



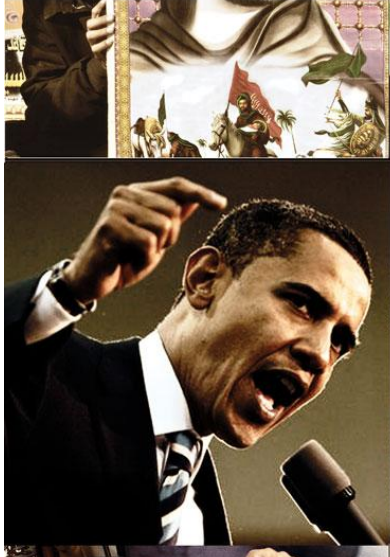
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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08 DECEMBER / ARALIK 2011
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1. IRAQ / IRAK

- **Allawi on Alsumaria: I am ready to reconcile with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki**

Head of Iraqiya List Iyad Allawi announced, on Tuesday, that he is ready to reconcile with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki if he is willing to renounce his opposing stands. This is the perfect time for real reconciliation, Allawi said warning against endless tensions.

“I have no problem in shaking hands with Maliki if he renounces his opposing stands against us and others. I am not embarrassed by any cause that serves Iraqis and the region,” Allawi told Alsumaria TV on Tuesday in a special interview with Jadal Iraqi talk show. “This is the perfect time for a real, honorable, realistic and healthy reconciliation,” he added.

“If Maliki adopts reconciliation and true openness, I would stand as a real supporter, otherwise, Iraq will be facing endless tensions in the future,” Allawi argued urging Al Maliki to seriously resort to true reconciliation.

Relations between former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and current Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki’s coalitions have been witnessing rising tension because of unsettled disagreements over security ministries’ candidates and the formation of the high strategic policy council. Political blocs had agreed in Erbil meeting upon forming the council, however, it has not been ratified till present. Maliki and his bloc members consider the council as unconstitutional and cast doubts on its importance. Maliki even stated that the council has no place in Iraq.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-71479-Allawi-on-Alsumaria%3A-I-am-ready-to-reconcile-with-Iraqi-Prime-Minister-Nuri-Al-Maliki.html>

- **Arabi comes to Baghdad today**

BAGHDAD, Dec. 8 (AKnews) - Arab League Secretary-General Nabil al-Arabi will arrive in Baghdad on an official visit today an Iraqi Government source said Wednesday.

Hamid Abdul Hussein al-Jabiri told AKnews that Arabi's visit aims to discuss preparations for holding the Arab summit

next March in addition to the Syrian situation.

"The visit will focus on Iraq's preparations to host the Arab summit next March. Arabi will meet the Prime Minister and President of the Republic and Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives."

The Iraqi Government will inform the Secretary-General of the initiative to achieve convergence of views between the Syrian regime and the opposition."

Iraq did not vote for sanctions within the Arab League in order to support the regime of Bashar al-Assad Jabiri said, but because the resolution does not serve the interests of the Syrian people.

A number of Iraqi political blocs criticized the Foreign Ministry's decision on sanctions saying it was politically motivated.

Iraq hosted the ninth session of the Arab League in 1978 in which a decision was taken to stop dealing with companies and institutions operating in Egypt that deal directly with Israel and not to approve the Camp David Summit.

Baghdad also hosted the 12th session that was held in 1990 amid growing tensions between Iraq, Kuwait and the UAE. The first Iraq war followed.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/27/6941/>

- **Maliki expected to discuss pending issues with Kuwaiti officials in visit**

Baghdad, Dec. 7 (AKnews) - Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is expected to discuss the pending issues between the two countries in an official visit to the neighboring country by the end of this month.

Maliki's planned Kuwait visit comes in response to a Kuwaiti invitation for Maliki to visit Kuwait to discuss the lingering issues between the two nations.

There are several issues lingering between Kuwait and Iraq that frequently spark tensions between the two neighbors: shared oil fields, land and water border demarcations, and the controversial Kuwaiti Mubarak Port which Iraqis believe will take business away from their ports and effect fishermen working in the Gulf.

An adviser to the Iraqi government, Salam al-Quraishi, told AKnews that "Kuwait is a neighboring country and Iraq has to maintain friendly relations with the country based on mutual interests "Maliki's unannounced Kuwait visit will focus on Mubarak port, finding ways to solve bilateral relations between the two states" al-Quraishi said.

Kuwait's Mubarak port will be built on Boubyan Island in Kuwait, just a few kilometers away from the site of Iraq's Al Faw port project, by Korean company Hyundai. Mubarak Port is projected to reach completion by 2016 at a cost of \$1.1bn and will process 1.8m containers a year by 2015.

According to economists, Iraq's main port will lose 60 per cent of its business if Kuwait goes ahead with its plans.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/276829/>

- **Defense ministry most corrupt**

BAGHDAD, Dec. 7 (AKnews) - The Parliamentary Integrity Commission said

Wednesday that the Defense Ministry tops their table of most corrupted ministries.

Commission member Khalid al-Alwani told AKnews that the commission will tackle the issue of the ministry next week.

"The spread of political corruption in government departments is behind the burden of financial and administrative corruption and the disruption of development projects in the country," he added.

The corruption index issued by Berlin-based anti-corruption organization Transparency International classified Iraq among the most corrupted countries in the world.

Although Iraq has the fourth largest oil reserves in the world, successive governments have been unable to provide public services to citizens.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/276816/>

- **Mohammadi: supporting the Syrian people, a duty, moral responsibility**

Baghdad (NINA) – MP from the Wasat Alliance, Waleed Al Mohammadi, said “Iraq through history was apt to support liberal movements and rebelling against dictators. Supporting the Syrian people in its legal demands is a duty, and moral and religious responsibility.”



In a statement issued by his office today, Mohammadi expressed “surprise over the Iraqi official stance that does not even rise to the other Arab stances,” pointing out that “there is a kind of favoritism and selectiveness in dealing with the Arab spring.”

He stressed “the importance of having the supreme Arab interest as our priority and never to be biased to one party in order to implement a stranger’s agenda.”

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

● Pdk Ve Ynk'nin Ortak Açıklaması

Peyamner Haber Merkezi/7-Dec-11(PNA)- Bugün Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi(PDK) İle Kürdistan Yurtseverler Birliği(YNK) politbüroları Başkan Barzani ile Talabani'nin katılımı ile bir toplantı düzenledi.

İki parti'nin politbürolarının düzenlemiş olduğu toplantı sonrası basına yapılan yazılı açıklamada, toplantıda Ortadoğu da yaşanan olaylar ve bölge ile dünya üzerinde ki etkileri ve özelde Irak ile Kürdistan'a etkisinin ele alındığı ve iki politbüronun mevcut sorunlar ve olayları ele aldığı ve bunların demokrasi ile Kürdistan bölgesi deneyimi üzerinde ki etkileri ile iki parti arasında ki stratejik anlaşmanın değerlendirildiği bertilen açıklamada, yapılan bu değerlendirmelerin ışığın bazı kararların aldığına yer verildi.

Irak'ın Durumu

Toplantıda Irak'ın çakılıp kaldığı ve çözemediği sorunlardan duyulan rahatsızlık dile getirildi. Tafralar ve kurumlar arasında ki sorunların çoğunlu halkın zararına sonuçlanmaktadır. Özellikle Irak'ın orta ve aşağı Irak'ta

gerekli temel hizmetlerin götürülmediği bariz bir şekilde ortada durmaktadır. Tehlikeli olanda uygulanmayan anayasa ve anlaşmadır(Hewler anlaşması), diğer güçler ile Kürdistan bölgesi ve Merkezi hükümet bu konuda anlaşmaya varmışlardı. Bu nedenle biz anayasa'nın ve anlaşmanın gerektirdiklerinin yerine getirilmesin de ısrarcıyız. İki politbüro'da farklıkların korunması konusunda ısrarcı ve sorunların çözüme kavuşması üzerinde de çalışmaya devam edecektir.

Kürdistan'ın Durumu

Kürdistan'ın içinde bulunduğu mevcut durum, oluşturulacak yeni bir siyasetle daha fazla reform ve daha fazla hizmet ile halkın refah düzeyinin yükseltilmesini gerekmektedir. Kürdistan Listesi ve sonrası başlatılan reform çalışmaları ki iki parti'de tam destek verilmişti, bu projeye. Tabi bu yasalara ve yetki ile sorumluklara uygun olarak yapılması şarttır. PDK ile YNK Kürdistan'ın demokrasi deneyiminin korunması ve daha fazla hizmet sunulması konusunda ısrarcıdır ve olaya devam edecektir. Tüm taraflarla sorumluluk bilinci için de diyaloga devam etmeye hazırız. Yapılacak öneri ve sunulacak projeleri kabul etmeye hazırdır ancak

siyasi huzura, birlikte yaşama kültürüne bağlı kalınmalı, ve unutulmaması gereken; siyasi özgürlükler, toplumsal ve barış ile huzur, çağa uygun olarak yürütülecek olan toplumsal, demokratik ve ulusal mücadelenin ve sorumluluğun temelini oluşturduğudur.

Bu ortak amaçlar temelinde, hiç şüphesiz ki, ne sebeple olursa olsun özgürlüklerin engellenmesi ve siyasi serbestinin çiğnenmesine izin verilmeyecektir. Hiç şüphesiz ki yasalara aykırı yapılacak olan her şeyin yasal bir cezası vardır.

Stratejik Anlaşma

Bölge, Irak ve Kürdistan'da ki gelişmeler PDK ile YNK arasında ki anlaşmanın ne kadar doğru olduğunu sürekli olarak ispatlamaktadır. Kürdistan Bölgesi'nin Demokrasi deneyiminin korunması, Irak, Kürdistan ve bölge'de de tehlikelerin uzaklaştırılmasıdır. Bu nedenle iki tarafta imzalanan anlaşmaya çok daha sıkı bir şekilde bağlı olacak ve Irak, Kürdistan ile Bölge'de ki gelişmelerin daha iyi tahlil ve analiz edilmesi için birkaç komite kurulması karar alındı.

Kurulacak olan ortak komiteler

- Bölge, Ortadoğu ve Kürdistan'da ki gelişmelerin değerlendirilmesi için bir komite
- Bir komite, basın organlarının ortak görevler için
- Bir Komite, kadro ve üyeler ile teşkilatların denetlenmesi için

<http://www.peyamner.com/details.aspx?id=258657>

- **Bm, Halkın Mücahitlerine Ülkeden Ayrılmaları İçin İmkan Sağlayın**



Peyamner Haber Merkezi/7-Dec-11(PNA)-
BM'nin Irak temsilcisi Irak hükümetinden Halkın Mücahitleri örgütü üyelerinin Irak'tan ayrılmaları için daha fazla imkan sağlanmasını talep ediyor.

BM temsilcisi Çarşamba günü toplanan güvenlik konseyin de, Irak'ta Halkın Mücahitleri üyelerinin kaldığı Eşref kampının kapatılması kararını gözden geçirmesini talep etti.

BBC'nin verdiği habere göre BM temsilcisi, Irak'ın kampta kalanları zorla çıkartma kararının yanlış olduğunu belirtti.

Irak Merkezi hükümeti, Eşref Kampı sakinlerinin bu yılın sonuna kadar ülkeyi terk etmeleri yönünde karar almıştı.

<http://www.peyamner.com/details.aspx?id=258619>

- **Iraqi woman breaks down law-enforcement barriers**



In Madhathiya, a small tribal town just south of old Babylon, the old-fashioned structures of society have driven young Asmaa Muhyi Al-Shimari to become the

first female police officer in her hometown. And not just any police officer: al-Shimari is the town's lieutenant.

In a rural area where women are expected to walk 10 feet behind their husbands, the rank of lieutenant being given to a woman was met with waves of anger and confusion from the local population, but also with support from the police officers she commands.

One police officer stated, "We are a traditional tribal-rural society that encounters many domestic issues, and we have benefitted greatly from having her with us when investigating family matters."

Al-Shimari is the first and only female police officer to walk a beat for Madhatiya's police department. There are many female lieutenants in Iraq now, but she is the first in a small rustic town such as Madhatiya. Indeed, prior to 2003 there were no women police officers anywhere in the country.

Many of the town's citizens are less than thrilled about having al-Shimari serve as the department's lieutenant; some say

they aren't convinced by the idea of a female officer walking around town with a gun strapped to her waist.

However, she has overcome the predisposed notions of women's roles in her society. "I encountered many difficulties from my own family and from the community, but I am past that stage now."

Some people have shown their support for Al-Shimari, and consider it a good idea that a woman be ranked lieutenant, affording her some sort of respect and protection. "It's very difficult for a woman to be a regular officer and not be judged or insulted while patrolling the streets," said one of the officer's fellow citizens.

Al-Shimari admits that some men attempt to flirt with her while she's on duty. "I've gotten used to it, especially when there are more significant matters to worry about, like going on with my work despite the discouragement of many."

Al-Shimari defied the odds and broke down barriers to achieve what might appear as a small role, but her journey is

significant in bringing hope for young Iraqi women.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/08/181448.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **US military winds down Iraq withdrawal**



Camp Adder, Iraq - There is almost nothing left of this sprawling military base near Nasiriyah, once a main hub for operations in southern Iraq, now reduced to more or less a fortified truck stop on the road to Kuwait.

Twelve thousand US troops were stationed here at the height of the Iraq war, with the usual complement of barracks, chow halls and other facilities. The military has dismantled most of these structures and shipped them out of the country, leaving behind kilometres of

dusty lots surrounded by high concrete walls.

Camp Adder, about 320 kilometres southeast of Baghdad, is one of only four US military bases still operating in Iraq, and on Wednesday morning it was almost deserted.

The airfield was empty, save for a C-130 carrying journalists from Baghdad. Soldiers complained not about mortar fire or improvised explosive devices, but the closure of the base's pizzeria and coffee shop last month.

"I got my T-shirt from the PX before it closed," said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fowler, referring to the post exchange, the on-base store, also shuttered several weeks ago. "The last one leaving Iraq, turn out the lights."

'That number moves fast'

Tens of millions of Iraqis are not leaving the country, of course, and for them the war is not over, not when car bombs and assassinations are a part of daily life. At least 187 civilians were killed last month in attacks, according to official figures, and

the actual tally is almost certainly higher. The security situation in much of the country remains tenuous at best.

But for the US military, the war is indeed ending: There are 8,000 American troops in Iraq today, down from a high of 170,000, according to General Jeffrey Buchanan, the chief spokesman for US forces in Iraq. "And that number moves fast," he said.

Barring some unforeseen (and unlikely) change, that number will be down to zero by December 31, save for a contingent of about 200 soldiers attached to the US embassy in Baghdad. That deadline is mandated by the US-Iraq status of forces agreement signed in 2008.

As those troops leave, so too does their equipment. Camp Adder - which the Iraqi army will rename Imam Ali Air Base - will be the last base to close, because it is the main hub for convoys travelling south to Kuwait.

Thousands of trucks have passed through here over the last 14 months, carrying everything from buildings to armoured vehicles to generators and forklifts from

the 500 bases which were once dotted around Iraq.

Roughly two million pieces of equipment have been removed from the country since September 2010, officials say. Some of it is destined for Afghanistan, where the US remains embroiled in a ten-year-old war; other items will be returned to the United States, or warehoused in Kuwait.

Soldiers on Camp Adder even broke down a factory which manufactured the concrete T-walls which surround the base.

"I've seen some stuff come through that I didn't know the army had," said Lt Col Jack Vantress, the commander of the 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, which secures the base.

'The end of the mission'

The 2,000 or so troops left at Camp Adder will bring the last of their equipment south in the final convoy to leave Iraq. The military will not say exactly when, for security reasons, but troops here say they expect to hit the road in the next couple of weeks.

Until then, soldiers like Captain David Moses will be busy directing traffic. Moses, on his third deployment in Iraq, heads the "movement control team" at Camp Adder. Trucks arrive from bases further north, stop off to rest and refuel, then continue on the four-hour drive to the Kuwaiti border.

Hundreds of trucks, many driven by men from South Asia hired by private contractors, are moving US equipment to Kuwait

Last month, Moses said, the massive staging area for these convoys handled 1,000 vehicles per day.

That number has since fallen to 500, because most of the stuff in Iraq has already left.

Most of the trucks are hired from private contractors.

"We're going to be here until the end of the mission. We're going to make sure that every piece of equipment in Iraq is clear," Moses said.

"What we're doing is something that has not been done since Vietnam."

(Moses may have underestimated the scale of the operation: Military officials say this is their largest logistical operation since World War II.)

Not everything will be shipped away, though. The army will leave \$220 million worth of equipment at Camp Adder, much of it containerised housing units (CHUs, in the military's ubiquitous jargon), trailers which housed the base's thousands of soldiers.

There is also a parking lot full of civilian vehicles used on the base, many in a state of disrepair after eight years of dusty roads and searing summer heat. The US is leaving those behind, as many as 950 vehicles, and handing the keys to the Iraqi government.

The military says this equipment will help the Iraqi security forces, though its real motives are a bit simpler: The US is leaving behind anything which is not worth the cost of shipping.

"We had three choices with that equipment," said Captain Rick Kaiser.

"We can walk away and abandon it. We can pay the millions of dollars it would cost to ship back to the United States. Or we can leave it... they'll still get some use out of this, where if we try to ship it back it won't survive the shipping."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/201112717295310300.html>

2. IRAN / İRAN

- **Iranian MP Blasts US for Secret Meetings with Terrorists in Afghanistan**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian legislator blamed the US officials for the recent increase in terrorist attacks in Afghanistan which have killed a large number of innocent civilians in the country, and said there are many documents proving that Americans have had meetings with terrorists in the war-torn country.

"It is now 10 years that the Afghan soil was occupied by the US military forces and documents indicate that the US officials hold official meetings with the terrorist groups," Head of the parliament's Human Rights Commission Zohreh Elahian told FNA on Wednesday.

Earlier news by the western media in July said that the US officials have met with a senior aide to the fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar at least three times in recent months.



The western media also reported that meetings have been facilitated by Germany and Qatar, but US officials have been present each time, meeting with Tayeb Agha, who is a personal assistant to Omar.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US State Department have been involved in the meetings, the western reports quoted an unnamed American official as saying at the time.

The meetings were first reported by The Washington Post and the German magazine Der Spiegel in July. A senior Afghan official and Western officials working in the region confirmed the

reports on condition of anonymity because they were not permitted to talk to the media about the issue.

While the US insisted that the conversations with the Taliban were at a "very, very preliminary" stage, media reports said that the first face-to-face meeting between Washington and Taliban officials occurred in Germany in November last year, mediated by German and Qatari officials. A second round occurred in Doha in February, and a third meeting in Germany was held in May.

10 years after the western invasion of the country, the insurgency is at its bloodiest since 2001, despite the presence of foreign troops in the war-torn country.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007276485>

- **Burucerdi: Casusluk uçağının düşürülmesi, İran'ın gücünü gösterdi**

FHA- İslami Şura Meclisi Milli Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Komisyonu Başkanı Alaeddin Burucerdi, Amerikan casusluk uçağının düşürülmesi, İran silahlı kuvvetlerinin yüksek kapasite ve gücünü yansıttığını vurguladı.

FHA- Amerika'nın RQ170 tipi insansız casusluk uçağının düşürülmesi hakkında muhabirimize konuşan Burucerdi, uçağın düşürülerek ele geçirilmesinin İran'ın İslam inkılabı rehberinin özel tedbirleri sayesinde ulaştığı yüksek kapasite ve askeri gücünü yansıttığını belirtti.



Burucerdi, Amerika ve bölge ülkelerinin İran aleyhinde insansız casusluk uçaklarını kullanarak casusluk faaliyetleri yapmak istedikleri takdirde İran savunması ile karşılaşacaklarını bilmeleri gerektiğini ifade etti.

Burucerdi, RQ170 insansız casusluk uçağının düşürülmesi, İran silahlı kuvvetlerinin İran sınırlarını çok yönlü savunabilecek kapasitede olduğunu ortaya koyduğunu vurguladı.

<http://turkish.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=9007276537>

- **Mısır'ın Müslüman Kardeşler Hareketi: İran'la kesilen ilişkileri yeniden gözden geçireceğiz**



FHA- Mısır'ın Müslüman Kardeşler Hareketi eski Genel Sekreteri Mahmut İzzet, İran ile kesilen ilişkileri yeniden gözden geçireceklerini açıkladı.

FHA- Mısır'da ilk özgür parlamento seçimlerinden zaferle çıkan Müslüman Kardeşler Hareketi liderlerinden İzzet, bu zaferin Mısır halkı için hayır ve bereket kaynağı olacağını kaydetti.

Mısır'da iktidar oldukları takdirde Arap ve İslam dünyası ve özellikle Filistin meselesi ile ilgili eski tutumlarından asla taviz vermeyeceklerini belirten İzzet, İslam dünyasının en önemli meselesinin, Filistin davası olduğunu vurguladı.

İzzet, Filistinli kardeşlerine her ne şekilde olursa olsun yardım etmeleri gerektiğini ifade etti.

Mısır'ın eski rejimin bir çok politikasını yeniden gözden geçirmesi gerektiğini vurgulayan İzzet, özellikle İran ile kesilen ilişkileri yeniden ele alacaklarını belirtti.

<http://turkish.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=9007276521>

- **China, Russia want to inspect downed U.S. drone**

TEHRAN, Dec. 7 (MNA) -- An informed source in the Iranian military has said that Russian and Chinese officials have asked for permission to inspect the U.S. spy drone that was recently downed by the Iranian Armed Forces, Nasimonline.ir reported on Wednesday.

On Sunday, an unidentified Iranian military source said that the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic had downed an advanced RQ-170 unmanned U.S. spy plane, which had violated the country's airspace along the eastern border.

There are unconfirmed reports that Iran may put the drone on public display.

According to the Washington Post, the RQ-170 drone has been used by the CIA

for highly sensitive missions into other nations' airspace, including months of surveillance of the compound in Pakistan in which Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was allegedly hiding before he was killed in an attack by Special Operations forces on May 1, 2011.

On Monday, U.S. military officials said that they are concerned that Tehran may now have an opportunity to acquire information about the classified surveillance drone program, AP reported.

U.S. officials considered conducting a covert mission inside Iran to retrieve or destroy the stealth drone but ultimately concluded such a secret operation wasn't worth the risk of provoking a more explosive clash with Tehran, a U.S. official said, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1478316>

- **Iran to use advanced electronic warfare equipment in naval war game**

TEHRAN, Dec. 7 (MNA) – Deputy Navy Commander Gholam Reza Khadem-Bigham announced on Wednesday that

advanced domestically manufactured electronic warfare equipment will be used in a major naval war game, codenamed Velayat 90, which will be held in the near future.

The naval war game is planned to be held in the Sea of Oman and the north of the Indian Ocean. Navy's officials say that the war game differs from previous ones in terms of the vastness of the area of action and military equipment and tactics that would be employed in maneuvers.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1478307>

- **Moscow, Beijing oppose oil embargo on Iran**

China and Russia, as two veto-wielding Security Council members who sit on the 5+1 group negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program, have opposed oil embargo against Iran.

Russia's energy minister said on Wednesday that banning Iranian oil sales would be a political move and Russia does not believe energy supplies should be used to exert pressure.



European Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger said on Tuesday there was consensus among some EU countries to ban imports of Iranian oil and that Europe hoped to bring Russia on board in a global ban.

But the world's biggest crude oil producer, which does not import any Iranian crude, is unlikely to back the plan aimed at piling pressure on Iran to drop its nuclear program.

"It is quite obvious that this decision is based on some political motivation ... In these situations we try to be as neutral as possible," Sergei Shmatko told reporters on the sidelines of the World Petroleum Congress in Doha.

"Do you realize the impact of this decision once it is made?" he said, according to Reuters.

China won't join U.S.-led anti-Iran bid

"China always places domestic law above the international law, which make use of any slightest pretext to impose unilateral sanctions. China is like many other countries. Our dealings with Iran are

completely above board," Press TV quoted Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei as saying at a press briefing on Tuesday.

He added, "They (China's deals with Iran) violate no UN Security Council resolution. They are neither in the interests of other countries nor the international community. They should not be called into question."

Meanwhile, an analyst has stated that China, the biggest buyer of Iranian crude, would not heed a possible embargo on oil imports from Iran.

"Iran is a very important supplier of oil for China. I believe there would a massive conflict between America's prohibition from and China's interest in the Iranian crude. China won't certainly do what the United States says," He Jun, from Anbound Information Consultancy, told Press TV in Beijing.

OPEC chief hopes EU will not impose embargo on Iran oil

The head of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

said on Wednesday he hoped the EU would not press sanctions on Iran's "difficult to replace" oil exports.

"I really hope there will not be an EU embargo on Iranian oil," OPEC Secretary General Abdullah El-Badri said at the World Petroleum Congress.

"It will be very, very difficult to replace" the exports of this OPEC member, AFP quoted him as saying.

"Europe now is facing some difficulties... so to cut these 865,000 barrels a day immediately, I think it will be a problem," he said, apparently referring to Iran's exports to all of Europe, as the EU imports around 450,000 bpd from Iran, according to the International Energy Agency.

The United States, Britain and Canada imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran's energy and financial sectors on November 21 in the wake of the latest report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the country's nuclear activities.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1478320>

- **İran-İngiltere ilişkilerinin düzeyinin düşürülmesi kanunu yürüğe girdi**



İran İslam Cumhuriyeti cumhurbaşkanı Mahmud Ahmedinejad, İran-İngiltere ilişkiler düzeyinin indirilmesi yasası ile ilgili bildirgeyi dış işleri bakanlığına gönderdi.

Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad geçtiğimiz Kasım ayında İran İslami Şura Meclisinde onaylanan İran-İngiltere ilişkileri düzeyinin indirilmesi yasasını dış işleri bakanlığına gönderdi.

İran-İngiltere ilişkiler düzeyinin indirilmesi kararı İran anayasayı koruma kollama konseyince onaylanmış bulunuyor.

Bu yasa gereğince İran dış işleri bakanlığı ulusal çıkarların korunması ve İran milleti haklarını korumak amacıyla iki hafta içinde İngiltere ile siyasi ilişkilerini maslahatgüzar

düzeyine inderip ekonomik ilişkilerini de en alt seviyede tutmakla yükümlüdür.

Yasaya göre, İran dışişleri bakanlığı İngiliz hükümetinin düşmanca siyasetlerini değişmesi halinde ilişkileri düzeyini yükseltebilecek.

Yasa Çerçevesinde, İran dışişleri bakanlığı İngiltere'ye benzer siyasetler izleyen ülkeler hakkında İran meclisine gereken kararı alması için bir rapor sunmakla görevlidir.

<http://www2.irna.ir/tr/news/view/line-119/1112081836123719.htm>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE / İSRAİL – FİLİSTİN

- **Israeli air raid kills Palestinians in Gaza; Tel Aviv builds more homes in Jerusalem**

By Al Arabiya with Agnecies
Gaza City and Jerusalem

An Israeli air raid in central Gaza killed at least two people and wounded others, Palestinian medical and security sources said

The Israeli army had no immediate comment on the reported strike, which Palestinian security sources said was carried out by an Israeli drone.



“The remains of two Palestinians were brought to Shifa hospital in Gaza City and two others were injured in the raid, which targeted a civilian car,” medical sources told AFP.

The strike came a day after Israeli warplanes carried out twin raids targeting what the military said was a Palestinian militant cell planning to launch rockets into Israel.

The strikes killed one Palestinian militant and wounded two others in an area east of the Zeitun neighborhood, the Islamic Jihad movement said.

Israel frequently targets militants it says are about to launch rockets into the

Jewish state, or bombs Gaza in response to such rocket fire, but it also carries out targeted attacks against members of Gaza militant groups.

On September 7, an Israeli air strike against a car travelling near Deir al-Balah in central Gaza killed a member of the Quds Bridge, Islamic Jihad's military wing.

More settlements

By this decision the committee is throwing oil on the flames... encouraging the settlers (and) their very explosive and problematic presence in this neighborhood

Yudith Oppenheimer, of Israeli NGO Ir Amim which lobbies for co-existence in Jerusalem

Meanwhile, Israel has approved construction of a new Jewish enclave in the heart of a Palestinian neighborhood of annexed east Jerusalem, state-owned Channel One TV reported Wednesday.

The channel said the 14-home project, to be named Maale David, was approved late Wednesday by the Jerusalem city council's planning committee and was likely to spark fresh international condemnation of Israel's settlements policy.

It is to be sited in the Arab neighborhood of Ras al-Amud, near an existing Jewish settlement of 1,000 people, the report said.

“By this decision the committee is throwing oil on the flames... encouraging the settlers (and) their very explosive and problematic presence in this neighborhood,” Yudith Oppenheimer, of Israeli NGO Ir Amim which lobbies for co-existence in Jerusalem, told the channel.

“We condemn this Israeli step very strongly,” Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat told AFP, adding a call for international support for a Palestinian appeal to the U.N. security council to intervene against the settlement.

Earlier on Wednesday, the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization decided to seek a Security Council meeting on the issue, Erakat said.

“The Palestinian leadership has decided ... to go urgently to the Security Council to stop these settlement plans, which aim to prevent the implementation of the two-state solution,” he said.

“We took the decision to begin preparing a Security Council resolution to stop these practices,” he added. He said “consultations” with the council would begin immediately.

Last month, the Israeli housing ministry invited tenders for the construction of more than 800 new homes in Har Homa and Pisgat Zeev, two settlement neighborhoods in occupied and annexed east Jerusalem, as part of a response to a successful Palestinian bid to join UNESCO.

On November 1, Israel’s inner cabinet decided to speed up construction of homes for Jews in Arab east Jerusalem and in other nearby settlements to punish the Palestinians for joining the U.N. agency a day earlier.

The initiative brought protest from the Palestinians and statements of concern from the international community.

Israeli construction of settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank remains one of the thorniest issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, scuppering direct negotiations that began in September 2010 and ground to a halt shortly

afterwards when a 10-month Israeli settlement freeze ended.

In May this year, the speaker of Israel’s parliament and two ministers attended the dedication of a previous batch of Jewish settler homes at Ras al-Amud, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the flashpoint al-Aqsa mosque compound and close to the centre of east Jerusalem.

The international community has repeatedly called on Israel to stop new building projects in east Jerusalem, which it captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six Day War and annexed shortly afterwards.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/08/181425.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **Muslim charity leaders lose appeal in Hamas case**

A U.S. federal appeals court on Wednesday upheld the convictions of five leaders of an Islamic charity on charges of funneling money and supplies to Hamas, which the United States designates as a “terrorist” group.

The organizers of the Texas-based Holy Land Foundation argued they were denied a fair trial in 2008 when the government used secret Israeli witnesses to testify against them. The organizers also raised a host of constitutional challenges to the evidence presented against them at trial.



The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected those challenges, concluding that “while no trial is perfect,” Holy Land and its leaders were fairly convicted. The court pointed to “voluminous evidence” that the foundation, which was started in the late 1980s, had long-running financial ties to Hamas.

Once the largest Muslim charity in the United States, Holy Land was closed by the administration of former President George W. Bush soon after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Holy Land argued that the millions of dollars it raised went to charities in the West Bank and Gaza known as zakat committees. Although those committees performed legitimate charitable functions, they were also Hamas social institutions, the court found.

Federal law makes it a crime to provide material aid and support to a designated terrorist organization like Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip and does not recognize Israel’s existence.

“By supporting such entities, the defendants facilitated Hamas’ activity by furthering its popularity among Palestinians and by providing a funding resource. This, in turn, allowed Hamas to concentrate its efforts on violent activity,” Judge Carolyn King wrote on behalf of the unanimous three-judge panel.

Federal prosecutors indicted the foundation and its leaders in 2004 for providing material support to a designated terrorist group.

While the first trial in 2007 ended in a mistrial, a federal jury convicted the five individuals in 2008 on charges that

included money laundering, tax fraud and conspiracy.

The charity organizers received prison sentences ranging from 15 to 65 years.

On appeal, the leaders argued the trial judge should not have allowed two Israeli witnesses to testify without revealing their real names. Pseudonyms prevented their lawyers from examining the witnesses' credentials and backgrounds, they contended.

"The Confrontation Clause of the U.S. Constitution basically didn't apply to these experts," said Gregory Westfall, a lawyer for defendant Abdulrahman Odeh. He said his client would likely appeal and predicted the case would eventually reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/08/181419.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **Former Israeli president goes to prison**

Former Israeli president Moshe Katsav has reported to prison to begin a seven-year

sentence for rape and other sexual offences.



Before travelling to Maasiyahu prison on Wednesday, Katsav, who was president from 2000 to 2007, once again claimed innocence, telling journalists his incarceration amounted to "executing a man... based on impressions, without real time testimony, without evidence".

The former president also accused authorities of ignoring evidence that could clear him, and predicted he would one day be vindicated.

"One day, consciences will prick and you will see that you buried a man alive."

Katsav, the highest-ranking Israeli official ever to enter prison, was convicted in December 2010 of raping a former female employee when he was a cabinet minister,

and of sexually harassing two other women while he was president.

In the absence of forensic evidence, prosecutors built their case almost entirely on witness testimony. Legal experts say the similarities in the accounts of victims who did not know each other likely led to the conviction, in which the judges accused Katsav of lying.

Katsav remained free while he appealed the ruling, but Israel's supreme court rejected his appeal last month.

The case has both captivated and appalled the nation, with Katsav's conviction hailed as a victory for women's rights and equality under the law.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/20111278259497838.html>

- **U.S. envoy: Washington closely coordinating with Israel on Iran**

Ambassador Dan Shapiro rebuffs previous claims by U.S. officials that Israel would not alert Washington ahead of a strike on Iran.

By Barak Ravid Tags: Iran nuclear Israel US

U.S. ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro said Thursday that Washington has been fully cooperating with Israel when it comes to the Iran and its nuclear program.

"There is no issue that we coordinate more closely than on Iran," Shapiro said during a briefing to reporters in Tel Aviv.



PM Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro

Photo by: Amos Ben Gershom, GPO

Shapiro's comments come against the backdrop of uncertainty regarding the U.S.-Israeli coordination on a possible strike on Iran.

General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last month that he did not know whether Israel would alert the United States ahead of time if it decided to take military action against Iran.

Shapiro, however, discounted these claims and asserted the close cooperation between Israel and the U.S.

"We believe Iran is pursuing a military nuclear capability and we are determined to stop it," he added.

He also noted that Quartet envoys are due to arrive in Jerusalem next week and meet Israeli and Palestinian officials.

"We emphasize that the parties need to talk directly," he urged.

Commenting on the recent elections in Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood's significant gains, Shapiro said that the U.S. expects that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty will be respected after elections in Egypt as well.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/u-s-envoy-washington-closelycoordinating-with-israel-on-iran-1.400339>

- **'US expects direct talks between Israel, Palestinians'**

By HERB KEINON

US envoy Dan Shapiro appears to support Israel's position in recent row over Quartet proposal; describes "extraordinarily close cooperation" on Iran between Washington and Jerusalem.



Both the US and the Quartet expect Israelis and Palestinians to meet in direct talks and exchange comprehensive proposals there on the issue of security and territory, US Ambassador Dan Shapiro said Thursday.

Shapiro, at a press conference in Tel Aviv, said that this position has been made clear to both sides.

His comments are significant because the Palestinians have said in recent days that while they have presented the Quartet with comprehensive proposals, Israel has refused to do so - casting Israel in the role of peace obstructor.

Israel's position is that the comprehensive proposals that the Quartet first discussed in September, are to come about as result of negotiations between the sides, and not as result of the Quartet mediating between them. Shapiro's comments appear to support Israel's interpretation.

Quartet representatives are scheduled to return to Jerusalem next week for a third round of separate talks with Israel and the Palestinians since the Quartet - made up of the EU, US, Russia and UN - launched a framework on September 23rd designed to bring about a return to direct negotiations.

Regarding Iran, Shapiro said that there was "extraordinarily close cooperation" between Israel and the US on this matter and that this issue is discussed between the two sides more than any other subject. A nuclear Iran, he said, is "a real threat to Israeli security, ours and our allies", and that is why we are determined to prevent this from happening."

Shapiro would not directly address US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's comments during a closed meeting last Saturday at the Saban forum in

Washington, during which she reportedly warned about threats to Israel's democracy. The ambassador did say, however, that "we believe Israel's an extremely vibrant democracy with very strong institutions, and that the US has 'confidence' in Israel's ability to work out the various issues on the agenda," such as proposed legislation on non-governmental organizations and the stiffening of libel laws.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=248653>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT / AFRİKA ve MISİR

- **Sudan's Bashir names new cabinet, keeps most ministries**

By Ulf Laessing and Khalid Abdelaziz
Reuters Khartoum

Sudan unveiled a new cabinet on Wednesday to include more opposition parties but kept major portfolios under the control of President Omar al-Bashir's ruling National Congress Party (NCP).

Al-Bashir has been trying to form a broadly-based new cabinet to strengthen

his power base since South Sudan became independent in July as part of a 2005 peace deal ending decades of civil war.



Analysts had been expecting fresh faces as the ruling NCP is under pressure to overcome an economic crisis which worsened when the South took away about three-quarters of the country's oil production, the main source of state revenues.

But in the new cabinet the same NCP ministers will maintain top portfolios including finance, oil, foreign affairs, defense and the interior, presidential assistant Nafie Ali Nafie told reporters.

Foreign minister Ali Karti, defense minister Abdulrahim Mohamed Hussein and Finance Minister Ali Mahmoud will stay in office, among other key officials.

Fourteen other parties were given posts, with the only major newcomer being the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The current industry minister, Awad al-Jaz, will become oil minister, a position he held in the 1990s.

The DUP will get three ministers including the cabinet affairs portfolio, Nafie said after a meeting of the NCP leadership attended by Bashir.

The Liberation and Justice Movement, a Darfur rebel group which signed a peace deal with Khartoum, will also join the cabinet, as will two groups that split off from the northern wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the ruling party in South Sudan.

The main opposition umbrella, the National Consensus Forces, has ruled out any cooperation with Bashir, who seized power in a 1989 coup, and has vowed to bring down his government.

They hope to capitalize on rising dissent over high food inflation that has provoked small protests in the capital Khartoum and the country's underdeveloped east.

Sudan has avoided an “Arab Spring” revolt like in Egypt but anger is rising over a crisis exacerbated by fighting with rebels in southern border states and Darfur, draining resources when the state needs to cut expenditure. Inflation hit 19.8 percent in October.

Government officials say the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia will not be repeated in Sudan and the country will be able to overcome the loss of oil revenues by expanding gold exports and developing the agricultural sector.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/08/181413.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **Tunisia Islamist leader stresses right to freedom of faith**



By Al Arabiya
Dubai

The head of Tunisia’s al-Nahda Party, which won a majority in the National Constituent Assembly elections, stressed in a recent visit to the United States that the Tunisian version of Islam is based on moderation and is in line with basic rights and freedoms.

“Islam in Tunisia is moderate,” Rachid al-Ghannouchi was quoted as saying in a speech he gave at the Brookings Institute in Washington D.C. The London-based Asharq al-Aswat published his comments.

“People think that Islam is about punishing people, but what we care about is eliminating crimes and offences before they take place,” he said.

Ghannouchi explained that he and his party study the Holy Quran and the Sunnah (the prophet’s teachings) for the main aims of Islam and not for the details of specific Quranic verses or prophet sayings.

When asked if citizens who choose to leave Islam are to be punished, Ghannouchi replied in the negative.

“Everyone is free to choose his or her faith,” he said.

Regarding the formation of the new government, Ghannouchi said that his party is in negotiations with several secular parties in Tunisia.

“This proves that Islamists are willing to cooperate with liberals,” he said.

The new constitution of Tunisia, Ghannouchi explained, would not have any articles that condemn Israel or any other countries.

“The Tunisian constitution is not going to mention any country other than Tunisia,” the party leader said.

When asked about earlier statements he made about rejecting the existence of Israel and praising military resistance in Palestine, Ghannouchi refused to comment.

“I am only focusing on Tunisia and not any other country. Our problems are serious and we have a million unemployed citizens,” he said.

As for the sweeping victory of Islamists in Egypt, Ghannouchi said that including them in the government is quite promising for the country.

“Allowing them to take part in politics will naturally make them less extremist and over time they will become more and more realistic and realize it’s not just about slogans and abstract ideas.”

Ghannouchi advised the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to form a government made up of secular parties and Copts.

“The most important thing is to make sure the Algerian scenario of the 1990’s is not to be reenacted,” he concluded.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/07/181355.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **Egypt PM names new cabinet**

CAIRO, (AFP) – Egypt's caretaker premier named a new cabinet on Wednesday charged with tackling worsening crime and a sliding economy after the first round

of elections showing a landslide victory for Islamist parties.

Interim PM Kamal al-Ganzuri announced his administration following nearly two weeks of delays, reportedly caused by problems in finding a suitable candidate to fill the highly sensitive interior ministry post.

He finally opted for Mohammed Ibrahim Yusuf, who headed police in the district of Giza in Cairo, who was sworn in in front of the head of Egypt's ruling military council Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, state television said.

Police have been accused of brutally handling recent protests against Tantawi, in which 43 people have died, and crime is widely seen as having increased since the ousting of former strongman Hosni Mubarak in February.

Foreign Minister Mohammed Kamel Amr was retained from the former cabinet which resigned in November in the face of escalating protests, while Mumtaz Said was named as finance minister.

Ganzuri, speaking to reporters on Tuesday night, called on all political parties to pull together behind his administration, billed as a "national salvation government."

"We can't leave security and the economy like this," he said.

"I ask for all the political movements, all the parties, and every individual to come together for the good of the country."

On Wednesday, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) also announced it had granted Ganzuri "presidential powers," giving him greater control to run the country but no oversight of the armed forces or judiciary.

The opening round of the first elections since Mubarak's fall wrapped up on Tuesday, showing a crushing victory for Islamist parties over their disorganised and fragmented liberal rivals.

The Muslim Brotherhood, banned for decades by Mubarak, said its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) had won 36 out of 54 individual seats up for grabs in the first phase of the multi-stage parliamentary polls.

In a separate party vote, which will see more than a 100 seats distributed, it won 36.6 percent while the hardline Islamic fundamentalist party Al-Nur came second with 24.4 percent.

The FJP's expected landslide victory in the individual seats -- set to be confirmed by official results -- and its pre-eminence in the party voting sets it up to become the leading power in the 498-seat new lower parliament.

Al-Nur won five seats in the run off, party spokesman Mohammed Nour told AFP.

"The Islamists win a crushing victory," headlined the state-run Al-Ahram newspaper.

Only one third of districts have voted so far, however, with the remainder set to head to the polls in a further two waves beginning on December 14 and in January.

Although attention inside and outside Egypt has mostly focused on the country's troubled transition to democracy after decades of authoritarian rule by Mubarak,

the economy is now causing grave concern.

The vital tourism industry has been badly affected by the unrest and corporate investment has dived.

A SCAF member warned last week that Egypt's foreign currency reserves were falling sharply and that it might have enough only to cover imports until the end of February.

Despite assurances from the army that it will hand full control to new civilian leaders, the elected parliament and a new president are expected to face a fierce power struggle.

The SCAF has already indicated it wants to retain many of its privileges from the Mubarak era, including oversight over military-related legislation, and wants to appoint figures to write the new constitution.

The prospect of an Islamist-dominated parliament has also raised fears among liberals about civil liberties, women's rights and religious freedom in a country

with the Middle East's largest Christian minority.

The Brotherhood stressed throughout campaigning that Islamic values were compatible with democracy, and that it was in favour of individual freedoms and working with other non-Islamist political parties.

But Al-Nur, a Salafist group that advocates a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia, has emerged as a powerful new influence and is expected to do well in the remaining rounds of voting.

After the voting for the lower house of parliament, which will end in January, Egyptians will then elect an upper house in a further three rounds of polls.

A committee to draft a new constitution will then get to work before presidential elections by the end of June 2012.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27602>

- **Egyptian expatriates begin voting in second phase of elections**

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<p>An elder voter casting her ballot during the second round of parliamentary poll, Cairo, 5 December, 2011. Run-off takes place on two days at nine governorates included within the first phase of parliamentary elections. Low turnout was witnessed on the first day.</p>



Egyptians living abroad began voting in the second phase of People's Assembly elections Thursday when the high elections commission posted the ballots on its website.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Amr Roshdy said all Egyptian embassies as well as 11 consulates will accept ballots by mail or in person through 12 December.

Egypt's foreign minister has instructed the embassies and consulates to extend their

work hours into the evening during the elections, Roshdy added.

Embassies and consulates will begin sorting ballots on Monday in the presence of representatives from the Egyptian communities in their countries. The results will be sent to the Foreign Ministry in Cairo, which will then submit them to the high elections commission.

Government reports estimate that 105,000 Egyptians living abroad are eligible to vote.

In total, 18.8 million Egyptians are eligible to vote in the second phase of People's Assembly elections, 1.3 million more than the first round, according to a report issued Thursday by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS).

For those in the country, the second round of voting will be held on 14 and 15 December in nine governorates: Aswan, Beheira, Beni Suef, Giza, Ismailia, Monufiya, Sharqiya, Sohag and Suez.

<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/539761>

- **Tourism Ministry calls for dialogue with Salafis**



Islamist successes in the first phase of the parliamentary elections have raised fears among those working in tourism, especially in light of Salafi statements questioning policies and practices within the industry.

“The Muslims did not destroy the temples of the pharaohs when they conquered Egypt,” said Assistant Tourism Minister Hisham Zaazou. He called for dialogue with the Salafis to explain to them the importance of tourism for the economy.

“The Muslim Brotherhood is more understanding than the extremist Salafis,” Zaazou said, denouncing Salafi statements about tourism promoting prostitution, alcohol and other vices.

“ Tourism brings in US\$12.5 billion, expected to reach US\$25 billion by 2025,” he said, hoping that liberal and moderate Muslim members of parliament realize the importance of that source of income.

<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/539286>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON / ÜRDÜN

- **Cabinet rejects FPM plan on wages, approves Mikati's**



The Lebanese cabinet on Wednesday rejected the proposal of Labor Minister Charbel Nahhas on wage increase and instead approved another proposal despite the strong objection by Free Patriotic Movement ministers.

“The plan we proposed was rejected and they adopted a hybrid plan, and I announce to the Lebanese that the

minimum wage did not hit the mark of 1.2 million L.L. or even 960,000 L.L. as they were expecting,” New TV quoted Nahhas as saying after leaving the cabinet session.

Briefing reporters after the cabinet session, Information Minister Walid al-Daouq said: “A wage increase proposal other than that proposed by Minister Nahhas was discussed and it received the required majority of votes and this is the democratic game.”

Daouq explained that the minimum wage was raised to 600,000 LL, while wages between 500,000 LL and 1 million LL where raised by 30 percent on the condition that the increase is minimum 150,000 LL and maximum 200,000 LL.

As for the wages exceeding 1 million LL, the cabinet agreed to a 20 percent raise as long as the increase does not exceed 275,000 LL, he added.

The cabinet also agreed to raise the annual scholarship amount for college students from 1 million to 1.5 million LL

The information minister said that the approved wage plan was proposed by Prime Minister Najib Mikati

LBC TV reported that “dismay showed on the faces of FPM ministers as they left the session.”

MTV reported that Prime Minister Najib Miqati opened the session by “calling on everyone to respect each other and resort to constitutional institutions,” saying “let no one try to intimidate the premier or threaten to boycott cabinet.” A possible reference to Free Patriotic Movement ministers whose leader MP Michel Aoun has been threatening to boycott the cabinet sessions.

According to al Liwa newspaper Mikati was able to secure the vote for his wage plan because several of Aoun’s allies sided with the PM’s plan .

Nahas’ proposal

Nahas’ proposal stipulates increasing the minimum wage to 750,000 LL and an increasing all other wages by a maximum of 300,000 LL.”

Loans to ministries

Daouq also told reporters that the cabinet agreed to grant loans to a number of ministries, including the ministries of education, culture and interior, sports and Finance.

Complaint to UN

Daouq also said that President Michel Suleiman directed Foreign Affairs Minister Adnan Mansour to file a complaint with the United Nations regarding the Israeli espionage device that was uncovered in Deir Kifa last week.

The Israeli army on December 2 detonated the device that had been monitoring Hezbollah’s private communications network, according Hezbollah.

National dialogue

Daouq also said that Mikati called on the president to hold a national dialogue session in light of the current difficult situation and without any prior conditions or agenda.”

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/12/08/cabinet-rejects-fpm-plan-on-wages-approves-mikatis/>

- **Safadi welcomes US assistance to Lebanon**



Lebanon Finance Minister Mohammad Safadi who is on an official visit to the United States said on Wednesday that the US is “always welcome” to assist Lebanon on the political and economic levels, according to a statement issued by his office.

“The US is always welcome to support Lebanon politically and economically and to assist the Lebanese army with all the necessary equipment to preserve stability in the country ,” Safadi told US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Elizabeth Dibble during their meeting in Washington, DC.

In turn, the US official said her country “does not intend to cut off aid to Lebanon.”

“Most of the officials in the US administration and in congress want to help Lebanon, especially following the decisions that the Lebanese government has taken,” Dibble said according to the statement, in reference to the funding of the Special tribunal for Lebanon (STL)

Last week, Prime Minister Najib Mikati announced the transfer of funding to the tribunal probing the 2005 assassination of former PM Rafik Hariri, despite Hezbollah’s objections.

STL indicted four Hezbollah operatives, however, the Shiite group has repeatedly said the court is a US-Israeli plot targeting the Resistance and refuses to cooperate with it.

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/12/07/safadi-welcomes-us-assistance-to-lebanon/>

- **Aoun says his ministers to attend the cabinet meeting**

Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun found on Wednesday an excuse for his ministers to attend the cabinet session later in the day .

Following talks with Marada chief Suleiman Franjieh, Tashnag Secretary-General Hovig Mekhitarian and Lebanese Democratic Party leader Talal Arslan in Rabieh Aoun said :



“We decided to participate in today’s cabinet session because includes in its agenda the draft on wages which we proposed ,”

He announced that the ministers representing his Change and Reform bloc in the government would participate in a cabinet session .

“We hope that the draft on wages would be approved so that everyone could enjoy the holidays,” Aoun said but hinted that his ministers would boycott the sessions again if their demands were not met.

There were reports that the Marada leader was instructed by Syrian president Bashar al Assad to mediate between Aoun and PM Nagib Mikati . Franjieh reportedly threatened Aoun that he will quit the Change and Reform bloc if Aoun insisted on boycotting the cabinet sessions.

According to the reports Assad considers the Lebanese cabinet vital for the survival of his regime specially because of the sanctions that were imposed on Syria by the Arab League

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/12/07/aoun-says-his-ministers-to-attend-the-cabinet-meeting/>

6. SYRIA / SURIYE

- **President al-Assad to ABC News: There Are Many Attempts to Distort Facts about What is Happening in Syria**



DAMASCUS, (SANA) – President Bashar al-Assad said that there are many attempts to distort facts about what is happening in Syria and false accusations, stressing the need to verify the authenticity of the images and reports broadcast about Syria.

In an interview with the US channel ABC News, President al-Assad was asked a question about the report of the UN committee on events in Syria and whether or not the UN sent the documents or evidence on which the report was based to Damascus, saying that the Syrian government received no documents or evidence pertaining to what the report described as "crimes against humanity" committed in Syria.

He called on the UN to send these documents to verify them, noting that most of the people killed in the events in Syria are supporters of the government, not the other way around.

In response to a question on whether he believed that his forces used exaggerated force against protestors, President al-Assad said "The forces in Syria aren't "my" forces; they are military forces that belong

to the homeland and nobody owns them," stressing that no orders were issued by anyone in Syria to kill or exercise brutality.

Regarding external pressure and the west's statements regarding what is happening in Syria, President al-Assad said that the most important thing for him is how the Syrian people view him, stressing that he is doing his best to protect the Syrian people, expressing pain over the loss of lives in the recent events.

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/337/2011/12/08/386816.htm>

- **Armed Terrorist Group Targets Crude Oil Transfer Line in Homs**

HOMS, (SANA)- An armed terrorist group on Thursday committed an act of sabotage against a crude oil transfer line in Tal Asour area to the northwest of the Refinery of Homs, SANA correspondent in the central province reported.

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/337/2011/12/08/386885.htm>

- **El-Esad'ın Sözlere Tahrif Edildi**

Aralık 08, 2011

ŞAM – Dışişleri ve Gurbetçiler Bakanlığı
Resmi Sözcüsü Cihat Makdisi; ABD dışişleri
bakanlığı sözcüsü Mark Toner'in
Cumhurbaşkanı Beşşar el-Esad'ın
Amerikan ABC Kanalına yaptığı ve henüz
yayınlanmayan demecinin içeriğine ilişkin
yaptığı açıklamalardan Suriye'nin esef
duyduğunu ve anormal karşıladığını
söyledi.



Makdisi dün Dışişleri Bakanlığında
düzenlediği basın toplantısında; ABD
Dışişleri Bakanlığı Sözcüsü Toner'in, farklı
maksatlarda söylenen sözleri tahrif ettiğini
belirterek, bunun minimum düzeyde gayrı
dakik ve gayrı profesyonel olarak
nitelendirilebileceğini ekledi.

Toner'in; Cumhurbaşkanı el-Esad'ın verdiği
demeç henüz yayınlanmadan, başkalarının
naklettiği bilgilere istinaden yorumlarda
bulduğuna dikkat çekerek; tabii
kastından saptırılan ve dakika olmayan

sözlere ilişkin geçerli nedeni olmayan
büyük bir medya çalkantısının yaşandığını
söyledi.

Makdisi; ABC Kanalından Bayan Barbara
Walters'in kişisel olarak kastederek, “
senin güçlerin şiddetle bastırdı mı?..”
sorusunu Cumhurbaşkanı el-Esad'ın
soruyu düzeltmek istediğini ve sözlerinin
akışında; “ bunlar benim güçlerim değil..”
şeklinde konuştuğunu belirtti.

20111207-205636.jpgDışişleri ve
Gurbetçiler Bakanlığı Sözcüsü; el-Esad'ın
sözlerinin akışında açıklamalarda
bulduğunu ve soruyu düzelttiğini
belirterek, Cumhurbaşkanının; “..
Suriye'de, anayasa doğrultusunda ülkenin
ulusal istikrar ve güvenliğini korumakla
yükümlü güçler var.. hatalar işlendi, fakat
istisnasız herkes yasaların karşısında hesap
verme çatısı altındadır.. yönetimin konusu
da burada yatmaktadır.. yani kanıtların
mevcut olmasıyla istisnasız herkes hesap
vermek zorundadır.. Bu da yargı
mekanizması kapsamında ve bu amaçla
teşkil edilen özel komisyon aracılığıyla
olmaktadır.. Bu komisyon kanıtların
bulunmasıyla cezalandırıyor ve kendisinin
hataları olması halinde o da

cezalandırılır..” şeklinde konuştuğuna dikkat çekti.

Cumhurbaşkanı el-Esad’ın bu şekilde konuştuğunu açıklayan Makdisi; el-Esad’ın Cumhurbaşkanı olması sıfatıyla anayasal olarak görevlerinin sorumluluğunu üstlendiğini belirtti.

Makdisi; ABD dışişleri bakanlığı sözcüsünü dikkatli olmaya davet ederek; “yanlış medya akışını kırmak amacıyla hatayı düzeltmek istedik..” dedi.

Cumhurbaşkanı el-Esad’ın kendisine sorulan sorulara ciddi ve net cevaplar verdiğini ifade eden Makdisi; “Bizler; yaptığımız her resmi açıklamanın ardından ABD idaresinin derhal yorumlarda bulunmasına alıştık.. ABD idaresi tarafından yapılan fevkalade başka hatalar da bulunuyor.. öyle ki daha büyük hataları arasında Irak ve Afganistan işgali, uçan cezaevleri, Guantanamo ve daha benzeri bir çok hataları var” şeklinde konuştu.

Arap Ligi ile imzalanması öne sürülen protokol taslağı konusunda ise Makdisi; Suriye'nin şu ana kadar Arap Ligi Genel Sekreterinden hiç bir resmi cevap almadığını açıkladı. Aynı zamanda

Suriye'nin şu ana kadar bulunduğu önerilerin, her hangi bir koşuldaki uzak olarak oldukça mantıklı öneriler olduğunun altını çizdi.

Makdisi; ABD ve Fransa büyükelçilerinin Şam’daki görevlerine dönmeleri konusunda kendisine yöneltilen bir soruya cevap olarak; “elçilerin dönüşünün, ilişkilerin iyileştirilmesiyle birlikte Suriye'nin egemenlik ve bağımsızlığına saygı bağlamında olmasını umut ediyoruz..” şeklinde konuştu. Buna ek olarak ABD büyükelçisini üstüne düşeni ve haklarını öğrenmesi amacıyla Viyana anlaşmasını yeniden okumaya davet etti.

ABD dışişleri bakanının yurtdışındaki muhaliflerden bir grupla toplantısı konusunda ise Makdisi; bunun hayır amaçlı olması ve bu muhaliflerin ulusal diyaloga katılmalarına katkı sağlaması temennilerinde bulundu.

Makdisi; “bizler diyaloga ve çözümün mutlak bir şekilde Suriyeli olduğuna inanıyoruz..fakat Uluslararası Güvenlik Konseyinde daimi ülkelerin BM misakına uymaları ve dünya güvenliği ve istikrarını koruma çabalarında bulunmalarını temenni ediyoruz..dolayısıyla yönetimleri

düşürme hedefi taşıyan toplantılar değil de, halkların barış ve istikrarını pekiştirecek toplantılar için çaba harcanması gerektiğini düşünüyoruz..” dedi.

Türkiye tarafından yapılacak ve güzel komşuluk ilişkileri hedefleyecek açıklamaları Suriye'nin memnuniyetle karşılayacağını ifade eden Makdisi; “Türkiye ile işbirliğinde oldukça ileri düzeye geldik.. durumların bu noktaya gelmesi de esef verici.. Fakat Türkler, hiç bir geçerli nedeni olmayan bu tutumlarını yeniden gözden geçirmek isterlerse Suriye bunu hoşnutlukla karşılayacak.. ileri düzeyde sağlanan işbirliğini yeniden sürdürmeye hazırız ve Türkiye dahil tüm komşularımızla en iyi komşuluk ilişkilerine büyük özen gösteriyoruz... bu özenin karşılıklı olmasını da umut ediyoruz..” şeklinde konuştu.

<http://www.sana.sy/tur/236/2011/12/08/386713.htm>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA / ARAP YARIMADASI VE BASRA KÖRFEZİ

- **German official again says Qatar should not have been awarded World Cup**



German football federation (DFB) president Theo Zwanziger has reiterated his criticism of the decision to award the 2022 World Cup to Qatar, saying normal hosting criteria had been “perverted.”

“I have never understood how such a small country is allowed to stage the most important sports event in the world, especially as Qatar was last in the rankings before the decision,” Zwanziger told reporters.

“The criteria for host nations have been perverted,” added the German, who has been a vocal critic of the decision. “I have my doubt as to whether sporting aspects were fully taken into account.”

Qatar has denied any wrongdoing and believes it won the right to host the World Cup fairly.

Zwanziger, a member of FIFA's executive committee, was appointed in October to head one of the new committees established to clean up soccer's governing body, which has been riddled with allegations of bribery and corruption.

He said last week he would step down as head of the German FA next October, one year earlier than planned. On Tuesday, DFB general secretary Wolfgang Niersbach announced he would stand for election as Zwanziger's replacement.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/08/181440.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **Yemen vice president sets up unity government for upcoming elections**

Yemen's vice president issued a decree on Wednesday to set up a national unity government to prepare for elections, as fighting raged on the streets of the capital Sana'a.

The announcement by vice-President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi paves the way for a unity government to be sworn in as part of a plan to end months of protests against outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

In the latest threat to a transition away from Saleh's 33-year rule, government forces traded artillery fire with tribal foes in Sana'a, witnesses said. One person was killed and more than a dozen were injured, according to the office of a tribal leader and Saleh opponent whose compound came under fire.

Under a Gulf-brokered power transfer plan signed in Saudi Arabia last month, Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) party agreed to divide cabinet posts with its opponents in a coalition government headed by an opposition leader.

Mohammed Basindwa, a former foreign minister, was nominated to head the new government by opposition parties. The GPC retained the key portfolios of defense and foreign affairs, while opposition parties received the interior and finance ministries.

Basindwa told Reuters the swearing in would take place on Saturday.

Apart from preparing for the presidential election, set for Feb. 21, 2012, the new government faces numerous challenges, such as restoring security, providing vital services disrupted by 10 months of mass protests and combating rising separatist sentiment in the south.

“I think the government is going to find it very difficult to be able to function and govern the whole of the united country properly. It remains to be seen how the street will react to this new government and the south also in particular,” said Ghanem Nuseibeh, an analyst and founder of the Cornerstone Global Associates consultancy.

The government must also deal with Islamist militants who have exploited the protests to strengthen their southern foothold.

Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia and the United States that a slide toward more chaos after the uprising against Saleh would embolden Yemen’s al Qaeda wing,

against which Washington has waged a campaign of drone strikes.

Fighting raged in Sana’a on Wednesday near government buildings and the compound of tribal leader Sadeq al-Ahmar, an arch-rival of Saleh. His office said one person had been killed and 13 injured in shelling by government forces on the al-Hasaba district.

Witnesses said shells had fallen on government buildings including the headquarters of state radio and the prime minister’s offices as government forces fought Ahmar’s men in their al-Hasaba stronghold.

“Militants and army soldiers have been fighting near the Interior Ministry since dawn. They’re using machineguns and RPGs,” Abdul Rahman, a Sana’a resident, said by phone as gunfire reverberated in the background.

“We are trapped in our homes and can’t get out,” he said. Residents of Sana’a said the streets were nearly empty in the affected districts.

The capital saw open warfare in May between Saleh's forces and those of Ahmar, a leader of the powerful Hashed tribal confederation, after Saleh pulled out of signing the transition deal backed by the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Last month Saleh bowed to international pressure and street protests demanding an end to chronic poverty, rampant corruption and lack of economic opportunity, and handed his powers to Hadi.

But the deal is threatened by fighting between Saleh's allies and enemies. In Taiz, 200 km (120 miles) south of Sana'a, the clashes have left at least 20 dead and led the United Nations to demand that government forces stop shooting protesters.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/08/181390.html?PHPSESSID=kgs4m21m93hldb0h4nb9cmb096>

- **Injuries as Bahrain police 'attack' protest**

Protesters in Bahrain say police have fired rubber bullets and tear gas at demonstrators who were trying to take

back the site of the Pearl roundabout - the symbol of the protest movement that erupted in February.



Bahrainis were marking Ashoura, a day of mourning for Shia Muslims, when the decision was made on Wednesday to move towards the roundabout. Several people are said to have been injured.

Bahrain's government tore down the Pearl Roundabout monument in the centre of the capital, Manama, after it became the rallying point for anti-government demonstrations. Many protesters were killed or arrested, but the movement has continued to simmer.

Mohammed al-Maskati, president of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, told Al Jazeera on the phone from Manama that hundreds of people marched to the site from the village of Sanabis.

When the protesters got close to the site of the former roundabout, security forces reportedly fired tear gas and rubber bullets.

"There are a lot of injuries. [People are] trying to transfer them to the closest houses to treat them, there are nurses who are volunteers," he said.

Fatal injury

Also on Wednesday, a woman who was seriously hurt during a recent anti-government protest in the Gulf kingdom died of her injuries, according to the ministry of health.

The ministry's statement said the 27-year-old woman sustained head injuries during "rioting" last month in a Shia village near the capital. She died in a hospital early on Wednesday.

Bahraini rights groups say she was fatally injured in the head by a metal rod during a November protest and that security forces were responsible for her death.

More than 35 people have died in clashes and protest-related violence since February when the pro-democracy protesters, many of them Shia, started campaigning for greater rights in the Sunni-ruled Bahrain.

The strategically important and petroleum-rich island is the home of the US Navy's 5th Fleet. Bahraini activists say these factors have led to a far more muted response to their protests, compared to recent uprisings in other Arab countries.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/201112717732984383.html>

- **Yemen vice president sets up unity government**

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The announcement by vice-President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi paves the way for a unity government to be sworn in as part of a plan to end months of protests

against outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

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Basindwa told Reuters the swearing in would take place on Saturday.

Apart from preparing for the presidential election, set for February 21, 2012, the new government faces numerous challenges, such as restoring security, providing vital services disrupted by 10 months of mass protests and combating rising separatist sentiment in the south.

"I think the government is going to find it very difficult to be able to function and govern the whole of the united country properly. It remains to be seen how the street will react to this new government and the south also in particular," said Ghanem Nuseibeh, an analyst and founder of the Cornerstone Global Associates consultancy.

The government must also deal with Islamist militants who have exploited the protests to strengthen their southern foothold.

Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia and the United States that a slide toward more chaos after the uprising against Saleh would embolden Yemen's al Qaeda wing, against which Washington has waged a campaign of drone strikes.

FIGHTING IN SANAA

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The capital saw open warfare in May between Saleh's forces and those of Ahmar, a leader of the powerful Hashed

tribal confederation, after Saleh pulled out of signing the transition deal backed by the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Last month Saleh bowed to international pressure and street protests demanding an end to chronic poverty, rampant corruption and lack of economic opportunity, and handed his powers to Hadi.

But the deal is threatened by fighting between Saleh's allies and enemies. In Taiz, 200 km (120 miles) south of Sanaa, the clashes have left at least 20 dead and led the United Nations to demand that government forces stop shooting protesters.

As fighting continued with al Qaeda-linked Islamists in the south, nine militants and four soldiers were killed on Wednesday outside the city of Zinjibar, centre of a province where the militants have seized swathes of territory, a local official said.

In Yemen's north, new fighting flared up on Wednesday between Shi'ite Muslim rebels, whom Saleh's forces attempted to crush with Saudi help in 2009, and Sunni

Muslim Salafi Islamists, a Salafi spokesman said.

The Salafis, who espouse a puritanical creed influential in neighboring Saudi Arabia, have said at least 25 people were killed late last month in attacks by Shi'ite Houthi fighters on a Salafi-run religious school in Saada province on the Saudi border.

The Houthis effectively control the province and are deeply suspicious of the Salafis, who deem Shi'ites heretics. They accuse the Salafis of attempting to build military camps near the border.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27598>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN / AFGANİSTAN - PAKİSTAN

• Karzai Cuts Britain Trip Short After Deadly Attacks in Afghanistan

VOA News
December 7, 2011

President Hamid Karzai has returned to Afghanistan, canceling a trip to Britain

after a pair of bomb attacks in Afghanistan killed at least 59 people.

Mr. Karzai arrived Wednesday in the capital Kabul to visit with some of the more than 160 wounded in the blasts. He traveled home from Germany, where he attended an international conference on Afghanistan.

Mourners also gathered to bury the victims in Kabul, where on Tuesday at least one suicide bomber set off a blast

that killed 55 people, including one American. The blast happened near the Abul Fazel shrine as Shi'ite worshippers gathered on Ashura, the holiest day of the Shi'ite Muslim calendar.

A second explosion killed four people at a shrine in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, but it is not clear if Shi'ites were specifically targeted.

In a new attack Wednesday, officials say a roadside bomb hit a bus in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province, killing at least 19 civilians. Five children were among the dead.

The Taliban denied involvement in Tuesday's attacks, calling them “cruel and indiscriminate” and blaming them on the “invading enemy.”

The Pakistan-based insurgent group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami claimed responsibility for the Kabul attack.

The Sunni extremist group is an offshoot of the bigger Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which is affiliated with al-Qaida and is responsible for a number of attacks against Shi'ites in Pakistan.

Mr. Karzai said the attacks Tuesday were the first of “that horrible nature” to take place on such an important religious day in Afghanistan.

Ashura marks the death of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad.

U.S. President Barack Obama strongly condemned the violence, saying the United States continues to stand with the people of Afghanistan against terrorism.

Experts say the attacks, which came a day after the conference to discuss Afghanistan's future as international

combat troops prepare to leave the country, underscores the importance of what was agreed in Bonn — that all countries in the region need to cooperate in securing long-term stability for Afghanistan.

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

- **Pakistani group claims Afghan attacks**

Press TV

December 7, 2011

Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has claimed responsibility for the recent bomb attacks in Afghanistan that left dozens of Shia Muslims dead.

Nearly 60 Afghans lost their lives in two separate bomb attacks in Afghanistan's Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif on Tuesday as Shia Muslims were commemorating the martyrdom of the third Shia Imam, Imam Hussein (PBUH).

One bomb went off in a mosque packed with a large crowd of mourners, marking the day of Ashura, in the capital Kabul, leaving at least 55 people including

women and children dead and more than 150 others wounded, DPA reported.

The other blast took place in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh Province, killing four people.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi belongs to the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan.

The terrorist group has carried out several bomb attacks in Pakistan but it is the first time it has claimed responsibility for an attack in Afghanistan.

Some informed sources say Saudi Arabia's rulers support Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan.

Millions of Shia Muslims across the globe are holding mourning rituals to honor Imam Hossein (PBUH), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and a number of his loyal companions who were brutally killed while fighting for justice in Karbala, Iraq, over 1,300 years ago.

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

- **Afghan gov't blames Taliban for Kabul bombing**

by Abdul Haleem

KABUL, Dec. 7 (Xinhua) -- Afghan Interior Ministry accused Taliban of organizing the suicide attack inside a shrine in the capital city of Kabul on Tuesday that left 55 civilians including women and children dead and injured 134 others.

"Taliban and terrorists once again massacred our innocent countrymen on Tuesday noon," said a statement released by the Interior Ministry late Tuesday night.

According to the statement, a man wearing suicide vest blew himself up inside the shrine of Hazrat Abul Fazal Al-Abas where the faithful Shiite mourners were observing Ashura and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), along with his 72 followers.

Ashura means "ten" in Arabic and is the tenth day of Moharam the first month of the year in Islamic calendar. Imam Hussain along with 72 of his followers including some family members were brutally murdered in Karbala of Iraq in 680 AD and since then both Muslim sects, the Shiite and Sunni commemorate the day to pay

respect and homage to Imam Hussain and followers.

Meantime, the Taliban outfit fighting Afghan government has utterly rejected its involvement in the deadly blast.

A statement posted on the armed outfit's website said that targeting civilians was against the code of conduct of the Taliban fighters and condemned killing the civilians in Kabul.

The shocking incident has prompted President Hamid Karzai to cancel his tour from Germany to London and return home, said a statement released by his office on Wednesday.

One more blast had also targeted Ashura mourners in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif on Ashura day Tuesday.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in capital Kabul and northern Mazar-e-Sharif.

Attack on Ashura ceremony was the first time registered in the war-torn Afghanistan.

"The enemies of Islam and the enemies of Afghanistan are behind the terrorist attacks on the day of Ashura. The followers of all religions in Afghanistan have been living in brotherhood and unity throughout history and the terrorist attacks on Ashura day is a conspiracy to undermine the unity of Afghans," Afghan President said in a statement released Tuesday.

Meantime, a Pakistani-based militant group, according to media reports, claimed of responsibility for the deadly suicide bombing in Kabul.

"The militant outfit, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al Almi has claimed responsibility for the Tuesday's attack on Ashura mourners in Kabul," Tolo television, an Afghan local TV channel, reported in its news bulletin Wednesday.

The attack on mourners in Kabul has drawn wide condemnations at home and abroad.

In addition to Afghan government and different political and religious circles, the U.S. and Iran embassies to Afghanistan

also denounced the bloody bombing in Kabul.

The U.S. embassy in a statement released here condemned the terrorist attacks on Ashura and said that the U.S. would continue to stand alongside Afghans in the war on terror, according to Tolo television.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has also condemned the attacks on mourners in Kabul and Mazar-e- Sharif.

"Such illegal and indiscriminate attacks are completely unacceptable and those responsible are fully accountable for the deaths and injuries of civilians caused by such brutal acts," said a statement released by UNAMA on Tuesday.

Millions of faithful Muslims particularly the Shiite sect across the world observe Ashura, a ritual to pay homage to Imam Hussain and his 72 followers who were martyred by despotic ruler Yazid in Karballah of Iraq some 14 centuries ago.

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

● **Bomb blast kills 19 in Afghanistan**

Press TV

December 7, 2011

A roadside bomb has exploded in southern Afghanistan, leaving at least 19 people including women and children dead, Afghan officials say.

The incident occurred on Wednesday when a roadside bomb hit a mini-van carrying Afghan civilians, leaving at least 19 people, including 7 women and 5 children, dead, AFP reported.

According to officials, the vehicle was travelling from provincial capital Lashkar Gah to Sangin district in Helmand province.

The blast came the day after nearly 60 Afghans lost their lives in two separate bomb attacks in Afghanistan's Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif as Shia Muslims were commemorating the martyrdom of the third Shia Imam, Imam Hussein (PBUH).

Violence continues across Afghanistan despite the presence of nearly 150,000 US-led foreign troops there.

Afghanistan issued on September 28 said that the monthly average number of security incidents recorded for the year through the end of August has climbed nearly 40 percent.

The report also said civilian casualties, already at record levels in the first six months of the year, rose five percent between June and August 2011, compared with the identical period in 2010.

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

- **NATO Ministers To Discuss Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia**

December 7, 2011

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Foreign ministers from NATO member states are gathered for two days of meetings at the alliance's headquarters in Belgium that are expected to focus on the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as relations with Russia.

The meetings come amid heightened tensions with Pakistan after an air strike by NATO planes near the Afghan border last month killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

The ministers are also expected to discuss the aftermath of this week's international meeting in Bonn on the future of Afghanistan, including the progress of moves to transfer security responsibilities to Afghan forces in 2014 and the alliance's mission in Kosovo following recent violence with minority Serbs that left 50 NATO troops injured.

On December 8, the NATO ministers will be joined by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council. That meeting is expected to focus on Russian concerns about the planned deployment of a NATO missile-defense system in Europe.

'New Arms Race' Warning

The chief of staff of the Russian armed forces meanwhile said as NATO ministers were preparing to gather that Russia was being pushed into a new arms race by the planned deployment of a NATO European missile-defense system.

General Nikolai Makarov, speaking at a meeting with foreign military attaches

warned of a possible "sharp deterioration" of relations.

"The very idea of creating a missile-defense system can definitely bring about a sharp deterioration in our relations," Makarov said.

The NATO meeting also comes one day after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton criticized Russia's parliamentary elections, citing allegations of fraud.

Protests in many Russian cities are continuing.

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

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**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanrıverdi O and Sercan Doğan. 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.*