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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

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1. IRAQ

• Six in Iraq face trial over Kuwait port plot

By AFP

NASIRIYA IRAQ

Six people are to go on trial suspected of planning attacks on a Kuwaiti port project in the Gulf that is disputed by Iraq, a judiciary official said on Wednesday.



“The police have arrested six people accused of preparing an attack on Mubarak port,” said a spokesman for the court of appeal in Nasiriya, 305 kilometers (190 miles) south of Baghdad.

Baghdad claims the Mubarak al-Kabir project, once completed, would strangle its shipping lanes in the narrow Khor Abdullah waterway that serves as its entrance to the Gulf, through which the vast majority of its oil exports flow.

Kuwait insists the port will not affect Iraq.

The court spokesman said the six detainees “all deny the charges, but a witness has confirmed that they were implicated in preparing to attack the port.”

The six, from Nasiriya and the port of Basra farther south, have been referred to a criminal court for trial, he added.

It was not known if the suspects were members of a particular group, and there was no trial date given.

Kuwait began construction on the container port in 2007 but Baghdad only raised objections to it last May, a month after Kuwait's emir laid the foundation stone.

An Iraqi Shiite militant group, Ketaeb Hezbollah, in July threatened to target firms working on the port project.

“The Iraqi people will not forget what the government of Kuwait is doing by building a port to strangle Iraq economically,” said a statement posted on the group’s website.

The \$1.1 billion (835,000-million-euro) facility on Kuwait's Bubiyan Island is scheduled for completion in 2016.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/02/192033.html?PHPSESSID=p967jdimgcmtpu34lmen2o8ii4>

- **Turkmen party eying expanded involvement in new KRG cabinet**

ERBIL, Feb. 1 (AKnews) – Kurdistan Regions Democratic Turkmen Party (DTP) with 3 seats in the 111-parliament of Kurdistan Region is eying a ministerial portfolio in the next Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) cabinet that is expected to be announced soon.

DTP won three of the five seats allocated in quota to the minority Turkmen in the semi-autonomous region in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Two other smaller Turkmen parties one one seat each.

Yet it was Erbil Turkmen List (ETL) which received the only ministerial portfolio given to the Turkmen in the power-sharing government. The DTP therefore feel they were wronged.

“While the were negotiation for the formation of the current KRG cabinet, we requested that the ministerial portfolio, that was expected to be given to the Turkmen, to us [DTP], but our request was turned down” Yashar Najmaddin, head of the DTP bloc in the parliament said.

“We hope that the same wrongdoing against us will not be repeated in the new KRG cabinet. The ministerial position that is dedicated to the Turkmen is our right” he said.

Najmaddin said they were planning to have an active participation in the next cabinet if the nee had o fgovernment asked them to.

Tahsin Sherdil, ELT's parliamentarian criticized the DTP statements: “As the Turkmen people, we believe that the ministerial posirtion be given to an independent Turkmen politician who can benefit the Turkmen people as a whole” Shedil said.

“A politician who strictly adheres to a certain political party will only serve the interests of his own party. Therefore, in the current cabinet, Sinan Chalabi who is

an independent Turkmen politician and serves as the Trade Minister has been successful in his work”

Sinan Chalabai is the only Turkmen minister in the KRG cabinet.

The new KRG cabinet is expected to be formed soon by Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)’s Nechirvan Barzani, a former KRG Prime Minister. The dates have not been set yet despite ongoing discussions and talks between the political parties about the new cabinet.

The current KRG cabinet has been headed by the Patriotic Union of Kuridstan’s (PUK) Barjham Ahmed Salih. He is preparing to quit as part of a political deal between the KDP and PUK under which they entered elections together and shared power 50-50 including each of the two parties heading the government for two years during each term they win in the elections.

By Fryad Mohammed

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/287714>

- **Iraqiya Representative survives Baghdad bombing**

02/02/2012 09:01

BAGHDAD, Feb. 2 (AKnews) - A source who spoke to AKnews on condition of anonymity said that a bomb exploded today when the convoy of Iraqiya Representative Qays Shadhir was passing through the highway in Dora neighborhood, southern Baghdad.

A bodyguard of the Representative was wounded and the convoy was damaged in the explosion.

Security forces cordoned off the area and transferred the wounded to hospital, added the source.

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/3/28773>

- **Talabani, Alawi call to resort to constitution and partnership**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi President Jalal Talabani discussed with Iraqiya bloc leader Iyad Alawi the current political situation in the country, calling to solve pending questions through the constitution and national partnership, according to a Presidential statement.

The statement, as was received by Aswat al-Iraq, added that the meeting stressed the importance of containing the problems in a fraternal atmosphere.

Talabani returned to Baghdad last Saturday from Germany following medical check ups.

Political circles are waiting Talabani to finalize the preparations for the national conference to solve the disputes that were increased and magnified following US forces withdrawal at the end of the last year.

RM (TP)/SR

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/\(S\(rn0omr55e0xjinfcvf04b455\)\)/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146745&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/(S(rn0omr55e0xjinfcvf04b455))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146745&l=1)

2. IRAN

- **Nuclear inspectors plan more visits to Iran**

Head of IAEA mission expresses optimism about recent trip to Iran, but says there is still "a lot of work" to be done.

The chief UN nuclear inspector has declared that there is still "a lot of work" to be done regarding Iran, as he returned from a visit to the country.

Herman Nackaerts said in Vienna on Wednesday that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team had had a "good" visit and was planning to return soon.

"We had three days of intensive discussions about all our priorities," Nackaerts, one of six-person team to visit Iran, said in the Austrian capital.

"We are committed to resolving all the outstanding issues and the Iranians said they are committed too.

"But of course there is still a lot of work to be done, and so we have planned another trip in the very near future."

The IAEA said in a statement that another meeting will take place in Tehran from February 21 to 22.

"The agency is committed to intensifying dialogue. It remains essential to make progress on substantive issues," Yukiya Amano, the IAEA director-general, said.

Iranian perspective

Ali Akbar Salehi, the Iranian foreign minister, told the Fars news agency on Wednesday that the IAEA talks were "good" and that it was agreed they would continue in the future.

"The delegation had some questions about the alleged studies [in the IAEA report], and thanks to God we had very good sessions," he was quoted as saying.

"They did not visit any nuclear sites. We were ready to facilitate such visits if they had wanted to."

The inspectors' visit was organised in the wake of a report published in November by the IAEA on Iran's nuclear ambitions, which significantly raised suspicions that Iran had done work on developing nuclear weapons.

The report said the IAEA had a trove of evidence that "indicates that Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear device".

It detailed 12 suspicious actions such as testing explosives in a steel container at a military base and studies on Shahab-3 ballistic missile warheads that the IAEA

said were "highly relevant to a nuclear weapon programme".

Stated objective

Iran says that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes and that the IAEA report was based on "forgeries" provided by its enemies.

The IAEA says, however, that Iran has a long history of being of breach of its obligations to declare nuclear facilities and materials and that the agency is unable to conclude all Tehran's activities are peaceful.

The last full talks between Iran and the so-called P5 1 - the US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany - broke down a year ago in Turkey.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, has insisted that his country is not dodging negotiations and is ready to sit down with world powers.

The major powers are, however, waiting for Iran to reply to a letter sent in October by the EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, that stresses that discussions

should focus on the "key question" of the Iranian nuclear issue.

The US, the EU and others have recently adopted sanctions to target Iran's oil industry and central bank. Iran has in turn threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for global crude shipments.

UN agency's stand

The IAEA said in January that Iran had begun enriching uranium to 20 per cent purity deep inside a mountain bunker at Fordow, taking it significantly closer to the 90 per cent mark needed for a nuclear bomb.

At the same time, though, it has vowed to keep up co-operation with the IAEA.

Amid growing calls in the US for a tougher stance against Iran, high-level US intelligence officials suggested on Tuesday that military conflict with Iran was not inevitable, despite the rising tensions.

And on Wednesday, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, said in Israel that the stalemate over Iran's suspect nuclear programme must be resolved peacefully.

At a news conference with Israel's prime minister in Jerusalem, Ban urged the Iranians to prove their nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

When asked whether he fears an Israeli attack, he said "there is no alternative to a peaceful resolution of these issues".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/201221115326824944.html>

- **IAEA Delegation to Visit Iran Again in Near Future**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The International Atomic Energy Agency is due to send another delegation to Iran in the near future, Deputy Director-General of the IAEA Herman Nackaerts said at Vienna airport upon arrival from a visit to Iran.



"But of course there is still a lot of work to be done, and so we have planned another trip in the very near future," Nackaerts said, following his visit to Iran to discuss Tehran's nuclear program.

The deputy director-general of the UN nuclear agency also said that both sides are "committed" to resolving all outstanding issues.

"We had three days of intensive discussions about all our priorities. We are committed to resolving all the outstanding issues and the Iranians said they are committed too," he said at Vienna airport on Wednesday.

IAEA's high-ranking delegation, led by Nackaerts and Assistant Director General for Policy Rafael Grossi, arrived in Tehran on Sunday to hold talks with Iranian officials regarding Iran's nuclear program.

"We had a good trip ... I will now go back to headquarters and inform the DG [IAEA director general Yukiya Amano] about the mission," he said.

The visit came at the invitation of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

Nackaerts had earlier told reporters as he was about to depart from Vienna airport that the team will try to resolve all the outstanding issues with Iran.

Iran's Ambassador to the IAEA Ali Asqar Soltaniyeh said on Friday that the main objective is to "thwart plots by enemies who are leveling unfounded allegations" against Iran and to prove that the country's nuclear program is transparent.

Soltaniyeh said the visit is aimed at negotiating issues of common interest between Tehran and the agency.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9010173277>

- **Russia urges West to change approach to Iran**

Moscow, Feb 1, IRNA - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday underlined the need for the West to change approach to Iran.



Denouncing the West's attitude toward Iran, he said some countries were trying to isolate Iran without considering the negative consequences of such a measure.

Lavrov said such an approach would cause unpredictable troubles in international relations.

Pointing to certain countries' attempts to isolate Hamas in occupied lands over recent years , he said unfortunately Iran and Syria are being treated in the same way.

The Russian foreign minister reiterated that Russia does its utmost to prevent such actions against any country.

Lavrov pointed out that those leaders who are after regime changes in the region should first take into account the unpredictable consequences of such actions.

Russia is seriously concerned about continuation of such measures to change governing systems in some countries through use of force, because it believes that such moves would cause difficulties more severe than what the world is now witnessing in Libya and Egypt, he added.

Lavrov made it clear that Russia will not let repetition of scenarios similar to what had happened in Libya and Egypt, in again.

<http://www.irna.ir/News/Politic/Russia-urges-West-to-change-approach-to-Iran/30793103>

- **France concerned about Iran oil embargo: Iranian MP**

TEHRAN, Feb. 1 (MNA) -- French Ambassador to Tehran Bruno Foucher has expressed concern about the European Union's recent decision to impose sanctions on Iran's oil industry, according to Iranian MP Hassan Kamran.

The European Union formally imposed an oil embargo on Iran and agreed to a freeze on the assets of the Central Bank of Iran on January 23, but existing contracts will be honored until July 1.

Kamran, who is the chairman of the Iran-France Parliamentary Friendship Group, told the Persian service of the Fars News Agency on Wednesday that he held a meeting with the French ambassador on Tuesday.

“The meeting lasted three hours and several discussions were held between me and the French ambassador,” Kamran said.

He added, “Bruno Foucher, the French ambassador to Tehran, is concerned about a (possible) halt to Iran’s oil exports to Europe, and we announced that the measure was taken by the Europeans not Iran.

“In the meeting, we told the French ambassador that the Islamic Republic of Iran has its own indigenous tactics for dealing with the West, which they (the Westerners) have not yet been able to figure out.

“The French ambassador also stated in the meeting, ‘We want to hold negotiations with Iran to help resolve the oil crisis.’ I also told him that Iran is in favor of friendship with all countries.

“In the meeting, the French ambassador was seeking to find out what stage the plan calling for a halt to Iran’s oil exports to Europe is in and what the final result will be.”

MP Nasser Soudani announced on January 5 that the Iranian parliament had been discussing a plan calling for a halt to Iran’s oil exports to the European countries that voted for sanctions on Iran’s oil industry.

Kamran also said, “In the meeting, the French ambassador said, ‘We are not in favor of a halt to Iran’s oil (exports) to European countries.’”

“It could be understood from the French ambassador’s questions and the way he negotiated that he does not want sanctions to be imposed on Iran’s oil imports by the European Union and wants the plan calling for a halt to Iran’s oil

exports to Europe to be scrapped,” the MP added.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1523368>

- **11 more Iranian pilgrims kidnapped in Syria**

TEHRAN, Feb. 1 (MNA) – An official at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus confirmed on Wednesday news reports saying that 11 more Iranian pilgrims have been abducted in Syria.

The official also advised Iranian citizens not to go on bus trips to Syria in view of the political situation in the Arab country.

The news agencies reported on Wednesday that 11 Iranian citizens were kidnapped while on a pilgrimage in Syria.

Iranians have been the target of abduction by unknown gunmen in Syria over the past few months.

On January 26, a group of unidentified gunmen attacked a bus carrying Iranian pilgrims on their way to Damascus and kidnapped 11 men.

In December 2011, gunmen also abducted seven Iranian engineers and technicians in the restive Syrian city of Homs.

In January, a previously unheard of group, called “movement against the Shiite tide in Syria,” claimed responsibility for the abduction of Iranian engineers and technicians and warned Iran of the consequences of supporting the Syrian government.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly called on the Syrian government to protect Iranian citizens in Syria, and the Syrian officials have promised to make every effort to obtain the release of Iranian abductees.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1523256>

3. SYRIA

- **Syria toll mounts amid Russian veto threat**

Fate of Arab League-backed Security Council resolution in the balance as scores are reported dead in fresh violence.

Fresh bloodshed has been reported from Syria after Western powers and the Arab

League demanded immediate UN action to stop what it called the Syrian government's "killing machine", and Russia responded by threatening to veto any proposal it deemed unacceptable.

The disagreement at the UN came as clashes were reported across Syria's flashpoint regions, leaving at least 68 people dead, mostly civilians, according to the Local Co-ordination Committees (LCC), an opposition group monitoring the uprising.

The group said on Wednesday that two women, two children and 14 fighters of the self-proclaimed Free Syrian Army were among the dead.

At least 35 of the deaths occurred in Wady Barada, a Damascus suburb; another 14 in Homs; eight in Daraa; and three in Idlib, the LCC said.

Some activists said on Wednesday that violence had claimed nearly 200 lives across Syria over the previous three days. The figures could not be independently confirmed.

On the diplomatic front, the US secretary of state, backed by her French and British counterparts, led a push on Tuesday for a tough UN resolution that would call on President Bashar al-Assad to end the bloodshed and hand over power.

"We all know that change is coming to Syria. Despite its ruthless tactics, the Assad regime's reign of terror will end," Hillary Clinton told the Security Council.

"The question for us is: How many more innocent civilians will die before this country is able to move forward?"

Qatar's appeal

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, the Qatari prime minister, speaking at the same Security Council debate on behalf of the Arab League, said Assad's government had "failed to make any sincere effort" to end the crisis and believed the only solution was "to kill its own people".

"Bloodshed continued and the killing machine is still at work," he said.

However, Russia, a longstanding ally of Assad and one of the government's main

suppliers of weapons, has appeared to rule out the possibility of a quick vote.

"Attempts are being made to find a text that is acceptable to all sides and would help find a political solution for the situation in Syria," the Interfax news agency quoted the Russian deputy foreign minister, Gennady Gatilov, as saying on Wednesday.

"Therefore there is going to be no vote in the next days."

Russia has declared that the Security Council does not have the authority to impose a resolution that called for regime change in Syria, a position supported by China.

"If the text is unacceptable then we will vote against," Vitaly Churkin, Russia's ambassador to the UN, was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency.

Russia would not approve a text it viewed as "incorrect" and would "lead to a deepening of the conflict", he said.

However, Alain Juppe, the French foreign minister, said in Paris on Wednesday that

Russia had a "less negative" attitude towards a Security Council resolution.

"For the first time, the attitude of Russia and the BRICS [China, India and South Africa on the Security Council] is less negative," he said.

Arab League's demand

The draft resolution, introduced by Arab League member Morocco, calls for the formation of a unity government leading to "transparent and free elections".

It stresses that there will be no foreign military intervention in Syria as there was in Libya, which helped to topple Muammar Gaddafi.

Analysts say that the Syrian conflict, between an armed movement backed by growing numbers of army defectors and a government increasingly dependent on use of force, has largely eclipsed the peaceful protests seen at the start of the uprising.

The Free Syrian Army's Turkey-based commander, Colonel Riyadh al-Asaad, has told the AFP news agency that half of the

country was now effectively a no-go zone for the security forces.

France said on Wednesday that 6,000 people had been killed since the beginning of the Syrian uprising nearly 11 months ago.

The UN human-rights chief, Navi Pillay, said on January 25 that her organisation had stopped counting the dead from Syria's security crackdown because it was too difficult to get information.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/201221173311902552.html>

- **Western officials say U.S., allies are exploring prospects for Assad and family exile**

By ARSHAD MOHAMMED AND MATT SPETALNICK

REUTERS WASHINGTON

The United States, European governments and Arab states have begun discussing the possibility of exile for Bashar al-Assad despite skepticism the defiant Syrian president is ready to consider such an offer, Western officials said on Wednesday.



While talks have not progressed far and there is no real sense that Assad's fall is imminent, one official said as many as three countries were willing to take him as a way to bring an end to Syria's bloody 10-month-old crisis.

Two sources said no European states were prepared to give Assad sanctuary, but one official said the United Arab Emirates might be among those open to the idea.

Talk of exile has surfaced amid mounting international pressure on Assad and a diplomatic showdown over a proposed Arab League resolution at the United Nations aimed at getting him to transfer power. He has responded by stepping up assaults on opposition strongholds.

With the White House insisting for weeks that Assad's days in power are numbered, it was unclear whether this marks an attempt to persuade the Syrian leader and his family to grasp the chance of a safe

exit instead of risking the fate of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, who was hunted and killed by rebels last year.

But with Assad showing he remains in charge of a powerful security apparatus and the Syrian opposition fragmented militarily, it could also be an effort to step up psychological pressure and open new cracks in his inner circle.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said neither the United States nor the European Union had taken the lead on the idea, which has been advocated by Arab nations as a way to try to end the violence in Syria.

"We understand that some countries have offered to host him should he choose to leave Syria," a senior Obama administration official said, without naming any of the countries.

Before that could happen, however, the question of whether Assad would be granted some kind of immunity would have to be tackled— something the Syrian opposition as well as international human rights groups would likely oppose.

"There are significant questions of accountability for the horrible abuses that have been committed against the Syrian people," the senior U.S. official said.

"Ultimately these issues will be deliberated by the Syrian people in concert with regional and international partners," the official said. "This is about what Syrians need to end this crisis and begin the process of rebuilding their country."

While U.S. officials maintained that exile was worth exploring among other options, one European official voiced doubt it would work, saying Assad had given no indication that he might accept a graceful exit.

Yemen-style solution?

Bruce Reidel, a former CIA analyst who has advised President Barack Obama, said Arab countries appeared to be trying to craft a political solution in Syria modeled after Yemen.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh arrived in the United States on Saturday for treatment of wounds suffered in an assassination attempt in June. Under a

power transfer plan drawn up by Gulf Arab countries for Saleh to step down to end a year of protests against his rule, a vice president is presiding over a unity government with presidential elections set for Feb. 21.

“Assad and his wife get safe exile,” said Reidel, now at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington. “But who will take him? Iran? Russia? UK? And does he get immunity like Saleh?”

Officials stressed the discussions of the exile option for Assad were at an early stage and there was no agreed plan on how such an exit might be orchestrated.

A European official said EU members were willing to consider the idea of Assad going into exile but that there was “no way we’d have him in our countries.”

“Our priority remains ending the slaughter that Assad and his regime are perpetrating against Syrian civilians, and facilitating a peaceful and orderly transition to democracy,” the senior U.S. administration official said.

Administration officials were hesitant to predict how much time Assad might be able to stay in power in the face of international isolation and sanctions. But the consensus was it would be months, not weeks, before Assad came to crunch time.

U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said on Tuesday that it was just a matter of time before Assad falls, but acknowledged “it could be a long time.”

Much could depend on the fate of a European-Arab-drafted resolution in the U.N. Security Council that would call for Assad to hand powers to his deputy to defuse the uprising against his family's dynastic rule.

Russia said on Wednesday it would veto any resolution on Syria that it finds unacceptable, after demanding any measure rule out military intervention to halt the bloodshed touched off by protests against Assad.

The political violence in Syria has killed at least 5,000 people in the past 10 months and activists say Assad’s forces have

stepped up operations this week on opposition strongholds, from Damascus suburbs to the cities of Hama, Homs and the border provinces of Deraa and Idlib.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/02/192065.html?PHPSESSID=p967jdimgcmtpu34lmen2o8ii4>

4. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel rejects UN chief's call to stop illegal settlements**

Israel has rejected calls by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to stop its illegal settlement construction in the occupied West Bank.



During a joint press conference with the UN chief in East al-Quds (Jerusalem) on Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that a halt in the illegal settlement activities “cannot be a precondition” to continue the Palestinian-Israeli talks.

Talks between the Palestinians and Israelis stalled in September 2010 after Israel

declined to renew a 10-month freeze on its illegal settlement construction in the West Bank.

Ban also met with acting Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Wednesday.

Abbas referred to several meetings between the Palestinian Authority representatives and Israelis in Jordan over the past few weeks and said Israel did not present “any encouraging proposal that we could advance with.”

“Israel continues to establish facts on the ground, to build settlements and take control of lands in [East al-Quds] Jerusalem and the West Bank. This is something we cannot accept, not today and not tomorrow,” Abbas added during a press conference with the UN chief.

Ban said all the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are “contrary to international law.”

Abbas is expected to meet with the Arab League foreign ministers on February 4 to discuss the future of the talks with Israel.

About 500,000 Israelis live in more than 100 settlement units built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/224416.html>

- **Hamas: West forced to change stance**

The West has been finally forced to change its stance vis-à-vis Hamas, despite having relentlessly striven since 2006 to isolate the Palestinian resistance movement, Hamas spokesman tells Press TV.

Ismail Radwan told Press TV's correspondent in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday that the Western states had failed to isolate Hamas since some countries have made efforts to hold dialog with the movement in an attempt to correct their approach towards the resistance group.

Many Western countries led by the United States launched a vicious campaign against Hamas when, in January 2006, the movement won the Palestinian parliamentary elections, which were

lauded as the freest and fairest polls ever held in the Arab world.

A Hamas parliamentary delegation headed by lawmaker, Mushir Al Masri, visited Switzerland last month after receiving an invitation from the Swiss Inter-Parliamentary Union to help establish good Europe-Hamas relations.

“Due to the changes and the Islamic Awakening in the Arab world that brought Islamic parties to power, the West, mainly the European Union, is reconsidering its position regarding their relations with Hamas,” political analyst, Mostafa al-Sawwaf, told our correspondent.

He added, “There are now direct and indirect contacts by some European countries.”

The elections awarded Hamas a phenomenal mandate of 74 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council against the rival Fatah faction's 46.

The two sides have been at odds since the electoral victory in a dispute that has marginalized Hamas' governance to the Gaza Strip.

Since 2007, the Israeli military has intensified its attacks against Gaza, claiming that the acts of aggression are being committed for defensive purposes. Civilians are often killed or injured during the attacks.

Gaza has also been blockaded by Tel Aviv since 2007, a situation, which has caused a decline in the standard of living, unprecedented levels of unemployment, and unrelenting poverty.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/224402.html>

- **Israel threatened by 200,000 missiles at any given time, top IDF officer says**

About 200,000 missiles are aimed at Israel at any given time, a top Israel Defense Forces officer said on Thursday, adding that Iran's ability to obtain nuclear weapons was solely dependent on the will of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The remarks by Military Intelligence Chief Major General Aviv Kochavi came after IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz said on Wednesday that the threats facing Israel have increased and intensified in recent years due to regional instability.



Head of military intelligence Aviv Kochavi speaking at the Herzliya Conference, Feb. 2, 2012.

Photo by: Tal Nissim

Speaking to the Herzliya Conference, Gantz said that Iran's nuclear program is a "global problem and a regional problem," adding that Tehran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons must continue to be disrupted.

On Thursday, Kochavi, speaking at the opening session of the Herzliya Conference's closing day, spoke of the growing threats Israel was facing "a more hostile, more Islamic, more sensitive Middle East, one more attune to public sentiment, less controlled by the regimes, and less susceptible to international influence."

The chief of military intelligence then indicated that about 200,000 missiles were aimed at Israel at any given time,

adding, however, that "Israel's military deterrence is intact."

Referring to Israel's concerns over Iran's nuclear ambitions, Kochavi presented a relatively tame estimation as to possible timeline en route to an Iranian atomic bomb, saying that the project depended more on the will of Iran's Supreme Leader than on any technological advancement.

"If Khamenei issues a command to achieve a first nuclear explosive device, we estimate it would take another year before that's achieved," the top IDF official said, adding that "if he asks to translate that ability to obtain a nuclear warhead, that would take another year or two."

Kochavi also reiterated the IDF estimate that Iran is in possession of more than 4 tons of low-grade enriched uranium as well as almost 100 kg of uranium enriched at 20%.

"If those are enriched more, to a 90% level, that would be enough for 4 atomic bombs," the IDF officer said.

The military intelligence chief added that the sanctions on Iran "are taking their toll. There's 16% unemployment, 24% annual inflation, and practically no growth," he said adding that "at this point the pressure isn't leading Iran to a strategic shift."

However, Kochavi added that "there's a potential, with greater the pressure, that the regime, interested first and foremost in its own survival, would reconsider its position."

Speaking at the Herzliya conference on Tuesday, President Shimon Peres also referred to the Iranian nuclear threat, saying that Tehran's "evil" leaders cannot be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons.

"It is the duty of the international community to prevent evil and nuclear [weapons] from coming together. That is the obligations of most of the leaders of the free world, one which they must meet," Peres said.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-threatened-by-200-000-missiles-at-any-given-time-top-idf-officer-says-1.410584>

- **Senior sources: Evidence indicates Netanyahu's bureau chief harassed subordinate**

Testimony provided to Civil Service Commission investigators thus far appears to provide a solid evidentiary basis for the allegation that Natan Eshel, the prime minister's bureau chief, sexually harassed a subordinate named R. for a lengthy period, officials familiar with the investigation said on Wednesday.

The information gathered thus far, they added, cannot be dismissed as mere gossip, which is how some people tried to present the story when the commission started its probe.



Natan Eshel.

Photo by: Nir Keidar

As of Wednesday, the Civil Service Commission had taken testimony from 16 people. Most of the testimony corroborated the information initially given to Attorney General Yehuda

Weinstein: that Eshel seemed obsessed with R., harassed her day and night, followed her movements and even acted jealous, distancing her or getting close to her as he saw fit.

The testimony indicated that Eshel used his cell phone to take pictures of a sexual nature of R. One of the witnesses quoted R. as saying that Eshel "had taken control of her life."

Commission investigators are expected to question Eshel under caution next week.

At the beginning of the week, when Weinstein decided not to give the case to the police, the head of the Civil Service Commission's disciplinary branch, Assaf Rosenberg, asked Eshel to take a leave so as to avoid facing suspension.

On Wednesday, sources involved in the case said that based on the testimony collected thus far, it doesn't seem likely Eshel will ever be able to return to his position.

One employee of the bureau who testified in the Civil Service Commission probe said that Eshel told R. he was following her

every move on orders from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's wife, Sara. According to this worker's testimony, Eshel also told R. that she only had her job because of him, and that he was the one who had convinced Sara Netanyahu to okay her employment in the bureau.

Another person who testified to the commission said Eshel had let it drop to R. that he had a role in the appointment of Shin Bet security service head Yoram Cohen, and could therefore get help from the Shin Bet to monitor her activities.

No comment was available from Eshel's attorney, Jacob Weinroth.

Also on Wednesday, it emerged that when three senior officials in the Prime Minister's Bureau revealed their suspicions about Eshel to Weinstein in December, they asked Weinstein to keep their approach to him secret, warning that if R. found out they had come to him, she was liable to harm herself. The three are Cabinet Secretary Zvi Hauser, National Information Director Yoaz Hendel, and Netanyahu's military secretary, Maj. Gen. Yohanan Locker.

After hearing the three out, Weinstein met with Hendel alone to hear what he knew about Eshel's behavior toward R.

Weinstein and his deputy, Raz Nizri, have been holding working meetings with law enforcement officials in Washington this week, and are expected back early next week. Both Nizri and Deputy State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan were chosen by Weinstein to work with him on the Eshel case.

In Weinstein's absence, Nitzan and State Prosecutor Moshe Lador are overseeing the commission's investigation, getting regular briefings from the investigators and keeping Weinstein informed.

It is still not known whether R. will give evidence. On Wednesday, her lawyers once again rebuffed efforts by the commission to persuade her to come forward. They remain firm in their position that R. shouldn't be dragged into the affair, which was reported against her will, and that her privacy must be protected.

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/senior-sources-evidence-indicates-netanyahu-s-bureau-chief-harassed-subordinate-1.410492>

5. AFRICA

• Many dead in Egyptian football riot

Troops deployed on streets of Port Said after clashes between rival fans leave 74 people dead and hundreds injured.



Egypt has deployed troops in the northern city of Port Said after stadium clashes between fans after a football match left at least 74 people dead and hundreds more injured.

Violence erupted as soon as the referee blew the final whistle in Wednesday's match, which saw home team al-Masry beat Cairo's al-Ahly 3-1.

"Egypt's army has deployed troops in Port Said to prevent further clashes between fans of [football teams] al-Ahly and al-Masry," state television reported on Wednesday, adding that the military had also secured the road out of the city.

The health ministry said in a statement that a policeman was among the 74 dead. Hundreds were injured, it said. At least two players suffered light injuries.

Forty-seven people have been arrested in connection with the violent pitch invasion, the country's interior minister said.

Mohamed Ibrahim said many of the victims had died in a crush of people at the stadium. He told state television the search for suspects linked to the incident was continuing.

The head of the ruling military council, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, pledged to track down those behind the violence in a rare phone call to an Egyptian TV channel.

"These kind of events can happen anywhere in the world but we will not let those behind this get away," Tantawi said, speaking to a sports television channel owned by the al-Ahly club. He said victims would receive compensation after their cases were examined.

"We will get through this stage. Egypt will be stable. We have a roadmap to transfer

power to elected civilians. If anyone is plotting instability in Egypt they will not succeed. Everyone will get what they deserve," he said, adding that securing the game was the responsibility of the police force.

State television said parliament would hold an emergency session over the violence.

Activists scheduled rallies on Thursday outside the headquarters of the interior ministry in Cairo to protest the inability of the police to stop the bloodshed.

Many gathered outside al-Ahly club in Cairo, chanting slogans against military rule, and hundreds filed into Cairo's main train station to receive the injured arriving from Port Said. "We die like them, or we ensure their rights," the crowd chanted, along with slogans denouncing the military rulers.

As the train arrived, scores jumped on top of the train and raised Egyptian flags.

In Port Said, residents marched early on Thursday, denouncing the violence and

saying it was a conspiracy by the military and police to cause chaos.

Army tanks and armoured vehicles joined police patrolling near hospitals and morgues. Police were not to be seen in the streets after the violence and were unavailable to break up fights that followed.

The tension also spread to the nearby Suez province. About 500 protesters, including football fans and activists, gathered outside the main police headquarters to protest what they called police negligence.

A security official said the police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd.

'War, not football'

Fans of the winning al-Masry team flooded the field seconds after the match with al-Ahly, Egypt's top team, was over.

A security official said the fans chased al-Ahly players and cornered their supporters on the field and around the stadium, throwing stones and bottles at them.

Thousands of supporters covered the field, as seen in a video posted online.

"This is unfortunate and deeply saddening. It is the biggest disaster in Egypt's soccer history," said Hesham Sheiha, deputy health minister. He said most of the injuries were caused by concussion and deep cuts.

Other significant incidents of football deaths

Al-Ahly players were trapped in the changing room along with supporters. Riot police were sent in to drive the rival crowds of fans back.

"This is not football. This is a war and people are dying in front of us. There is no movement and no security and no ambulances," al-Ahly player Abo Treika told the team's television channel.

"This is a horrible situation and today can never be forgotten."

The Muslim Brotherhood, the country's largest political force, accused supporters

of the toppled president, Hosni Mubarak, of instigating the violence.

"The events in Port Said are planned and are a message from the remnants of the former regime," Essam al-Erian, a parliamentarian, said in a statement on the group's Freedom and Justice Party website.

Al-Ahly's supporter club, known as the Ultras, said on their website that they would head to Port Said later in the evening.

Sepp Blatter, the head of football world governing body FIFA, said he was "very shocked and saddened" by the incident.

"This is a black day for football," he said in a statement. "Such a catastrophic situation is unimaginable and should not happen."

History of clashes

Al-Masry's 3-1 win was a rare victory over al-Ahly, one of the biggest clubs in Egypt. The two teams have a long history of bad blood, and clashes have erupted in recent years between their fans.

Al Jazeera's Rawya Rageh, reporting from Cairo, said al-Ahly fans were said to have been provoking al-Masry fans throughout the game with abusive language.

But our correspondent said the issue went beyond the pitch, with Egypt experiencing a "security vacuum" after the revolution which overthrew Mubarak.

"There were clearly riot police on that pitch, but they were seen either not getting involved or running in the other direction," she said.

"Some people say the police force perhaps has not been trained to deal with violence, except in the way they were trained during Mubarak, which was with sheer and brutal force. And now when they can't do that, they're unable to deal with violence."

A match in Cairo on Wednesday evening was interrupted following the news of the deaths in Port Said. Television footage showed a big fire behind the supporter stand at the Cairo stadium.

The Egyptian premier league, which the games were part of, was suspended indefinitely.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/201221231925902989.html>

- **Brotherhood urges SCAF to protect Parliament**

Al-Masry Al-Youm

Egypt Independent



Photographed by Mohamed Abdel Ghany
The Muslim Brotherhood on Wednesday toughened its stance toward protesters.

The group issued a statement calling on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the Interior Ministry to protect the People's Assembly and other state institutions. The statement comes a day after a standoff between Brotherhood youth and protesters. At least 75 people were injured in the confrontation.

“Some groups are seeking to destroy [state institutions] under the theory that all state institutions must be dismantled, including the military establishment, before the state can be re-built,” said the statement issued by the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau.

“We demand that the SCAF and the Justice Minister take the necessary legislative measures and for them to release the information collected during their lengthy investigations on individuals and groups that received funding and training in foreign countries,” the statement added.

In December, the SCAF warned of a secret plot to destroy the state on 25 January. The allegation was largely dismissed as an attempt to scare demonstrators demanding an end to military rule, especially when the council failed to release details about the alleged plot.

The statement went on to say that these groups and individuals “continue to be used to finance disorder, aggression, and vandalism” and that they “obviously coordinate with each other.” The statement said that “hiding this

information “encourages the continuation of these destructive actions.”

The statement stressed that “the current Parliament is the true representative of the Egyptian people” and that it “held several good sessions that embrace the revolution’s demands.” It pointed out that some individuals and groups had “claimed the invalidity of the People's Assembly” and that the “legitimacy of Tahrir Square overrides the legitimacy of Parliament.”

“We have read and heard them calling to prevent MPs from entering and some of have threatened attacks [on MPs].”

The statement added that some Egyptians demand the SCAF's departure. However, some demand an “immediate departure while the Brotherhood and others are calling for its departure following the establishment of all constitutional institutions so that power can be handed over to legitimate institutions,” it said.

The statement argued that “the immediate departure of the SCAF would leave a security vacuum that would lead to chaos in the country, especially in the

absence of an effective police force and cleansing of the Interior Ministry.”

“We support shortening the remainder of the transitional period as much as possible, provided the proceedings correspond with the Constitutional Declaration, which was accepted by a referendum in March 2011.”

The statement said that "those demanding the SCAF's immediate departure are the ones who were begging them to remain [in power] for two or three years, as they were not prepared for elections and the Brotherhood were the only ones prepared."

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/632556>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Lebanon special court to try Hariri accused in absentia**

By AFP

THE HAGUE

A special U.N.-backed court probing the murder of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri said Wednesday it will try four Hezbollah members in absentia for the 2005 bomb attack.



“The trial chamber of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon has decided to try the four men accused of the 14 February 2005 attack in their absence,” the Hague-based STL said in a statement.

“The Trial Chamber concluded that all reasonable steps have been taken to secure the appearance of the accused and to notify them of the charges against them,” it added.

The STL sent arrest warrants for Salim Ayyash, Mustafa Badreddine, Hussein Anaissi and Assad Sabra to Lebanese authorities on June 30, and Interpol issued a “red notice” in July.

Beirut has however failed to arrest them.

The four are accused of assassinating Hariri and 21 others in a massive suicide car bomb blast near a Beirut hotel on Feb. 14, 2005, while the politician was on his way home.

The STL is the only international court that has a mandate to try suspects in absentia.

Created by a 2007 U.N. Security Council resolution at Lebanon's request, the STL opened its doors in 2009 and is tasked with trying those suspected of responsibility for Hariri's assassination.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/02/192017.html?PHPSESSID=p967jdimgcmtpu34lmen2o8ii4>

- **Lebanon's Arabic press digest - Feb. 2, 2012**

February 02, 2012 09:26 AM

The Daily Star

Following are summaries of some of the main stories in a selection of Lebanese newspapers Thursday. The Daily Star cannot vouch for the accuracy of these reports.

Al-Liwaa

Letters from Damascus to Elysee

The decision to suspend Wednesday's Cabinet session does not seem odd in itself. What seemed strange were the circumstances surrounding Prime Minister Najib Mikati's decision following "non-stop, daily wrangling" by ministers from

MP Michel Aoun's Change and Reform bloc.

The latest evidence of a power-struggle came in the form of an argument that broke out after pro-Aoun ministers objected to the appointments to the Higher Disciplinary Committee and the Civil Service Board.

Perhaps the decision to suspend the Cabinet session aimed at exhausting the Mikati government in light of two developments: Mikati's upcoming visit to France and a decision by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to go ahead with trials in absentia.

Al-Anwar

Cabinet suspends meetings pending a solution on [public] appointments

The situation exploded during the Cabinet session Wednesday evening after a dispute between Prime Minister Najib Mikati and ministers from MP Michel Aoun's Change and Reform bloc over administrative appointments.

Information Minister Walid Daouk said the prime minister decided to suspend Cabinet meetings until an agreement on

the issue of appointments has been reached.

Daouk did not rule out the possibility that Mikati could take a break from this crisis at a later stage.

Al-Akhbar

Cabinet meeting torpedoed

After weeks of mutual threats and intimidation between members of the government, and after months of complaining the Cabinet is non-productive and despite the calm and productivity that prevailed during Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, differences were explosive during Wednesday's Cabinet session.

The session was torpedoed after ministers from MP Michel Aoun's Change and Reform bloc tried to block a quorum, prompting Mikati to suspend the meeting to deprive them of this "achievement."

The issue is no longer focused on reactivating government's work but is back to square one instead.

Most eyes were turned on Speaker Nabih Berri, who appeared angry at what

happened at the Cabinet session Wednesday.

"Instead of focusing on the country's interests, the government is getting busy with itself," Berri was quoted as saying.

MP Walid Jumblatt was no less angry, according to a source close to him.

:: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Feb-02/161911-lebanons-arabic-press-digest---feb-2-2012.ashx#axzz1lDJ1Z5j9>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA

• Kidnapped aid workers released in Yemen, 5 militants dead

By REUTERS

SANA'A AND ADEN

Six kidnapped foreign aid workers have been released in Yemen, the defense ministry said on Thursday, and a military source said separately that five Islamist militants were killed in clashes with the armed forces in the country's south.



“The six aid workers were released...after mediation efforts led by Energy Minister Saleh Samee,” the defense ministry said in a statement. “They are in good health.”

It said the aid workers were of Yemeni, German, Palestinian, Iraqi, and Colombian origin. A U.N. source said the six worked for its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Kidnappings, which come against the backdrop of relentless anti-government protests, have become common in Yemen where hostages are often used by disgruntled tribesmen to press their demands on authorities, and are usually freed unharmed.

One of the kidnapers told Reuters the release was under way after a delay earlier when one of the hostages had fallen ill. He said the hostage was now well after receiving medical treatment, adding

the government had agreed to release a tribesman in exchange for the hostages.

The United States and neighboring Saudi Arabia are worried that political unrest could give al-Qaeda’s Yemen wing the opportunity to gain more control of the impoverished country.

Protests have continued even after President Ali Abdullah Saleh transferred his powers and bowed to a year of mass protests demanding the end of his 33-year rule.

Activists demand that Saleh, in the United States for medical care, be tried for alleged killings of protesters, and the government be purged of his relatives.

In Yemen's south, four Islamist militants were killed and five more wounded in an army attack on two cars late on Wednesday in the city of Zinjibar, a military source said. Another car escaped unharmed.

A fifth militant was killed by a sniper in the south of Zinjibar in a separate incident, said the source.

The defense ministry said separately late on Wednesday that a leading member of Yemen's security forces escaped an assassination attempt in the capital Sana'a.

It said armed men fired at his car, wounding two of his bodyguards and wounding a young girl who was sent to hospital.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/02/192060.html?PHPSESSID=p967jdimgcmtpu34lmen2o8ii4>

- **Kuwaitis head to polls as opposition press for change in snap election**

By AL ARABIYA WITH AGENCIES

Kuwaitis head to the polls on Thursday in a snap parliamentary election which the opposition, inspired by political change sweeping the Arab world, hopes to use as a chance to press for broader freedoms in the oil-exporting Gulf Arab state.



Frustration with Kuwait's ruling family has been brewing since last year, with tensions boiling over in November when hundreds of opposition supporters stormed the parliament.

Kuwait's ruler, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, called the snap vote in December after dissolving the chamber in a power struggle that has paralyzed politics in the U.S.-allied nation.

Voters and candidates say the stalemate is holding up vital reforms and development projects in a country of 3.6 million - one of the world's richest thanks to its vast oil wealth.

"The situation cannot remain as it was," opposition candidate Faisal al-Mislem told hundreds of supporters at a campaign event. "If this election is just a game of musical chairs then it's a waste of time."

Kuwait positions itself as a democratic state in the Gulf, a region dominated by autocrats who tolerate little dissent.

Its oil wealth and generous welfare programs have helped it avoid the kind of violent anti-government protests that

have ousted leaders of other Arab countries.

The vote will usher in the fourth parliament in six years. Formal political parties are not allowed, which means opposition politicians are forced to rely on forming blocs in parliament.

Shahin Shamsabadi, senior associate at the Risk Advisory group, said deputies still had a chance of broadening the powers of the 50-member chamber if public opinion were on their side.

“The key thing is: are the people going to be fed up enough this time to change the parliament, or is it going to take another election?” Shamsabadi said.

Tempers have flared in the runup to the vote. Tribesmen torched the tent of a candidate who appeared to insult their tribe and skirmished with police outside the office of a satellite channel that was hosting his ally.

Other candidates have been coaxing voters into their tents with lavish buffets and pledges ranging from lifting a ban on

the sale of alcohol to bringing laws into line with Islam.

Meanwhile, pollsters and analysts expect a resounding victory for the Islamist-led opposition.

Tech savvy youth groups armed with smart phones and access to social networks have been organizing their own campaigns.

“We need to move on and I think people are seeing that and are moving towards that,” said blogger Jassim al-Qamis, member of a team organizing liberal ex-MP Aseel al-Awadhi’s campaign.

Opposition players accuse the government of misdeeds and corruption ranging from bribery, turning a blind eye to diesel smuggling and fomenting divisions within parliament.

Politicians say their battle will continue. “These elections have shown the government’s true cards. It continues to play the same tawdry game,” said opposition ex-MP Jamaan al-Hirbish.

Although parliament has the power to initiate legislation, cabinet members also vote, giving the government a bloc it can use to dilute opposition or swing a majority in the assembly.

And crucially, reforms depend on the will of the al-Sabah family which has ruled Kuwait since the 18th century.

“Meaningful constitutional reform is unlikely under the leadership of the current emir,” said Jamie Ingram, an analyst at RUSI based in Qatar. “However after power transitions to a new generation, more deep-seated change is likely.”

Many believe some kind of eventual change is inevitable.

“The government is very slow, like a tortoise, and society is like a hare and it's going to be very difficult for the tortoise to outsmart the hare,” said Shafeeq Ghabra, a political scientist at Kuwait University. “A lot of these monarchies (in the region) have done great things for their people. But now the society wants to take charge.”

Clashes with tribesmen

Meanwhile, more than 20 people were wounded when Kuwaiti riot police clashed with tribesmen who stormed a local television station in the second day of violence ahead of general polls, witnesses said on Wednesday.

The incident took place late on Tuesday at the offices of private Al-Watan satellite channel which was hosting pro-government candidate Nabeel al-Fadl.

Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd that started hurling rocks, wounding around “20 security men and four reporters,” a witness told AFP.

Some of the angry crowd managed to enter the offices and damaged some furniture and equipment, but all staff members escaped unhurt. They later attacked a nearby fire department center, the witness added.

Around 15 tribesmen were arrested during the clashes.

The incident came a day after angry tribesmen burned down the election tent of controversial pro-government

candidate Mohammed al-Juwaihel over remarks deemed offensive to the Mutairi tribe, the second largest Bedouin clan in Kuwait.

Tribesmen consider Fadl, a strong critic of the opposition, as a close ally of Juwaihel, who disappeared after the burning of his tent late on Monday night.

Election rallies in Kuwait are held in large tents.

Opposition tribal candidates had held a massive rally to condemn Juwaihel's "derogatory" remarks and to ask the government to take legal action against him.

"We tell the (ruling) family that we are partners in governance and public funds and we are free people," leading opposition candidate Mussallam al-Barrak told a crowd of over 20,000 who listened to him under heavy rain.

"Tunisian martyr Mohamed Bouazizi did not burn himself because of hunger but out of frustration," said the outspoken former lawmaker, in reference to the

Tunisian man whose death triggered the Arab Spring.

Several other speakers demanded that Juwaihel should be disqualified from contesting Thursday's election over his remarks of "hatred."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/02/192031.html?PHPSESSID=p967jdimgcmtpu34lmen2o8ii4>

- **Yemenis want regime figures out**

Yemenis have staged a sit-in protest in front of Vice President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi's house in the capital Sana'a to demand the removal of the regime's key figures.



Hundreds of demonstrators on Wednesday called for the dismissal and prosecution of the figures, who used to hold key posts under the country's outgoing dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Saleh is expected to officially resign his post under a power transfer deal, initiated

by the Arab grouping of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council, which has been drawn up to defuse the political crisis in the country.

Shouting slogans like, "Field Marshal, you must bring change!," they called on Hadi to cleanse the country of the remnants of Saleh's regime.

Saleh's sons and nephews still hold key positions in the military and intelligence services. Many high-profile figures from the former regime are accused of committing crimes against peaceful protesters during the popular revolution that has been raging on since late January 2011.

Nearly 2,000 demonstrators have been killed during regime crackdown since the anti-government protests started.

Meanwhile, fresh mass anti-regime demonstrations were held in the southern city of Taizz to denounce the immunity from prosecution given to Saleh under the power transfer deal.

Condemning Saleh's crimes, they also demanded that he and his aides be tried for violating the rights of Yemeni people.

The dictator arrived in the United States on Sunday to receive 'medical treatment' for injuries he had sustained in an attack on the presidential palace in Sana'a in June 2011.

The Yemeni Embassy in Washington said Saleh was scheduled to stay in the US for 'a short-term private medical visit.' Last week, Embassy officials said Saleh would "return to Yemen in February...."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/224388.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

SC to indict PM for contempt on Feb 13

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that contempt of court proceedings would be initiated against Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, DawnNews reported.



The apex court has summoned the premier on Feb 13 when he is expected to be formally indicted.

The ruling came after a seven-judge bench of the apex court heard the contempt case against Prime Minister Gilani.

“After the preliminary hearing, we are satisfied that prima facie (at first sight) there is enough case for further proceeding,” the bench ordered after the hearing.

“The case is adjourned until Feb 13 for the framing of charges. The prime minister will be present in person.”

The prime minister’s lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan said it was possible to appeal.

“He (Gilani) has been asked to be present in person on February 13 when he will be indicted,” he said.

“There is a possibility for an appeal in this matter. It is up to the court whether to suspend this order or not. This will be decided after getting a copy of the order,” Ahsan added.

The prime minister could face six months in prison and be disqualified from holding office if convicted.

The court ordered the government to write to Swiss authorities over two years ago to reopen a corruption case against President Asif Ali Zardari dating back to the late 1990s.

The government has refused, saying the president enjoys immunity from prosecution while in office.

<http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/02/sc-resumes-contempt-hearing-against-pm.html>

- **Pakistan will do whatever Kabul wants for peace: FM**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is willing to do whatever the Afghans want to help facilitate an end to 10 years of war with the Taliban, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar told reporters on Thursday.



Speaking a day after talks with President Hamid Karzai in Kabul billed as a fence-

mending visit designed to ease frosty ties, Pakistan’s top diplomat sought to refute perceptions that Islamabad was an obstacle to peace.

Pakistan is widely accused of harbouring the Taliban and the Haqqani network, whose leaders are based in Pakistan.

“We’re willing to do whatever the Afghans want or expect,” Khar told reporters when asked whether Pakistan was ready to push the Haqqani network towards peace negotiations, but stopped short of naming the group or commenting further.

She said an effective peace process was still “miles away” but that the process should be “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, Afghan-driven”.

“Once the Afghan people decide the way forward, whatever assistance Pakistan can give, it will give,” she said.

<http://www.dawn.com/2012/02/02/pakistan-will-do-whatever-kabul-wants-for-peace-fm.html>

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

Tanrıverdi O and Sercan Doğan. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.

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