



GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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1. IRAQ

- **Maliki calls Kuwait to bear a part of the responsibility for Saddam's adventures**

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki called Kuwait, on Friday, to bear a part of the responsibility for Saddam Hussein's adventures. The amount of compensations strains Iraq, Maliki declared describing some of Kuwait's demands as unrealistic.

"There is a serious US desire to annul provisions of UN's chapter VII over Iraq," Maliki told Alsumaria TV during an interview and pointed that the multi-faceted Kuwaiti issue is delaying the process.

"Iraqi forces' entry to Kuwait resulted in some dues," Maliki explained adding that some dues are real such as the burning of wells, oil, and the missing people, while others are international decisions. "Such dues require fast solutions especially compensations paid by Iraq that amount 5% of oil production," he advanced stressing that this is a huge amount out of which Iraq paid 30 billion dollars with 20 others left to pay.

"Some Kuwaiti demands are unrealistic especially those regarding its archive and remains of people killed during the invasion," Maliki argued. "If we had Kuwait's archive we would have handed it over, it is useless to keep it or to keep innocent people's remains if we have them," he uttered.

The Council of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations announced, on November 24, that Iraqi government is ready to give Kuwait a part of its archive lost in 1991. Iraq is seriously searching for Kuwaiti properties lost following former Iraqi regime's downfall, the council revealed.

"Kuwait should bear a part of the responsibility for Saddam Hussein's adventures," Maliki called pointing out that the only issue to be solved is about water frontiers especially Mubarak Port. "We are determined to solve these issues which would be on the agenda of my next visit to Kuwait," he concluded.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72507-Maliki-calls-Kuwait-to-bear-a-part-of-the-responsibility-for-Saddam%E2%80%99s-adventures.html>

- **Al Qaeda Financial Officer arrested in training site**

Kirkuk Police Command announced, on Thursday, that it arrested Al Qaeda's Financial Officer with a group of his assistants when they were training to attack southwestern regions in Kirkuk.

"In an extensive security operation in Al Huwaija District, southwestern Kirkuk, a police force managed today to arrest the Financial Officer of Islamic State of Iraq (Dawlat Al Iraq Al Islamiya) with a group of his assistants when they were preparing attacks and raids over governmental buildings southwestern Kirkuk," Kirkuk Police Force Commander Brigadier General Jamal Taher Baker told Alsumarianews.

"The arrest operation was based on accurate intelligence information and was carried out by a police force coordinating with division 12 of Iraqi Military," Baker added noting that investigations with detainees took place in a security station. "Detainees were training in Hamrin Mountains southwestern Kirkuk in preparation for a series of terrorist attacks in Huwaija and Kirkuk," Head of Kirkuk Police, General Sarhad Qader told

Alsumarianews considering the arrest of Financial Officer of Islamic State of Iraq as a deathblow to the organization in Kirkuk. Kirkuk witnessed, on Thursday, the arrest of 5 Al Qaeda members for performing explosive attacks during an operation southwestern the province.

Kirkuk Province, situated 250 km northern Baghdad, is one of Iraqi disputed areas which witnesses constant violence targeting security forces members as well as civilians. Kirkuk is also facing murders due to tribal or personal conflicts.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72476-Al-Qaeda-Financial-Officer-arrested-in-training-site.html>

- **Hashemi opens a temporary office in Sulaymaniyah**

Iraqi Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi opened a temporary office in Sulaymaniyah Governorate after he moved to Kurdistan Region following the issuance of an arrest warrant for him for terrorism charges. Hashemi called to end raids on his headquarters and offices, and to release employees detained without any judicial warrants.

“It is necessary to stop all raids and stalking over Vice-President Hashemi’s headquarters, offices and houses of employees, their families and relatives to allow them to get back to their official duties,” the temporary office stressed in a statement, a copy of which was delivered to Alsumarianews.

“Two employees have been detained since 5 days without details about the reason or place of detention,” the statement added calling to ensure safety of all detainees and to release those detained without judicial warrants.

“Iraqi constitution and its enforced laws prevent the detention of accused in unofficial places and limit detention operations, transfers and protection of the accused to Justice Ministry only,” the statement highlighted asking Iraqi prosecution presidency and Commander General of Armed Forces’ office to undertake all necessary actions to transfer detained bodyguards and employees of Hashemi to Justice Ministry’s detention places.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72471-Hashemi-opens-a-temporary-office-in-Sulaymaniyah.html>

- **Kurdistan Alliance and Iraqi National Alliance to prevent Asadi from attending parliamentary sessions**

Kurdistan Alliance announced, on Tuesday, that it agreed with Iraqi National Alliance blocs’ leaders upon preventing MP Hussein Al Asadi from attending parliamentary sessions until he presents an official apology for his statements against Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

“Kurdistan Alliance agreed with National Alliance blocs’ leaders to condemn MP Hassan Al Asadi’s statements, to call for deleting his intervention in parliamentary session and to prevent him from attending parliamentary sessions until he presents an official apology for his statements against Iraqi President Jalal Talabani,” Kurdistan Alliance MP Khaled Shawani told Alsumarianews.

“Kurdistan Alliance hopes to settle this issue fast to achieve quorum’s in next parliamentary session,” Shawani added assuring that such statements harm constitutional state institutions’ dignity.

Kurdistan Alliance MPs withdrew, on Tuesday, from the 11th parliamentary session of the 2nd legislative term of the 2nd legislative year to protest against State of Law Coalition's MP Hussein Al Asadi behavior, calling him to apologize. The alliance MPs returned to the session following National Alliance MPs' apology for Asadi's statement, Kurdistan Alliance declared revealing that it called Parliament Speaker to prevent Asadi's participation in sessions if he doesn't apologize. Parliament Speaker Osama Al Nujaifi decided to put this demand for voting, Kurdistan alliance indicated.

"Stipulations of article 4 of Anti Terrorism Law apply to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani for harboring his deputy Tarek Al Hashemi," State of Law MP Hussein Al Asadi told Alsumarianews on the first of January. "Covering for Hashemi is a clear constitutional and legal breach of justice," he added.

Article 4 of Anti Terrorism Law stipulates that whoever harbors convicted with terrorism charges would be sentenced to lifetime imprisonment.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72430-Kurdistan-Alliance-and-Iraqi-National-Alliance-to-prevent-Asadi-from-attending-parliamentary-sessions.html>

- **Allawi decries claims about Iran's visit purposes**

Iraqi Minister of Communications Mohamed Tawfiq Allawi denied seeking Iran's mediation in the issues of Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Al Mutlaq during his latest visit to Iran. Hashemi's issue is judicial while Mutlaq's issue is internal, Allawi explained assuring that his visit intended to urge Iranian officials to decrease congestion in the region.

"Media reported that I visited Iran seeking its mediation in issues of Iraqi Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi and Vice-Prime Minister Saleh Al Mutlaq," Allawi told Alsumarianews stressing that these claims are not correct.

Local media had reported, on January 1st that head of Iraqiya List Iyad Allawi appointed Minister of Communications Mohamed Tawfiq Allawi to visit Iran and seek its mediation in the issues of Vice-

President Tarek Al Hashemi and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Al Mutlaq.

“Justice is the only authority that has the powers to deal with Hashemi issue,” Allawi uttered stressing that it should not be politicized.

“Mutlaq’s issue is an Iraqi internal affair that could be solved through understanding,” Allawi added.

“My latest visit to Iran was intended to urge Iranian officials to reduce congestion in the region especially that it could affect the overall situation in Iraq,” Communications Minister concluded.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72429-Allawi-decries-claims-about-Iran%E2%80%99s-visit--purposes.html>

- **Iraq explosion kills 10 and wounds 50**

60 persons were killed and wounded in the explosion of two car bombs in Kazimiyah region northern Baghdad, an Iraqi police source reported on Thursday.

“The explosion of two car bombs in Kazimiyah, northern Baghdad led to the

death of 10 persons and the injury of 50,” the source told Alsumarianews expecting an increase in death toll due to the explosion’s intensity.

“Ambulance cars rushed to the incident site and transported wounded to a nearby hospital for treatment and corpses to the department of forensic medicine,” the source declared on condition of anonymity adding that a security force cordoned off the region and blocked all roads leading to it.

A number of people were killed and wounded in the explosion of two bombed cars in Kazimiyah area northern Baghdad, a police source had told Alsumaria earlier today.

Baghdad also witnessed, today, the death of 10 persons and the injury of 35 in the blast of two explosive devices in Sadr City eastern Baghdad.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72426-Iraq-explosion-kills-10-and-wounds-50.html>

- **Shia pilgrims targeted in deadly Iraq attacks**

Roadside bombs kill at least three Shia pilgrims in Mahmudiya and Baquba, as protest held in Basra against president.



Two roadside bombs have targeted Shia pilgrims in Iraq, killing at least three people and wounding 23, local police sources have said.

The first explosion occurred in Mahmudiya, a small town just south of Baghdad, killing two pilgrims and wounding 20.

Another person was killed when a bomb attached to a car carrying pilgrims exploded in Baquba, in Diyala province, 65km northeast of the capital.

The attacks came after a wave of bombings on Thursday that killed more than 70 people and has further deepened the country's sectarian divide at a time of

ongoing crisis in government. Two more Shia pilgrims were killed on Friday.

Most of the attacks have been aimed at Shias commemorating Arbaeen, a period ending 40 days of mourning following the anniversary of the death of Imam al-Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

Saturday's blast targeted pilgrims walking to Karbala, a city holy to Shias.

Talabani protest

Meanwhile, in the southern city of Basra, about 400 people staged a protest on Saturday to denounce a decision by Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, to shelter the country's top Sunni politician after an arrest warrant was issued against him.

Iraq's Shia-led government called for Tariq al-Hashemi's, the vice president, arrest on terrorism charges just as the last US troops were leaving last month.

The standoff over al-Hashimi is at the heart of an ongoing political crisis pitting the leaders of the country's mostly ethnic-

and sectarian-based party blocs against each other.

The protesters demanded Talabani hand over his deputy so that he can stand trial.

Demonstrators hoisted Iraqi flags and banners reading "The Iraqi people demand a trial for al-Hashemi," and "Talabani is behind the sectarian turmoil" while chanting "No to Talabani" and "No to terrorism."

Al-Hashemi is staying in a guesthouse owned by Talabani in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north - effectively out of reach of state security forces.

Some analysts fear that the political crisis, combined with the withdrawal of US forces, will create an atmosphere in which armed groups can rebuild themselves.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201217103336727604.html>

- **Iraq: Back to chaos?**

A wave of deadly attacks has raised fears of a deepening sectarian divide in a country sliding into political chaos.

Four explosions ripped through Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, on Friday. Earlier, two Shia pilgrims were killed in Baghdad by roadside bombs.

The wave of violence comes after a series of explosions killed at least 84 people on Thursday. The deadliest attack in Iraq in more than a year hit Shia pilgrims heading to the holy city of Karbala, killing nearly 50 people.

These latest deadly strikes have now raised fears of a deepening sectarian divide in a country sliding into political chaos.

Is Iraq descending back into deadly chaos? What challenges does Nouri al-Maliki's government face? And can the politicians agree on any kind of reconciliation before it is too late?

Inside Story, with presenter Darren Jordon, discusses with guests: Saad Almutalabi, a former adviser to the Iraqi government who is also the secretary-

general of the Iraqi Free Youth Movement; Gala Riani, a senior Middle East analyst for the business advisory firm IHS Global Insight; and Fanar Haddad, a visiting lecturer at Queen Mary University of London and the author of the book *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*.

"Certainly the attacks bare the hallmark of al-Qaeda in Iraq, who have carried out these types of attacks very much in the past, very much of the same nature. The fact that it was a very sectarian target also would indicate that it could be them. And really they are the ones who would seek to benefit from the current political stalemate. At this point there is quite a lot of concern about where Iraq is heading. The most recent political crisis has heightened these sectarian tensions and there is a lot of fear, I think, on the ground, but also from the outside, the international community, about where Iraq is heading."

Gala Riani, a Middle East analyst with IHS Global Insight

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2012/01/20121775941411920.html>

- **Al-Iraqiya works to dismantle political crisis**

By Hamza Mustapha

Baghdad, Asharq Al-Awsat- Maysoon al-Damluji, spokeswoman for the al-Iraqiya List led by Iyad Allawi, has emphasized that "a political truce alone is not enough to solve the crisis, especially as we have seen many attempts at a truce in the past that were soon violated by one side or the other".

Al-Damluji told Asharq al-Awsat that "the countdown for the Iraqi national conference, the holding of which has been agreed upon, will begin after President Jalal Talabani returns in the next few days to Baghdad", which means that the location for the conference has been decided, and it will be the Iraqi capital.

With regards to what exactly has been agreed upon, al-Damluji said "the most important thing that has been agreed upon is that we put a road map in place for resolving the current political crisis in

the country, with all its aspects”. She added that “At the level of the political crisis, the most prominent results were the agreements not to politicize the judiciary and to release innocent detainees who have yet to be sentenced. This is in addition to other national partnership issues that were discussed, including the security ministry and other issues which were subject to the Erbil Agreements in the past”.

Regarding the decision taken by the al-Iraqiya List to exclude 6 of its members because of their involvement in parliamentary sessions, thus violating the List’s decision to boycott all government and parliamentary meetings, al-Damluji said “al-Iraqiya was correct to issue this decision, during the meeting of some of its leadership in Baghdad. However, although we consider the decision to be correct in principle, we are now working to heal the crisis and restore the excluded members back into the al-Iraqiya List again”. When asked whether the decision was therefore not final, al-Damluji said “we are working hard in this regard and we expect matters to return to normal, especially as all members of the al-Iraqiya List confirm their commitment to its national project”.

The al-Iraqiya List had previously announced - in a statement received by Asharq al-Awsat – the dismissal of six of its members because of what it described as “their deviations from the al-Iraqiya List’s project, and their weak and irresponsible stances, which have impeded the national project”. The statement said that “the al-Iraqiya List has always, since the first day of its formation, been [committed] to achieving the national project that puts the citizen first. When it resorts to a position such as this, it is doing so out of the belief in achieving national interests, without regarding personal moods or whims. This is out of commitment to those that have assigned al-Iraqiya to undertake political action on their behalf, and have given it their trust, in spite of the suffering and difficult circumstances experienced by al-Iraqiya’s supporters”.

The statement added “from this perspective, the al-Iraqiya List participated in the government and outlined its goal in accordance with a mechanism unanimously agreed upon by all its members [to boycott government and parliamentary meetings]. In doing so, al-Iraqiya consulted everyone’s opinion, and

respected its members' opinions and rights". The statement goes on to say that "the al-Iraqiya List met recently to discuss the stances of some of its members, who have deviated from its project and the aspirations and issues of its supporters. For quite some time they have behaved out of personal and utilitarian interests, away from al-Iraqiya's consensus that remains faithful to the national project, representing the aspirations of our patient people all over Iraq. This behavior was not at the required standard for a representative acting in the Iraqi parliament to defend the issues of our people. Their performance has become a hindrance to the progress of al-Iraqiya's national project". Al-Iraqiya also said in its statement that "for these reasons, the al-Iraqiya List has decided to distance itself from these members, believing that this will increase the List's strength and distance it from weak and irresponsible positions".

According to the statement, the six dismissed members are "Mohammed Nasser al-Karbouli, Kamal al-Dulaimi, Qais al-Shathr, Ahmed Abdullah al-Jubouri, Abdul Rahman Alloizi and Jamaa al-Mutaioti". The statement concludes by

saying "The al-Iraqiya List pledges to the good Iraqi people that it will continue to adhere to the unity and independence of Iraq, defend the Iraqis and prevent external interference in their affairs, and work to achieve their aspirations in building a safe and stable civil state where every citizen can enjoy freedom, justice, dignity and prosperity".

The al-Iraqiya List has recently witnessed numerous defections, the latest being the withdrawal of MP Iskander Witwit, along with four members from Babil province, earlier this month. Likewise, dozens of members of the Iraqi National Accord (INA) movement - led by Iyad Allawi - in the province of Basra announced their withdrawal and their intention to join another political movement currently under formation. This is in addition to further dissidents from the INA and al-Iraqiya List from other provinces, with one leader earlier stressing that marginalization, exclusion and the List's sectarian orientation being reasons behind the withdrawals.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28017>

2. IRAN

- **Minister downplays UK decision to send warship to Persian Gulf**

TEHRAN, Jan. 8 (MNA) – Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi has downplayed Britain’s decision to dispatch its most advanced warship to the Persian Gulf, calling the move “unimportant.”

He made the remarks after a cabinet meeting on Sunday.

Britain said on Saturday it plans to send its most powerful destroyer, named HMS Daring, to the Persian Gulf amid threats by Iran to block the Strait of Hormuz, the world’s most important oil shipping lane, the Economic Times reported.

According to the Telegraph, HMS Daring has been fitted with new technology that will give it the ability to shoot down missiles.

The one-billion-pound destroyer, which will leave Portsmouth next on Wednesday, also carries the world’s most sophisticated naval radar, capable of tracking multiple incoming threats from missiles to fighter jets.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1504740>

- **Iran sent out 5 warning signals during naval drill: admiral**

TEHRAN, Jan. 8 (MNA) – During the 10-day naval war games, which ended on January 3, the Iranian Navy sent five warning signals to foreign warships, planes, and helicopters, the Navy commander says.

“Our warships sent warning signals” to five foreign warships, helicopters and planes, which had intended to enter the theaters of operations, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said during a televised interview broadcast live on television on Saturday night.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1504671>

- **Iran, 5+1 to resume talks in Turkey soon: Davutoglu**

TEHRAN, Jan. 8 (MNA) – Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has announced that Turkey will host new rounds of talks between Iran and the 5+1 group (the

United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany) in the near future.

Davutoglu made the remarks in a recent interview with the Japanese newspaper Nihon Keizai Shimbun.

Iranian and EU officials have agreed that talks be held in Turkey, Davutoglu stated, noting that the agreement was reached during the meetings he recently held with a number of Iranian officials and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who represents the 5+1 group.

Commenting on the sanctions that the United States has imposed on the Islamic Republic and a number of European countries' decision to impose sanctions on Iran, Davutoglu said that Ankara will not comply with such sanctions and sees no limitations hindering the expansion of ties with Tehran.

Davutoglu made an unannounced two-day visit to Tehran on January 4 and 5, in which he held talks with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, and Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili.

At a joint news conference with Salehi on January 5, Davutoglu said that he carried a message from Ashton in regard to the resumption of talks.

"I gave Ashton's message to Mr. Salehi, the Iranian foreign minister, (and) the Iranian foreign minister also expressed readiness (for dialogue)," he said at the time.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast said on January 3 that Iran is waiting for the 5+1 to suggest a date and venue for a new round of talks.

"At present, we are waiting for Ms. Ashton to announce her suggested date and venue for the continuation of talks with Iran," Mehmanparast stated.

He added, "After receiving the letter of Ms. Ashton, Mr. Jalili will announce his views," and an agreement would be reached, Mehmanparast stated.

EU foreign policy spokesman Michael Mann said on December 31, 2011 that the EU is open to meaningful talks with

Tehran, provided there are no preconditions on the Iranian side.

“We continue to pursue our twin-track approach and are open for meaningful discussions on confidence-building measures, without preconditions from the Iranian side,” Mann stated.

The Iranian ambassador to Germany said on the same day that the next round of talks will be held after Jalili sends a letter to Ashton.

In late January 2011, a new round of talks between Iran and the major powers was held in Istanbul but no date was set for the next round of negotiations.

After the end of the Geneva talks in early December 2010, Jalili announced that Iran and the 5+1 group had agreed that the next rounds of talks should focus on common ground for cooperation.

However, the 5+1 group reneged on the agreement, and after the end of the Geneva talks, Ashton read out a statement saying the nuclear issue would be the focus of the next round of talks, a move

which drew strong criticism from Iranian officials.

The main bone of contention between Tehran and the West is Iran’s uranium enrichment program.

Iran says all its nuclear activities are totally peaceful, and, as an International Atomic Energy Agency member and a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty signatory, it has the legal right to produce nuclear fuel for its research reactors and nuclear power plants.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1504377>

- **The West’s pressure on Iran will backfire**

TEHRAN, Jan. 8 (MNA) -- Iran has repeatedly denied the allegations that it is producing nuclear weapons. But the repeated denials mostly fall on deaf ears in the West.

This is the seemingly never-ending story of Iran’s nuclear dispute with the West, which Western media outlets spin every day and every hour, repeating that Western governments are not inclined to

accept that the country's nuclear program poses no threat to world peace and global security.

Once a nation reaches a certain point in its technological and scientific development, it is impossible to prevent it from developing and making progress. A glance at the record of Iran's responses to Western sanctions and threats over the past few years shows that the West cannot win this battle.

The latest round of threats made by Western governments, especially the United States and Britain, which is in the form of the new economic sanctions and a potential oil embargo, has been viewed by many anti-Iran circles as a promising measure that may persuade Tehran to bow to the pressure and stop enriching uranium.

However, all these efforts will get nowhere.

Iran regards access to nuclear energy as its inalienable right. This means that it will never take a step backward in its endeavors to attain nuclear self-sufficiency. Access to weapons of mass

destruction, including any form of nuclear capabilities, has no place in Iran's comprehensive defensive doctrine. This has been obvious since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

However, the West has been trying to destroy the Iranian economy for decades. But these actions have never had any palpable impact on the daily life of Iranians. Not one Iranian believes that the country would have had a better economic situation if the West had not imposed sanctions.

The Westerners are looking for an excuse to start another war in the region. Western media outlets have used Iran's recent naval maneuver in the Persian Gulf as a pretext to intensify their Iranophobia campaign. Some Westerners have also said that the naval maneuver was a prelude to a nuclear test. The remarks of some Iranian officials, who said Iran would close the Strait of Hormuz in response to an oil embargo, have also been interpreted as warmongering moves.

So why is the West so interested in creating a media hype around Iran and its peaceful nuclear program?

The answer is that the United States is concerned about the massive influence Iran has gained over the past few years, especially since the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan began. The rise of Iran has altered political equations in the region, which has frightened U.S. officials.

Western media outlets are trying to convince the world that Iran's trump card in its current showdown with the West is not the threat to close the Strait of Hormuz and choke off the world's oil supply, but rather will be a test of a nuclear device.

According to this farfetched scenario, any kind of nuclear test, even one like North Korea's ambiguous 2006 nuclear blast, could give the Iranians exactly what they want -- a standoff that would preempt any conventional attacks by its enemies.

Although Iran has many options besides closing the Strait of Hormuz to respond to any military assault, the country's defense doctrine is mainly based on spiritual power not military capabilities. This spiritual influence has already created a

nightmare for the West in the Middle East and many other parts of the world.

The masses in the Islamic world and even in many non-Muslim states feel a strong connection with Iran due to its brave anti-hegemonic policies. These people would harshly condemn any attempt to destabilize Iran.

This is what the U.S. policymakers and generals are worried about. In other words, imposing pressure on the Iranian nation not only intensifies anti-U.S. sentiments across the globe but also makes the Iranian government more determined to continue on the path of resistance in order to defend the rights of Iranian citizens.

The West's pressure will backfire due to Iran's connection with the countries of the Global South.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1504761>

- **Iran sentences Iranian-U.S. man to death for spying**

Iran's Revolutionary Court sentenced an Iranian-U.S. man to death for spying for

the CIA, the semi-official Fars news agency reported on Monday.



“Amir Mirza Hekmati was sentenced to death ... for cooperating with the hostile country (the United States) and spying for the CIA,” Fars said, without giving a source.

“The court found him Corrupt on Earth and Mohareb (waging war on God).”

Judiciary officials were not available for comment.

Hekmati, a 28-year-old of Iranian descent, was arrested in December and Iran’s Intelligence Ministry accused him of receiving training at U.S. bases in neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq.

Iran’s judiciary said Hekmati admitted to having links with the CIA but said he had no intention of harming Iran.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/09/187248.html>

- **Iran: Uranium enrichment has begun**



Iran has begun uranium enrichment at a new underground site built to withstand possible airstrikes, a leading hard-line newspaper has reported in another show of defiance against Western pressure to rein in Tehran's nuclear program.

The operations at the bunker-like facility south of Tehran, reported by the Kayhan daily newspaper, are small in comparison to Iran's main enrichment site. But the centrifuges at the underground labs are considered more efficient and are shielded from aerial surveillance and protected against airstrikes by up to 90m of mountain rock.

Uranium enrichment is at the core of the international standoff over Iran's nuclear program. The US and its allies fear Iran could use its enrichment facilities to develop high-grade nuclear material for warheads.

Iran - which claims it only seeks nuclear reactors for energy and research - has sharply increased its threats and military posturing against stronger pressures, including US sanctions targeting Iran's Central Bank in attempts to complicate its ability to sell oil.

A senior commander of the Revolutionary Guard force was quoted as saying Tehran's leadership has decided to order the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic oil route, if the country's petroleum exports are blocked.

Revolutionary Guard ground forces also staged war games in eastern Iran in an apparent display of resolve against US forces just over the border in Afghanistan.

Iran's nuclear chief, Fereidoun Abbasi, had told Keyhan on Saturday that Iran will "soon" begin enrichment at Fordow. It

was impossible to immediately reconcile the two reports.

Iran has a major uranium enrichment facility in Natanz in central Iran, where nearly 8,000 centrifuges are operating. Tehran began enrichment at Natanz in 2006.

The US and Israel have not ruled out militant strikes against Iran if diplomacy continues to fail to resolve the dispute.

Iran disclosed the existence of Fordow to the IAEA only in September 2009, after learning that Western intelligence agencies had detected it.

Ban on unofficial money trade

Iran has been hit by four rounds of UN sanctions and the US and the EU have imposed increasingly tight economic sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear programme.

Iran's parliament cracked down on unofficial money traders on Sunday after new US sanctions helped trigger a currency crash as Iranians rushed to buy dollars.

The rial lost about 20 per cent of its value against the dollar before the central bank intervened last week to try to stem further losses by injecting hard currency into the market.

At a special parliamentary debate on the currency crisis, lawmakers passed a measure imposing legal penalties on touts who sell foreign currencies outside official exchange offices and banks where rates can be subjected to government controls.

The measure may scare away touts, a common sight in parts of Tehran where they wave wads of currency at passing motorists.

But it will have no immediate impact on the price most Iranians have to pay for dollars which, even at licensed exchange offices, sell at a 40 per cent premium over the central bank's "reference rate".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/20121883426286842.html>

- **Report: Iran begins enrichment at new site**

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran has begun uranium enrichment program at a new underground site well protected from possible airstrikes, a leading hardline newspaper reported Sunday.

Kayhan daily, which is close to Iran's ruling clerics, said Tehran has begun injecting uranium gas into sophisticated centrifuges at the Fordo facility near the holy city of Qom.

"Kayhan received reports yesterday that shows Iran has begun uranium enrichment at the Fordo facility amid heightened foreign enemy threats," the paper said in a front-page report. Kayhan's manager is a representative of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

But Iran's nuclear chief Fereidoun Abbasi said late Saturday that his country will "soon" begin enrichment at Fordo. It was impossible to immediately reconcile the two reports.

Iran has a major uranium enrichment facility in Natanz in central Iran where nearly 8,000 centrifuges are operating. Tehran began enrichment at Natanz in April 2006.

The Fordo centrifuges however are reportedly more efficient, and the site better shielded from aerial attack.

Built next to a military complex, Fordo was long kept secret and was only acknowledged by Iran after it was identified by Western intelligence agencies in September 2009.

Uranium enrichment lies at the heart of Iran's dispute with the West. The technology that can be used to produce nuclear fuel, but also materials for atomic bombs.

The U.S. and its allies fear Iran's ability to make its own nuclear fuel will eventually lead to atomic weapons, because the technology offers a possible pathway to weapons-grade nuclear material.

Iran says it only seeks reactors for energy and research, but refuses to halt its uranium enrichment activities. It says it needs to keep the enrichment program to produce fuel for future nuclear reactors and medical radioisotopes needed for cancer patients.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28009>

- **Iran holds military exercise near Afghan border**

TEHRAN, (Reuters) - Iran launched a military manoeuvre near its border with Afghanistan on Saturday, the semi-official Fars news agency reported, days after naval exercises in the Gulf increased tensions with the West and pushed up oil prices.

Mohammad Pakpour, commander of the Revolutionary Guards' ground forces, said the "Martyrs of Unity" exercises near Khvat, 60 km (40 miles) from Afghanistan, were "aimed at boosting security along the Iranian borders," Fars reported.

The Revolutionary Guards' naval forces' 10-day exercise in the Gulf that ended last Monday worsened relations with Washington days after U.S. President Barack Obama approved sanctions that aim to stop countries buying Iranian oil.

Threats that Iran could close the Strait of Hormuz, which leads out of the Gulf and provides the outlet for most oil from the Middle East, pushed up oil prices and Iran

warned Washington not to send an aircraft carrier back into the Gulf.

Forces with the USS John C. Stennis aircraft carrier strike group, the target of Tehran's threat, rescued 13 Iranian fishermen from Somali pirates days after passing through the Strait.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi played down the political significance of the rescue.

"On some occasions, Iran has helped and secured the released of many other countries' sailors that had been caught by pirates," he told state-run Press TV.

"This is a humanitarian gesture and it is not related to the countries' relations with each other.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28004>

- **IRGC Forces to Start Main Phase of Drills in Eastern Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Ground Force units of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) are scheduled to exercise new

tactical strategies in the main phase of their wargames in Eastern Iran today.



The IRGC Ground Force on Saturday started a series of military exercises, codenamed "Shohaday-e Vahdat (Martyrs of Unity)", in Khaf general zone, East of Iran.

Spokesman of the drills General Hamid Sarkheili said that ground units are scheduled to exercise new tactical strategies, particularly in desert regions, as well as passive defense on Monday.

He noted that the capabilities and innovations of the Ground Forces in tactical aspects will be displayed during the main phase of the drill.

Earlier, Commander of the IRGC Ground Force Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour said that the wargames are aimed at boosting security along the Iranian borders and are part of the IRGC

Ground Force's routine drills staged to maintain and boost combat preparedness of different IRGC units.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9010170407>

- **Iranian Parliament Speaker Due in Turkey on Wednesday**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, heading a parliamentary delegation, is scheduled to pay a visit to Turkey on Wednesday to meet with his Turkish counterpart.



The visit will take place at the official invitation of Turkish Parliament Speaker Cemil Cicek.

Iran and Turkey have in recent years increased their cooperation in all the various fields of economy, security, trade, education, energy and culture.

The two sides have exchanged several politico-economic delegations during the last few months.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited the Iranian capital Tehran last week and met with Iran's Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi before holding talks with his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi as well as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on mutual ties and latest regional and international developments.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9010170405>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel charges five Jewish extremists over army base raid: reports**

Israel on Sunday charged five alleged Jewish extremists over a December raid on an army base, accusing them of gathering intelligence on the Israeli military and planning a riot, local media said.

The Jerusalem Post said that the accused, from Jerusalem and two West Bank settlements, were charged with “gathering important military intelligence,

conspiracy to riot and entering a closed military zone.”



In the attack on a brigade headquarters in the northern West Bank, about 50 right-wing activists breached the perimeter fence and went on the rampage, setting fire to tires, assaulting a senior officer and damaging vehicles with stones, paint and nails.

Public radio said that the indictment presented in court on Sunday accused the five of tracking the movements of army units in the West Bank and passing them on to settlement activists.

“They sought to prevent by illegal means the dismantling of (settlement) outposts decided by the government, and distributed reports from spotters, scouts and accomplices,” the radio said.

The December raid was just one in a rising tide of so-called “price-tag” attacks by settlers and their supporters aimed at stopping government moves to dismantle wildcat West Bank settlement outposts.

The attacks have mainly targeted Palestinian property and the homes and offices of Israeli peace activists, but of late they have twice struck military bases associated with outpost demolition operations, enraging the political leadership which has vowed to clamp down on the perpetrators.

Destruction of Palestinian property, including the vandalizing of several mosques in the West Bank and Jerusalem, has rarely resulted in Israeli legal action.

“Of all of the mosques which have been torched or damaged in the past two years, there have not been any charges,” Sarit Michaeli of Israeli rights group B’tselem told AFP.

Police say they arrested suspects in connection with mosque attacks but were unable to press charges due to lack of evidence.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187116.html>

- **Demographic trends worry Israel**

Population growth figures suggest Palestinians in Israel and occupied territories will outnumber Israelis by 2020.

Some Israeli officials are worried that a growing Palestinian population could undermine the country's identity as a Jewish state.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, demographic figures project that Palestinians, who live mainly in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, will outnumber Israelis within a decade.

Rory Challands reports from the West Bank.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201216153545964103.html>

- **Israel to increase defence budget by \$700m**

Prime minister to boost spending due to "abundant challenges and threats",

despite previously saying he would make cuts.



Israel will boost defence spending by about six per cent this year in the face of deepening regional instability, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said, after saying last year that he would make cuts to the military to finance social reforms.

"We are going to add three billion shekels (\$700m) to the defence budget," Netanyahu told a news conference on Sunday.

Netanyahu had in October supported the recommendations of a report he commissioned, by economist Manuel Trajtenberg, which were intended to address rising frustrations about the cost of living and income disparity in Israel that triggered mass protests last year.

One of the Trajtenberg report's proposals was to cut a defence budget that amounts to around \$14bn, of which \$3bn comes in annual US military aid, to finance a series of social initiatives without increasing the deficit.

"I have reflected on this question, but in view of what has happened in the region, I have reached the conclusion that cutting the defence budget would be a mistake, even a big mistake," Netanyahu told a weekly cabinet meeting.

Israel faces a strategic map that has been radically redrawn in the past 12 months.

It looks likely to lose regional alliances with Turkey and Egypt, faces a possible entente between the two main Palestinian factions, an ongoing uprising in neighbouring Syria and growing fears over Iran's nuclear programme.

'Shield of the country'

"Any sensible person can see what is happening around us ... All these changes have strategic implications for the national security of the state of Israel, for our

ability to face the new challenges and instability," Netanyahu said.

The Israeli army "is the shield of the country, which is why we must increase its means," he added.

The prime minister said that in return for the spending increase, the defence ministry would have to respect the principle of transparency, which would allow the government to monitor the management of the budget.

"In the past, we discovered things late, whereas now we will become aware of them in real time," he said.

Israel's cabinet in October approved the recommended economic reforms outlined by the 267-page Trajtenberg report, which covered housing, competitiveness, social services, education and taxation.

Despite their apparent victory, defence officials were circumspect about the changes, saying they might only receive extra funding for this year and that they expected cuts to be imposed later.

"The defence budget has been sharply and routinely decreased over the years," Defence Minister Ehud Barak said in a statement, noting that in 1986 the defence budget was 17 per cent of GDP.

The 2011 defence budget was about six per cent of GDP.

"Cuts will bring the IDF (Israel Defence Force) to a red line in everything to do, with capabilities, training and readiness to face the challenges before us," Barak said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/20121961921721933.html>

- **Gaza premier plays down talks with Israel**

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — The prime minister of the Gaza government said Thursday the first meeting between Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators in more than a year was "a futile gesture" that will lead nowhere.

Ismail Haniyeh of the Palestinian faction Hamas received a hero's welcome at Tunisia's airport where he was greeted by thousands of people chanting their support for the Palestinian cause. He also

met with Tunisia's new prime minister, Hamadi Jebali.

"We are not optimistic. It is a futile gesture which will lead nowhere," Haniyeh said regarding Tuesday's Israeli-Palestinian talks in Jordan. The meeting ended without any significant breakthroughs, and Israel and the Palestinians remain far from agreement on key issues to resolve their decades-long conflict. But the talks are to continue.

Haniyeh is on an official tour of the Muslim world, his first trip outside the blockaded territory since the Islamist group took over Gaza in 2007.

In an interview, Haniyeh said Thursday he is visiting Tunisia to congratulate the country on the success of its revolution which launched the Arab Spring. Tunisia deposed its long-ruling dictator in January 2011, sparking uprisings across the region.

Hamas officials say the goal of Haniyeh's trip is to improve ties with Muslim countries swept up in the uprisings shaking the Arab world.

Hamas and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas Fatah movement joined in a short-lived unity government following 2006 parliamentary elections. But the following year the alliance shattered and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip during several days of fighting, leaving the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in charge in the West Bank. Repeated attempts at reconciliation failed, and both sides have cracked down on the other in their respective territories.

Reconciliation talks currently under way with Egyptian mediation appear to be making progress, with both Fatah and Hamas saying they hope to allow Palestinian elections to go ahead in 2012.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27985>

- **Lieberman: Palestinian Authority not looking to make peace**

Foreign minister tells Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee "The only way forward is to manage the conflict, and not to end the conflict"; peace talks set to take place in Amman.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman had grim predictions for Monday's peace talks in Amman, saying the Palestinian Authority has no plans to make peace in the foreseeable future.



"The only way forward is to manage the conflict, and not to end the conflict," Lieberman said at a Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee meeting, hours before Israeli and Palestinian delegations were set to meet in the Jordanian capital.

Lieberman said the Palestinian Authority agreed to peace talks in Jordan because they could not refuse an invitation by Jordanian King Abdullah II.

According to the foreign minister, the PA leadership is waiting for the Quartet deadline for Israelis and Palestinians to formulate proposals for borders and security to expire.

When that happens, on January 26, the PA will launch an "anti-Israel" campaign at the United Nations and UN Security Council, picking up where they left off vis a vis their "failed" statehood bid, according to the foreign minister.

Israeli and Palestinian officials are scheduled to meet in Amman on Monday for the second time in a week, though Palestinian officials say the gap between the two sides on security and border issues remains as wide as ever.

Unlike the meeting last Tuesday, this time representatives of the Quartet – the US, EU, Russia and UN – will not be in attendance. Jordan will host the talks at the Foreign Ministry in Amman.

Palestinian officials in Ramallah said they did not expect Monday's meeting between chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat and Israeli envoy Yitzhak Molcho to achieve a breakthrough in the current stalemate.

PLO Secretary-General Yasser Abed Rabbo characterized the talks in Jordan as only "exploratory meetings" and not serious negotiations.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=252806>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Petitioners to show evidence against Mubarak in Egypt's 'trial of century'**



The trial of Egypt's former President Hosni Mubarak, popular as the 'trial of the century' will resume on Monday, as judges will begin hearing arguments from the plaintiffs, an Egyptian daily reported on Monday.

The former president, his two sons -- Alaa and Gamal --, the former interior minister Habib al-Adly and six senior police officers face charges ranging from corruption to involvement in the deaths of around 850 protesters during the Jan. 25 revolution that succeeded in forcing Mubarak to step down on Feb. 11.

Petitioners say that they have additional proof that Mubarak and his aides should be held accountable for the deaths of hundreds of protesters, Egypt's al-Masry al-Youm reported.

They are scheduled to present evidence implicating the accused, and focus on the first charge of ordering the shooting. Mubarak also faces charges of corruption.

The chief prosecutor in Mubarak's trial on Thursday demanded the death sentence for the fallen Egyptian dictator, arguing that he had ordered the killings of anti-regime demonstrators.

"The law foresees the death penalty for premeditated murder," Mustafa Suleiman told the court at the end of his three-day case against the former president.

In wrapping up his remarks, Suleiman said "the president of the republic is responsible for protecting the people, and the question is not simply one of whether he ordered the killing of protesters, but to know why he did not intervene to stop the violence."

He also argued that then interior minister Adly could "not have given the order to fire on demonstrators without having been instructed to do so by Mubarak."

Mubarak and the other defendants deny any responsibility for the deaths.

Mubarak is the only one of the leaders toppled in the wave of protests that have swept the Arab world to stand trial in person. In a country in political and economic disarray, many Egyptians say national renewal will be impossible unless those killed receive justice.

A day before, Suleiman described Mubarak as a "tyrannical leader who sought to hand power to his younger son Gamal, who spread corruption in the country and opened the door to his friends and relatives, ruining the country without any accountability.

The trial began on Aug. 3 after months of protests to pressure the military rulers to place the former strongman on trial along with ex-regime officials.

There was a three months hiatus in which lawyers for the alleged victims unsuccessfully sought the dismissal of

Judge Ahmed Refaat, whom they accused of bias towards the defense.

Relatives of those who died in the protests say their hopes to see Mubarak sentenced have been dashed by a string of witnesses who mostly confirmed the defense's case that the former president never gave orders to shoot protesters.

Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, Mubarak's former defense minister and now the country's military ruler, testified behind closed doors. The court issued a gag order on his testimony, but lawyers say he did not incriminate Mubarak.

Mubarak is in custody in a military hospital on Cairo's outskirts, where he is being treated for a heart condition. His lawyer says he suffers from stomach cancer.

According to al-Masry al-Youm report, the plaintiffs' legal team held a meeting on Saturday to determine who would be responsible for presenting their argument. The court asked the team to choose eight lawyers to argue the case.

Meanwhile, several other lawyers boycotted the meeting, saying they are

not satisfied with the lawyers assigned the case.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/09/187231.html>

- **Sudanese rebels call on Libya's NTC to arrest Bashir during Tripoli visit**

Sudanese rebels seeking to overthrow President Omar al-Bashir have asked Libya on Sunday to arrest the accused war criminal during his visit to Tripoli.

In his first visit since Libya's long-time dictator Muammar Qaddafi was overthrown and killed last year, the Sudanese "revolutionary" rebels called for Bashir to be sent to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"We are calling for the Libyan authorities to arrest Bashir and send him to the ICC because he committed crimes against his people in Darfur," Ibrahim al-Hillu of Darfur's Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) faction headed by Abdelwahid Nur, told AFP.

"We condemn the revolutionary authorities for receiving Bashir," Hillu said,

in reference to Libya's ruling National Transitional Council (NTC).

He called on the NTC to not provide funding to the Sudanese leader "because he is using this money to kill" people in his country.

The Hague-based ICC issued an arrest warrant for Bashir in 2009 for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Darfur. A later warrant added genocide to the charges.

United Nations estimate that at least 300,000 people have been killed in Darfur since fighting between non-Arab rebels and the Arab-dominated central government erupted in 2003.

Khartoum puts the death toll at 10,000.

The Sudanese president's visit to Libya has been in an effort to help disarm Libya's former rebel fighters and integrate them into the army and police forces, it was reported on Saturday.

"We have good experience in integrating insurgents and entering them into the armed forces or the police," Bashir said at

a news conference with Libyan officials during his visit to Tripoli. "Our officers are ready at any time."

Bashir, wanted globally for genocide and war crimes, said on Saturday that the fall of Qaddafi's regime was the "best gift" to his country from Libya.

Libyan officials welcomed al-Bashir in a red carpet ceremony at a Tripoli airport, and Prime Minister Abdurrahim el-Keib called him one of Libya's friends.

It remains unclear, however, if Libya will accept al-Bashir's offer to help with militia integration.

Some pointed out the irony of a government founded by rebels who overthrew one autocrat warmly welcoming another.

Amnesty International criticized Libya for receiving al-Bashir.

South Sudan killings

Meanwhile, a United Nations official said on Saturday that there had been no evidence of mass killings in South Sudan, where reports that armed 3,000 people

were killed last week when thousands of armed youths attacked the Pibor region of Jonglei

“We found no evidence that support those numbers,” Hilde Johnson, U.N. Special Representative for South Sudan said following a visit to affected areas where up to 8,000 rampaging armed youths set homes on fire and forced thousands to flee.

In a dramatic escalation of bitter tit-for-tat attacks, a militia army from the Lou Nuer tribe last week marched on Pibor, home to the rival Murle people, whom they blame for abductions and cattle raiding.

It was still not clear on Saturday how many people had died but with as many as a third of all thatch huts set on fire in targeted areas, some 60,000 people were in desperate need of help, Johnson added.

“People are left without shelter, their homes have been torched, and with their cattle taken their livelihoods are dismantled,” she said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187049.html>

- **U.S. reaches out to Egypt’s Brotherhood; Islamists see further parliament gains**

The United States is reaching out to the Muslim Brotherhood as the group gains political momentum in the parliamentary elections.



“It’s clear that they (the Brotherhood) are now the only game in town,” and U.S. officials must talk to them, Marina Ottaway, who heads the Middle East program in Washington for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace told AFP.

Banned under deposed President Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood has emerged as a major political winner from the uprising that toppled him in the form of the well-organized Freedom and Justice Party.

During the Mubarak era, Ottoway said that the U.S. administration had essentially “bought” the former president’s “line” that the Brotherhood and its links to Islamist militants were a threat to Egypt’s and the region’s stability, even though it had renounced violence decades ago.

“The U.S. essentially backed Mubarak in its repression of the Muslim Brotherhood,” Ottoway said.

U.S. officials had also turned down invitations by her think-tank to attend post-2005 meetings with Arab Islamist groups, including Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood.

“For the U.S. now to reach out to the Muslim Brotherhood is a big step, it’s a step that’s long overdue, but it’s a step that the United States has resisted,” she added. “It’s a huge change and they’re doing it out of necessity.”

The Muslim Brotherhood said on Saturday it had won at least 41 percent of the seats in Egypt’s lower house of parliament, with Islamists of various stripes occupying almost two thirds of the assembly so far.

The Brotherhood has promised that Egyptians of all persuasions will have their say and, while the strong Islamist performance has alarmed some Egyptians and Western governments that backed Mubarak, it is far from clear whether rival Islamists will cooperate in the new legislature.

The Brotherhood’s Democratic Alliance list has won 41 percent of the seats so far, while another list led by the hardline Islamist Nour Party came second with 20 percent of the seats.

The Nour Party seeks strict application of Islamic law and the more moderate Brotherhood may seek an alliance with liberal groups to allay concerns about the prospect of an Islamist-led Egypt.

Sixty-two percent of potential voters cast their ballots in the third round of the election, which took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, Egypt’s election commission said.

But with increasing political Islamist influence throughout the country, foreign policy concerns still linger, particularly in

relation to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel.

"On that score, the Brotherhood has kind of given reassuring signals but at this point they're fairly general," Analyst Nathan Brown, a George Washington University professor, told AFP, adding: "The Brotherhood, as an organization, is close to Hamas (in Gaza) and hostile to Israel."

Meanwhile, Shibley Telhami, a University of Maryland professor, said the Brotherhood does not want to "rock the boat on foreign policy" or make certain drastic domestic changes as it seeks repairs for Egypt's badly damaged economy.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said before the polls that the United States had pursued "limited contacts" with the Brotherhood as Washington was "re-engaging in" a six-year-old policy in light of Egypt's political changes.

For one, Telhami said, it will want Egypt to continue receiving U.S. and other foreign aid. It is also unlikely, at least in the short term, to ban alcohol or bikinis as it tries to

revive tourism, an economic mainstay, he said.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said before the polls that the United States had pursued "limited contacts" with the Brotherhood as Washington was "re-engaging in" a six-year-old policy in light of Egypt's political changes.

In discussing contacts with the Brotherhood, Clinton's spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said last week that Washington had "some good reassurances from different interlocutors" on respect for human rights and Egypt's international obligations, an allusion to the peace treaty.

But she added: "We will continue to seek those kinds of reassurances going forward."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187031.html>

- **Sudan's Bashir offers to help form new Libyan army**

TRIPOLI, (Reuters) - Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, wanted by the International Criminal Court on genocide

charges, said on Saturday he has offered to help Libya integrate its dozens of militias into the country's armed forces.

"We have an experience in integrating rebels in a national army," said Bashir, whose visit to Libya drew criticism from human rights groups.

"We have offered to help our brothers in Libya in building a national army that includes the components of the Libyan revolution. Our experts are available and our officers are available," he said.

Bashir also said he had offered the new Libyan government help from Sudanese troops in protecting Libya's southern borders during the war that ended Muammar Gaddafi's rule but that his offer was declined.

Libya's new rulers are struggling to include thousands of former rebels who helped oust Gaddafi in a military and police force or in civilian jobs.

Mustafa Abdul Jalil, chairman of the National Transitional Council, warned this week that Libya risks sliding into civil war unless it cracks down on rival militias

which filled the vacuum left by Gaddafi's downfall.

The militias are vying with each other for influence, and believe that to ensure they receive their due share of political power they need to keep an armed presence in the capital.

Abdul Jalil, who visited Khartoum in November, has said Sudanese weapons and ammunition helped Libya's former rebels oust Muammar Gaddafi last year and take control of the North African country.

Relations between Khartoum and Tripoli were strained during Gaddafi's rule because of his support for rebels in Sudan's western Darfur region and in South Sudan, which gained independence in July under a 2005 peace deal.

Bashir said that the ousting of Gaddafi was "the best piece of news in Sudan's modern history."

"We came here to thank the Libyan people for the gift they offered to the Sudanese people by removing Gaddafi," he said.

RIGHTS GROUPS' CRITICISM

Bashir's visit was criticised by rights groups.

"Welcoming Bashir ... raises questions about the NTC's stated commitment to human rights and the rule of law," Richard Dicker, international justice director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

"Following the end of decades of brutal rule in Libya, it is disturbing if Tripoli hosts a head of state on the run from international arrest warrants for grave human rights violations."

Mohammed al-Keelani, who heads a group of 50 Libyan civil society organisations, said Bashir was not welcome in Libya.

"For us, Omar al-Bashir is the Gaddafi of Sudan," he said. "We have reservations against this visit because he's a tyrant who oppresses his people and his policy contradicts our principles."

Bashir is under increasing pressure at home after his country lost much of its oil production to the south.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28011>

- **Egypt Islamists claim 62% in latest voting**

CAIRO, (AFP) - Egypt's two main Islamist parties claimed on Saturday to have together taken 62.2 percent of the vote in the final stage of a general election, maintaining their lead in the overall contest.

The Freedom and Justice Party of the powerful Muslim Brotherhood said on its website that it had garnered 35.2 percent of the party list vote in the polling in the final nine governorates on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Al-Nur party of the even more conservative Salafists, said it received 27 percent.

The two parties chalked up 65 percent in the first two phases of Egypt's first general election since the February ouster of president Hosni Mubarak.

5. SYRIA

The elections for the lower house of parliament have divided up the country geographically.

The last stage included the unstable Sinai region, which lies along the border with Israel and the Gaza Strip and includes the country's popular Red Sea tourist resorts.

Under the complex electoral system adopted after Mubarak's ouster, second-round run-offs still have to be held later this month where necessary for the one third of seats that are decided in first-past-the-post constituencies.

From January 29, two-stage elections will then be held for the upper house.

Once the new parliament has been sworn in, a commission will be appointed to draft a new constitution before presidential elections are held by the end of June.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28005>

- **Syria's opposition criticizes Arab League; Turkey urges SNC to use 'peaceful means'**



Syrian opposition activists criticized the Arab League's failure to take a firmer line against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as violent crackdown against protesters resumed across the country, Al Arabiya reported on Monday.

Turkey, meanwhile, called on the Syrian opposition to continue its resistance against President Assad's regime through "peaceful means," a foreign ministry spokesman said Monday.

"The Syrian opposition demands democracy and we told them during a meeting yesterday (Sunday) that this should be done through peaceful means," the spokesman told AFP, referring to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's talks

in Istanbul with the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC).

Davutoglu's meeting with a 10-member delegation led by Burhan Ghalioun, leader of the Syrian National Council, is the third after his contacts with the group on Oct. 13 and Nov. 17, said the spokesman. The Syrian National Council has an office in Istanbul, he noted.

One person was reported to have been killed by the fire of Syrian security forces in Hama early Monday, according to activists. As many as 20 people were killed on Sunday, Al Arabiya reported citing activists at the Local Coordination Committees (LCC).

The Arab League has urged the Syrian government to end its violence against protesters and allow League monitors in the country to work more freely, but stopped short of asking the U.N. to help.

The arrival last month of the monitors in Syria to judge whether the government was honoring a pledge to end a crackdown on a popular revolt has not ended the violence, in which the United Nations says more than 5,000 people have been killed.

After a progress meeting in Cairo on Sunday, the Arab League group on Syria said the government had only partly implemented a promise to stop the crackdown, free those jailed during the crisis and withdraw its troops from cities.

In its closing communiqué, the League said it would increase the number of monitors from the present 165 and give them more resources, ignoring calls to end what pro-democracy campaigners say is a toothless mission that buys more time for Syrian President Assad to suppress opponents, according to Reuters.

The Arab League communiqué called on the Syrian opposition to present its political vision for the country's future, and asked the League's secretary general to convene a Syrian opposition meeting. Opposition rejects Arab League communiqué

The LCC stressed its complete rejection to the Arab League communiqué and said in a statement that it puts the killer and the victim on the same line, according to Al Arabiya.

The statement called on the Arab League to meet its responsibility towards the Syrian people through the following steps:

-Immediately announcing that the Arab observers have failed in their mission in Syria.

-Referring the Syrian file to the U.N. Security Council, paving the way for imposing a no-fly zone and establishing a safe corridor for protecting the military defector.

-The Arab League should release all evidence proving the presence of armed groups and terrorists among the protesters.

-The Arab League would be held accountable if the Syrian revolution is changed from its peaceful nature to an armed one.

-Syria should be announced a disaster-zone and thus campaigns to deliver relief and aid should be launched at once.

Some Syrian opposition groups hope a failure of the mission might open the way to foreign military intervention like that

which helped topple Libya's Qaddafi last year.

But Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Araby said that while the Syrian opposition had asked for the case to be referred to the U.N. Security Council, there was no international appetite for military intervention in Syria.

Crackdown resumes in presence of Arab observers

Arab League officials said the continuation of the mission, due to make a full report on Jan. 19, depended on the Syrian government's commitment to ending violence and honoring its promises. League foreign ministers will discuss the findings on Jan. 19-20.

"If the ... report comes out saying the violence has not stopped, the Arab League will have a responsibility to act on that ... We have to be clear and honest with the Syrian people," Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani told a news conference after the meeting.

He did not say what the Arab League might do, but Assad's failure to abide by the peace plan resulted in Syria's

suspension from the 22-member regional body in November.

The Arab plan also called for Assad's government to permit peaceful protests, start dialogue with political opponents and allow foreign media to travel freely to the country. Syria agreed, but the pledge remains unfulfilled.

Qatar, which chairs the group and has been critical of the mission's performance, had proposed inviting U.N. technicians and human rights experts to help Arab monitors assess whether Syria was honoring its pledges.

"We have not yet agreed to send individuals," Sheikh Hamad said. Asked if this could happen in the future, he said: "it depends on how events develop."

About 50 protesters gathered outside the Cairo hotel where the meeting was held, singing: "The people want the president dead" and "Down, down with Bashar". Some waved posters showing Assad as a vampire sucking the Syrian people's blood.

Meanwhile, Syrian security forces and pro-regime militias shot and killed 20 civilians

in different parts of the country on Sunday, including 10 in the central flashpoint province of Homs, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

And fighting between the Syrian army and deserters in the southern Deraa province took the lives of 11 soldiers, according to the Observatory.

Another 20 soldiers were wounded in the fighting in the village of Basr al-Harir in Deraa province, south of Damascus, while nine soldiers defected to join the rebel troops, the group added.

The Britain-based watchdog also reported heavy machinegun exchanges between the army and deserters in the Deraa town of Dael. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Cradle of the anti-Assad protests that began in March, Deraa has been one of the provinces hardest hit by the crackdown.

Iron fist

On Saturday, Syria held funerals for 26 victims of a suicide bombing in Damascus, promising an "iron fist" response.

The opposition pointed the finger for Friday's bomb at the regime itself, as it did after similar attacks in Damascus on Dec. 23 killed 44 people.

The Assad regime has consistently asserted that the unrest sweeping the country is the work of armed rebels, not largely peaceful demonstrators as maintained by Western governments and human rights watchdogs.

After the Damascus bombing, the United States condemned it and again called for Assad to step down, while U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon said "all violence is unacceptable and must stop immediately," according to AFP

The Syrian National Council, an opposition umbrella group which includes the Muslim Brotherhood, said the bombing "clearly bears the regime's fingerprints."

It said the U.N. Security Council had to address the bloodshed, which the world body estimated in December had killed more than 5,000 people since March.

The SNC said "a joint effort between the Arab League and the United Nations Security Council represents a first step toward the urgent and necessary measures to assure the protection of civilians, and to ensure that the regime does not commit additional bombings and killings."

So far veto-wielding Security Council permanent members Beijing and Moscow have blocked efforts by Western governments to secure U.N. action against Damascus.

On Sunday, a large Russian naval flotilla led by an aircraft carrier was docked in the Syrian port of Tartus in what state media hailed as a show of solidarity by its Cold War ally.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/09/187210.html>

- **Russian naval flotilla docks in Syria: state media**

A large Russian naval flotilla led by an aircraft carrier has docked in the Syrian port of Tartus in what Damascus state media hailed on Sunday as a show of solidarity by close ally Moscow.

The six-day port call by the carrier group in the Mediterranean port where Russia has a recently expanded naval base is intended to boost ties at a time when President Bashar al-Assad's government is under mounting Western and Arab pressure over its bloody crackdown on dissent, the Syrian press said.



“The port call is aimed at bringing the two countries closer together and strengthening their ties of friendship,” the official SANA news agency quoted a Russian naval officer it named as Yakushin Vladimir Anatolievich as saying.

“The commanders of the Russian naval vessels docked in Tartus took turns to express their solidarity with the Syrian people,” the news agency added.

The governor of Tartus province, Atef al-Nadaf, paid tribute to the “honorable

position adopted by Russia which has stood by the Syrian people.”

The Al-Watan newspaper, which is privately owned but close to the government, reported last week that the carrier Admiral Kuznetsov was escorted by a large flotilla including submarines.

Despite strong Western criticism, Russia has stood by its Cold War ally in the face of a mounting international outcry over the death toll from security force efforts to crush nearly 10 months of anti-government protests.

In October, Moscow joined Beijing in vetoing a Western-drafted U.N. Security Council resolution that would have threatened Damascus with “targeted measures” if it failed to rein in its security forces.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187090.html>

- **Arab ministers ask observer mission in Syria to continue despite criticism**

Arab ministers meeting in Cairo have given observers in Syria the green light to continue their mission, despite a barrage

of criticism and calls for their withdrawal, and ask the regime in Damascus to put an immediate end to violence against protesters.



The Arab ministerial committee on Syria “has decided to give Arab League observers the necessary time to continue their mission according to the protocol,” it said in its final statement.

On the ground, at least 20 people were killed across the country on Sunday, the General Commission of the Revolution said.

Clashes between the Syrian army and deserters before dawn left 11 soldiers dead and another 20 wounded, according to the British-based activist group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The watchdog also reported heavy machinegun exchanges between the army

and deserters in the Daraa town of Dael, however there was no immediate word on any casualties.

A team of Arab League monitors has been in Syria since Dec. 26, trying to assess whether President Bashar al-Assad’s regime is complying with a peace accord aimed at ending its deadly crackdown on dissent.

But critics say it has been completely outmaneuvered by the government and failed to make any progress towards stemming the crackdown, with calls for the mission to pull out.

Dabi, a Sudanese former military intelligence chief – who is himself the focus of controversy – said it was too early to judge the mission.

“This is the first time that the Arab League has carried out such a mission,” Dabi told Britain’s Observer in an interview. “But it has only just started, so I have not had enough time to form a view.”

The Arab League has admitted to “mistakes” but defended the mission, saying it had secured the release of

prisoners and the withdrawal of tanks from cities.

On the eve of the meeting, the head of the monitoring operations room at the League's headquarters in Cairo, Adnan al-Khudeir, said the withdrawal of the monitors was not on the agenda and they were continuing their work according to protocols agreed with the Syrian government, Reuters reported.

Ten Jordanian monitors had arrived in Damascus on Saturday, Khudeir said, bringing to 153 the number of monitors involved.

The United Nations says more than 5,000 people have been killed in the uprising against Assad. The Free Syrian Army, an armed opposition force composed mainly of army deserters, has joined the revolt. The Syrian government says "terrorists" have killed 2,000 members of the security forces during the uprising.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187053.html>

- **Arab League Syria mission to continue**

Arab ministers meeting in Cairo have given observers in Syria the green light to continue their mission, despite a barrage of criticism and calls for their withdrawal.

The Arab ministerial committee on Syria "has decided to give Arab League observers the necessary time to continue their mission according to the protocol," it said in its final statement on Sunday.

It also called on "the Syrian government and all armed groups to immediately stop all acts of violence".

Al Jazeera's Mike Hanna, reporting from Cairo, said that the Arab League ministers have issued a statement outlining six basic points.

Six main points from Cairo meeting

1. Arab league calls on the Syrian government to comply with its pledges.
2. Calls on the Syrian government to stop all acts of violence, specifically against anti-government protesters.

3. Affirmation of the work of the mission - which depends on cooperation from the Syrian government.

4. The Secretary General will continue to talk to the UN secretary general about "technical assistance" with regard to the monitors.

5. A full report is to be delivered by the mission leader on January 19 in which he will provide information about cooperation of Syrian government.

6. Calls on all Syrian opposition groups to intensify efforts to present their vision of next phase. The secretary general to hold a preparatory meeting with Syrian opposition in accordance with the motion agreed to on December 24.

"Certainly, the mission will continue," said Hanna.

"We understand that the number of monitors will be increased, but very strongly, from the Arab League, that this mission can only succeed if there is full cooperation from Syria."

The first report by Arab League observers in Syria recommends the controversial mission continue and says monitors were subjected to "harassment" by the government and the opposition.

The report recommends "the mission continue its work" with more technological assistance and "calls on the opposition and the government to let the mission move freely," Arab League sources said on Sunday.

Arab League foreign ministers have gathered in Cairo to discuss the findings of observers sent by the body to Syria, and to gauge whether Damascus is honouring its pledge to end a 10-month-old crackdown on unrest and protests.

The Arab diplomat was speaking as the head of the observer mission, General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, was briefing ministers in Cairo on the results of the monitors' visit.

Ahmed bin Helli, a deputy secretary-general of the League, said al-Dabi will brief the committee with photographs, maps and comprehensive information on what observers witnessed.

'Divisions' within the meeting

Our correspondent in Cairo said that "there is division inside the meeting of the foreign ministers".

"Basically the point of division is whether or not to widen the Arab League monitoring mission and to create a greater degree of international involvement, in particular, the United Nations," said Hanna.

"We do understand that some of the delegates have been arguing in favour of this, in particular, Qatar, however others are opposed to any UN involvement, among them, we believe, the secretary general of the Arab League himself."

He also said the Syrian government has only partially complied with its pledge to release political prisoners.

The group has said it will not withdraw the observers, which have been in Syria since December 26, but will instead focus on reinforcing the mission.

The ministers will also discuss ways the mission might operate more independently of Syrian authorities and whether or not to ask the United Nations for assistance.

Meanwhile, Syrian activists reported that violence was continuing on Sunday. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least 11 Syrian soldiers had been killed in heavy clashes with rebel troops in the province of Deraa on Sunday.

The Local Co-ordination Committees, an umbrella anti-government activist group, said that "heavy shelling and ... gunfire" had also been reported in Deir ez-Zor.

Because of reporting restrictions imposed by the Syrian government, Al Jazeera is unable to independently verify casualty figures.

UN assistance

Qatar, which currently heads the Arab League, has proposed inviting UN technicians and human rights experts to help Arab monitors judge whether Syria is

honouring its pledge to stop repression, Arab League sources said.

Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, Qatar's prime minister, said Syria was not implementing the terms of the Arab League peace plan it agreed, and monitors could not stay in Syria to "waste time".

The Syrian army had not withdrawn from cities and there had been no end to the killing, he said. Arab League sources said ministers were likely to re-affirm support for the monitors, resisting calls to end what Syrian pro-democracy campaigners say is a toothless mission that buys more time for President Bashar al-Assad to suppress opponents.

Syria says it is providing the monitors with all they need and has urged them to show "objectivity and professionalism".

Ten Jordanian monitors arrived in Damascus on Saturday, bringing the number of monitors involved to 153. The United Nations has said more than 5,000 people have been killed in the uprising against Assad.

The 22-member Arab League suspended Syria in November after months of silence over the crackdown but some Arab leaders are uncomfortable about targeting one of their members given their own restive populations, diplomats say.

Assad's opponents say Syrian authorities have systematically deceived the monitors, in some cases allegedly hiding prisoners in military facilities, falsifying routes and staging events for the monitors' benefit.

Refugees wait

Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra, reporting from the Turkish town of Reyhanli, near the Syrian border, said Syrian refugees there have been anxiously waiting for any sort of development out of the Cairo meeting.

There was a gathering at the refugee camp on Sunday night, during which our correspondent said people were "denouncing the Arab League, saying that they have to show some robust stance when it comes to the monitoring mission".

Ahelbarra also said protesters across Syria are calling for international intervention and an end to the Arab League mission, which many Syrians view as a failure.

It is the first time the Arab League has dispatched a peace monitoring mission to gauge one of its members.

"The opposition says the continuing violence, the killing of civilians and restrictions on the observer mission are all clear indications the government has failed to comply with the peace plan and now they want the international community to step in and use whatever means available to enforce a radical change in Syria," our correspondent said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleast/2012/01/201217235048263324.html>

6. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Yemeni government grants immunity to Saleh and his aides**

The Yemeni cabinet approved on Monday a draft law granting outgoing president Ali Abdullah Saleh and members of his inner

circle immunity from prosecution, the state TV reported Sunday.



Saleh is still honorary president but handed authority over to his deputy last month when he signed the Gulf-brokered deal in which he won immunity from prosecution in exchange for ending his 33-year rule when polls are held in February.

Angry youth have staged defiant protests against the plan, insisting that Saleh stand trial and that all members of his regime be removed from their posts.

The cabinet's decision Sunday came amid a simmering crisis between the country's acting leader, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and Saleh.

Mansour Hadi, who was Saleh's vice president, has threatened to leave office unless Saleh and his allies stop "interfering" with his duties, a senior

member of the opposition said on Saturday.

“Relations between Saleh and his deputy have deteriorated... and Hadi has informed Western mediators he will leave Sanaa if the interference in his jurisdiction continues,” a senior member of the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The plan by Yemen’s wealthier Gulf neighbors to transfer power has divided cabinet posts between the JMP and Saleh’s General People’s Congress (GPC), forming a national unity government intended to steer Yemen towards a presidential election in February under Hadi’s leadership.

The United States and Saudi Arabia are keen for the plan to work, fearing that a power vacuum in Yemen is giving militants space to thrive alongside a key shipping strait, the Red Sea.

Saleh signed the deal in November, having backed out of it three times before, but question marks remain over the intentions of the veteran leader, who earlier this week said he would stay in Yemen,

reversing a pledge to travel to the United States.

The unnamed JMP member said Hadi had warned mediators he would quit his position if Saleh and his followers continued to obstruct him.

Relations between Saleh and his deputy soured after Hadi refused the president’s orders to reinstate his allies, and a spat in which Saleh supporters heavily criticized Hadi, leading the deputy president to boycott a subsequent meeting.

But the spokesman for the president’s office told Reuters there was no truth to the report.

“Let me be clear, there is no ongoing rift between the President and his principal deputy the Vice President,” he said in a statement sent by e-mail.

Militant fighting flares

More than a month after the Gulf deal was clinched, Yemenis angry at the offer of legal immunity to Saleh over the killing of demonstrators are still taking to the streets, calling for him to be put on trial.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said on Friday any guarantee of immunity to Saleh would violate international law, undermining the Gulf initiative.

In the south of the country, thousands of protesters marched almost 60 km (37 miles) from the port of Aden to their old homes in the city of Zinjibar but were blocked from completing their journey by militants who told them the area was mined.

“We will not despair. We will try a second time and a third time and a fourth until we can enter and go back to our houses and our city. The militants must understand they are not wanted,” said one marcher, Saleh al-Mosalli.

The marchers had been driven from the city in fighting between the army and Islamist fighters suspected of links to al Qaeda.

Underlining the lack of security, four militants and one soldier were killed in Zinjibar on Saturday during fighting for control of the city, a local official said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187188.html>

- **Japan foreign minister holds energy talks in Saudi**

Japan’s foreign minister met top Saudi officials on Sunday as part of a regional tour to discuss potential sanctions on Iranian oil exports and their effects on resource-poor Japan.

In talks with the Saudi oil and defense ministers, Koichiro Gamba discussed “the latest regional and international developments ... and bilateral oil and energy cooperation,” said a statement from the official SPA news agency.

Speaking to reporters in Riyadh, deputy spokesman for Japan’s foreign ministry Masaru Sato said the talks included Iran's nuclear ambitions and Saudi oil supplies.

According to the spokesman, Saudi Arabia supplies 30 percent of Japan’s oil imports, with another 20 percent coming from the United Arab Emirates, 10 percent from Qatar and nine percent from Iran.

Pressure from Washington and the European Union to boycott Iranian crude

comes at a time when Japan must make greater use of thermal power plants after a massive earthquake and tsunami sparked a nuclear power crisis last March.

The vast bulk of Japan's 54 nuclear reactors are now shut down, amid public distrust of the technology and increased safety calls.

Speaking at a Friday news conference, Japan's industry minister Yukio Edano said the world's third biggest economy was preparing for a potential Iranian oil embargo "by taking every possibility into consideration."

Saudi Arabia is seen as the only oil exporter capable of boosting production sufficiently to make up for a crunch in the global oil market.

The president of JX Nippon Oil & Energy, Japan's biggest petroleum refiner, expressed confidence in the ability of the world's largest oil exporter to raise output, in a recent interview. "I think we can make do if we have months to spare," Yasushi Kimura told SankeiBiz digital news.

"We have sounded out Saudi Arabia on what can be done" if the ban on Iran is implemented, he said.

The foreign minister's eight-day tour, which began on Thursday, will include Qatar, the UAE and Turkey.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187140.html>

- **Kuwait to naturalize some stateless within weeks: minister**



Kuwait will start granting citizenship to some stateless people by early February, the interior minister said in remarks published on Sunday.

"The first batch of citizenships (to stateless) will be announced by the end of January or the beginning of February at the latest," Sheikh Ahmad al-Humud Al-Sabah told Al-Rai newspaper, without giving further details.

Of the 105,000 people considered stateless, four groups could qualify for citizenship, the minister said last week.

These include: people in the army or police; people recorded in the 1965 census; relatives of Kuwaitis; and children of Kuwaiti women divorced from foreign husbands.

Saleh al-Fadhlah, who heads the government's central agency for illegal residents that deals with the stateless, said last month that there are 34,000 stateless people who could qualify for citizenship.

According to his agency's findings, 71,000 stateless people in Kuwait in fact hold other nationalities from countries including Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria, Fadhlah said.

Those people "must produce their nationality papers" to be given legal residence permits in Kuwait, Fadhlah has said.

Thousands of stateless, locally known as bidoons, have been demonstrating for the

past several weeks to press for citizenship and other basic rights they claim they have been deprived of.

Sheikh Ahmad however said that the ministry will not allow any further protests by bidoons.

Kuwait has long alleged that bidoons, and in some cases their ancestors, destroyed their original passports to claim the right to Kuwaiti citizenship in order to gain access to the services and generous benefits provided to citizens by the state.

In a bid to force the bidoons to produce their original nationality papers, Kuwait has refused to issue essential documents to most of them, including birth, marriage and death certificates, according to a June report by Human Rights Watch.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/08/187083.html>

7. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Pakistan ties with Israel? Why not, asks Musharraf**

ISLAMABAD, (Reuters) - Pakistan should consider establishing ties with Israel, said

exiled former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, remarks likely to anger many in the Muslim-majority country where he hopes to make a political comeback.

Musharraf, who resigned in 2008 in disgrace, has said he plans to return to Pakistan this month, despite possible arrest, in order to participate in a parliamentary election due by 2013.

On Sunday, he is scheduled to address a rally via video in Pakistan's biggest city and commercial hub, Karachi, sources in his recently formed All Pakistan Muslim League said.

Speaking in favour of relations with Israel could make Musharraf more unpopular, especially among militants who made several attempts on his life with bombings because of his support for the U.S. "war on terror" following the 9/11 attacks.

Those same groups want the destruction of Israel.

"There is nothing to lose by trying to get on Israel's good side," Musharraf, a former army chief, told the liberal Israeli

newspaper Haaretz in an interview carried on its website.

"Pakistan also needs to keep readjusting its diplomatic stand toward Israel based on the mere fact that it exists and is not going away."

That kind of talk could comfort Israel, which is increasingly nervous because Islamist groups opposed to the Jewish state have been making political gains in Arab states following revolts that brought down autocrats in the region.

Israeli officials were not immediately available for comment on Musharraf's remarks.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUND

Pakistan has been a staunch supporter of demands for a Palestinian state. Pakistan and Israel, however, have maintained covert contacts for decades, officials have said.

According to an October 2009 U.S. diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks, the head of Pakistan's main spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), said he

had contacted Israel officials to head off potential attacks on Israeli targets in India.

A senior ISI official said the agency has never established any contacts not authorized by the government and which were not in the interests of Pakistan.

Many Pakistanis think Israel and the United States are constantly plotting against Pakistan -- a belief that inspires abundant conspiracy theories. Pakistani media routinely rail against Jews and Israeli plots.

Musharraf, who came to power in a 1999 coup, said Israel's influence in the United States and its relations with Pakistan's main rival, India, can help Pakistan gain influence abroad.

The first public talks between Israel and Pakistan were held in 2005.

They were described as a "huge breakthrough" by then Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, but sparked fury in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed South Asian nation that is home to some of the world's most feared militant groups.

"I felt I needed to test the waters in Pakistan when it comes to Israel," Musharraf said.

"We have been anti-Israel in Pakistan because of Palestine ... But I believe in realism and in assessing ground realities."

Musharraf left office, and Pakistan, after his allies lost a 2008 general election and he faced an impeachment motion by the new coalition government for invoking emergency rule and suspending the constitution.

A Pakistani court issued an arrest warrant for Musharraf in February 2011 over accusations that he failed to provide adequate security to former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in December 2007.

Musharraf was declared a fugitive of law after he failed to respond to a court summons.

He has denied suggestions that he, his security agencies, or the military were involved in Bhutto's murder.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27996>

- **Afghans recapture town from Taliban**

Press TV

January 8, 2012

Afghan forces have recaptured a town under long-time Taliban occupation in the country's troubled south, Press TV reported.

According to a statement made by the Afghan government, its forces along with foreign troops pushed insurgents out of the Miyanshin district in Kandahar Province.

Further information regarding casualties during the operation has not been released.

Afghan sources say several towns in Southern Afghanistan are still under Taliban control.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan took place in 2001 under the pretext of combating terrorism, toppling the Taliban

regime, and establishing security in the country.

However, insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of thousands of foreign forces in the country.

The US-led war in Afghanistan, with civilian and military casualties at record high, has become the longest military conflict in US history.

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

- **US-led soldier killed in Afghanistan**

Press TV

January 8, 2012

The Western military alliance NATO says that another US-led troop has been killed during a shooting in Afghanistan's troubled south.

The alliance has not yet released details regarding the soldier's nationality or name.

On Friday, four members of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force

(ISAF) also died in a homemade bomb attack in southern Afghanistan.

A total of 565 US-led troops, most of them Americans, were killed in Afghanistan in 2011, while more than 2,800 foreign troops have died in Afghanistan during the past decade.

The increasing number of military casualties in Afghanistan has caused widespread anger in the US and other NATO member states, undermining public support for the Afghan war.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan took place in 2001 under the pretext of combating terrorism, toppling the Taliban regime, and establishing security in the country.

However, insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of thousands of foreign forces in the country.

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

- **Taliban weapons facilitator captured: ISAF**

KABUL, Jan. 8 (Xinhua) -- A senior Taliban weapons facilitator was captured in Afghanistan' eastern Nangarhar province, the NATO- led ISAF forces said on Sunday.

"An Afghan and coalition security force captured a senior Taliban network facilitator named Mashahud during a security operation in Surkh Rod district, Nangarhar province, January 1," the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a press release.

"Mashahud is a well-known weapons facilitator who planned large- scale attacks against the local populace throughout the region," it said, adding that the captured Taliban facilitator has also been linked to a command wire bomb attack on Dec. 21, 2011, that left five ISAF service members dead in eastern province of Ghazni.

More than 130,000 members of ISAF, mostly Americans, have been serving in Afghanistan.

Taliban, which launched in May 2011 an offensive against Afghan and NATO forces, has yet to make any comments.

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

- **7 insurgents killed in S. Afghanistan**

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan, Jan. 8 (Xinhua) -- Seven suspected Taliban insurgents, including four local insurgent leaders, were killed Sunday in a special operation in the Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand, a provincial government spokesman said.

"A unit of Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) launched a special operation on a Taliban hideout in Mirmandab area of Gereshk district in the wee hours Sunday," spokesman Daud Ahmadi told Xinhua.

Ahmadi said an exchange of fire broke out shortly after the NDS or intelligence agency forces arrived at the compound, leaving seven insurgents dead. Four local insurgent leaders, namely Malawi Mansour, Abdul Raziq, Mullah Maluk and Shekari, were among the dead.

No members of the security force or civilians were injured in the raid, he added.

Taliban, who launched in May 2011 an offensive against Afghan and NATO forces, has yet to make comments.

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

**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanriverdi 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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