



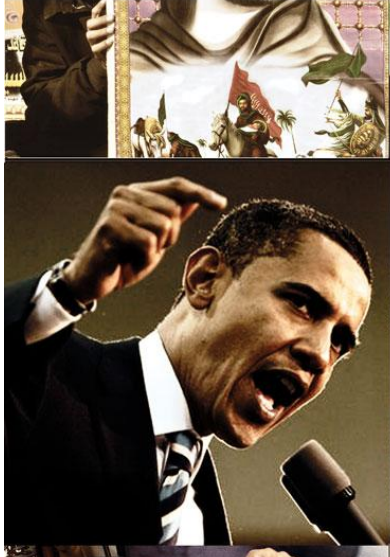
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
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1. IRAQ

- **Iraqi boy addicted to gas, weirdest phenomenon in Wasit Province in 2011**

Citizens of Wasit Province considered that the case of ten year old Hussein Alwan, whose favorite drink is gas, is the weirdest phenomenon the province ever witnessed in 2011. We ask researchers and experts to study this phenomenon and investigate about its reasons and consequences, citizens said.

“If we move away from evaluating the most important security, political, economic, sports and cultural events that Wasit Province witnessed in 2011, we would reach a weird phenomenon which is the addiction of 10 year old Hussein Alwan on gas,” reporter Jalal Al Shati told Alsumarianews.

“In the beginning, I couldn’t believe what I heard from people and colleagues about that boy,” he added noting that he believed it after he saw the boy drinking gas. “This is why we consider this as the weirdest phenomenon in 2011,” he advanced.

“This boy is different from children his age because he is calm and sometimes lazy,” a citizen in Al Naft Street southeastern Al Kut reported. “He doesn’t eat candy and drink soft drinks but prefers instead to drink gas which became his favorite beverage,” he stated.

“Since four years, my son disappears sometimes until we caught him once stealing gas and drinking it from parked vehicles,” the father revealed.

“In the beginning we couldn’t believe this even though he used to continuously faint,” the father explained. “Regardless of all our efforts to make him stop he would always come back to drinking gas,” he added, a source told Alsumaria.

Hassan, for his part, admits that he used to face dangerous setbacks since he used to faint every time he drinks gas. “Now, not a single day passes without having my favorite drink,” Hassan revealed.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72281-Iraqi-boy-addicted-to-gas%2C-weirdest-phenomenon-in-Wasit-Province-in-2011.html>

- **Iraqiya List warns against dismissing ministers**

Iraqiya List headed by Iyad Allawi warned, on Friday, that dismissing its ministers would breakdown the political process. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki cannot dismiss ministers because they are not regular employees, Iraqiya argued.

“Prime Minister Maliki took office due to Iraqi political parties’ accordance,” Iraqiya MP Nabil Harbo told Alsumarianews noting that ministers from the different political parties are not normal employees that Prime Minister can dismiss.

Harbo warned against the dismissal of ministers assuring that it would breakdown the political process especially in the event that Iraqiya MPs withdrew from parliament, a source told Alsumaria.

Iraqiya list called Al Maliki, on December 28, to show a flexible position in order to resolve the present situation. Suspending membership of Iraqiya members in both parliament and cabinet is a clear message that there is a crisis to be solved between the different political parties, Iraqiya said.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72279-Iraqiya-List-warns-against-dismissing-ministers.html>

- **Mayahi: Iraq security institutions are infiltrated and involved in torturing detainees**

The member in Iraqi parliamentary committee of security and defense, Adnan Al Mayahi, announced on Thursday that the majority of security institutions iare “infiltrated”, and carry out arrests without judicial warrants while they are involved in torturing detainees. Security commanders should be interrogated, Mayahi said.

“The majority of security institutions are “infiltrated” and carry out arrests without judicial warrants,” Mayahi told Alsumarianews assuring that they are also involved in torturing detainees in prisons.

“Security commanders should be interrogated State of Law Coalition MP Adnan Al Mayahi urged, a source told Alsumaria.

No Iraqis would be imprisoned for their opinions and thoughts but for violence and terrorism only, Armed Forces General Commander Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki

assured, on December 10. There are no limits for human freedom if it doesn't oppose public interest, he added, a source told Alsumaria.

Iraqiya List headed by Iyad Allawi revealed, on December 14, that random arrests are still occurring in all Iraqi regions which contradicts human rights' basics. Our members are holding constant meetings regarding this issue, Iraqiya indicated.

Iraqi Government is not executing most of its international agreements and conventions concerning human, women, children and prisoners' rights, Representative of Secretary General of the United Nations in Iraq Walter Kalin accused in his report on June 3.

In its report issued last February, Amnesty International revealed that there are secret prisons in Iraq where detainees are being tortured for confessions used in their convictions.

Iraqi security forces are referring to torture such as beating and mistreatment , especially in detention facilities, to get

out confessions from detainees who are isolated from the outer world.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72252-Mayahi%3A--Iraq-security-institutions-are-infiltrated-and-involved-in-torturing-detainees.html>

- **Maliki says ready to execute Iraq Anbar provincial council demands**

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki expressed, on Wednesday, his willingness to execute all demands advanced by Anbar Provincial Council.

Many Iraqi Central Government's authorities will be transferred to local provincial governments, Maliki revealed.

"Demands advanced by Anbar Provincial Council are totally legitimate," Maliki said in a statement, which Alsumarianews received a copy of, following his meeting with a number of the province's Sheikhs and Dignitaries. "I am ready to execute all these demands except ones exceeding my constitutional authorities," he promised.

"We will transfer all authorities of Iraqi Central Government to local provincial governments except ones concerning

sovereignty, security, international affairs and wealth distribution that should remain central in order to equally distribute them on Iraqis," Maliki explained.

"It is necessary to preserve national unity between all Iraqis and increase provincial authorities to enhance services and fasten provinces reconstruction," Maliki stressed, a source told Alsumaria.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72226-Maliki-says-ready-to-execute-Iraq-Anbar-provincial-council-demands.html>

- **Iranian ambassador in Baghdad denies any Iranian mediation to resolve Hashimi's case**



Baghdad (NINA) - Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Danae Far, denied news about the Iraqi government request from

Iran to mediate to resolve the Vice President Tariq Al Hashimi's case.

He said, in a news conference today, that "Iran asserts that the charges against Hashimi are judicial and the Iraqi judicial authorities should take a decision and solve Hashimi's case in collaboration between the Iraqi parties and officials."

"We reject the allegations made by Hashimi against Iran," Far added, pointing out that "putting such claims would not help to ease the charges against him, they would lead to the complication of his accusations."

Regarding the US withdrawal from Iraq and its impact on relations between Tehran and Baghdad, Far said that "relations between Iran and Iraq are too deep to be affected by such issues and we have a special relationship with Iraq, whether in the presence of US forces or at the current time."

Vice President Tariq Al Hashimi accused Iran of playing a role in issuing the arrest warrant against him on charges of supporting insurgent operations.

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

- **National Accord Movement accuses a political party of devoting its concerns to establish "dictatorship of cardboard"**

Baghdad (NINA) - The Iraqi National Accord Movement accused a political party, without naming it, of devoting its concerns to establish what it called "dictatorship of cardboard."

Hadi Al Dhalimi, spokesman of the movement, said in a press statement today, that "at a time in which one-third of the Iraqi people live under the poverty line and hundreds of thousands of young Iraqis (the richest oil country) beg for a job opportunity in humiliation at the gates of official institutions, an influential political party controls a lot of public money and spends it in buying conscience of lackeys of the ruler, or thugs in preparation for the suppression of voices of freedom, as what happened in Tahrir Square."

He noted that this party has recently lured some people through holding press conferences for cheap political bidding against the movement and its Secretary

General Dr. Iyad Allawi and their history of struggling against the dictatorship and building national civil state, according to the statement.

The statement called on the Iraqi people and the Iraqiya Slate supporters to "beware of the cheap methods that aim at creating illusion of the weakness of the movement or splits inside it by repeating the display of faces that accepted to trade themselves cheaply."

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

- **Iraqiya boycott continues until demands are met**

It is almost two weeks that Iraqiya deputies have staged the boycott in protest to lack of "real" partnership in political process and what they described as "unilateral ruling."

Hamed Mutlag told AKnews that Iraqiya List decided to boycott sessions of the House of Representatives and Council of Ministers over a host of issues which will be resolved in the expected meeting of political blocs' leaders.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani has called for an emergency national conference which will be held soon. In the meeting the political blocs are to find resolutions for the crisis created by recent tensions.

"If Iraqiya realizes that all the complications have taken the way to solution, then it will end its decision to suspend the sessions," he said "but before this meeting, I don't think that the List will end the boycott," he said.

Tension escalated in Iraq after two Iraqiya leaders encountered critical situations. Vice President Tareq Hashemi has been accused of terrorism and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlag has been sacked after he described the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki Maliki as "like a dictator".

Hashemi said that the Iraqi judiciary is under the influence of the executive branch, and that his bodyguards' confessions presented by the government were taken under torture and threats.

The VP has fled to Kurdistan, where the authorities consider him a guest and refuse to hand him over to Baghdad for trail. Hashemi has demanded Kurdistan

courts attend to his case- but Baghdad has turned down the demand.

Mutlag also has refused to recognize the dismissal order which is subject the final approval of the House of Representatives.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/281654/>

- **Maliki: Political stability foundation for security**

BAGHDAD, Jan. 1 (AKnews)- Iraq needs political stability to establish security and launch state building, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said today.

During a speech at a ceremony in Baghdad for celebrating the withdrawal of US troopers, Maliki said "I realized that the political stability recently has become the basis for the security and the process of construction, a political stability based on the Constitution."

Maliki

Recent political tensions over accusing VP Tareq Hashemi of terrorism and sacking Deputy PM Saleh Mutlag were followed by a range of bombings in the Iraqi capital

which left more than 250 citizens dead or wounded.

"Iraqi nation cannot bear more," PM warned, asking all Iraqis to "join for one thing which is unity of Iraq."

He warned some parties against finding a foreign third party "though they are friends", in reference to the recent letter by Iraqiya's List to the US President Barak Obama.

VP Hashemi and the sacked deputy PM, Mutlag, are both Iraqiya leaders. The issue of these officials has further strained relations with Maliki's State of Law Coalition. The two blocs have repeatedly accused each other of violating the Constitution.

PM warned this stage for Iraq is not less dangerous than the previous ones as "the time for political courtesies is over and from now the Constitution will judge all and it will not be disabled."

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/281641/>

- **US embassy denies meeting between Ambassador and Harth al- Thari**



US embassy denies meeting between Ambassador and Harth al- Thari

US embassy denies meeting between Ambassador and Harth al- Thari

Embassy of the United States of America in Baghdad, in a statement , denied any meeting between Ambassador James Jeffery and Harith al-Thari, the head of the Association of Muslim Scholars .

Thari's views have no role in political developments and the process of reconciliation taking place in Iraq, and his links to terrorist groups that killed thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women and children and members of the Iraqi security forces , increased the conflict and the sectarian divide, the statement said.

http://www.pukmedia.com/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11074:us-embassy-denies-meeting-between-ambassador-and-harth-al-thari&catid=25:iraq&Itemid=386

- **Wifaq Movement members resigned in Basra**

Basra / Aswat al-Iraq : Wifaq Movement spokesman said here today that most of its members resigned due "to negligence by the leadership of Movement".

Spokesman Ghalib al-Asadi told Aswat al-Iraq that "more than 42 members of the movement submitted their resignation, who are the majority of the members in Basra".

He added that "they do not feel any connection with the Movement leadership, either organizationally or financially".

Asadi added that "the failure of Iraqiya bloc, which comprises mostly of the Wifaq movement, in administering different dossiers was another reason for the resignation".

He disclosed that they waived with their resignation, but no reply was received from Dr.

Iyad Alawi.

Asadi pointed out that the remaining members of Wifaq movement are very few.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28vnnj5555mb4m3beqwlcdpyv%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146291&l=1

2. IRAN

- **MP Praises Iran's Naval Drills as Show of Power**



TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior legislator praised the Iranian forces for their recent naval wargames, codenamed Velayat 90, in international waters in the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean, and said the maneuvers showed the country's might and power.

"The Velayat 90 wargames displayed Iran's might and power of establishing peace and security in the region," member of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Esmayeel Kosari told FNA on Monday.

He also described the wargames as a show of power to the trans-regional forces deployed in the region, and said if the US and its allies send hundreds of warships and nuclear-armed submarines to the region, they will not be able to impede Iran's progress.

Iran's naval forces started 10 days of wargames, dubbed as Velayat 90, in an area stretching from the East of the Strait of Hormoz in the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden last Saturday.

The wargames entered its third stage two days ago. The third state includes test-firing long-range missiles from coasts and navy vessels.

Different types of short and long-range coast-to-sea, surface-to-surface, surface-to-air missiles are going to be tested by

Iranian vessels in this stage which will last until today.

Iranian submarines are also scheduled to launch smart torpedoes and Iranian naval forces will test-fire shoulder-launched missiles at this stage.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007279892>

- **Ahmadinejad Deplores US Sanctions on Iran's Central Bank**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hit back at the US after Washington introduced new sanctions against Iran's central bank.

President Ahmadinejad told an annual meeting of senior central bank officials that Iran's central bank would respond with "force" to the new US sanctions intended to pressure Tehran to abandon its nuclear program.

He said the bank was strong enough to defeat "enemy plans".

The sanctions - which cut off from the US financial system foreign firms that do business with the central bank - are part of a defense bill signed by President Barack Obama on Saturday.

The extra US sanctions aim to squeeze Iran's oil sales, most of which are processed by the central bank, although many even in the West believe that the move would prove futile.

They will take hold after a warning period of up to six months.

Ahmadinejad said the central bank was "the backbone" of the country in facing outside pressure and should have the strength and confidence "to thwart enemy plans".

He said the bank "must with strength and self-confidence have the solidity to eliminate all of the enemies' plots."

"We must protect the people and the nation against the plots of enemies, so

that the people are not under pressure," he said, according to a statement posted on the leader's website.

Ahmadinejad said that "currently there is no particular problem in the economic sector."

The western states are highly concerned that the sanctions against the Iranian central bank could force up the price of oil.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007279888>

- **Iran Resolved to Start Development of Arash Gas Field**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran said it would launch full-scale development of the offshore Arash gas field in the Persian Gulf if Kuwait does not respond to its offer of joint development.

"Our emphasis presently is on joint partnership strategy rather than competition, and we are hopeful to reach a conclusion with Kuwait over the development of the shared Arash field," Head of the Iranian Offshore Oil Company Mahmoud Zirakchianzadeh said.

He said Iran's policy on shared oil and gas fields is partnership rather than confrontation.

But "if Iran's positive diplomacy is turned down, we will be carrying on our efforts at Arash field unilaterally just as we did in Hengam oil field," Zirakchianzadeh said.

Iran is developing its part of the offshore Hengam oil field, shared with Oman, on its own.

Zirakchianzadeh said Iran has already launched its "operational activities" on the development and production at Arash and was not dragging its feet in anticipation of Kuwait's response.

Arash gas field is located on Iran-Kuwait's water border and it is called Dorra in the Kuwait part of the field.

The field's gas reserve is estimated at one trillion cubic feet along with some 310 million barrels of oil.

In November, Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi stressed that development of joint oil and gas fields shared with the neighboring countries sets a priority for his ministry and the Iranian government.

"As declared earlier, development and production at joint oil fields is a priority of the oil ministry and oil industry," Qassemi said on the sidelines of a ceremony held to mark the endorsement of a contract on crude production at Yaran joint oil field in November.

Qassemi has also earlier made similar remarks. "(Iran's) oil industry is seriously pursuing activity in joint fields," Qassemi said in Iran's Eastern province of South Khorassan in October.

"And all government bodies support and accompany the oil industry in fulfilling this important task (development of joint oil and gas fields)," the minister reiterated.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007279886>

- **Iran tests first domestically produced nuclear fuel rod**

TEHRAN, Jan. 1 (MNA) – Scientists and researchers at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran have successfully tested the first domestically produced nuclear fuel rod, Iranian news agencies reported on Sunday.

Now Iran should convert fuel rods into fuel plates to power the Tehran research reactor, which produces radioisotopes for cancer treatment.

According to the reports, the first nuclear fuel rod was loaded into the core of the Tehran research reactor as part of an experiment to test its performance in operation.

Iran has constructed an advanced plant at the Isfahan nuclear facility for manufacturing nuclear fuel plates. With the construction of the plant, Iran is now among the few countries that can manufacture both nuclear fuel rods and plates.

The nuclear plant for converting enriched nuclear fuel into fuel rods was

inaugurated in Isfahan in early spring 2009.

Iranian officials had previously said that the technology for producing nuclear fuel plates does not differ greatly from the technology for producing nuclear fuel rods.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1498470>

- **We should avoid hasty decisions on security issues: speaker**

TEHRAN, Jan. 1 (MNA) – Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani has said that Iranian officials should not make hasty decisions about important issues in regard to national security.

Officials should be well aware of the situation of national and international security to be able to make right decisions, Larijani stated during a speech on Sunday at a gathering of Iran's ambassadors and heads of missions to foreign countries and international organizations.

“What is important in the area of foreign policy is that we accurately identify our

country's national interests and objectives in order to develop the means to achieve them and the diplomatic (apparatus) shoulders the responsibility," Larijani said.

Given the complexity of diplomatic issues in today's world, a country will make intelligent decisions only when identify its capabilities, he said, adding that doing this requires some professionals in the Foreign Ministry whose job is to research and study.

He also attached high significance to the relationship between the Iranian diplomatic apparatus and research centers and said that the Foreign Ministry should utilize the research centers no matter how professional the ministry is.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1498774>

- **Hormuz is part of Iran's strategic geography: IRGC**

TEHRAN, Jan. 1 (MNA) – The deputy commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Brigadier General Hossein Salami, said on Sunday that the Strait of Hormuz is part of "Iran's defense geography."

'Strait of Hormuz is part of Iran's defense geography'

TEHRAN, Jan. 1 (MNA) – The deputy commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Brigadier General Hossein Salami, said on Sunday that the Strait of Hormuz is part of "Iran's defense geography."

Salami stated that any threat issued by the enemy will be met with a more serious threat on the part of the Islamic republic.

"This issue is not bound to any time or any geographical area, and the Strait of Hormuz is part of our defense geography," he stated.

"We will take any measure to implement our defensive strategy within the framework of our defense doctrine if the situation requires it," Salami added.

Commenting on Iran-U.S. conflict in the Persian Gulf, Salami said that the country's strategic confrontation with the enemy has reached its climax and that Iran's influence in the region is tipping the balance of power in Islam's favor.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast stated on December 14, 2011 that Iran's threat of closing the Strait of Hormuz is a response to the United States' threats against the Islamic Republic.

The U.S. Fifth Fleet issued a warning on December 28, 2011, in which it said that it would not allow any disruption of traffic in the Strait of Hormuz.

30 percent of world's seaborne oil exports is shipped through the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1498201>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Palestinians plan diplomatic steps to put Israel under 'international siege'**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's envoy Isaac Molho will meet with top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat in Amman Tuesday for preliminary talks aimed at setting an agenda for peace negotiations, even as the Palestinians are preparing a diplomatic campaign that aims

to put Israel under "a real international siege."



Among those who have been pushing hard for the meeting Tuesday, the first official meeting between Israeli and Palestinian representatives in several months, are Jordan's King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh and the Quartet's Mideast envoy, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Senior Israeli officials said there was very little chance that the meeting would lead to the renewal of negotiations.

The diplomatic offensive the Palestinians are planning to launch later this month could include pushing the UN Security Council to pass a resolution condemning settlement construction and urging the International Criminal Court to try Israel for war crimes related to its 2008-2009 incursion into the Gaza Strip.

2012 "will be the start of an unprecedented diplomatic campaign on the part of the Palestinian leadership, and it will be a year of pressure on Israel that will put it under a real international siege," said Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Sha'ath, according to an Israeli Foreign Ministry document. "The campaign will be similar to the one waged against apartheid in South Africa."

According to information that has reached Israel, the Palestinians are considering several steps as part of their campaign:

* Asking the UN Security Council in February to pass a resolution that would condemn settlement construction and impose international sanctions on Israel. If a resolution were brought to a vote, all Security Council members other than the United States would be expected to vote in favor.

* Urging the International Criminal Court in The Hague to try Israel for war crimes related to Operation Cast Lead. If that fails, Palestinian officials are likely to encourage Palestinian citizens to file lawsuits against Israel in Western courts.

* Pushing for the implementation the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention that ban the construction of communities and transfer of populations in occupied territory. The Palestinians have been trying for some time now to persuade the Swiss government to convene the signatories on the document for a special debate on the subject of applying the Geneva Convention in the West Bank.

* Asking the UN General Assembly or the UN Human Rights Council to send an international fact-finding committee to look into the settlement issue.

* Renewing efforts in the UN Security Council to secure full-membership status for Palestine, or asking the UN General Assembly for status as a nonmember state. A similar move was suspended last October after UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural agency, accepted Palestine as a member, in response to which Israel froze Palestinian tax revenues.

* Organizing mass rallies against Israel in the West Bank, as part of a non-violent popular uprising. In reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah, the head of

the Hamas political bureau, Khaled Meshal, said the two movements would focus their activities on a popular uprising in an effort to draw international attention to the Israeli occupation.

The diplomatic campaign is expected to begin January 26, which marks the end of the three-month period the Quartet allotted to Israel and the Palestinian Authority for resuming talks and presenting substantive proposals on borders and security arrangements.

The Palestinians agreed not to take any unilateral steps in international forums before that date.

No breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian talks is expected before then, according to an Israeli source who met recently with several senior Palestinian officials.

In an interview Saturday with Palestinian television, PA President Mahmoud Abbas said that if the Quartet failed in its efforts to renew talks between Israel and the Palestinians before January 26, "all options will be open" as far as the Palestinian Authority is concerned.

Speaking about tomorrow's meeting between Molho and Erekat, senior Israeli officials said there is a deep mistrust on both sides and that the Israelis and Palestinians are each trying to convince the Quartet to hold the other side responsible for the failure to resume peace talks.

The meeting does not mark the resumption of negotiations, just a run-up to them that involves deciding on the agenda for future peace talks and the principles on which they would be based.

"We're talking about negotiations on holding negotiations," said a senior Israeli source.

Blair and Judeh will sit in on the first part of tomorrow's meeting between Molho and Erekat, as will representatives of all the parties that make up the Quartet: the United States, United Nations, Russia and the European Union. In the second part of the meeting, Judeh will hold discussions with Molho and Erekat.

In a statement from the Prime Minister's Bureau, Israel thanked Abdullah and Judeh

"for their initiative in convening the sides in keeping with the Quartet guidelines."

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/palestinians-plan-diplomatic-steps-to-put-israel-under-international-siege-1.404973>

- **Barak: Negotiations can prevent Israeli isolation**

Defense minister says peace talks good for Israel, even if they fail; Clinton welcomes announcement of first direct meeting between sides in more than a year; PA: "This is not a resumption of negotiations."

Good faith negotiations with the Palestinians can impede attempts to isolate Israel, Defense Minister Ehud Barak told Army Radio Monday, following the Jordanian government's announcement that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will meet in Amman Tuesday for direct talks.

"It's important that it be clear that Israel is active in a real way," Barak said. "It can hinder the effectiveness of attempts to isolate us internationally."

Noting that alternatives to the two-state solution "are bad," Barak said that Israel

has a "responsibility" to try reducing tensions with its neighbors. "There's no reason not to work toward reducing tension with the Palestinians, with the Turks and the Egyptians. Even if it's not certain we'll see results."



On Sunday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton welcomed the announcement of the first public direct meeting between the two sides in more than a year, calling on them to "take advantage of this opportunity."

One Israeli official said there have been intensive behind-the-scenes talks over the last few days between Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan and the Quartet – made up of the US, EU, Russia and the UN – to arrange the talks.

Israel will be represented by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's envoy Yitzhak Molcho, and the Palestinians are

expected to be represented by PA negotiator Saeb Erekat.

"We welcome and support this positive development. I applaud the efforts of the [Jordanian] King [Abdullah] and Foreign Minister [Nasser] Judeh to bring the parties together and encourage them to approach these meetings constructively," the US secretary of state said.

Clinton added: "We are hopeful that this direct exchange can help move us forward on the pathway proposed by the Quartet. As the [US] President [Barack Obama] and I have said before, the need for a lasting peace is more urgent than ever. The status quo is not sustainable and the parties must act boldly to advance the cause of peace."

The Palestinian Authority, however, tempered expectations of the meeting, emphasizing that it did not signify a renewal of negotiations.

Wasl Abu Yossef, a senior figure in Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's umbrella PLO executive, described Tuesday's meeting as a forum for the sides to "offer their positions on security and

borders" as requested by the Quartet in October.

"This is not a resumption of negotiations," Abu Yossef told Reuters in Ramallah, the seat of Abbas's administration.

Erekat said the meeting would be "part of ongoing Jordanian efforts to compel Israel to comply with its international legal obligations ... specifically its obligation to freeze all settlement construction".

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=251805>

- **'Peace process must involve Hamas as a player'**



In meeting with Haniyeh, Erdogan praises Palestinian unity efforts, discusses what he terms "Judaization of J'lem."

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Hamas Prime Minister

Ismail Haniyeh in Istanbul Sunday, saying that any process leading to a solution of Palestinian issues must involve Hamas as a player.

Erdogan's comments were reported following the meeting at his home in Istanbul. Palestinian media outlets said that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was also present in the meeting.

During the meeting, Erdogan referred to Israel as the “occupier” and discussed with Haniyeh what he termed the “Judaization of Jerusalem” and actions meant to make Arab residents flee the city, according to Palestinian media.

Haniyeh reportedly thanked Erdogan for his support of Gaza residents during Israel’s Operation Cast Lead two years ago. Haniyeh’s visit to Turkey follows visits to Egypt and Sudan. He is expected to meet with leaders also in Qatar, Tunisia and Bahrain.

Erdogan also expressed support of Hamas and Fatah’s reconciliation and said he hoped the Palestinians will establish an umbrella organization which would

democratically represent all political players among the Palestinians.

Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Shaath arrived in the Gaza Strip Sunday evening as part of efforts to implement a Palestinian unity deal with rival Hamas, Palestinian news agencies reported. The issue of Palestinian reconciliation was the main priority of the trip, during which he was set to discuss implementing the deal on the ground.

Also Sunday, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry announced that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will renew direct talks in Amman on Tuesday. This will be the first public direct meeting between the sides in more than a year.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=251799>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood plans to put treaty with Israel to a referendum**

MB says 'will not recognize Israel under any circumstances'; move to cancel peace treaty could represent strategic chance

too great for MB as it seeks international legitimacy.



The Muslim Brotherhood, the overwhelming victor in the first round of elections for the Egyptian Parliament, has announced it will not recognize Israel and intends to bring the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty to a referendum.

"We will not recognize Israel under any circumstances; we are talking about an occupation entity and a criminal enemy," said Dr. Rashad Bayoumi, the deputy head of the Brotherhood.

"There is no condition that obligates the movement to recognize Israel," Bayoumi reportedly told the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper.

This position appears to be in stark contrast to the previous reports by Western diplomats, who stated that the

movement's leaders had told them the Brotherhood would not endanger Egypt's relationship with Israel.

Yet Bayoumi is rejecting any possibility that he or any member of his movement would agree to meet with Israelis. He said the Muslim Brotherhood would uphold all international agreements signed by Egypt during the current "interim" period, but added that once a new government is in place the peace treaty with Israel would be reopened and the people would be asked to decide.

"This is an agreement that was formulated and signed far from the eyes of the people and the Parliament, so we must return this agreement to the people and let them have their say about whether this agreement hurts Egyptian interests and sovereignty," Bayoumi said.

A senior Egyptian journalist told Haaretz, however, that this position could change after the government is formed.

He noted that the Muslim Brotherhood is seeking international legitimacy, particularly among Western countries such as the United States, and any move

to cancel the peace treaty with Israel could represent a strategic chance too great for the movement to take upon itself. This likely explains why the Brotherhood is discussing a referendum, he said.

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood-plans-to-put-treaty-with-israel-to-a-referendum-1.404987>

- **Egypt's trial of Mubarak, two sons and top security aides, resumes in Cairo**



The trial of Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak, his two sons Gamal and Alaa, former interior minister Habib al-Adly and six top police officers, was resumed on Monday at a Cairo court.

Mubarak was wheeled into court on a stretcher, live footage broadcast by state television showed.

The 83-year-old strongman is being treated in a military hospital for a heart condition between sessions of the trial. His lawyer Farid al-Deeb says Mubarak suffers from stomach cancer.

Mubarak and his aides are accused of ordering the killing of protesters during the Jan. 25 revolution. If convicted, Mubarak could face the death penalty.

Alaa (L) and Gamal Mubarak (R) stand either side of their father, former President Hosni Mubarak

Alaa (L) and Gamal Mubarak (R) stand either side of their father, former President Hosni Mubarak

Mubarak's trial was resumed on Wednesday after a three-month hiatus that saw the ousted strongman's fate eclipsed by deadly clashes and an Islamist election victory, but later an announcement from the Egypt court said that the trial would be postponed and will take place on Monday instead.

In early December, the court turned down an appeal for a new judge which was filed by lawyers representing the victims' families to change Judge Ahmed Refaat.

Television cameras, which were allowed in for the opening sessions, will not be allowed in court when the trial resumes.

Mubarak is the first leader to be toppled in the so-called Arab Spring uprisings to appear before a court. The first hearing on Aug. 3 was broadcast live on television, but Refaat soon ordered the cameras out.

Egypt's military ruler Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi testified in Mubarak's trial on Sept. 24 under a total media blackout. Leaks of his testimony suggested that he sought to absolve Mubarak of any responsibility for the killing of nearly 850 protesters during the 18-day uprising that forced him to step down on Feb. 11.

Ever since the trial began in August, many in the country have been riveted by the sight of their ailing former ruler of nearly 30 years lying in a hospital bed inside the courtroom's cage, where defendants traditionally sit during trials in Egypt.

During early sessions, the trial was bogged down by frequent commotion and arguments in the courtroom between the

defense and the lawyers representing the protesters.

Lawyers supporting the former president are hoping to clear his name.

Yussri Abdul Razek, who heads the defense committee -- which includes four Kuwaiti lawyers -- said last week he had obtained "new documents that will prove Mubarak's innocence."

Presidential polls process to begin April

Meanwhile, a report by state-run al-Ahram newspaper on Sunday said that the door for presidential candidature applications will open in April following the public referendum on the new constitution.

The report quoted Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Judge Mohammed Attiya as saying that the presidential elections will be held after the referendum on the new constitution, adding that the constituent assembly that will draft the constitution will be formed after both houses of parliament are seated end of March.

Attiya also said that cabinet will discuss the presidential elections law next Wednesday before presenting it to Egypt's military rulers for final approval.

Al-Ahram quoted Attiya as saying that the process of electing a new president will be organized by a committee similar to the Supreme Electoral Commission which managed the recent parliamentary elections.

This committee will organize the voting process through election sub-committees in Egypt's 27 governorates and will set rules on issues related to funding and campaigning.

Amongst the presidential contenders are former U.N. nuclear watchdog chief Mohammed ElBaradei; former Arab League chief Amr Moussa; opposition figure Ayman Nour who also ran in the 2005 presidential race against Mubarak and Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party representative Mohammed Selim al-Awa.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/02/185839.html>

- **Algeria's moderate Islamist party derides 'political mediocrity,' exits government**

A moderate Islamist party pulled out of Algeria's governing coalition on Sunday, saying that 2012 is the year of competition - not alliances.

The announcement by the Movement for a Peaceful Society, or MSP, to leave the so-called presidential alliance comes ahead of April legislative elections.

The MSP's decision to enter the opposition should allow it to try to capitalize on the wave of Islamist victories in other Arab countries, although it is unclear how well the party can prosper after years inside the power structure.

The party had already reached out to Algeria's Islamist ranks ahead of the elections, and differences with its partners, the powerful National Liberation Front and the National Democratic Rally, were well known.

The decision to leave the governing coalition, which it joined in 2004, was announced at the end of a gathering of the party's Consultative Council focused

on the upcoming elections and the party's role in the alliance behind President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

MSP leader Abou Djara Soltani put the accent on disagreement over how to implement an array of reforms announced April 15 by Bouteflika to placate the restless Algerian population as uprisings now known as the Arab Spring have toppled leaders of other Arab nations.

He accused coalition partners of "emptying the political reforms of their substance in the name of partisan interests" rather than ensuring reforms worked in the interest of the people.

The year 2012, Soltani said, will be "the year of political competition ... and not that of the alliance," synonymous with "political mediocrity which serves neither the country nor its citizens."

Alliance partners, the powerful FLN and RCD, have rejected the MSP's criticism that the planned reforms are tactical.

The MSP has four ministers in minor posts.

The MSP founder, Mahfoud Nahnah, who died in 2003, changed the party's name from Hamas - not linked to the Palestinian movement - in 1999 to conform with a law banning references to Islam in party names.

That law grew out of Algeria's effort to block the return of Islamic fundamentalism to the political scene after a now-banned Islamic party nearly won the nation's first multiparty elections in 1991 - aborted by the army to stop a likely victory. The move triggered an insurgency that left an estimated 200,000 Algerians dead.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/01/185796.html>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **For the 1st time in more than a year, Mideast negotiators to meet in Jordan: source**



Palestinian and Israeli negotiators will meet for the first time in more than a year in Jordan on Tuesday to discuss stalled peace talks, a source close to the talks told AFP on Sunday.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat and his Israeli counterpart Yitzhak Molcho would meet in Jordan under the auspices of the so-called Quartet of major diplomatic players.

“The international Quartet has decided to hold a meeting bringing together its representatives and the Jordanian foreign minister, along with Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat and Israeli negotiator Yitzhak Molcho,” the source said.

“The meeting will discuss the visions of the Palestinian and Israeli sides for the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that have been on hold since September 2010,” the source added.

Direct talks ground to a halt shortly after they resumed in 2010, when an Israeli freeze on most settlement construction in the occupied West Bank expired and

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declined to renew it.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas has said he will not hold talks unless Israel halts settlement construction and agrees a clear framework for talks on a two-state solution based on 1967 lines.

The Quartet, made up of the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States, has been trying to draw the two sides back to the negotiating table, asking each to submit comprehensive proposals on territory and security.

But the efforts have failed to produce direct talks, and a Palestinian official said on Sunday that the Tuesday meeting would not constitute a departure from Abbas's position on the need for an Israeli settlement freeze.

The meeting “is not a resumption of negotiations,” the official said.

“The goal of the meeting is to make more serious efforts to restart talks based on Israel’s implementation of its obligations to freeze settlement activity and recognize

the 1967 lines as the basis for negotiations.”

Hamas premier visits Turkey

Meanwhile, Gaza Strip’s Hamas premier is in Turkey for meetings with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the head of an Islamic aid group whose Gaza-bound vessel was the target of a deadly raid by Israeli troops in 2010.

Ismail Haniyeh is on an official tour of the Muslim world, his first trip outside the blockaded territory since the Islamist group overran Gaza in 2007. Turkey’s ties with Israel, a former ally, deteriorated sharply over the flotilla raid that killed nine activists on the Turkish boat, and Erdogan has demanded that Israel lift all restrictions on the Palestinian territory.

Haniyeh is scheduled to meet Erdogan at his Istanbul residence on Sunday afternoon. On Monday, he will meet officials of the Islamic aid group IHH.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/01/185781.html>

- **Al-Qaeda infiltrated extremist groups in Lebanon: MP**

BEIRUT: Challenging Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s remarks that Lebanon is Al-Qaeda-free, Baath Party MP Assem Qanso has said the Islamist organization has infiltrated a number of extremist groups in Lebanon.



“Al-Qaeda has infiltrated more than 20 fundamentalist organizations that [share similar ideologies to Al-Qaeda],” Qanso said in remarks published Monday by pan-Arab Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat.

Defense Minister Fayeز Ghosn said last month that Al-Qaeda militants were sneaking into Lebanon under the guise of Syrian dissidents.

Ghosn’s statement has thrown Mikati’s government, already torn apart by sharp differences over many key issues, into disarray after both the prime minister and Interior Minister Charbel Nahhas rejected

the claims of the presence of Al-Qaeda militants in Lebanon.

Qanso said Salafi movements in north Lebanon and several areas in the eastern Bekaa Valley have provided “fertile ground” for the spread of Al-Qaeda in Lebanon.

He said the Salafis also helped Al-Qaeda members infiltrate into Homs, Al-Qusair and Tal Kalakh in Syria “to fight in order to weaken Syria in an attempt to topple it.”

The Baath Party lawmaker, a close ally of Damascus in Lebanon, said Al-Qaeda began to build its strength in Lebanon under the name of Fatah al-Islam from the time of the incidents at the northern Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in 2007. It then moved under the name of Jund al-Sham and Kataeb Abdullah Qassam in the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp in south Lebanon, he added.

Qanso said “some” residents in the border Bekaa town of Aarsal had set up a small town in the Christian area known as Mashareeh.

A mosque and a mobile clinic set up by Aarsal residents were designed to provide Al-Qaeda easy access to Syria, he added.

Qanso also accused Future Movement MP Khaled Daher, a fervent critic of Damascus over its crackdown on reform-seeking protesters, of being involved in the unrest in Syria, “given that one of his bodyguards was killed in Homs a few days ago.”

He expressed concerns that once the “Syrian revolution” is over, Al-Qaeda militants would flourish in Lebanon.

“If Syria falls, the last resistance bastion will turn into a state similar to that of Egypt or Libya and will become a breeding ground for Salafis and [Muslim Brotherhood],” Qanso said.

“In that case Hezbollah would be affected and Hamas and the Palestinian cause would be dissolved.”

Meanwhile, a high-ranking security source insisted Al-Qaeda was not operating in Lebanon.

“There is no Al-Qaeda presence in Lebanon at all,” the source told Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat.

“Lebanon is no longer an open arena and its security is no longer slack,” he said, adding that Lebanese territory is also “no longer a base or corridor for any terrorist group.”

Tripoli-based Salafist sheikh Bilal Diqmaq hit back at Qanso, describing as “inaccurate” accusations that the Salafi movement was harboring Al-Qaeda militants.

“It is true that we share some beliefs and doctrines with Al-Qaeda ... but we disagree with [Al-Qaeda] in applying the political Jihadist policy in the Arab countries,” Diqmaq told Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Jan-02/158545-al-qaeda-infiltrated-extremist-lebanon-groups-mp.ashx#axzz1il23ZAct>

6. SYRIA

- **Arab League monitors leave Syria as violent crackdown claims more lives**



The first mission of Arab monitors left Syria to the Egyptian capital after spending ten days during which they toured various Syrian cities, Al Arabiya reported on Monday.

On arrival at the Cairo International Airport, Arab League Assistant secretary General Samir Saif al-Yazal refused to give any statements regarding the vision of the monitors on the reality of the situation in Syria.

“All new developments will be included in a statement by the Arab League Secretariat,” Yazal told reporters. The Arab League forthcoming statement is expected to include a full report on the work of the Arab monitors as well as

Syria's compliance with an Arab peace plan that calls for Assad to withdraw troops and tanks from the streets, release detainees and talk to his opponents.

In a video released by the Observatory, a man wearing an orange vest with the Arab League logo said in Deraa: "There are snipers; we have seen them with our own eyes."

In a video released by the Observatory, a man wearing an orange vest with the Arab League logo said in Deraa: "There are snipers; we have seen them with our own eyes."

Arab League Secretary-General Nabil al-Araby had said it should take only a week to see if Assad was keeping his word.

Syrian security forces, meanwhile, killed twelve more protesters on Sunday.

President Bashar al-Assad's forces, keen to prevent huge protest rallies under the monitors' eyes, have killed at least 286 people since Dec. 23, the day before the mission's leader arrived in Syria, according to activists who tally casualties.

Some of Sunday's deaths occurred when security forces fired on protesters in the Damascus suburb of Daria, they said.

On Sunday, a seven-year-old boy was killed in the central city of Hama when his father's car came under a hail of bullets, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"The first victim of 2012," the Britain-based watchdog said in a statement received by AFP in Nicosia.

Activists have accused the regime of posting snipers on rooftops, and that issue appears to have triggered a dispute among the observers.

In a video released by the Observatory, a man wearing an orange vest with the Arab League logo said in Deraa: "There are snipers; we have seen them with our own eyes."

"We ask the authorities to remove them immediately; if they don't remove them within 24 hours, there will be other measures," the unnamed speaker in the video, which was dated Friday, told a crowd of people.

The Arab Parliament, an 88-strong advisory committee of delegates from the Arab League's member states, said the violence was continuing to claim many victims, according to Reuters.

"For this to happen in the presence of Arab monitors has roused the anger of Arab people and negates the purpose of sending a fact-finding mission," its chairman, Ali al-Salem al-Dekbas, said in Cairo.

"This is giving the Syrian regime an Arab cover for continuing its inhumane actions under the eyes and ears of the Arab League," he said.

Assad's opponents, while welcoming the Arab mission as a rare chance for outsiders to witness events in Syria, had few illusions that the observers could halt a crackdown on dissent that U.N. officials say has cost over 5,000 lives since March.

"The presence of monitors has not affected the behavior of the regime with hundreds killed and no let-up," said Rima Fleihan, from the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC).

The Arab Parliament was the first body to recommend freezing Syria's League membership in protest at the bloodshed.

Arab monitors visiting Deraa, a southern town viewed as the cradle of the nine-month-old revolt, went to the home of Sheikh Ahmad Hayasneh, the elderly imam of the Omari mosque where the first big protests against Assad's 11 years in power erupted in March.

It was unclear if the monitors met Hayasneh, who residents say has been under house arrest for at least five months.

Some statements by Sudanese General Mohammed al-Dabi, the mission's leader, have suggested a soft approach to the Syrian authorities, although some monitors have not minced their words.

"We saw snipers in the town, we saw them with our own eyes," one observer filmed in Deraa said in Arabic, visibly concerned. "We're going to ask the government to remove them immediately. We'll be in touch with the Arab League back in Cairo."

Dabi later told the BBC the observer's remarks, shown on a YouTube clip posted on Saturday, had been misreported.

In another incident, shown on Al Arabiya, a monitor in the embattled neighborhood of Baba Amr in Homs appealed to the authorities by telephone to stop firing there.

Tens of thousands of Syrians have taken to the streets in the past week in an apparent effort to show the Arab monitors the depth of their rejection of Assad's government.

"The Syrians want a modern regime in the New Year," read a placard carried by protesters in a suburb of Damascus.

Assad blames the unrest on foreign-backed armed Islamists who officials say have killed 2,000 security personnel.

He retains the support of much of his minority Alawite community and, despite some defections, of the armed forces. While anti-Assad sentiment runs high in the provinces, there have been few

protests in central parts of Damascus or Aleppo.

YouTube videos circulating on the Internet showed protesters across Syria welcoming 2012 in with fireworks and holding up signs pledging "Freedom for Life" and denouncing President Assad as the enemy.

A YouTube video shot in Zabadani near Damascus, shows hundreds of people dancing around a Christmas tree and chanting: "The people demand the ouster of the assassin."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/02/185833.html>

- **AL Observer Delegations Visit Neighborhoods, Hospitals in Provinces, Met with Residents**

PROVINCES, (SANA) – Three teams of Arab League (AL) observers on Sunday paid visits to Armenians, al-Zahraa and al-Abbasiya neighborhoods in Homs and met with residents.

An AL delegation visited the Military Hospital in Homs and met the injured.

Another delegation visited Bab Draib, Wadi al-Dahab and al-Hadara neighborhoods in the Province and met its residents.



In Idleb, a team of AL observers made a tour in the city and visited the National Hospital.

In Damascus Countryside, another AL delegation visited al-Muaddamya town and met its residents.

The delegation in Daraa made a tour in the Province and met the residents.

Another delegation visited the Medical Center, Justice Palace in Hama and the neighborhoods of al-Olailiat and al-Hader al-Saghir and met the locals.

Al-Khudir: Monitors Mission Working according to AL Protocol

Head of the Operations Room of the Arab League monitor mission to Syria, Adnan Issa al-Khoudhir, stressed that the monitors team in Syria is equipped with all tools of observation and authentication, adding that the mission is moving in Syria according to the protocol signed by the Arab League.

Al-Khoudhir pointed out on Sunday that the room is in permanent contact with the monitors mission in the Syrian territories.

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/337/2012/01/02/391672.htm>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahraini regime forces kill teenager**



Thousands of people carrying Bahraini flags and chanting anti-government

slogans converged on the island of Sitra, south of the capital Manama, to mourn the death of Sayed Hashim Saeed, The Associated Press reported.

Police earlier tried to seal off the site of the funeral to prevent crowds from gathering.

The protesters said the teenager died Saturday after a tear gas canister fired at close range hit him in the chest.

Jaffer al-Sheik, 40, who identified himself as a relative of Saeed, said after the funeral that the boy died while participating in a protest march. He said the canister fired by riot police caused burns on Saeed's chest arm and head.

Also Sunday, Bahrain's new police chief announced that the kingdom would hire an additional 500 police officers "from all sections of Bahrain society," according to a statement from the country's Information Affairs Authority. The official, Tariq Alhassan, said the extra officers would work only in communities from where they were recruited.

Dozens of people have been killed and thousands more have been arrested or fired from their jobs in Bahrain since the beginning of the uprising in February 2011.

On November 23, 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) issued a report saying the Manama regime had used "excessive force, including the extraction of forced confessions against detainees," in response to demonstrations in the country.

Many health workers, teachers, opposition figures and human rights activists in Bahrain are still facing trial or serving prison terms over participation in demonstrations.

Bahrain authorities announced on December 29, 2011 that five police officers accused of torturing two detainees to death would face trial later in January.

In December 2011, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa invited "all parties, including those in opposition, to post an adviser in his office to monitor the reconciliation and reform process" in the country.

However, Bahraini anti-regime protesters have expressed their determination to support “the cause of the martyrs of the revolution” despite King Hamad's decision.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/middle-east/94123-bahraini-regime-forces-kill-teenager->

- **OIC chief says no to foreign intervention in the Gulf, urges for dialogue to solve crisis**

Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said that the organization is against any foreign intervention to solve the Hormuz crisis in the Gulf, the International Islamic News Agency reported on Sunday.

On the sideline of an OIC meeting held in Jeddah, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu said that the Islamic organization rejects any foreign intervention in response to the crisis regarding Strait of Hormuz.

Ihsanoglu cited examples of foreign intervention in all of Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, and said that these kind of military interventions would transform the region into ruins.

Iranian leaders and military officials have warned that additional Western sanctions could push them to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Gulf.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, around twenty percent of the world's oil passes through the strait.

As for Syria, Ihsanoglu said that the Islamic organization is following closely the work of the Arab observers sent by the Arab League to monitor the situation in Syria, adding that OIC is waiting for them to report their findings. He added that it is too early to comment on their work so far.

In addition to that, Mark Toner, a spokesman for the U.S. State Department said that it was premature to assess the work of the Arab monitors. “We need to let this mission get up and running, let them do their job, and then let them give their judgment,” he said.

Meanwhile, Ihsanoglu urged for dialogue as an exit strategy to solve the situation in the region, especially in Syria.

"The OIC reiterated its call for the Syrian crisis to be resolved through dialogue, for the reforms promised by the Syrian leadership to be implemented in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, and for security and stability to return to Syria," the group said in a statement published on Thursday.

OIC's meeting in Jeddah was held to assess progress on the national reconciliation in Somalia.

OIC's humanitarian efforts in Somalia has entered the recovery phase with the digging of approximately 700 wells for drinking water at a cost of \$ 85 million, the largest well-digging process in the history of the country, Ihsanoglu said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/01/185795.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Terrorist attack foiled in S. Afghanistan**

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan, Jan. 1 (Xinhua) -- A terror attack was thwarted in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province, the provincial government said on Sunday.

"A car bomb was found and defused by personnel of National Directorate of Security (NDS) on Saturday on a compound in Nawa district," the provincial government said in a press release.

The terrorists intended to attack an official ceremony in Nawa district during which security responsibilities of the district were handed over from NATO-led coalition troops to Afghan security forces, it said.

"Once again the determined workforce of NDS or intelligence agency hindered a coward attack designed by enemies of peace and stability," said the release.

Helmand's provincial capital Lashkar Gah, 555 km south of capital Kabul, was among the seven areas where Afghan army and police took full control of security from NATO and U.S. forces in July this year.

NATO and U.S. forces handed over security responsibilities of Helmand's Nawa, Nad Ali and Marja districts to Afghan forces on Saturday, parts of a process which will run through 2014 when Afghanistan will take over the full

leadership of its own security duties from U.S. and NATO forces.

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

- **Explosion rocks Kandahar, Afghanistan, no casualties**

KABUL, Jan. 1 (Xinhua) -- A blast rocked Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province on Sunday morning, causing no casualties, police said.

"There was a blast in Sanzarai area of Zhari district in the wee hours Sunday but it was a controlled explosion" a police official in Kandahar city told Xinhua.

The police official said Afghan and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) security forces discovered and detonated a handful of explosives at around 8:30 a.m. local time Sunday, but no one was injured.

Erlier local media reported that a blast rocked Kandahar city, however, the police source said there was no explosion in city, some 450 km south of capital city of Kabul.

"The explosive were planted by suspected insurgents to target Afghan and foreign forces in the area but their vicious plan have been foiled," the source said.

Afghan people are war-weary and any big bang caused panic among them.

A total of 10 Afghan local policemen were killed and another injured when their vehicle ran over a roadside bomb in neighboring Helmand province on Thursday.

Taliban insurgents claimed responsibility for Thursday attack that occurred in Helmand's Nad Ali district in the province, some 555 km south of Kabul.

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

- **380 insurgents lay down arms in Afghan's Badghis province in 2011**

KABUL, Jan. 1 (Xinhua) -- About 380 anti-government insurgents have laid down arms and joined the government-backed peace process in Afghanistan's Badghis province, 555 km northwest of capital Kabul, last year, local media reported Sunday.

"Twenty anti-government armed opposition groups composed of 380 people have given up fighting and laid down their arms in Badghis province over the past year," Tolo television quoted spy agency spokesman Lutfullah Mashal as saying.

Several commanders were among those who handed over their weapons to the authorities in Badghis province, Mashal added.

According to Afghan and NATO-led forces, more than 3,000 anti-government militants have given up fighting and joined the government-initiated national reconciliation and peace process over the past year in the war-torn country.

However, the Taliban outfit fighting Afghan and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has rejected the claim as baseless.

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

- **Iran, Afghanistan seal library MOU**

Iran Book News Agency (IBNA)

January 1, 2012

In his visit from cultural, scientific and library centers in Afghanistan, head of Iran's national library signs two new agreements with Afghanistan's National Archives Center.

IBNA: According to the public relations office of the National Library and Archives Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Eshagh Salahi, head of the organization, met with Seyyed Makhdoum Rahin, Afghan minister of culture and intelligence, and signed an agreement with him.

In the visit, the two sides agreed on expansion of bilateral cultural, scientific and library ties. Based on the agreement, Iran will transfer its expertise and experience in preservation and maintenance of manuscripts and documents to Afghanistan's national library.

Providing free access to archival documents for researchers and archive staff, application of new technologies in libraries to share information, exchange and sharing of digital resources, exchange

of books, journals, publications and other library resources, research on issues of common library and information science, and transfer of teachers and library experts for exchange of library experience, dissemination of information, and arrangement of exhibitions and meetings were among the provisions of the joint agreement signed by Iran and Afghanistan.

ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.

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

**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.*

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