

## IRAQ

- The Head of Erbil Office of the Independent High Electoral Commission Hindren Muhammad said that the election propaganda campaign of the upcoming Parliamentary Elections will start on Friday, February 12, 2010. (*PUK Media*)
- Statements made by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi on possible civil war in the country in case the Justice and Accountability Commission rejected some candidates are dangerous, spokesman for the Iraqi government said. (*PUK Media, Aswat Al Iraq*)
- Iraqi security forces arrested 20 suspected terrorists in operations in Iraq over the last two days, military officials reported. (*PUK Media*)
- Northern Iraq Regional Government prohibits the use of official buildings for electoral purposes, the cabinet's official spokesperson said. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- Iraqi Vice President, Tareq al-Hashemi, said that his talks with U.S. officials in Washington were candid, constructive and fruitful. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- The Presidential Board approved the 2010 federal budget which reached 61735.312.500 billion Iraqi dinars. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- A panel of Iraqi judges has reportedly upheld the decision to bar two prominent Sunni members of parliament from contesting in general elections scheduled for March 7. The endorsement of the ban against Saleh al-Mutlaq and Dhafir al-Ani, hours ahead of the official start of election campaigning on Friday, is likely to raise tensions between the Shia-led government and Sunni Iraqis, who claim they are being marginalised. (*Al Jazeera*)

## IRAN

- Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Serkisian said that cooperation between Iran and Armenia helps promote stability in the region. Addressing a ceremony commemorating the 31st victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Serkisian referred to growing bilateral ties and said that they have entered a new stage in recent years. (*IRNA*)
- Millions of Iranians poured into streets on February 11 to renew allegiance with the lofty ideals of the late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini. (*IRNA*)
- Kuwaiti Emir in a message on Thursday felicitated President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution's triumph. In his message, he referred to cordial ties between the two countries and said that he is sure mutual cooperation will continue. (*IRNA*)
- Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was scheduled to arrive in Tehran Tuesday evening to meet top Iranian officials including Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. Turkey's semi-official Anatolia news agency reported on Tuesday that Davutoglu is expected to pay a visit to Iran ""for nuclear talks"". (*Tahrn Times*)

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- DEBKAfile's military sources report that not only are Syrian leaders beating war drums - Syrian foreign minister Walid Muallem said in Damascus: "Israelis, do not test the power of Syria since you know the war will move into your cities" - but Egyptian military sources have put out information purporting to outline Israel's preparations to strike Iran. They report that the Israeli Navy together with the US Fifth Fleet have for some weeks been charting Persian Gulf waters and Iranian shorelines in preparation for attacks by Israeli naval and special operations forces. (*DEBKAfile*)
- Iranian and military sources report the war threats from Damascus this week were backed by massive Iranian airlifts for boosting Syria's missile arsenal. Fresh supplies also reached the Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas in Gaza. (*DEBKAfile*)
- A Ynet report that Knesset Member Shaul Mofaz plans to form a separate faction if Kadima Chairwoman Tzipi Livni refuses to hold primary elections in the coming months has sparked a political row. Senior party officials criticized Livni on Thursday night, saying

she must work to unite the party despite the tension between her and Mofaz. (*Yediot Ahronot*)

- Middle East envoy Tony Blair will "intensify" his work with US negotiator George Mitchell to broker peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Thursday. (*Yediot Ahronot*)
- According to an article by Ari Shavit, published in Haaretz, Liebermann is helping to delegitimize Israel. The article says that "The minister heading the Foreign Ministry today is exacerbating Israel's distress over legitimacy instead of alleviating it. This minister cannot solve the problem he is part of. The Arab world abhors him. Europe sees him as a Le Pen-style nationalist. The United States sees him as an embarrassing malfunction." (*Haaretz*)
- Israel is facing a global campaign of delegitimization, according to a report by the Reut Institute, made available to the cabinet on Thursday. The Tel Aviv-based security and socioeconomic think tank called on ministers to treat the matter as a strategic threat. The report cites anti-Israel demonstrations on campuses, protests when Israeli athletes compete abroad, moves in Europe to boycott Israeli products, and threats of arrest warrants for Israeli leaders visiting London. (*Haaretz*)

## LEBANON

- Preparations were intensifying Thursday ahead of the February 14 rally to mark the fifth anniversary of former Premier Rafik Hariri's assassination, as March 14 officials called for major participation in support of their alliance's goal of strengthening the Lebanese state. Meanwhile, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) praised Thursday the former premier's achievements on the national level and his role in legitimizing the resistance against Israel in the international arena. (*Daily Star*)
- The National News Agency (NNA) reported on Friday that President Michel Sleiman headed to Cyprus in the morning for an official one-day visit during which he is scheduled to meet with his Cypriot counterpart, Demetrius Christofias. According to the agency, Sleiman will also meet with a number of Cypriot officials, including Speaker Marios Karoyian, as well as Lebanese expatriates residing in Cyprus. (*Now Lebanon*)

## EYGPT

- Senior Egyptian Islamists arrested early this week are accused of forming militant cells, newspapers reported on Thursday, while Human Rights Watch called the arrests a blow to free elections. Egyptian police arrested Muslim Brotherhood deputy leader Mahmud Ezzat and three members of the opposition group's politburo on Monday, along with 13 activists. (*Egypt Daily News*)

## AFGANİSTAN-PAKİSTAN

- At least 15 people have been killed and 20 wounded in two blasts at a police compound in northwestern Pakistan, officials say. The bombing occurred on Thursday in the town of Bannu, which has been a flashpoint for pro-Taliban fighters attacking security and civilian targets. The attack came as the government announced that it believed Hakimullah Mehsud, the leader of Pakistani Taliban, was killed in a US missile attack last month. No group has claimed responsibility for the Bannu bombing (*Al Jazeera*)
- Afghan civilians have been warned to "keep their heads down" when US-led Nato forces launch a planned military offensive in southern Helmand province. Mark Sedwill, Nato's senior civilian representative in Afghanistan, admitted on Tuesday that fighting around the town of Marjah was likely to prompt an exodus from the area, but said that authorities were prepared to deal with it. The offensive in the area, which is currently under the control of Taliban fighters, is expected to be one of the largest since the Taliban were forced from government in 2001. (*Al Jazeera*)

## YEMEN

- Yemen's president has announced a ceasefire agreement with Houthi fighters in the country's north. Ali Abdullah Saleh declared an end to military operations against the Houthis on Thursday, in an agreement that could see an end to the six-year conflict. "We have decided to halt military operations in the northwestern region ... to stop bloodshed, bring peace to the region," the president's office said in a statement. The truce was made possible after the group, belonging to the Zaidi Shia sect of Islam, accepted six conditions put forward by the government. (*Al Jazeera*)