

IRAQ

- Eleven people were wounded in bomb and mortar attacks in Iraq's oil-rich province of Kirkuk, a provincial police source said. (*www.kerkuk.net*)
- Two separate attacks targeting security forces in northern Iraq have killed a police officer and wounded many other people. (*www.kerkuk.net*)
- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani discussed Iraqi-Turkish bilateral relations with Turkish Ambassador to Iraq Murat Ozcelik. The meeting focused on issues of common interests, as well as exchanging views on recent political developments in Iraq. (*PUK Media*)
- A suicide bomber detonated an explosives belt at a restaurant popular with Iraqi security forces in a city that was once a flash point for sectarian slaughter, killing at least two people, authorities said. (*Peyamner News Agency*)
- The special representative of the United Nations secretary general for Iraq, Ad Melkert, has described the Accountability and Justice Commission's measures as an "Iraqi affair." (*Peyamner News Agency*)
- An al-Qaeda front group in Iraq claimed responsibility for a suicide car bombing earlier this week at Baghdad's main crime lab that killed at least 22 people. (*Peyamner News Agency*)
- Two US citizens have been arrested and are being held by the Iraqi army in the north of the country. (*Al Jazeera*)
- Tony Blair, the former British prime minister, has told an inquiry into the 2003 Iraq war that he has "no regrets" about removing Saddam Hussein from power. (*Al Jazeera*)

- Three gunmen were killed and another wounded in clashes that erupted between a group of unidentified gunmen and a U.S. force south of Mosul city on Sunday, a local security source said. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)

IRAN

- Iranian and South Korean officials stressed the need for the bolstering of ties and cooperation between the two Asian countries mostly in agricultural and fishery fields. (*Farsnews*)
- Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki conferred on Sunday with his Egyptian counterpart Ahmed Abul Gheit on regional and global developments in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 14th Summit Meeting of the African Union where both sides called on NAM's troika to play a much more active role. At the meeting, the two foreign ministers agreed to hold a joint session in the future. (*IRNA*)
- Iran's Justice Minister Morteza Bakhtiari met with Algerian Ambassador to Iran Sofiane Mimouni. During the meeting Bakhtiari called for expanding judicial and legal cooperation with Algeria. (*IRNA*)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Sunday that Israel's continued activity in the West Bank was leading to a "one-state solution," telling The Guardian in an exclusive interview that he was prepared to relaunch peace negotiations in exchange for a full three-month settlement freeze. (*Haaretz*)
- The Palestinian leader also told The Guardian that he could be inclined toward accepting the Obama administration's proposal for direct, but low-level, talks prior to beginning full-scale peace negotiations. (*Haaretz*)
- Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak spoke personally multiple times on Sunday in an effort to settle their dispute over whether to form a committee to probe Operation Cast Lead. (*Jerusalem Post*)

- Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who opposes the appointment of an independent commission of inquiry into the Israeli operation in Gaza, has come up with a general draft for an investigation in response to the international pressure on Israel. According to Barak's plan, a team of senior and highly esteemed legal experts from Israel and abroad will look into the instructions issued by the government to the Israel Defense Forces' top command during Operation Cast Lead and the investigation of incidents by the judge advocate general (*Yediot Ahronot*)
- A Jordanian security official says authorities have arrested dozens of Muslim militants in connection with a failed bomb attack on Israeli diplomats. (*Yediot Ahronot*)
- 10 Fatah leaders on Saturday evening submitted their official resignations to the leadership of their movement's central committee in Nablus in protest at monopolizing the regulatory decision-making and not implementing the revolutionary council's resolutions. (*Palestine Information Center*)
- Hamas announced its leader's death in Dubai was because of Mossad's poisoning. (*Ya Libnan*)

EGYPT

- Days before Israeli Ambassador to Egypt, Shalom Cohen, finishes his term as the longest serving ambassador to the country, he said that the political relations between his country and Egypt have witnessed a thawing and reached its highest level, but added that that the drawbacks of Cairo in the face of cultural relations between both peoples is a "tragedy." (*Egypt Daily News*)
- Twenty-five Egyptians were arrested on suspicion of planning a bombing attack against Jewish pilgrims in the country and belonging to a militant Islamist group, a security official said on Sunday. (*Egypt Daily News*)
- The American Coptic Assembly said in a statement last week that the Coptic community in the United States and across the world had sent 4,350 letters to American President Barack Obama in the past week, asking him to take a stand to protect the Copts in Egypt. (*Egypt Daily News*)

LEBANON

- March 14 General Secretariat Coordinator Fares Soueid said at the end of the Bristol meeting: We want to turn the black pages and open a new page of hope. We want a state where we can combine both accomplishments ... liberation and second independence. Soueid called for a massive turnout on February 14 commemoration to mark the fifth anniversary of the assassination of former PM Rafik Hariri. (*Ya Libnan*)
- The United States Ambassador to Lebanon Michele Sison confirmed that her country's policy toward Hezbollah has not changed, and that the party remains on the list of terrorist organizations, "and stressed that" Hezbollah "threatens not only Lebanon but the entire region, and pointed out that Washington does not distinguish between the military and the political wings of the party. (*Ya Libnan*)
- The Lebanese army issued a statement on Sunday that an Israeli patrol kidnapped 17-year old Rabih Mohammad Zahra at 1:45 p.m. near the Bistra farm close to Kfar Shouba, the disputed territory of the Shebaa Farms. The statement described the kidnapping as an attack on Lebanese sovereignty and an inhibition of a citizen's freedom, adding that the army and UNIFIL are working for Zahra's immediate release. (*Now Lebanon*)
- The Lebanese Army issued a statement that at 3:25 a.m. on Sunday, an Israeli gunboat launched two flare bombs 200 meters inside Lebanon's regional waters. The army described the act as a clear violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. (*Now Lebanon*)

SYRIA

- The United States has reportedly appointed Robert Stephen Ford as its ambassador to Syria, according to Lebanese daily An Nahar... Washington has not had an envoy in Damascus since former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recalled Margaret Scobey in February 2005 in response to the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and amid tensions between the two countries mainly over issues relating to Iraq and Lebanon. (*SANA, Syrian Official News Agency*)
- Rector of Damascus University Wael Moalla discussed on Sunday with Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Turkish University of Yeditepe Haluk Kabaalioglu means of enhancing scientific and culture cooperation between the two universities. (*SANA, Syrian Official News Agency*)

YEMEN

- The National Defense Council (NDC) affirmed on Sunday that the government has no mind to end the military operations if the Houthi rebels committed to implement the six point-ceasefire already announced by the government. In its meeting chaired by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the council discussed the situation in Saada province and what was announced by Houthis on Saturday about their commitment to some of the points announced by the government to halt the military operations. The council insisted the commitment of the Houthis to the six points, including the obligation not to attack on the Saudi lands and to delivery the Yemenis and Saudis kidnapped by the Houthi rebels without delay, to stop the military operations. (*SABA Yemen News Agency*)

AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN

- Ashraf Ghani, a former finance minister of Afghanistan, has said that reconciliation talks with the Taliban are under way. Ghani, currently a senior fellow for the Brookings Institution in Washington, also said that Saudi Arabia had been active in mediation. At a conference in London earlier in the week, officials announced that "moderate" Taliban would be urged to enter talks with the Kabul government and a new fund would be set up to encourage fighters to lay down their arms. (*El Cezire*)
- The Pakistani Taliban has dismissed reports on state television suggesting that Hakimullah Mehsud, the head of the group, had been killed and subsequently buried. Pakistani television said on Sunday that Mehsud died in an attack by a US drone sometime in the past two weeks, but the Tehrik-e-Taliban was quick to respond. (*Al Jazeera*)