

IRAQ

- Crowds of pilgrims are pouring in to Karbala in commemoration of Imam Hussein Arbaeen (AS) amidst fears of attacks. Security was beefed up in protection of pilgrims while armored cars and ambulances accompanied convoys of pilgrims. (*Al Sumaria*)
- Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki accused some political parties without naming them of opposing the upgrade of anti-terror forces in Iraq. (*www.kerkuk.net*)
- Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdulmahdi has called on the international community to support Iraqis in their attempts to combat terror. (*Peyamner News Agency*)
- Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi has met with U.S. President Barack Obama and his deputy Joe Biden during his current visit to the United States, a presidential statement said. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- An al-Qaeda-in-Iraq (AQI) leader was arrested and five explosive belts were seized in Diala's Baaquba, a local police commander said. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- Police forces in Basra arrested on Tuesday 14 wanted men and seized two Katyusha rockets. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- A total of 20,000 policemen have been deployed in Diala to protect Shiite pilgrims heading to the holy province of Karbala, a local source said. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)
- The Central Bank of Iraq's (CBI) dollar sales dropped to \$146.278 million in its daily auction, compared to \$195.655 million in the previous session. (*Aswat Al Iraq*)

- President Ahmadinejad met with Qatari Deputy Emir and Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hama al-Thani on Tuesday. In the meeting, president Ahmadinejad described the two sides' relations as brotherly and said Tehran and Doha have many things in common which should be used for expansion of mutual, regional and international relations and cooperation. (*IRNA*)
- Minister of Defense and Logistics Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said on Tuesday that the countries in the region should play active role to maintain security and stability of the sensitive Persian Gulf region as well as Hormuz strait. (*IRNA*)
- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani on Tuesday reiterated that the presence of alien forces, specially the US army, is the main problem of the region. Addressing the US officials, Larijani stressed it seems strange that the Americans are not aware that they are region's problem with sending more and more (army) equipment to the region. "Regional countries must know that the US puppet show for security and protection of the region is nothing but a new political fraud and it wants to pave the way for its presence in the region at the expense of other countries," he added. (*Farsnews*)
- Iran and Senegal expanded cooperation in the agricultural sector by signing four agreements. The agreements were signed Tuesday night during a meeting between Iran's Minister of Agricultural Jihad Sadeq Khalilian and his visiting Senegalese counterpart Fatou Gaye Sarr. Based on the agreements, the two countries will cooperate in such areas as research, education and training, production of plants, water, soil and related industries. (*IRNA*)
- Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister in Consulate Affairs Hassan Qashqavi conferred with Azerbaijan Republic Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov here on Tuesday afternoon. In the meeting, Mammadyarov welcomed developing relations between the two countries as well as visa-free regime imposed by Iran and said that a reciprocal action by Azerbaijan Republic is being considered, too. (*IRNA*)

- The Israel Defense Force chose to risk civilians in Gaza in order to protect its soldiers during Operation Cast Lead, a high-ranking Israeli military officer told the British daily The Independent on Wednesday (*Haaretz*)
- Three Palestinians were injured Tuesday night in an Israel Air Force strike in the southern Gaza Strip, Palestinian sources said. According to the report, IAF aircraft fired three missiles at the tunnel area near the Gaza-Egypt border and three additional missiles at the old airport in Dahaniyeh. (*Jerusalem Post*)
- In a rare speech to an Israeli audience, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said Tuesday that Israel must show the Palestinians that it is beginning to roll back the occupation, and that the way to do that is primarily by stopping both settlement construction and IDF incursions into Palestinian areas. Fayyad, addressing the 10th Herzliya Conference immediately after Defense Minister Ehud Barak, said in a speech delivered in a conciliatory tone that the problem with settlement construction was that not only was it eating up territory where the Palestinians hoped to build a state, but that the inability to stop the construction raised doubts among the Palestinians as to whether any Israeli government could implement a future agreement. (*Jerusalem Post*)
- IDF has discovered in its ground forces in light of the threats it is facing from Hizbullah in Lebanon and Syria. It is planning the production and procurement of additional Merkava tanks, Namer armored personnel carriers and Trophy active protection systems for tanks. (*Jerusalem Post*)
- Ismail Radwan, one of the leaders of the Hamas Movement in Gaza, called on Fatah faction to hold direct talks with his Movement to reach an understanding on signing the national reconciliation agreement. (*Palestine Information Center*)
- A senior Hamas leader said on Tuesday that indirect talks with Israel on a prisoner exchange had collapsed and blamed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for hardening Israeli terms. (*Ya Libnan*)

LEBANON

- Change and Reform bloc leader MP Aoun, commenting on abolishing political sectarianism said : A sectarian system was established in Lebanon for a reason, and I supported Hezbollah's weapons for a reason, adding "disarming Hezbollah cannot take place without a valid reason." He added: "A pluralistic state should promote the culture of pluralism" The government once again failed on Monday to reach an agreement on reforms presented by Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud related to the municipal electoral law. (*Ya Libnan*)
- The 17-year-old's temporary detainment by Israeli soldiers has prompted an investigation into the incident by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and created a diplomatic tussle. (*Ya Libnan*)
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday accused Lebanon of allowing Hezbollah to develop its military force by smuggling weapons. (*Now Lebanon*)
- Marada Movement leader MP Sleiman Franjeh issued a statement that all Lebanese should participate in February 14's commemoration of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. (*Now Lebanon*)
- An unnamed ministerial source told An-Nahar newspaper on Wednesday that Prime Minister Saad Hariri clearly rejects the proposal to divide Beirut into three districts during June's municipal elections. (*Now Lebanon*)

SYRIA

- President Bashar al-Assad received on Tuesday a letter from French President Nicolas Sarkozy connected with bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and prospects of developing them further. (*SANA, Syrian Official News Agency*)
- Lebanon's former President Emile Lahoud, accompanied by his two sons, former MP Emile Emile Lahoud and Ralph Lahoud, met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad at the People's Palace this afternoon and discussed various regional and international developments. Lahoud said following the meeting that relationship between Syria and Lebanon have to be special. (*SANA, Syrian Official News Agency*)