-on-energy-municipality-projects-says-mop&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19)

- **Headquarter of IHC detonated in Shurqat district**

Baghdad (AIN) –The headquarter of the Iraqiya Hurra Coalition was detonated by many Improvised Explosive Devices in Shurqat district on Thursday evening.

The Media Office of the Iraqiya Coalition mentioned that "The headquarter of the IHC was detonated by unidentified gunmen which resulted in causing major material damages to the building without any human casualties."

The Head of Iraqiya Hurra Coalition MP Qutayba al-Jobouri condemned the incident saying that "This coward attack will encourage us to expose the criminal acts and the gangsters' methods practiced by enemies of Iraqi People," stressing that "The people will judge these criminals whose names will be written in history pages of shame and disgrace."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29830:headquarter-of-ihc-detonated-in-shurqat-district&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29830:headquarter-of-ihc-detonated-in-shurqat-district&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51)

- **Elewi calls Friday prayers' Imams in Anbar, Mosul to avoid sectarian rhetoric**

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Karim Elewi of the Iraqi National Alliance called on the orators of Friday prayers sermons in Mosul, Anbar and Salah il-Din provinces to move away from the sectarian rhetoric.

Elewi said "The so called (The Syrian Free Army) started to expand at Iraq's western region alongside borders with Syria, exploiting the unstable situation there due to the demonstrations to implement foreign agendas that aim to destabilize the security posture and overthrow the political process."

"The demonstrations in the western provinces started to arouse major worries especially when raising sectarian slogans which demonstrate that these protests are supported by foreign agendas," he added.

Elewi reminded the "Imams of Friday prayers to be aware of these malicious schemes since the government is eager to meet the legitimate demands of the demonstrators."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29831:elewi-calls-friday-prayers-imams-](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29831:elewi-calls-friday-prayers-imams-)

[in-anbar-mosul-to-avoid-sectarian-rhetoric-&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51](#)

- **Next Friday "Last Chance" for Maliki to meet demonstrators' demands**

ANBAR/ Aswat al-Iraq: Official spokesman of Anbar demonstrators said today that next Friday prayers will be "the last chance" before Premier Nouri al-Maliki and his government to meet the demands of the demonstrators, otherwise "all demands shall be cancelled and more to be added according to Iraqi law and constitution".

Sheikh Saeed al-Lafi told Aswat al-Iraq that all components agreed to this terminology because Maliki's government is wasting time.

He stressed that the sit-in is peaceful and "will remain so", calling the government to stop inciting new crises and fabricated charges.

Ramadi, center of the province, lies 110 km west of the capital, Baghdad.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ufuu2eyrp5tato23ftk0fw55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152634&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ufuu2eyrp5tato23ftk0fw55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152634&l=1)

- **Japan contributes \$7.5 million for Syrian refugees in Iraq**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Japan announced today that it will contribute with the amount of \$7.5 million to assist the Syrian refugees in Iraq.

In a statement by the Japanese embassy in Baghdad, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, UNHCR will receive \$4 million for lodging, educational and health services.

\$1.5 million will be allocated to UNICEF programmes and \$2 million shall be allocated to IOM to develop the living of the Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, including Iraq.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ufuu2eyrp5tato23ftk0fw55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152633&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ufuu2eyrp5tato23ftk0fw55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152633&l=1)

- **General strike in Salahal-Din province**

SALAHAL-DIN / Aswat al-Iraq: Most of the cities in the province were empty for the general strike that resulted in closing the shops and the abstention of the students to go to schools, today.

Security sources told Aswat al-Iraq that most of the shops in different cities of Salahal-Din province were closed in implementation of the call for a general strike, though it was not officially announced by the Provincial Council.

Salahal-Din is one of the provinces that oppose the central government since 21 December, 2012.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ufuu2eyrp5tato23ftk0fw55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152629&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ufuu2eyrp5tato23ftk0fw55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152629&l=1)

- **Demarcation of borders threatens 250 families with displacement**

Shafaq News / The director of Umm Qasr district in Basra , Saleh al- Eaidani warned on Friday, that the process of demarcation of the borders between Iraq and Kuwait taking place now contrary with two hundred and fifty houses.

Saleh Eaidani said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "there is no serious and clear view by the local government officials in Basra and the Iraqi government to establish housing projects after demarcation operations of two hundred and fifty families, which are threatened

with displacement if demarcation of the borders took place."

Eaidani added "we did not accept any evacuation of any family of mentioned families, except in the case of the provision of alternatives, such as the provision of residential neighborhoods or houses."

The UN Security Council has issued in 1993 a resolution No. 833, which provides the enactment of the borders between Iraq and Kuwait.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5453-demarcation-of-borders-threatens-250-families-with-displacement-.html>

- **America and Iraq to sign trade and investment agreement**

Shafaq News / The U.S. Trade Representative's office said that an agreement between the United States and Iraq to promote trade and investment links is expected to come into force later this year after eight years of negotiation.

U.S. companies operating activity in energy, defense, information, technology, automotive and transportation sectors are

increasing in Iraq , which has been invaded by the United States 10 years ago.

The United States negotiated with Iraq on a framework agreement for trade and investment (TIFA) in 2005 to set up a forum that brings together the two governments to discuss how to increase trade and investment flows between the two countries.

The U.S. Trade Representative, Ron Kirk said that "after an exchange of diplomatic notes, TIFA put into practice later this year, the first meeting of the Joint Council for bilateral consultations on issues of trade and investment that can be held in 2014."

The volume of bilateral trade between the United States and Iraq last year was \$ 21.3 billion, including \$ 2.04 billion in U.S. exports to Iraq while the value of Iraqi exports to the United States is dominated by \$ 19.3 billion of oil.

In another step aims at strengthening trade ties between the United States and the Muslim world , Kirk announced plans that would allow for more Egyptian companies to qualify to exempt its exports

to the United States from tariffs as long as it use checkpoints to enter goods from Israel.

Kirk said that he plans to expand the rating of "Qualified Industrial Zones" in Egypt that would make all current and future production facilities in those areas eligible to be included in the exemption of its exports from the United States from customs duties.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5452-america-and-iraq-to-sign-trade-and-investment-agreement-.html>

- **Nineveh: 320 Iraqi families displace from the borders**

Shafaq News / Nineveh province revealed on Friday, the displacement of about 320 Iraqi families from the border areas to Qadisiyah border compound and pointed out that the homes of Iraqis came under fire from the Syrian side by the clashes there.

The spokesman of the province , Qahtan Sami said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "about 320 Iraqi families were living in villages and areas adjacent to the border fled to Qadisiyah border

compound," noting that "those left their home areas due to their exposure to fire from the Syrian side due to the clashes there".

He noted that "food aid and relief have been distributed to these families, and we are going to take other measures to manage any emergency situations like this."

A security source in Nineveh province has revealed on Wednesday, that armed clashes broke every while and then between the elements of the Free Syrian Army and Iraqi forces, adding that Iraqi forces responded to the sources of fire from the Syrian side.

The Syrian Free army has taken over Rabiah border crossing (Syrian Yaurba) at the beginning of this week after the Syrian army forces expelled the formal forces from it.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/5451-nineveh-320-iraqi-families-displace-from-the-borders.html>

## 2. IRAN

### • EU to impose new sanctions on Iran: European diplomats

The European Union is planning to impose sanctions on nine Iranians over allegations of violations of human rights, EU diplomats say.

The new sanctions, to be announced next week, come after the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran Ahmed released his fourth report in late February accusing Iran of 'violations of human rights.'

The Iranian government dismissed the recent UN report, calling it unsubstantiated, biased, and a repetition of the Western allegations against Tehran. On March 2, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said that Ahmed Shaheed collates the information he uses to write reports accusing Iran of human rights violations from anti-Iranian media outlets and terrorist groups.

He emphasized that the Islamic Republic is eternally committed to respecting human dignity and the basic rights of the people,

in line with its Constitution and religious teachings.

The Iranian Judiciary's Human Rights Committee (HRC) also dismissed the report on March 5, saying it aims at intensifying pressure on the Islamic Republic.

This report has been drafted under the influence of certain hostile Western governments to mount psychological and propaganda pressure on Iran and lacks legal credibility, read a statement issued by the committee.

The EU has also imposed economic sanctions on Iran based on the unfounded allegation that Iran is seeking to produce a nuclear bomb, a claim Tehran has vehemently rejected.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/08/292483/eu-to-impose-new-sanctions-on-iran/>

- **Iran urges global action on nuclear disarmament**

Iran believes that any selective reinterpretation of the countries' rights and commitments would bear no result

and that a review of the NPT should be carried out effectively and transparently.”

Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations  
Mohammad Khazaei



Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations Mohammad Khazaei has refreshed the country's call for a stronger global action to promote nuclear disarmament at an international level.

“We have always announced nuclear disarmament as one of our most important priorities while emphasizing the right of all signatories to the NPT [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] to use peaceful nuclear energy,” Khazaei said on Thursday in an address to an extraordinary meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the UN premises to discuss the movement's positions in the NPT Review Conference.

He added that NAM member states call for the disarmament of all countries possessing nuclear weapons.

The Iranian envoy stated that the next changes in the NPT should be made with the purpose of strengthening its signatories' commitment to the nuclear disarmament free from dual and discriminatory standards.

He emphasized that such changes should not turn into a new obstacle in the way of the NPT signatories' access to the nuclear technology.

Iran believes that any selective reinterpretation of the countries' rights and commitments would bear no result and that a review of the NPT should be carried out effectively and transparently, Khazaei said.

He reaffirmed NAM's support for the establishment of a Middle East region free of nuclear weapons.

Iran has repeatedly expressed its strong opposition to any production, possession or use of nuclear weapons, saying such

arms have no place in the Islamic Republic's nuclear doctrine.

On February 22, 2012, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Iran considers the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons "a grave sin" from every logical, religious and theoretical standpoint.

Israel, the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, is widely known to have between 200 and 400 nuclear warheads.

The Israeli regime rejects all the regulatory international nuclear agreements, particularly the NPT, and refuses to allow its nuclear facilities to come under international regulatory inspections.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/08/292470/iran-renews-call-for-nuclear-disarmament/>

- **China opposes 'blind' sanctions on Iran, defends Iran's nuclear rights**

We believe that Iran, as a signatory of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, possesses the right to use nuclear energy

for peaceful purposes while following relevant international obligations."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman  
Hua Chunying

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman  
Hua Chunying has reaffirmed her country's support for Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy, expressing Beijing's opposition to "blind" sanctions against Tehran.

"We believe that Iran, as a signatory of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, possesses the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes while following relevant international obligations," she said at a daily press briefing on Thursday.

She added that 'blind' sanctions will not help to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue and the use of force is even more unacceptable.

Hua insisted on "dialogue and negotiations" as the only way to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue.

The Chinese spokesperson stressed the importance of maintaining and promoting negotiations to properly solve the Iranian nuclear issue in a comprehensive way.

She pointed to the latest round of talks between Iran and the six major world powers of P5+1 group in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and noted that the sides achieved active results.

Iran and the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany) wrapped up their latest talks in Almaty on February 27.

Both sides agreed to convene in Almaty again on April 5-6 for the next round of the negotiations after holding expert-level talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul on March 17-18.

On February 28, China's Assistant Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu, who heads the Chinese delegation to the talks between Iran and the P5+1, urged both sides to maintain their negotiations process and said they made "tangible progress" in their latest round of talks.

Hua further urged all relevant parties to step up their diplomatic efforts in a flexible and practical manner and resume substantive negotiations at an early date.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member state of the P5+1, China has always reaffirmed Iran's right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and stressed that negotiations and dialogue are the right approach to address the Islamic Republic's nuclear issue.

In an address to a Security Council meeting on Wednesday, China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations Wang Min reiterated his country's strong opposition to the US-led unilateral sanctions against Iran over its nuclear energy program, saying Beijing is not in favor of putting excessive pressure or new sanctions against Tehran.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/08/292457/china-opposes-blind-sanctions-on-iran/>

- **P5+1 closer to Iran's stance at Almaty talks: Diplomat**

Iran and the P5+1 group held the latest round of talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, February 2013.

Iran and the P5+1 group held the latest round of talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, February 2013.

A senior Iranian diplomat says the proposals recently tabled by the group of six major world powers over the issues regarding Iran's nuclear program incorporate more logical elements which are closer to Tehran's views.

"The proposals of the P5+1 (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) at the meeting in [the Kazakh city of] Almaty have become closer to the proposals of the Islamic Republic of Iran and they are more logical and realistic in

nature,” said Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania Affairs Abbas Araqchi at a meeting with foreign ambassadors to Tehran.

The latest round of the talks between Iran and the P5+1 was held in Almaty on February 27-28. The two sides agreed to convene again in the Kazakh city on April 5-6 to continue the talks after holding “expert-level” talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul on March 17-18.

Noting that different aspects of the P5+1 are still unclear, Araqchi stated, “Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran expects that the groundwork will be laid for achieving a consensus at the next Almaty session in April 2013, after [Iran] witnesses proper goodwill and flexibility from the other side.”

On Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei pointed to the West's track record of disregarding its own agreements and statements and noted that the next round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group will be a test of Western sincerity.

After the Almaty meeting, both Iran and the P5+1 group expressed hope and optimism about the prospect of their comprehensive negotiations.

On February 28, Reuters quoted an unnamed Western diplomat as saying that, “This was more constructive and more positive than previous meetings because they were really focusing on the proposal on the table.”

In an interview with Austrian broadcaster ORF on March 1, Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi described the latest round of the talks as a “milestone” and a “turning point in the negotiations.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/08/292456/p51-closer-to-iran-at-almaty-meeting/>

- **Iran: UN human rights rapporteur took US bribes**

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — An Iranian official has accused the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Iran of taking bribes from the United States.

A Friday report by the semi-official ISNA news agency quotes Mohammad Javad

Larijani, secretary general of Iran's high council for human rights, as saying Ahmed Shaheed "received money" from the US He said that was why he could only parrot US allegations against Iran. He did not detail the evidence.

Larijani said Iran has provided UN with considerable evidence of violations by Shaheed, the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on Iran.

He said Shaheed behaves like a TV celebrity, appearing on western television stations to make comments against Iran.

Shaheed has produced four reports on alleged violations of human rights in Iran. Iran denies the charges.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-un-human-rights-rapporteur-took-us-bribes/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Large rally in Rafah in solidarity with prisoners**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Protesters in Gaza organized a massive rally Thursday in

solidarity with Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli jails.

Participants raised Palestinian flags, and held pictures of hunger strikers. They condemned aggressive Israeli practices. Palestinian national and Islamic factions participated in the rally.

Rasmi Abu al-Ainin, a member of the the Palestinian Arabic Front political office, called for implementing national unity to support the Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli jails.

He also condemned the Israeli prison authority's practices against Palestinian prisoners. He stressed that all prisoners need to be released, and this is considered a national duty that deserves all support, assistance and solidarity. It also requires public and officials pressure at all levels.

He called on human rights organizations to pressure Israel to stop abusing prisoners.

The released prisoner Amin Salih, a leader in the DFLP, called upon the Palestinian people to intensify their solidarity

activities to support long-term hunger strikers.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=572737>

- **Obama meets US Jewish leaders ahead of Israel trip**

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- US President Barack Obama hosted leaders of major American Jewish organizations at the White House on Thursday as he sought to smooth the way for his first presidential visit to Israel later this month.

The meeting was a chance for Obama to preview his agenda for the trip, including the Iran nuclear standoff, Syria's civil war and Israel-Palestinian issues, and to reiterate his "unshakable support" for Israel, an administration official said.

Obama's outreach to prominent figures in the Jewish community could help ease any residual tensions following the 2012 election campaign. Republicans had accused the Democratic president of not being sufficiently supportive of Israel, Washington's closest ally in the Middle East.

But Obama has repeatedly stressed his commitment to Israel despite a sometimes testy relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"President Obama invited leaders from across the American Jewish community to discuss and get input about his upcoming trip to Israel," the official said.

"The president noted that the trip is not dedicated to resolving a specific policy issue, but is rather an opportunity to consult with the Israeli government about a broad range of issues -- including Iran, Syria, the situation in the region, and the peace process," the official said. "He also underscored that the trip is an opportunity for him to speak directly to the Israeli people."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=572736>

- **Hold the mazal tovs on new coalition, says Bennett**

Jewish Home party chair Naftali Bennett addresses the Knesset in February (photo credit: Flash90)

Jewish Home party chair Naftali Bennett addresses the Knesset in February (photo credit: Flash90)

With time running out on coalition talks Friday morning, some Israeli political leaders sought to temper assessments that a deal that would see the Yesh Atid and Jewish Home parties join a presumptive Likud-led coalition was imminent.

Naftali Bennett, the leader of the right-wing Jewish Home, likened the talks to a birth, and, while allowing for cautious optimism, indicated that the coalition hadn't quite crowned.

"If establishing the government was like a labor process, we'd be two fingers dilated, and the doctor would be optimistic," Bennett tweeted.

Meanwhile, Yesh Atid dismissed leaks from Likud sources to the effect that the party's leader, Yair Lapid, had been offered, and turned down, the post of finance minister.

"I spoke to Yair Lapid yesterday, and he told me that no one had offered him that

portfolio, so he couldn't have turned it down," MK Yael German of Yesh Atid told Army Radio. "He heard about the proposal over the airwaves."

According to recent assessments, Bennett is set to become finance minister, a largely thankless position that will likely be especially unpopular in the coming term due to the government's need to patch up a budgetary deficit of some NIS 40 billion.

As for Lapid: Likud sources have maintained that Yesh Atid's popular leader had his sights set on the prestigious role of foreign minister, which Netanyahu has been reserving for his prime partner, Yisrael Beytenu party leader Avigdor Liberman.

Liberman served in the position throughout Netanyahu's previous term, stepping down in late 2012 after he was indicted on charges of breach of trust. Liberman has indicated that if his trial ends in anything but acquittal, he will retire from politics.

German's statement is consistent with Yesh Atid's categorical denial of reports that Lapid's insistence on the Foreign

Ministry was the main sticking point in talks with the Likud. Leaks to that effect from sources close to Netanyahu were nothing but “spin,” the centrist party has maintained.

Channel 2 News on Friday morning cited sources in the political system in reporting that Lapid would in fact serve as interior minister in the next cabinet, a post — currently held by the ultra-Orthodox Shas leader Eli Yishai — which would allow Yesh Atid to promote its liberal agenda on conversion to Judaism and the right to marry in Israel.

Netanyahu, who has until next Saturday to form a coalition, will likely aim to present an agreement to President Shimon Peres upon Peres’s return next Wednesday from a sojourn in Europe.

If Netanyahu fails to present a new government in time — he is already in the midst of a 14-day extension granted him by Peres after his first 30 days of efforts proved futile — the president will either tap another politician as presumptive prime minister, or call another round of elections. Netanyahu, who, poles indicate, would likely lose to Lapid if Israelis head

back to the polls, is said to be aiming for a Wednesday or Thursday swearing-in ceremony for his new government.

Netanyahu’s cabinet is expected to number 23-24 ministers, five or six fewer than he wanted, and five or six more than Lapid had sought in an effort to slim down what he’s termed Israel’s “bloated” executive branch.

More than the question of the number of ministers, the chief issues to draw out coalition negotiations were Yesh Atid and Jewish Home’s push for a universal conscription law that would extend to young ultra-Orthodox males and the application of new education standards in religious schools. The two parties’ united front on these topics prompted the ultra-Orthodox parties, traditionally allies of Netanyahu, to stay out of the government and launch an acerbic public relations campaign on the Jewish Home party.

The emerging deal on ultra-Orthodox service will see more than 400 young males excluded from service each year — the quota sought by Yesh Atid — with a dramatic rise in the number of men going into the military.

Tzipi Livni's Hatnua party, with six seats, is the only party to have signed with Likud-Beytenu and its 31 seats. In addition to the position of justice minister, Livni was promised the right to lead peace talks with the Palestinians, an offer that Bennett and Lapid have insisted be recanted if they are to join the government.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hold-the-mazal-tovs-on-new-coalition-says-bennett/>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Tunisians face petrol price hike**

Experts warn that raising fuel prices will pose new problems for Tunisia.

By Yasmine Najjar in Tunis for Magharebia  
– 07/03/13

Tunisians are outraged by the latest increase in fuel prices, which some suggest could also imperil the country's fragile political environment.

Higher petrol prices went into effect Tuesday (March 5th), the industry ministry announced. However, gas cylinders for domestic use and lighting fuel prices would remain unchanged.

Finance Minister Elyes Fakhfakh said the price increase would reduce the cost of subsidies in the 2013 budget by 500 million dinars (242 million euros) to 4.2 billion dinars (2 billion euros).

A year ago, Tunisia started a campaign to reduce subsidies in the framework of an agreement struck with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan worth 1.37 billion euros.

Since March 1st, the government started deducting one per cent from salaries above 1700 dinars (824 euros) to help fund subsidies.

"The regulation of fuel prices is a major problem because it contributes to inflation, which Tunisia is already suffering from, at a rate of 6 per cent," said economist Ezzedine Saidane.

"If we exclude subsidised goods, real inflation ranges between 10 and 11 per cent," he added.

Since "fuel prices are part of the cost of production, whether goods or services", Saidane said he expects to see an increase in the prices of most consumable goods.

"This increase will have an impact on Tunisian exports," he predicted.

Economic and financial expert Moez Joudi said: "The series of price increases will continue and the power of the consumer will deteriorate further."

"The country needs foreign loans from the IMF but cannot obtain them unless certain painful conditions for the citizen are met," Joudi added. "These conditions include the removal of subsidies and perhaps the reduction of the salaries of civil servants. Price increases will continue and will even affect bread and other subsidised goods."

He cautioned, "Political data is not reassuring yet we continue with the same political approach, the same ministers and continued poor governance, inefficiency and lack of clarity of vision."

On the Tunisian street, many citizens are apprehensive of the anticipated increase in fuel prices.

"It is the second increase in fuel prices in a non-oil producing country within few months," Mokhtar Jlidi, 55, told Magharebia. "This is a very bad indicator, not counting what this could entail in terms of increases in prices of goods and other vital services."

Moufida Saidi said that "the income of Tunisians has not risen and remains the same while prices are witnessing a scary escalation."

"We did not believe that the revolution and the change would have such a high price," commented Lobna Belkassam, 33.

The Tunisian Consumer Defence Organisation (ODC) is organising a protest against higher fuel prices on March 15th outside the Constituent Assembly headquarters.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-01)

- **Libya, US partner for healthcare**

After working together to oust Kadhafi, Benghazi doctors are now linking up with the US to establish emergency medical care in Libya.

By Asmaa Elourfi in Benghazi for Magharebia – 07/03/13

A group of doctors from the Benghazi Medical Centre for Health Services reached an agreement last month with counterparts in the United States to develop emergency medical services in Libya.

Dr. Laila Taher Boukaiqis, deputy director of Benghazi Medical Centre, said that an agreement was reached on February 6th during her 10-day visit to the US and Canada. Boukaiqis was accompanied by a number of other doctors from the centre, including Dr. Nasrallah al-Saadi and Dr. Naima Qubaa.

Under the agreement, a group of specialists, including six doctors and nurses, will undergo training. After that, further coaching will be given at the medical centre in Libya by instructors from

the US. She added that the aim was to reach the right result in emergency services, starting with how to call a special ambulance number to save a patient's life within the first three hours after injury.

"We've been working on developing emergency services since 2011," Boukaiqis added. "We got to know a group of American doctors who came to help us at the medical centre at the time of Libyan war. We talked to them about how to develop services."

She added that "emergency services differ from one country to another, but the best are available in the US, and therefore, we preferred to choose the US model to be like it. We were actually able to draw up a work development plan."

Emergency medical services are a major issue nationwide, as the specialisation is still relatively new to the country, having been created in the wake of the revolution.

"We now want to have doctors who are willing to specialise in emergency treatment," she said. "We've reached an agreement with the Americans about

holding graduate studies in emergency services."

Meanwhile, a French company started preparing the second tower at the medical centre. One of the first departments to be opened will be the maternity ward, where there will be two operating rooms. Moreover, the emergency department will be opened and its capabilities will be boosted so it can receive a bigger number of patients and provide better services.

"We now focus more on developing human, medical capabilities, including the development of radiology department, training of administrative cadres in senior and middle management positions and health management," Boukaiqis said.

"There will be training on all levels at departments in the medical centre, and it will continue both outside and inside the country," she added.

But Boukaiqis said insecurity in Benghazi was hampering efforts to bring in better medical care for citizens.

"We suffer from poor security in Benghazi," Boukaiqis added. "This is not

acceptable to instructors from Harvard University who believe that the security situation in Libya hasn't been stable since the assassination of US consul, and say that Libya is still a source of worry."

Boukaiqis added that the place could be "until security in the country has stabilised".

"For our part, we managed to show to them that the situation is gradually improving. We want to restore the trust that was lost after the events in the US consulate in Benghazi."

"They were helping us as far as the medical field is concerned and conducting interviews with doctors to select those who need training," the doctor added.

"We were waiting for the ambassador to launch this agreement between Harvard University and Benghazi Medical Centre, but he has unfortunately died."

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-02](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-02)

- **Algeria focuses on Kabylie terrorists**

Algerian security officials have set their sights on the remaining al-Qaeda terrorists in the Kabylie region.

By Walid Ramzi for Magharebia in Algiers  
– 07/03/13

Algerian National Police Director-General Major General Abdelghani Hamel paid a working visit to the operational security installations in Bouira province on Wednesday (March 6th).

Hamel recognised the role played by the police force in protecting citizens while emphasising in the same context the mandatory need to address all forms of criminality in the Kabylie region.

Roughly 400 armed al-Qaeda militants are still active in the Kabylie region, security officials announced last week.

The figure was released during a meeting focused on the assessment of security measures in the region to confront the gunmen deployed in the provinces of Boumerdès, Bouira and Tizi Ouzou, Tout sur l'Algerie reported.

These areas constitute the most important strongholds of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The sources pointed out that about 280 militants out of the 400 in eastern Algeria were active in the province of Bouira, where terrorists recently attacked a Djebahia gas pipeline. Roughly 73 militants were in Boumerdès and 50 were in Tizi Ouzou.

The latest terrorist attack in Tizi Ouzou occurred on Monday when a soldier was seriously injured after a bomb exploded in the Yakouren Forest. The explosion took place during a sweep conducted by members of the Algerian army.

One day prior to the attack, army troops clashed with terrorists at the southern entrance of the city of Tizi Ouzou after a terrorist group opened fire on a security checkpoint.

Security affairs expert Kamal Al Hadeif attributed the growth of terrorists in the region to the "withdrawal of the gendarmes after the events of the Black Spring and the protests that defined the region years ago".

"These terrorists pose a threat to the residents of the villages," retired military officer Tahar Ben Thamer said, noting that residents in the area became "victims of extortion of money and supplies after terrorists lost their most important Emirs".

He added that they were operating in a "scattered manner after the after security forces and the army tightened the noose".

A report prepared by the Tizi Ouzou Chamber of Industry and Commerce noted 71 cases of businesses leaving the province for reasons related to management difficulties hindering economic development as well as the security situation.

During a visit to the region last summer, Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablia called for greater participation of local people in the fight against terrorism through co-ordination with the army and security forces.

"Terrorism has declined significantly," he said while stressing the need to continue the fight until its final elimination.

According to security analysts, targeting militants deployed in the region would be a fatal blow to the organisation.

Security forces succeeded last year in eliminating a number of AQIM senior leaders in the region, in addition to dozens of insurgents who died during the security operations.

Algerian security reports described 2012 as the calmest year in the last decade. Armed attacks fell to their lowest level since 2002, with the most significant decrease found in the traditional strongholds of terrorism in the east.

The year saw a total of 65 terror attacks. With most of the danger emanating from Boumerdès, Tizi Ouzou, Bouira and Béjaïa, army forces have focused on the Kabylie region.

"The decline in armed attacks in 2012 is due to the pressure exerted by the security services on the strongholds of armed groups," Tout sur L'Algerie quoted a military source as saying.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-03](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-03)

- **Mauritanian ulema confront extremism**

Mauritanian religious leaders diagnose "the basic ills of society" and recommend ways to combat radicalism.

By Jemal Oumar in Nouakchott for Magharebia – 07/03/13

More than fifty Mauritanian scholars, imams, clerics and government officials recently wrapped up a three day conference where they collaborated on ways to combat extremism.

The Mauritanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs with the Mauritanian Association of Ulemas concluded the training forum on February 20th in Nouadhibou, 450km north of Nouakchott.

The three-day forum focused on topics related to Islamic identity and the concept of the state from an Islamic perspective. In addition, it addressed the socio-economic dimension of state-building and the

seriousness of extremism as it affects the entity of the nation.

Participants left the event with a number of recommendations, including the need to establish a zakat fund and increased promotion of justice in order combat extremism and fanaticism, AMI reported.

Other ideas included increased care for mosques and religious schools, and encouraging the involvement of women at such forums.

The event "called for a prominent role in guiding our youth and linking them with behaviour and ethics of the Islamic religion known for tolerance, openness and moderation, and rejection of all forms of violence and extremism", Islamic Affairs Ministry official Mohamed Hadi Ould Taleb said at the closing of the event.

The forum "made it possible to diagnose the basic ills of society from the point of view of the clergy", Association of Mauritanian Ulema Inspector General Bouna Omar Ly.

He also stressed on the other hand the issue of national unity and added that

diagnosing these diseases and finding solutions for them would support the state in its development programs.

There was also discussion on the role women could play in confronting extremism, women's rights activist Salema Mint Cheikh said.

Although the recommendations did not provide a specific role that women could play, Cheik said that in general, women were better able to confront extremism.

"Women are the first school. If they were involved effectively, extremism would not have found its way to us," she said.

She added that most extremists were influenced by radical ideas because they were uneducated, and the vast majority who weren't influenced came from families that were literate.

She demanded a focus on informing and educating women. She noted that they were victims of forced illiteracy, neglect and denied participation in the development of a strategy for the eradication of extremism.

"Through the role that can be played by educated women and teachers in the schools... enlightenment and education can be spread. In addition, there should be an addition in the curriculum that shows in a simplified manner the difference between extremist ideology and the tolerance of Islam," she said.

"There is no more effective way to confront extremists than dialogue, and to develop awareness and education to confront deviance," researcher in Islamic thought Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Bashir said of the forum.

He added that education and literacy played important roles in combatting extremism radicalism and that the majority of extremists were ignorant of religion "while considering themselves at the same time to be protecting it".

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-04](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/07/feature-04)

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Houri: Mansour's speech should be withdrawn from Arab League records**

Future bloc MP Ammar Houri on Friday said that the Lebanese cabinet must send a memorandum to the Arab League asking it to withdraw the speech of Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour from the organization's documents.

"The speech of Mansour before the Arab League is the official speech for the Lebanese state registered in the Arab League records, regardless of the justifications we hear," Houri told Free Lebanon radio.

"This sin can only be corrected through a memorandum requesting [the Arab League] to withdraw the speech and voicing the Lebanese cabinet's commitment to the disassociation policy," Houri said.

On Wednesday, Lebanon's foreign minister called on Arab foreign ministers gathered in Cairo to allow the Syrian government retake its seat at the Arab League, from which it was suspended in 2011. March 14 leaders slammed the statement, saying it violated Lebanon's dissociation policy.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/houri-mansours-speech-should-be-withdrawn-from-arab-league-records>

- **Bassil says 1960 electoral law will not pass**

Energy Minister Gebran Bassil on Thursday said that the elections would not be held under the 1960 electoral law because the Christian parties will refuse it.

"The 1960 electoral law will not pass because the Christian parties do not want it. The Christians have returned as part of the system and are playing their role. Nothing will pass in this county unless the Christians approve of it," Bassil, who represents March 8's Free Patriotic Movement, said during a press conference.

The energy minister also said that the Orthodox Gathering's electoral law proposal had not failed yet.

"The Orthodox law will be cast to vote during a parliament plenary session, and if it will not be approved, we can then call it dead and all the Lebanese will know who killed it," Bassil added.

Lebanese Premier Najib Miqati and President Michel Suleiman on Monday 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 have called for the Orthodox law—which the LF backed—to be brought to a vote in a general session of the parliament, but Speaker Nabih Berri has said that he will not permit a vote until consensus is reached on a draft law.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/bassil-says-1960-electoral-law-will-not-pass>

## 6. SYRIA

### • Syria UN hostages talks continue

Frame from video showing rebels with captured peacekeepers' UN vehicle The rebels accused the peacekeepers of collaborating with the Syrian regime

Negotiations to free 21 Filipino peacekeepers held hostage by Syrian rebels are continuing, despite earlier hopes the group would be released by Friday morning, the Philippines says.

An official said the rebels had not backed down on their demands for Syrian troops to be repositioned first.

The peacekeepers were seized by the Martyrs of Yarmouk group in the Golan Heights, near Israel, on Wednesday.

Some appeared in videos online, saying they were safe and being treated well.

The rebel group said it would free the men if Syrian troops withdrew from the area.

"The demand of the rebels for the repositioning of Syrian forces in the area of Jamla is still outstanding so this is still being worked out," Philippines foreign ministry spokesman Raul Hernandez said.

"I don't know exactly know what happened, why the expected release did not happen, but... [their] demand is still there," he told reporters in Manila,

according to the Associated Press news agency.

The incident is a sign that the fighting between rebel groups and government troops of President Bashar al-Assad is spreading, and indicates a lack of central control among the rebels, correspondents say.

Around 70,000 people have been killed and a million refugees have fled since the crisis in Syria began two years ago.

'Safe hands'

Map of Golan Heights

Several videos emerged on Thursday, showing groups of between three and six peacekeepers from the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (Undof).

"They will be passed to safe hands when possible - because the area is surrounded and the Assad regime is bombarding it," Abu Essam Taseel, a member of the Martyrs of Yarmouk, was quoted as saying by Reuters news agency.

The observers had been monitoring the ceasefire line between Syria and Israel, which captured the Heights in 1967.

The UN said they had been on "a regular supply mission" when they were stopped near an observation post by the armed men.

The UN has had its monitors in the area since the 1974 ceasefire between Israel and Syria.

Israel has occupied the Golan Heights since the 1967 Middle East war. It annexed the territory in 1981, a move that is not internationally recognised.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21712013>

- **U.N. Peacekeepers Still Held by Syria Rebels**

By ALAN COWELL and HANIA MOURTADA

A group of United Nations peacekeepers from the Philippines who were seized in the disputed Golan Heights region between Syria and Israel two days ago, remained in captivity early on Friday as their captors pressed demands for a redeployment of government forces nearby, the Filipino authorities said.

A video posted online Wednesday showed a member of the Martyrs of Yarmouk claiming responsibility for the abduction of a group of U.N. peacekeepers.

The rebels had offered assurances on Thursday of the 21 peacekeepers' well-being and appeared to back away from threats to hold them as hostages. But news reports on Friday quoted Raul Hernandez, the spokesman for the Philippines Foreign Ministry, as saying the insurgents were still pressing for Syrian government to move away from the area around Al Jamlah, the village where the international troops were seized on Wednesday.

Al Jamlah lies close to the Golan Heights, controlled by Israel, where a United Nations force has patrolled since a cease-fire halted the 1973 October War.

The rebels said Thursday they wanted Syrian troops to move away with their heavy weaponry to open up an exit route for their captives. But the demand also seemed driven by tactical considerations in the nearly two-year-old Syrian conflict.

Israel, which has watched anxiously for spillover as the Syrian civil war has intensified, signaled Thursday that it had no intention of becoming embroiled in the situation. Amos Gilad, a senior official in the Defense Ministry, told Israel Radio that "we can rely on the U.N. to persuade" the insurgent fighters to release the peacekeepers and that "neither the rebels nor anyone else has an interest in clashing with the international community, which it needs for support."

The authorities in Manila said the troops had not been harmed and President Benigno S. Aquino III said he believed the peacekeepers would be viewed by both sides in the Syrian conflict as a "benign presence, so we don't expect any further untoward incident to happen."

The detention of the peacekeepers was the first time any regional United Nations forces had been drawn into the Syrian war.

A group calling itself Martyrs of Yarmouk claimed responsibility for capturing the unit and, in a video posted on the Internet, threatened that if Syrian forces did not withdraw from the surrounding

area within 24 hours, the peacekeepers would be dealt with “like war prisoners.”

But on Thursday, a statement on what appeared to be the group’s Facebook page asserted that the rebels had acted to protect the Filipino unit from a Syrian government assault. “With God’s help, we were able to keep a group of U.N. members, who work in the border village of Al Jamlah, safe from the barbaric shelling of Assad’s criminal gang,” it said, referring to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

The peacekeepers were “under our protection until we can get them to safe areas,” the post continued.

“We dissociate ourselves from all statements issued prior to this one regarding the detention of U.N. personnel,” it said. “They are now safe and honored and hosted as guests by the brigade’s leadership until we can deliver them safely to their headquarters.”

A series of videos was also posted on the Internet showing different groups of the peacekeepers offering remarkably similar accounts. In each, an officer identifies

himself and his unit, explains that they came under fire from government forces and were aided by civilians, who were giving them food and water and keeping them safe.

A spokesman for the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an activist group based in Britain, said Thursday that the rebels were seeking the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the area, a halt to their shelling and a secure road to use to hand the Filipino soldiers over to international forces in the Quneitra border region.

The observatory, which has a network of opposition contacts in Syria, said the soldiers were still in Al Jamlah and reported “clashes” between government troops and rebels on Thursday on the village’s northern outskirts. There was no immediate independent confirmation.

The group said that Arab League representatives had joined United Nations officials in negotiating with the rebels.

Violence continued elsewhere, with activists reporting that warplanes struck the north-central city of Raqqa, where rebels have made gains in recent days,

and that the neighborhood of Khalidiya, in Homs, was being shelled.

There were also reports of a warplane crashing in a southern suburb of the northern city of Idlib. An activist working with the Syrian Observatory said it was hit by anti-aircraft fire and poured out black smoke. Other witnesses said they saw two parachutes.

The scale of the destruction wrought by the almost two-year-old conflict emerged starkly on Thursday when Doctors Without Borders, a humanitarian aid organization, said in a report that Syria's once-efficient health care network had broken down, with patients treated in caves and basements as large numbers of hospitals closed and medical facilities became tools "in the military strategies of the parties to the conflict."

"Medical aid is being targeted, hospitals destroyed and medical personnel captured," said Marie-Pierre Allié, the president of Doctors without Borders.

The report, issued in New York, added to a catalog of woes this week as the number of refugees fleeing Syria exceeded a

million and the school system was reported to have collapsed.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/09/world/middleeast/syria-developments.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&r=0>

- **Syria's Assad hails Turkey anti-Erdogan opposition**

President Bashar al-Assad on Thursday hailed Turkish opposition to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's backing for the revolt that began in Syria nearly two years ago, in a statement seen by AFP.

The statement comes after Assad met a Turkish opposition delegation, which prompted Erdogan to issue a stinging criticism of the politicians, asking why they were meeting with "such a dictator."

Assad told the Republican People's Party delegation there was "a need to distinguish between the stance of the Turkish people, who support stability in Syria, and the positions of Erdogan's government, which supports terrorism, extremism and destabilization in the region," it said.

"The Syrian people appreciates the position adopted by forces and parties in Turkey that reject the Erdogan government's negative impact on our societies, which are multi-religious and multi-ethnic," Assad said.

The Turkish delegation, headed by Hassan Akgul, stressed "the Turkish people's refusal to interfere in Syrian affairs, and a commitment to good neighborly relations," the statement said.

The visitors also "warned of the risks of the Syrian crisis's impact on Turkey and other countries in the region," it added.

Speaking on television, Erdogan asked: "Why is this country's main opposition party sending its three lawmakers to meet with this dictator, this tyrant? What do they want to achieve?"

Damascus, meanwhile, called on the international community in letters to the United Nations to condemn Ankara's role in the Syrian conflict, which has left some 70,000 people dead.

"Syria hopes that the international community... will fulfill its responsibilities clearly and sincerely, and denounce the role of the Turkish government and other states that fund the Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist groups, while bearing them responsible for what is happening in Syria," the letters said.

Assad's government has systematically blamed the violence in Syria on a foreign-backed plot, and has frequently accused Turkey of channeling funds and weapons to the armed opposition.

Reacting to the letters, Erdogan asked if Assad would "complain about Turkey to the United Nations just because we are accommodating 250,000 Syrians on our soil? This person is committing a kind of genocide there... Will he complain about us because of this?"

Ankara broke off relations with Damascus soon after the outbreak of Syria's uprising, which morphed into an armed insurgency after the regime unleashed a brutal crackdown against dissent that began in mid-March 2011.

Turkey hosts some 200,000 Syrians who fled the violence, and earlier this month it hosted a Syrian opposition election for Aleppo's provincial council.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syrias-assad-hails-turkey-anti-erdogan-opposition>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Yemen's Hadi urges vigilance for national dialogue**

President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi Thursday urged Yemen's army and security forces brass to be vigilant in case enemies of the state try to undermine a national dialogue set to begin later this month.

The army and security forces must be "vigilant" and on the lookout "for the enemies of security, stability and unity in Yemen," ahead of the March 18 national dialogue, the official Saba news agency reported him as saying.

"All military and security apparatus must draft the necessary plans, exchange

information, unite operations and monitor terrorist elements," Hadi said.

The much-anticipated national dialogue aims to set in motion a process to draft a new constitution and electoral law for parliamentary and presidential polls elections in 2014.

The talks were originally planned for mid-November but the conference was delayed after factions in the Southern Movement, which has campaigned for autonomy or secession for the formerly independent south, refused to join in.

Hadi was elected in February 2012 as part of a UN-backed Gulf-brokered exit deal that eased veteran president Ali Abdullah Saleh out of office after 33 years in power, and ended a year of protests against his regime.

The dialogue, which is stipulated in the Gulf initiative, "is a historic responsibility at a delicate moment during which Yemen is facing security, political and economic crises," Hadi said on Thursday.

He also warned of "severe measures" against anyone who tries to undermine the talks.

Meanwhile General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a key figure who backed demands by demonstrators for the ouster of Saleh during the 2011 protests, urged military and civilian forces to rally around the dialogue and back Hadi's efforts.

Ahmar told AFP this was necessary to secure Yemen's stability and set up "a modern, civilian and democratic state" in the impoverished Arabian Peninsula country.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/yemens-hadi-urges-vigilance-for-national-dialogue>

- **"Friends of Yemen" group urges faster aid**

International donors must speed up aid to impoverished Yemen to help it complete its delicate political transition and fight Al-Qaeda, ministers warned at a meeting of the "Friends of Yemen" group in London Thursday.

The grouping of more than 35 countries and international organizations pledged

\$7.9 billion (6.06 billion euros) of aid to Yemen in 2012, but little of the funding has been distributed so far.

"Yemen is now at a very important and dangerous crossroads," Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi told a joint press conference with his British and Saudi counterparts, who co-chaired the London meeting.

"Perhaps Yemen has moved away from the abyss but it is still facing many political, economic and social challenges," he said, speaking through a translator.

Yemen was rocked in 2011 by an uprising that left the already stricken country's economy in tatters and weakened the government's control over several areas, especially across the south and east, where it is battling Al-Qaeda militants.

Yemen is now in a political transition process led by President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi.

The World Bank said on Thursday that apart from aid from Saudi Arabia, only \$500 million of funding pledged by the

Friends of Yemen has been disbursed to date.

Saudi Arabia has deposited \$1 billion in Yemen's central bank to shore up its currency while the two governments have agreed 14 investment projects worth \$1.3 billion.

"But the progress on the disbursements from other donors on the promised project level funds remain slow," the World Bank's vice-president for the Middle East and North Africa, Inger Anderson, said in a draft statement on the latest Friends of Yemen meeting.

Yemen is due to begin a much-anticipated national dialogue on March 18 to push forward the transition following the fall of Yemen's strongman leader Abdullah Ali Saleh.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague welcomed the forthcoming dialogue -- which will pave the way for presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 -- and stressed that it must give a voice to women, civil society groups and southern Yemenis pushing for secession.

"The national dialogue conference must allow the Yemeni people, through their representatives, to decide for themselves the future of their nation," Hague told the news conference.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/friends-of-yemen-group-urges-faster-aid>

- **Kuwait to build 174,000 houses by 2020, minister says**

The wealthy Gulf state of Kuwait plans to build around 174,000 houses by 2020, the housing minister told parliament on Thursday, in projects that will cost billions of dollars.

"Currently, we have more than 100,000 applications for houses from citizens. The number grows by over 8,000 a year and we expect to require around 174,000 units by 2020," Salem al-Othaina said in a special parliament debate.

"By 2020, we plan to build three new cities with a capacity of 108,000 units... In addition, we plan to create several new residential areas with around 66,000 units," he said.

One of the three cities is planned on the Saudi border while the other two will be built close to the frontier with Iraq, Othaina said.

He gave no estimates for the total cost of the eight-year plan, but one lawmaker said the infrastructure alone for the planned projects would cost more than \$5 billion.

Othaina said the ministry plans to invite companies in the private sector to take part in the project.

The special debate was called by MPs wanting to know why the government was lagging far behind in meeting housing applications despite having more than \$400 billion of surpluses generated from oil sales.

Under Kuwait's generous welfare system, all Kuwaitis, estimated at just 1.2 million, have the right to apply for a government house after getting married, but the waiting time has recently soared to around 15 years.

Once they receive the house, they pay it off in easy installments over around 30 years.

Othaina and several MPs said the reasons for the delay in building homes include the scarcity of land available for housing, as most is reserved for oil projects, and the high price of land and houses.

"No one in this country can buy his own house from the open market because of the high price of real estate," said independent MP Yussef al-Zalzal. "Some influential people want these prices to remain high."

A square meter of housing land can cost \$1,000 in remote areas and much more close to Kuwait City. More than 95 percent of the land is state-owned.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-to-build-174000-houses-by-2020-minister-says>

- **Kuwait jails two for emir insult tweets**

A court in Kuwait on Thursday sentenced two opposition activists to prison terms on charges of writing remarks on their

Twitter accounts that were deemed offensive to the emir, a defense lawyer said.

Sager al-Hashash was given two years in jail with immediate effect while Nasser al-Deehani was handed a 20-month term but was asked to pay 200 dinars (\$700) to suspend it, lawyer Khaled al-Humoud wrote on his own Twitter account.

The two verdicts are not final as they can be challenged in the Gulf emirate's court of appeal and supreme courts, Humoud said.

Kuwaiti courts have handed down several prison sentences to a number of opposition activists and former MPs for remarks deemed offensive and insulting to the emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, over the past few months.

In February, the same court acquitted five activists on the same charges. Dozens of opposition activists and former MPs are on trial on similar charges and for taking part in "illegal" protests.

Last month, the US-based Human Rights Watch said that the rights situation in

Kuwait deteriorated last year, with police using force to disperse protesters and launching crackdowns on online activists.

HRW also urged the authorities to drop all charges against online activists.

The information ministry denied the watchdog's accusations and called them unrealistic.

HRW said that based on unofficial records, at least 35 opposition activists and former MPs have either been convicted, are on trial or are under investigation on similar charges.

Criticizing the emir is illegal in Kuwait and is considered to be a state security offense. Those convicted face up to five years in jail.

The Kuwaiti opposition has staged regular demonstrations in protest at an amendment last year of the electoral law and subsequent December elections.

Kuwait has seen many opposition-led demonstrations in protest against the changes to the law, which opposition groups claimed allowed the government

to influence election results and elect a rubber-stamp assembly.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-jails-two-for-emir-insult-tweets1>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • Two explosions rock western Afghanistan

Press TV  
March 7, 2013

Two bomb explosions have rocked western Afghanistan, injuring at least five civilians in the war-torn country, Press TV reports.

One of the blasts took place on Thursday morning near the provincial governor's compound in the city of Herat.

"An explosives-packed motorcycle remotely detonated in Herat city close to the governor's office when the governor was in a meeting," said Abdul Raouf Ahmadi, a police spokesman.

A second similar bomb explosion occurred on the road from Herat city to the Gozara district.

No one has claimed responsibility for the bombings, but such attacks are often blamed on the Taliban militant group.

Militants use improvised explosive devices, including roadside bombs, against Afghan forces, foreign troops and civilians.

On February 27, a bomb attack on a bus transporting Afghan military personnel in the capital, Kabul, injured seven people, including the attacker.

On February 28, at least 10 people including eight policemen and two civilians lost their lives in a roadside bomb attack targeting a vehicle packed with police officers in the northeastern province of Kunar.

The UN said in its annual report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict on February 19 that over 2,750 civilians had been killed in Afghanistan in 2012, taking the toll to nearly 14,730 since 2007.

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

### • American soldier jailed for smuggling \$1m out of Afghanistan

By Sayed Jawad - 07 Mar 2013, 11:53 am

Khaama Press

A court in United States sentenced an American soldier to five years in jail for helping to smuggle more than \$1 million out of Afghanistan.

The American soldier, Tonya Long, 30, will serve five years in jail on charges of bulk cash smuggling and aiding and abetting bulk cash smuggling, The Telegraph reported.

She will also be followed by three years probation after she reportedly spent almost \$500,000 on herself and her family including on plastic surgery, a holiday and an 18 wheel truck and trailer.

Terrence Boyle district Judge has ordered Tonya Long to pay back \$1 million in restitution.

According to the court records, Tony Long serviced in Afghanistan as customs inspector with the 189th Combat Sustainment Battalion between 12 January 2008 and 5 April 2009.

She was responsible for checking personal items belonging to troops before they were sent back to the USA in containers and the authorities are saying that Tony Long along with her co-conspirator who has not been named are responsible “a double-billing kickback scheme”.

The authorities also added that the pair would strip out the components from VCR machines and fill them with cash in order to hide the money.

US attorney Thomas G Walker quoted by The Telegraph said, “Tonya Long betrayed her team and while other soldiers were fighting for our country, she was stealing money intended to support the mission.”

He said, “Her conduct undermined her fellow soldiers and our nation’s reputation.”

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

- **US to equip Afghan army with drone capabilities: Gen. Mattis**

By Meena Haseeb - 07 Mar 2013, 3:17 pm

Khaama Press

A top US military general on Wednesday said Afghan national security forces will be equipped with drone capabilities in a bid to keep a watch on the tough terrain along its eastern border with Pakistan.

Gen James Mattis, the commander of US Central Command, told members of the powerful House Armed Services Committee, “The Afghans do not have that capability yet. It’s one of the enablers that we are trying to build into them before we leave.”

He said, “The long-term view is that we will continue this so long as we are there, and we will transition this capability, standing it up inside the Afghan forces so when we leave, they have the ability to keep an eye on that border area.”

“I’ve operated in many areas around the world, and I’ve never had more difficult military terrain to operate in than along that border.” the US General said while referring to the difficult terrain along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border.

In the meantime US Congressman Ron Barber expressed concerns regarding the ability of US and its NATO allies to target

terrorists including Haqqani Network on Pak-Afghan border.

Gen. Mattis was responding to Ron Barber’s question which focused on any possible long-term plan for American unmanned reconnaissance after the planned drawdown of American troops.

The US Congressman also questioned the capacities of the Afghan national security force have for unmanned aerial platforms to target terrorists’ networks.

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

- **British PM announce £10m fund for Afghanistan mining program**

By Ghanizada - 07 Mar 2013, 11:09 am

Khaama Press

British Prime Minister David Cameron has revealed to fund £10m to help exploit Afghanistan’s huge natural resources program, BBC reported.

According to reports around \$1-3tn worth of gold, gems, iron ore, and oil and gas lies underground in Afghanistan.

While speaking during an event at Downing Street British PM David Cameron announced that the fund will be granted to ministry of mines of Afghanistan in a three year program to support Afghan natural exploitation.

This comes as there have been growing concerns regarding corruption for awarding mining contracts in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

Particular criticisms were raised over the Afghan government after the exploitation project of Ainak Copper mine was awarded to a Chinese company which has a duration of 30-years.

Amid growing rumours of bribery and kick-backs, Britains new support is reportedly aimed at improving the process in a bid to bring better regulation and more transparency for future Afghan mining concessions.

Prime Minister David Cameron said United Kingdom had already played “a huge and honourable role” in stabilising Afghanistan, but that the country needed

“prosperity, growth, jobs, investment and wealth”.

The announcement by David Cameron was welcomed by mining companies in United Kingdom.

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

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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ORTADOĐU STRATEJİK ARAŐTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES  
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ  
ÖZGÜR DÜŐÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT  
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION