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GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU / GÜNEY ASYA BÜLTENİ
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1. IRAQ / IRAK

- Moktada al-Sadr, the anti-American cleric in exile with a sizable bloc of followers in Iraq's new Parliament, took his first direct public step into the country's protracted political impasse on Monday, meeting in Syria with Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's top rival to lead a new government.

Notes from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and other areas of conflict in the post-9/11 era.
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Mr. Sadr, a Shiite with a militia that until two years ago openly battled with American and Iraqi forces, has emerged as a potent political leader who could shape the government that oversees the withdrawal of American forces over the next 18 months.

His followers won 39 seats in a new 325-member Parliament formed after national elections in March, and while they have since joined an alliance with Mr. Maliki's bloc, they oppose his re-election to another four years as prime minister.

Traveling to Damascus from Iran, where he is in a self-imposed exile, Mr. Sadr met with Ayad Allawi, a former Shiite prime minister whose largely Sunni coalition, known as Iraqiya, narrowly defeated Mr. Maliki's State of Law coalition.

It was the first time that Mr. Sadr, who despite his influence inside Iraq has sought to remain above the political fray, met with any of the leaders vying for ascendancy in the country's new government. That he met with Mr. Allawi, not his putative coalition partner, was clearly intended to increase pressure on Mr. Maliki to step aside.

"I found a readiness from Iraqiya to make concessions," Mr. Sadr said of Mr. Allawi's coalition in remarks broadcast on Iraqi television, "and I call on State of Law to do the same for the general good and for the Iraqi people."

Whether their meeting has any effect on the deadlock remains to be seen. The efforts to form a new government and elect a prime minister, as well as a president, have taken place largely behind closed doors — and often outside Iraq itself — with only mild public assurances that all involved are acting in the spirit of national unity.

Nearly five months after the election, unity is clearly lacking. That has spawned endless, and often baseless, speculation about various power-sharing agreements that would include Mr. Allawi's and Mr. Maliki's coalitions and the Kurds in a majority coalition that requires at least 163 seats in Parliament.

Mr. Allawi, whose coalition won 91 seats, two more than Mr. Maliki's 89, continued to insist that as the election's winner he had the constitutional right to lead the next government.

Of his meeting with Mr. Sadr, brokered by Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, he said, "Yes, there's an agreement of the necessity to accelerate the formation of the government, and it must include all Iraqis."

Fatah al-Sheik, a leader in Mr. Allawi's slate, said it was the first time the two men had met and called it "the final word, the final decision" in forming a new government without Mr. Maliki, though they had yet to reach a formal agreement on its shape.

"Sayid Moktada is very upset about the delay in the forming of the government," he said in a telephone interview, using a respectful form of address, "because it has a bad effect on everything."

Mr. Sadr's fate in Iraq is unclear. American and Iraqi officials have said that he faces arrest if he returns to Iraq on a warrant that dates to 2004, when he was leading the Shiite resistance to the American occupation.

A significant role for the Sadrists in the new government could complicate American plans for a continued military relationship after the last American troops withdraw by the end of 2011. In his remarks in Syria, he said the Americans had "messed up everything" and continued to destabilize the country.

"I have a red line against the Americans," he said. When a reporter asked about the loyalists of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, many of whom now live in Syria, he said, "I have a red line against them, too, but a little bit less than the Americans."

The meeting came as violence flared. A bombing in Mosul killed a British security contractor on Monday morning, while a suicide bombing at a cafe in Baquba, the capital of Diyala Province, killed 7 and wounded 17. (New York Times)

- Two figures at the centre of drawn-out efforts to form a new Iraqi government, former premier Iyad Allawi and Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, met in Syria's capital on Monday.

President Bashar al-Assad also held talks with Allawi, who has been embroiled in months of haggling to reach a deal on a new coalition government in Baghdad, two days after the Syrian leader met separately with Sadr.

Allawi told a press conference in a Damascus hotel that he and Sadr had agreed on "the need to speed up the formation of a government that would group all the political movements and have a clear program."

Separately, Sadr told reporters that Allawi's bloc was "ready to make concessions to put an end to Iraq's political crisis," and urged other parties to do the same "for the sake of the Iraqi public interest."

Neighbouring countries are welcome "to give advice" but "without interfering in Iraqi affairs," he said.

In his talks with Allawi, Assad reiterated "Syria's support for any inter-Iraqi accord (on a government) which conserves the unity of Iraq, its Arab identity and its sovereignty," Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

Allawi, who is vying for the post of prime minister with the incumbent, Nouri al-Maliki, in turn thanked Syria for playing host to hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees and its support for efforts to restore stability in Iraq.

Efforts to form a new government, more than four months after a March 7 election in Iraq, also figured in talks in Damascus last Saturday between Assad and Sadr.

The bloc of anti-U.S. cleric Sadr, who lives in self-imposed exile in Iran, gained 39 seats in Iraq's new 325-strong parliament, against 91 for Allawi and 89 for Maliki -- both also Shiites.

On Monday, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was also headed for Damascus to meet Assad for talks covering Iraq, their common neighbor. (Al Arabiya)

- Following are security developments in Iraq at 1915 GMT on Tuesday.

* Denotes a new or updated item.

* BAGHDAD - A bomb attached to a car carrying a government official working at the Agriculture Ministry wounded him in Baghdad's northern district of Adhamiya, police said.

* BAQUBA - Two roadside bombs targeting a police patrol wounded 10 policemen in a small town east of Baquba, 65 km (40 miles), northeast of Baghdad, police said.

BAQUBA - One person was killed and seven others were wounded when a parked car bomb exploded near a restaurant west of Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, police said. Most of the wounded were Iranian pilgrims, police said.

QARA TAPPA - A car bomb killed two civilians and wounded 17 others when it went off in a marketplace in the small town of Qara Tappa, 122 km (73 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

KIRKUK - A roadside bomb wounded a soldier when it struck an Iraqi army patrol southwest of Kirkuk, 250 km (155 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

KIRKUK - A roadside bomb wounded three policemen when it exploded near their patrol in southern Kirkuk, police said.

TAL AFAR - Iraqi army forces, tipped off by intelligence, killed a suicide bomber trying to blow himself up in a residential area of Tal Afar, 420 km (260 miles) northwest of Baghdad, on Monday, police said.

BASRA - A roadside bomb wounded three soldiers when it hit a military convoy in central Basra, 420 km (260 miles) southeast of Baghdad, on Monday, police said. (Reuters)

- A suicide car bomber ploughed into a convoy carrying employees of a British company in northern Iraq on Monday, killing four of them and wounding five Iraqi civilians, Iraqi security officials said.

The suicide bomber targeted the last vehicle of the convoy in restive Mosul, a dangerous city where al Qaeda remains active, and the force of the blast threw the armoured vehicle 40 metres into a ravine, killing everyone inside, police said.

"I saw the other members of the convoy bring out four dead foreign civilians from the smashed car. One of them was beheaded," an Iraqi military officer, asking not to be named, said by telephone from the site of the attack in northern Mosul.

Iraqi officials said the firm was a British construction company but its name was not immediately known and there was no independent confirmation. The British embassy had no immediate information on the incident.

The nationality of the dead foreigners was not immediately known.

Mosul is on the front line of a longstanding feud between Iraq's Arabs and minority Kurds over land, power and oil wealth.

The region is also a hub for Sunni Islamist insurgents, and the U.S. military, which will end combat operations on Aug. 31, sees Mosul as al Qaeda's last urban stronghold in Iraq.

Iraq is on high alert for insurgent attacks after a March 7 national election produced no clear winner and left the country adrift in political uncertainty.

Overall violence has dropped sharply since the height of sectarian carnage in 2006-7. But bombings and killings continue daily. (Reuters)

- Several obstacles face the implementation of investment projects in Iraq by foreign companies because of the complicated procedures in allotting lands, in addition to economic and security conditions, head of the Karbala Investment Commission said on Monday.

“There are several Arab and foreign companies attempted to implement investment projects in Karbala and there are foreign investors try to invest in the province, but they faced several obstacles, which prevented them from implementing their projects,” Jalal al-Hashemi told Aswat al-Iraq news agency. (Aswat al-Iraq)

- Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki called on Monday for the development of economic and trade relations with South Korea, according to a statement of his office.

“Al-Maliki held on Monday (July 19) a meeting with a delegation of South Korean companies, Ambassador Su B. Park and Head of the National Investment Commission Sami al-Aaraji,” said the statement received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

“The premier underlined the Iraqi’s government’s keenness to develop relations with South Korea in various domains, mainly in economic and trade fields,” the statement added.

The South Korean ambassador wished his country would play bigger role in Iraq’s housing, oil, energy and electricity sectors. (Aswat al-Iraq)

- The Baghdad Mayoralty has granted more than 23 investment permissions to amusement projects in the Iraqi capital.

“The mayoralty has put a comprehensive plan to build big and small amusement cities in Baghdad, to create tourist locations in the Iraq capital,” the mayoralty said in a release on Tuesday as received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

It noted that the investment permissions have been granted to build those amusement cities according to the most advanced standards and designs. (Aswat al-Iraq)

- A lawmaker from the Dawlat al-Qanoon Alliance on Tuesday warned that the United Nations (UN) might intervene to redo the elections in Iraq in case of excessive delays in forming the new Iraqi government.

"Iraq is still under UN mandate, and one of the proposed solutions is to redo the elections," Lamaker Bahaa Jamal al-Din told Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

He noted that Iraqi politicians who did not win the election want to achieve this result by insisting on their demands.

"If the election results are to be redone, then Iraq will go through a dark tunnel because of political leaders who do not care about the interests of the Iraqi people, but only their personal benefits," Jamal al-Din. (Aswat al-Iraq)

- Three policemen and one Iraqi army soldier were wounded on Tuesday in two separate attacks with roadside bombs in Kirkuk province.

"A roadside bomb went off today targeting a police patrol near the Domez Bridge, south of Kirkuk city, wounding three policemen and damaging their patrol vehicle," a local police source told Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

"Two roadside bombs went off today targeting an Iraqi army patrol near the al-Zab district, 85 km southwest of Kirkuk city, wounding a soldier and damaging the patrol's vehicle," another police source said.

The oil-rich city of Kirkuk lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. (Aswat al-Iraq)

- US Vice President Joe Biden said United States remains on track for its drawdown in troops from Iraq by August despite the political stalemate in Baghdad and the end of military operations in Iraq is going according to the fixed timetable and will not be delayed if Iraqis were not capable of forming a government by the fixed date.

"I don't have a doubt in my mind that we'll be able to meet the commitment of having only 50,000 troops there and it will not in any way affect the physical stability of Iraq," Biden said during an interview. (Al Sumeria TV)

- In a day that can be considered the most sanguinary since May 10, 48 people were killed at least and dozens were wounded in 2 suicide bombings targeting Awakening Councils forces in Baghdad and Anbar, early on Sunday and with a short time delay.

At least 44 men were killed and 52 others wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up among "Sahwa" Awakening Councils forces. As more than 85 people lined up at the main gate of the military base in Al Balasem Town in Al Radwaniah region, to receive salaries when a person wearing an explosives belt approached the crowd and blew himself. It is to be noted that a number of Sahwa leaders were among the killed.

On the spot, tight security measures were taken in the blasts regions while hundreds were waiting in front of Al Mahmoudiah hospital to recognize the bodies of their relatives.

On the other hand, in Al Kaem city in Anbar, 4 people died and 7 others were wounded during a suicide bombing in Sahwa headquarters in the city.

Northwest Baghdad, in Or neighborhood, a bomb fixed to a car blew killing the driver and wounding 4 people. (Al Sumeria TV)

- Informed sources within the Iraqi National Alliance which is led by Ammar al-Hakim informed Asharq Al-Awsat that they had received a copy of proposals from Iyad Allawi's Iraqiya bloc with regards to the formation of the next government of Iraq. The sources said that the proposals include Iraqiya bloc leader Allawi becoming Iraqi Prime Minister, with the presidency remains with current Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, and the position of parliamentary speaker being given to a member of al-Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.

The source within the National Iraqi Alliance told Asharq Al-Awsat that "the Iraqiya bloc is making proposals regarding the designation of the leadership positions [prime minister, president, parliamentary speaker] and some high-level positions in the next government, and we are studying these proposals which we received a copy of the day before yesterday, as did the Sadrist trend."

The source clarified that the proposal was for the formation of a national partnership government led by the Iraqiya bloc's Iyad Allawi, with Talabani remaining president, and both Adil Abdul-Mahdi, a senior member of al-Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, and the Iraqiya bloc's Tariq al-Hashemi, remaining as Iraq's vice presidents. The Iraqiya bloc also proposed Hamam Hammoudi, also of al-Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, as the Iraqi parliamentary speaker.

This came as Allawi was scheduled to meet with Sadrist trend leader Moqtada al-Sadr yesterday in Damascus amidst signs that the crisis over the formation of the Iraqi government is drawing to a close. (Asharq Alawsat)

- Moqtada al-Sadr, the influential Iraqi Shia religious leader, says he is ready to end all of his disagreements with Iraqi politicians for the benefit of the country.

Al-Sadr made the comment on Monday following talks with Iyad Allawi, a former Iraqi prime minister whose Iraqiya coalition won 91 seats in the country's March parliamentary election.

The two met in Damascus, the capital of neighbouring Syria, to discuss the issue of political uncertainty in Iraq four months after the election.

Allawi, who has been entangled in months of haggling to reach a deal on a new coalition government in Baghdad, said Sadr's views were "positive, showing care to preserve Iraq and accelerate forming a government".

He told a news conference on Monday that he and Sadr had agreed on "the need to speed up the formation of a government that would group all the political movements and have a clear programme".

'Ready for concessions'

Meanwhile, Sadr told reporters that Allawi's bloc was "ready to make concessions to put an end to Iraq's political crisis". He urged other parties to do the same "for the sake of the Iraqi public interest".

"If there were past differences, I am forgetting them so that the political process proceeds," Sadr, who lives in self-imposed exile in Iran, said.

"I don't back specific names, but programmes and mechanisms to arrive at the next prime minister."

Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria, also held talks with Allawi on Monday, in which he expressed his support for "any inter-Iraqi accord (on a government) which conserves the unity of Iraq, its Arab identity and its sovereignty," Syria's official Sana news agency reported.

Allawi in turn thanked Syria for hosting hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees and for its support for efforts to restore stability in Iraq.

Political wrangling

Initial election results from Iraq showed Allawi's coalition taking a slim lead over the bloc of Nouri al-Maliki, the incumbent prime minister. But Allawi, a Shia, has been unable to form a coalition.

Al-Maliki, whose State of Law bloc trailed with 89 seats, has since joined with the National Iraqi Alliance to form a larger coalition but the new union still does not have enough seats to get a majority.

As the politician with the highest number of seats, Allawi believes his Sunni-dominated bloc should be able to form a government.

Allawi has said that failure to properly integrate Sunnis into the structures of power could reignite sectarian violence that killed tens of thousands.

Maliki's supporters say their candidate should stay on as prime minister because he represents the country's Shi'ite majority. (Al Jazeera)

- A group of Iraqi Kurdish peace envoys returned Monday from Turkey after failing to reach an agreement about the rights of the ethnic group and the end of armed struggle.

Around 34 Kurdish militants and sympathizers crossed from Iraq in October to express their support of the Turkish plan to expand the freedoms of the Kurdish minority in order to end the 26-year old armed struggle between the government and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

" We extended the hand of peace and found only air "

Peace delegation spokeswoman

The self-proclaimed peace envoy was made up of 30 adults, eight PKK militants and 22 supporters of the Kurdish cause, and four children.

Despite voluntarily going to Turkey in a good-will gesture, the 30 adults were charged with links with the PKK, which made them subject to up to 20 years in jail. Ten of the 30 were actually put in jail pending trial. The first hearing took place in June.

It is not clear how many of the group managed to cross back to Iraq. The Turkish news channel NTV estimated the number of returnees at 19 while CNN-Turk news channel said the number is 14.

The Firat news agency, which is close to the PKK, quoted a spokeswoman for the returnees as saying that the prosecution of the group which initially went to Turkey for the promotion of peace made it impossible for them to pursue their efforts.

"We extended the hand of peace and found only air," she said.

" I wish they had stayed in this country to contribute to the government's efforts for peace "

Turkish Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin

On the other hand, Turkish Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin said he had no confirmed information that the activists have gone back to Iraq and expressed the government's willingness to cooperate with them.

"We have received news reports to that effect," he told journalists. "I wish they had stayed in this country to contribute to the government's efforts for peace."

Last year, the Turkish government announced launching a dual strategy that involves granting the Kurdish minority more political and cultural rights while continuing to exercise pressure on the PKK to end the armed struggle and the call for self-rule in the southeast.

The initiative was dealt a heavy blow with an upsurge of PKK violence since May when jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan said he was abandoning efforts for peace with Ankara.

Around 45,200 people have been killed since 1984 when the PKK, blacklisted as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, started its separatist movement and took up arms against the Turkish government. (Al Arabiya)

2. IRAN / İRAN

- İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışışleri Bakanlıđı Sözcüsü, Zahidan'da düzenlenen terörist saldırısına işaretle, terörizmle mücadele konusunda Pakistan devletiyle müzakere gündeme alındıđını söyledi.

Mehr haber ajansı muhabirinin bildirdiđine göre, bugün Salı yerli ve yabancı basın yayın ve medya organlarının temsilcileriyle düzenlediđi basın toplantısında gazetecilerin sorularına yanıt veren Ramin Mihmanperest, Fransa polisinin protestoculara yönelik sert müdahalesi üzerinde muhabirimizin sorusuna yanıtlarken, Fransa'nın güney şehrinde meydana gelen meselelerin bu ülkenin iç meselesi olduđunu, onun köklerini mültecilere yönelik uygulanan çifte standart davranışlarda ve adaletsizlikte aramak gerektiđini söyledi.

Mihmanperest, Fransa'da düzenlenen protestolara yönelik yapılan sert müdahalelere İran onaylamadıđını kounşmasına ekledi.

Zahidan'da düzenlenen terörist saldırıdan sonra İran ve Pakistan arasında muhtemelen yeni müzakerelerin başlayıp başlamayacađı yine muhabirimizin sorusuna yanıt veren Mihmanperest, bölgenin güvenlik meseleleriyle ilgili ciddi çalımların başlatılması

kaçınılmaz olduğunun yanısıra, bu bağlamda da terörizmle mücadele konusunda Pakistan devletiyle müzakere gündeme alındığını söyledi.

İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı Sözcüsü, "Batılı ülkeler terörisme destek vermekten ve onu güçlendirmekten vazgeçmeleri lazım. Çünkü terörsim hiç kimsenin menfaatine değil" dedi.

Kabil Zirvesi çerçevesinde İran ve ABD Dışişleri Bakanları arasında müzakere söz konusu olup olmadığı bir gazetecinin sorusu üzerinde Ramin Mihmanperest, "Böyle bir şeyin kesinlikle söz konusu değil" şeklinde yanıt verdi.

Bin Ladin'in ailesi İran'da olduğu şeklindeki bazı yabancı basın yayın ve medya organlarının iddiasıyla ilgili kendisine yöneltilen soruya karşın Mihmanperest, bu gibi söylentileri İran ciddiye almadığını kaydetti. (Mehr News Agency-MNA)

- İran İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı Ali Laricani, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin barışçıl nükleer teknoloji peşinde olduğunu vurguladı.

Önceki gün İsviçre'de düzenlenen Uluslararası Parlamento Başkanları Birliği Zirvesine katılan İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı Ali Laricani, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin barışçıl nükleer teknoloji peşinde olduğunu vurguladı ve Tahran yönetimi güdümlü müzakereler gibi mantıklı yolları olumlu karşıladığını, nitekim Tahran üçlü nükleer deklarasyonu da bu eğilimin en güzel örneği olduğunu kaydetti.

Laricani, "İran milleti barışçıl nükleer enerjiden yararlanmakta kararlıdır ve yaptırım gibi hukuk dışı ve insanlık dışı çabalar İran milletinin azim ve iradesini etkilemez" ifadesini kullandı.

İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı Laricani ayrıca uluslar arası arenada sağlıksız güç yapısının, UAEA gibi uluslar arası kurumların birer araç gibi kullanılmalarına yol açtığını, bu durumun beşeriyetin bugünü ve geleceğine ziyan olduğunu vurguladı.

Bazı devletlerin NPT anlaşması çerçevesinde nükleer enerjiden barışçıl amaçlar uğruna yararlanma çabalarına da temas eden Laricani, "UAEA ve BM Güvenlik Konseyi nükleer ve

kitle imha silahlarına sahip olan devletlerle uğraşmak yerine, nükleer enerjiden barışçıl amaçlı yararlanmak isteyen ülkeleri engellemeye çalışıyor" şeklinde konuştu. (MNA)

- İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanı Menuçehr Mutteki, Afganistan Cumhurbaşkanı Hamid Karzai ile bir araya gelerek görüş alışverişinde bulundu.

Mehr haber ajansı muhabirinin Kabil'den bildirdiğine göre, Uluslararası Kabil Zirvesi için Afganistan'da bulunan İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanı Menuçehr Mutteki, bu ülkenin Cumhurbaşkanı Hamid Karzai ile bir araya gelerek görüş alışverişinde bulundu.

Mutteki bu görüşmede Afganistan krizinin çözülmesinin bölgenin güvenliğini garanti edeceğini belirterek, Afganistan yönetiminin Afgan halkı ve devletine devredilmesi işleminin en kısa zamanda gerçekleşmesini temenni etti.

Mutteki, ayrıca bölgesel, uluslar arası ve iktisadi potansiyellerden yararlanmanın Afganistan'ın gelişmesine vesile olacağını kaydederek, İran'ın geçmişte olduğu gibi Afganistan devleti ve halkıyla işbirliğini geliştirmeye önem verdiğini söyledi.

Afganistan Cumhurbaşkanı Hamid Karzai ise bu görüşmede, Tahran'la devam eden dostluğa dayalı ilişkilerden memnuniyetini dile getirirken, Afganistan sorununun çözümü için İran'ın görüşlerine olumlu yaklaştıklarını söyledi.

Bölgesel işbirliğinin önemli olduğunu kaydeden Karzai, İran, Afganistan ve Pakistan arasında işbirliğinin bölgenin güvenliğinin sağlanması bakımından son derece önemli olduğunu kaydetti. (MNA)

- İran İslam Cumhuriyeti ve Pakistan Dışişleri Bakanları, bölgesel işbirliğin Afganistan sorularını çözümünde en iyi yol olduğunu vurguladılar.

Mehr haber ajansı muhabirinin Kabil'den bildirdiğine göre, Uluslararası Kabil Zirvesine katılmak için önceki gün Pakistan'a giden İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanı Menuçehr Mutteki, meslektaşı Zalmay Resul ile bir araya gelerek görüş alışverişinde bulundu.

Uluslararası Kabil Zirvesi'nin Afganistan'ın menfaatleri doğrultusunda başarıyla gerçekleşmesini ümit eden Mutteki, İran, Pakisatan ve Afganistan'ın üçlü oturumuna işaretlerle, bölgesel işbirliğin bu ülkenin sorunlarının çözümünde en iyi yol olduğunu vurguladı.

Afganistan Dışişleri Bakanı Zalmay Resul ise bu görüşmede Ululararası Kabil Zirvesi'nin amaçları hususunda bilgi vererek, bölgesel işbirliğin bu ülkenin sorunlarının çözümünde en iyi yolu olduğunu vurguladı.

Zalmay Rersul, İran'ın Uluslararası Kabil Zirvesi'ne katılmasının önemli olduğunu niteledi.

Bu görüşmede güvenlik işbirliğin yanısıra ekonomik ve ticaret işbirliği yolları üzerinde görüş alışverişinde bulunuldu. (MNA)

- İran ve Türkiye konut ve kentleşme bakanları bu alanda ikili işbirliğini geliştirmek amacı ile dün Tahran'da işbirliği protokolü imzaladı.

İran Konut ve Kentleşme Bakanı Ali Nikzad, Türkiye İmar ve İskan Bakanı Mustafa Demir'le bir araya geldi.

Tahran'da gerçekleşen görüşmede iki bakan konut ve kentleşme alanında işbirliğini geliştirmek amacı ile işbirliği protokolü imzaladı.

Anlaşmaya göre iki taraf arasında, bakanlar ve uzmanlardan oluşan çalışma grubu oluşturulacak ve bu grup her yıl oturum düzenleyerek bulgularını karşılıklı olarak paylaşacak.

İşbirliği protokolünde ayrıca depremlerin olumsuz tesirleri ile mücadele, konut inşaatı, kentleşme ve mimari gibi alanlarda eğitim programları da öngörülüyor.

Türkiye imar ve iskan bakanı Mustafa Demir, üç gün önce İran'da temaslarda bulunak üzere üst düzey bir heyet başkanlığında Tahran'ı ziyaret etmişti. (MNA)

- Iran will not step back an inch in its nuclear program, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in Qazvin on Monday.

No sanctions resolution can force Iran to relinquish its right to access to nuclear technology, he added.

The president stated that the imposition of sanctions on Iran has not only proven to be counterproductive but has actually helped the country consolidate its self-sufficiency.

Since they imposed sanctions on Iran in 2006, the country's industrial exports have nearly tripled in Qazvin and some other provinces, he noted.

"If they step up their pressure now, our industrial complexes will be able to become competitive at the international level," he added.

He also criticized the Western powers for using threatening language toward Iran over its nuclear activities and called it a mistake.

"Knock yourself out with your sanctions. Every piece of machinery or equipment that you don't sell to us, we will make here at home," he said.

"We're interested in reasoning and dialogue, but you don't seem to have anything to do other than imposing sanctions, closing a few bank accounts, or inspecting some ships, which you cannot do. If you want to show your teeth, we will sit down and watch your show. But we still advise you to listen to us. It will be in your own best interests," he added.

And the Iranian nation will always be prepared to stand up to any country seeking to impede Iran's progress, Ahmadinejad said. (MNA)

- ABD "CIA" casusluk teşkilatının İran'ın barışçı nükleer faaliyetlerine karşı baskıları arttırma niyetiyle ülkemiz nükleer faaliyetlerine dair yeni raporu yakında yayınlanıyor

Muhabirimizin Radyo-Televizyon Teşkilatı Dış Medya Bültenine dayanarak bildirdiğine göre, ABD'nin 2005 ve 2007 yıllarında istihbarat düzeyinde İran'ın barışçı nükleer faaliyetleriyle ilgili hazırlattığı tahmin raporları, bu mesele hakkında ve tabi ona karşı nasıl bir tavır sergilenmesi gerektiği konusunda bir dayanak olmuşlardır. Şöyle ki, ABD'nin istihbarat organları İran'ın nükleer ilerlemeleriyle ilgili olarak arada bir siyasi-propaganda

nitelikli yazı ve raporlar yayınlıyor ve Tahran'ın nükleer silah elde etmek istediği iddiasıyla bu meseleye karşı nasıl tedbir alınması gerektiğini belirliyorlar.

Amerikan "Ferda (Yarın) Radyosu, "New York basımı "Wall Street Jurnal gazetesini CIA teşkilatının İran İslam Cumhuriyetinin nükleer programı hakkında hazırladığı ve yakında yayınlaması beklenen raporuyla ilgili bir yazısında, 2007 yılında hazırlanan ulusal rapora değinerek böyle bir raporun bir tarafsız grup tarafından değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini vurguladı" diye duyurdu. (Fars News Agency-FNA)

- European Union foreign ministers will adopt tighter sanctions against Iran next week, including measures to block oil and gas investment and curtail its refining and natural gas capability, EU diplomats said.

A draft declaration prepared for a meeting of EU foreign ministers showed they would approve a decision taken by EU leaders on June 17 to adopt further sanctions over Tehran's nuclear programme, and also call on Iran to resume talks.

The measures, which go beyond steps approved by the United Nations on June 10, are designed to put pressure on Tehran to return to talks on its uranium enrichment programme which Western powers believe is designed to produce nuclear weapons.

The draft declaration says the ministers, who meet in Brussels on Monday, will approve the new sanctions "in accordance with the European Council Declaration of 17 June," referring to the decision taken by EU leaders at a summit.

It said the measures were adopted "with a view to supporting the resolution of all outstanding concerns regarding Iran's development of sensitive technologies in support of its nuclear and missile programmes, through negotiation."

The declaration is still to be endorsed by EU ambassadors, meeting in Brussels this week, but big changes are unlikely.

The new EU steps focus on trade, banking and insurance, transport including shipping and air cargo, and important sectors of the gas and oil industry.

EU leaders said on June 17 the energy sector sanctions would prohibit "new investment, technical assistance and transfers of technologies, equipment and services related to these areas, in particular related to refining, liquefaction and liquefied natural gas technology."

Iran denies its nuclear programme is aimed at producing weapons and says it is for energy and other peaceful purposes.

INCREASING PRESSURE ON IRAN

The measures are intended to put strong financial pressure on Iran, which is the world's fifth largest crude oil exporter but has little refining capability.

But diplomats have also acknowledged that the impact of the sanctions will depend on steps to ensure compliance.

Traders said this month Iran was depending more on friendly powers for fuel supplies because of the sanctions intended to hinder its fuel imports, and was buying about half of its July gasoline imports from Turkey and the rest from Chinese sellers as most other suppliers had stopped selling.

The foreign ministers will also back appeals by EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton for Iran to restart talks in response to a July 6 letter from Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, that proposed resuming dialogue.

"The Council (of foreign ministers) calls on Iran to seize this opportunity to allay the concerns of the international community about its nuclear programme and agree on a concrete date for talks with the EU High Representative, together with the six countries," the draft declaration said.

It was referring to the six powers -- the United states, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany -- that are involved in discussions on Iran's nuclear programme.

Jalili's proposal was the first indication that Tehran is willing to engage with world powers on its atomic programme since the United Nations imposed its new sanctions last month.

The U.S. Congress has also drawn up its own set of measures against Iran in addition to the U.N. sanctions package, parts of which were watered down by Russian and Chinese opposition. (Reuters)

- Iran and Saudi Arabia are two influential countries in the Islamic world whose growing ties would strengthen unity among Muslims, Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani said on Monday.

In a meeting with new Saudi Arabian ambassador to Iran, Larijani pointed out that strong bonds between Iran and Saudi Arabia will thwart the enemy's attempts to sow discord between the two important Islamic countries.

He went on to say that Iran will welcome the expansion of bilateral relations with Riyadh in all areas.

Tehran and Riyadh should attach great importance to judicial cooperation and agreements and ought to exchange views on establishing a committee of Islamic countries' judicial chiefs, Iran's top judicial official suggested.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said Islam has many pieces of advice with respect to human rights which should be spread in the world through Islamic countries particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The new Saudi ambassador, for his part, said the two countries should increase ties.

The ambassador added strong relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia will promote respect to Muslims around the world and make them stronger in the face of anti-Islamic moves. (MNA)

- Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani says the double-standard approach applied by the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency toward Iran's nuclear program is a clear sign of the corruption of the international power structure.

Larijani made the remarks on July 19 in an address to the third Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference at the UN headquarters in Geneva.

The Iranian parliament speaker also said that the United Nations has been lax in fulfilling its duties.

Without a doubt, the *raison d'être* of the United Nations is promoting world peace and security and preventing wars between countries and aggression, he stated.

Larijani lamented the fact that over six decades since the establishment of the UN, the world has witnessed many harrowing and brutal wars, namely the United States' war against Vietnam, the U.S.-led wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Israeli attack on Lebanon in 2006.

International terrorism has also been able to thrive under the UN watch, the latest example being the deadly terrorist attack in the southeastern Iranian city of Zahedan, he added.

This incompetence is undoubtedly due to the double-standard approach and unilateral policies of the major powers, and particularly the United States, toward other nations, Larijani noted.

He went on to say that the IAEA and the UN Security Council should deal with countries that have stockpiled vast arsenals of various types of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

However, those organizations have instead opted to step up pressure on countries that legitimately seek access to nuclear technology meant for peaceful purposes, he added.

(MNA)

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE / İSRAİL – FİLİSTİN

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bureau on Tuesday firmly denied reports that the Israeli leader had presented Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak with a map delineating the borders of a future Palestinian state during their meeting in Cairo earlier this week.

The London-based A-Sharq al-Awsat quoted an Israeli source as saying that the Egyptian president rejected the proposal as out of hand, and it did not meet the Arab League's demands for a state based on 1967 borders with negligible amendments.

The Egyptian president reportedly advised Netanyahu to redraft the proposal to be consistent with the vision laid out by the Arab world. According to the same report, Mubarak grilled Netanyahu over the course of their three-hour meeting on Sunday to see how serious the Israeli leader was about resuming direct peace talks with the Palestinian Authority.

Although the report cited Mubarak has having praised Netanyahu for his latest efforts to move toward peace, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said that Cairo's official position on the matter was that more work needs to be done to bridge the gap between Israel and the Palestinians before they can move to direct talks.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Netanyahu met separately with Mubarak in Cairo on Sunday. Abbas has refused to negotiate directly with Netanyahu unless Israel agrees to recognize its 1967 borders as a basis for drawing a future Palestinian state, and accepts the deployment of an international force to guard its borders. Netanyahu has refused to be pinned down on a framework for negotiations.

At the conclusion of the Mubarak-Netanyhau meeting, the prime minister lauded the Egyptian leader for his involvement in the peace process.

"President Mubarak represents the aspiration to expand the circle of peace, stability and security to all the region's peoples. I view him as a central partner in achieving these important goals." (Haaretz)

- Al-Qaida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri blasted Arab leaders for having "surrendered" to Israel after their last summit in March, according to a new message posted Monday on Islamist websites.

"Arabs met in Sirte, (Libya), and they only came out with what they call strategic peace choice. What strategic peace choice, when they are sending a message of surrender to

Israel that 'We have given up, so do whatever you like in Palestine,?' asked a voice, purportedly al-Zawahiri, the top deputy to terrorist network chief Osama bin Laden.

Produced by al-Qaida's media arm, al-Sahab production, the piece features an audio statement in Arabic from al-Zawahiri, criticizing the Arab summit where leaders announced their support for the indirect Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Al-Zawahiri accused summit participants of conspiring with the United States and Israeli policies in the region, and he attacked Egypt's steel barrier to Gaza, which he described as "a disgrace to the people of Egypt."

In recent months, Egypt has been criticized for building an underground barrier beneath its border with the Gaza Strip, in a bid to cut the number of smuggling tunnels between Rafah and the Israeli- besieged enclave. (Haaretz)

- Peace of the cowards

Op-ed: Netanyahu, Palestinians ready for deal but more scared of it than ever before

The prime minister is depressed. His spirits are low. He enters the government's conference room angry-faced and comes out even more irate. He has no joie de vivre. He finds an outlet for his distress only among his closest friends.

Netanyahu is torn. He realizes that as prime minister of Israel he has the duty to take advantage of the opportunity and quickly secure a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinians. And he is willing to pay the price. In closed-door sessions ahead of the elections he declared that he is a leader who can bring peace to Israel now.

Researcher Zaki Shalom, of the Institute for National Security Studies, recently wrote that Netanyahu sounds as though he is going above and beyond in order to embark on direct talks with the Palestinians as soon as possible, ahead of a comprehensive agreement. Netanyahu's position is puzzling and enigmatic in Shalom's view and he attributes manipulative intentions to the PM.

Netanyahu is not in the business of manipulation, yet he faces an abyss between his mind and his emotions. From childhood, he absorbed the belief in the Greater Land of

Israel. He smells its intoxicating scent every time he recalls his youth and every time he is among family.

At those junctions, his personality changes and Netanyahu turns into Bibi: The mutation known as “Bibi” is planted deep in his soul. When the divisive, zealous Bibi takes over, the rational, learned Netanyahu, a statesman willing to endorse practical compromises, shrinks and disappears. At 60 years of age, with a split personality and overcome by cognitive dissonance, Netanyahu still suffers frequent Bibi attacks. He’s still scared of the Bibi within him.

In his meeting with US President Barak Obama, Netanyahu showed impressive flexibility. The PM and America’s president reached almost complete agreement on the outline of an Israeli-Palestinian-Arab deal. Obama told his people that Netanyahu positively surprised him: The man seeks peace.

However, this love will not last. On his way back to Jerusalem already, Netanyahu completely changed. He turned from a leader to one being led, from an initiator to an evader, and from a bold statesman to a hesitant functionary. Bibi returned to the homeland.

Palestinian impotence

However, it would be unfair to lay the blame for a failure to reach an agreement on the Netanyahu-Bibi duo alone. The current Palestinian leadership, and especially Mahmoud Abbas and the group of longtime associates around him, insists on avoiding dialogue with Netanyahu because of its own fears.

They are scared of him, because he may offer them a peace plan they cannot refuse without losing the West’s support and cannot accept without losing the Middle East’s support. In the Arab world and on the Arab Street Netanyahu is disqualified, regardless of any agreement he proposes.

The de-legitimization /scare-mongering campaign led by Abbas and his comrades succeeded above and beyond expectations: Now, they are constrained by their own foolish propaganda, waiting for the Arab League to approve a deal – a permit they won’t be receiving.

The Palestinian Authority president evades a meeting with Israel's prime minister not because they have nothing to talk about, but rather, because they do have something to talk about and a target they can reach.

A stone's throw away from realizing its historical desires, the Palestinian national movement is afflicted by severe impotence. It is fatigued and split and has little strength left for positive practical decisions. Hamas weakened its spirit and the economic prosperity quelled its zeal.

So now we have paradoxes: On the one hand, never before had we seen a Palestinian leadership so ready for a comprehensive agreement with Israel. On the other hand, never before had we seen a Palestinian leadership so scared of a deal with Israel. Meanwhile, Netanyahu was never before so ready for a peace agreement with the Palestinians. On the other hand, Netanyahu was never before so scared of a deal.

However, never before were the Jews and Arabs in the Land of Israel so scared of the possibility of a bi-national state.

Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat spoke about peace of the brave, which was not materialized. Now, the only possibility is peace of the cowards. Perhaps this kind of peace will materialize. (Yedioth Ahronoth)

4. EGYPT / MISIR

- Thirty Egyptian opposition figures agreed on Tuesday to make efforts towards mobilizing the masses in support of political change while vowing to avoid contact with the government.

The agreement was reached at a meeting hosted by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) opposition movement at the group's headquarters in South Cairo. MB General Guide Mohamed Badie called for the meeting to provide opposition figures with a forum in which to discuss recent domestic political developments and to coordinate opposition efforts.

Among the opposition figures in attendance were National Association for Change (NAC) General coordinator Hassan Nafaa and Democratic Front Party Chairman Osama el-Ghazali.

At the end of the meeting, Badie read a joint statement endorsed by participants. It stated that the "grave political situation" in Egypt demanded that everyone join forces to achieve democratic and constitutional reform. It also proposed preliminary mechanisms to achieve these objectives, such as avoiding contact with the regime and mobilizing the public behind political reform.

According to the statement, participants agreed to adopt the NAC's stance vis-a-vis upcoming People's Assembly Elections, embodied in the organization's slogan, "Participate together or boycott together."

Attendees also stressed the need for more meetings between the various factions that constitute Egypt's political opposition. The first such gathering, entitled "No elections without guarantees," is scheduled to be held at Wafd Party headquarters on 4 August.

Meeting participants announced their intention to form four committees to study the national constitution, the legal climate, upcoming elections, and the future of governance in Egypt. The committees will also be mandated with studying how to ensure the integrity of future elections.

The statement went on to note that efforts would also be expended on purging opposition factions of "collaborators with the regime."

Wafd Party Political Liaison Ashraf Balbaa stated that his party had not yet decided whether it would participate in upcoming People's Assembly elections, slated for October. He said that the Wafd Party was waiting to see if other opposition parties would participate, but emphasized that the party did not wish to coordinate with the MB in the matter.

However, according to Wafd Party Chairman Sayyid el-Badawi, the Wafd had not been officially represented at the meeting since the MB Supreme Guide had not sent a formal invitation to the party. "Anyone from the Wafd in attendance was there only in a

personal capacity, and any statements supposedly made in the name of the party have no relation to the Wafd,” said el-Badawi.

Nasserist Party General Secretary Ahmed Hassan, for his part, stated that his party had also not been represented at the meeting, since the Nasserist Party had a policy of only coordinating with legal opposition parties. He added that Farouq el-Ashari, who claimed to be the Nasserist representative at the meeting, “did not represent and would never represent” the party. (Al Masry Al Youm)

- A consortium of French companies specialized in the construction and management of nuclear power stations has offered to help Egypt develop its own nuclear program.

The French Areva conglomerate claims to have extensive expertise regarding nuclear fuel cycles, operational procedures and plant safety mechanisms developed during its previous work building and managing French nuclear plants.

The French Cultural Center in Cairo is expected to host a meeting soon between consortium representatives and Egyptian government officials from the Nuclear Power Plants Authority and the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.

An official source noted that Areva has long endeavored to play a role in building Egypt’s first nuclear power plant.

Egypt has recently stepped up efforts to obtain permission from the International Atomic Energy Agency to build its first nuclear power plant. Authorities have announced tentative plans to build the plant in the Dabaa region on Egypt’s North Coast. (Al Masry Al Youm)

5. LEBANON / LÜBNAN

- NOW Lebanon’s correspondent reported on Tuesday that President Michel Sleiman voiced the importance of “the need to keep things calm and away from the media as was agreed upon during the national dialogue sessions.”

This comes after Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah made a fiery statement, calling the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) an Israeli project that aims at targeting the party and inciting sectarian strife in Lebanon.

The statement was harshly criticized by March 14 MPs.

Sleiman met on Tuesday with top figures, including Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun, Future bloc leader MP Fouad Siniora and Loyalty to the Resistance bloc leader MP Mohammad Raad.

Also, the president discussed with Hariri his recent visit to Syria, during which the latter met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. (Now Lebanon)

- Change and Reform bloc leader MP Michel Aoun told the press following his bloc's meeting on Tuesday that he is "afraid the judges in the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) will develop a bad image of Hezbollah [because] when that happens, there will be prejudgments and gaps in the investigation."

"According to my information, the Hezbollah members who were questioned by the STL are reassured and did not feel pressured," he also said.

The STL is probing the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Media reports say the tribunal's indictment will be issued before the end of 2010. There are also reports that Hezbollah members could be named in the indictment.

"[Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan] Nasrallah expresses himself according to his way, and I do so according to my way," Aoun added, referring to the Hezbollah leader's Friday statement that the STL is an Israeli project that aims to incite sectarian strife in Lebanon.

Aoun also rejected reports that he told Nasrallah in a meeting last week to "change the rules of the game in Lebanon," a reference to a Saturday article in As-Safir newspaper.

"I did not tell Nasrallah that [anyone] wants to kill him. This is not the way I speak," the Change and Reform bloc leader also said.

“As-Safir’s comments were only political analysis. I hope the [paper’s] analysis will be wrong,” Aoun added.

He also said that Israel will not wage war against Lebanon if it is not collaborating with someone inside Lebanon. (Now Lebanon)

- Speaker Nabih Berri ruled out on Tuesday the possibility of a war breaking out in Lebanon, NOW Lebanon’s correspondent reported.

“There is nothing to worry about,” Berri said, calling on the cabinet to manage the economic and social needs of the people.

Berri’s statement came while he was taking part of the World Conference of Parliament Speakers, which is held in Geneva between July 19 and 21. (Now Lebanon)

- In a Tuesday interview with NOW Lebanon, Lebanon First bloc MP Okab Sakr described an article published earlier on Tuesday in Al-Akhbar newspaper—saying that an unnamed security source warned the media against publishing reports linking Hezbollah to the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri—as suspicious and dangerous.

The daily said that the source warned those accusing Hezbollah that the accused party members “can kill anyone who intervenes in the matter.”

This comes as the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) is probing Hariri’s murder. Media reports say the tribunal’s indictment will be issued before the end of 2010. There are also reports that Hezbollah members could be named in the indictment.

Sakr said that such statement harms Hezbollah’s image and jeopardizes the freedom of expression in Lebanon.

He also said that he will ask the head of the Media and Telecommunications parliamentary commission, Loyalty to the Resistance bloc MP Hassan Fadlallah, to call for a commission’s meeting and discuss the issue. (Now Lebanon)

- Following its weekly meeting on Tuesday, the Future bloc issued a statement that “all accusations against the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) harm national interests and affect Lebanon negatively.”

The STL is probing the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Media reports say the tribunal’s indictment will be issued before the end of 2010. There are also reports that Hezbollah members could be named in the indictment.

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah accused the STL on Friday of being an Israeli project designed to target the Resistance by stirring up sectarian strife in Lebanon.

The Future bloc also commented on Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s Sunday visit to Damascus, saying that the trip was “an advanced step to enhance Lebanese-Syria relations.”

“Lebanese-Syrian relations should be based on mutual respect of the countries’ independence,” the statement added.

This comes as Hariri made a visit to Damascus on Sunday with a ministerial delegation and signed several bilateral cooperation agreements. (Now Lebanon)

- The command of the German contingent of the United Nations Maritime Taskforce (MTF) was transferred at a handover ceremony on Monday at Beirut port.

Around 200 troops from Germany’s naval UNIFIL operation were present to witness Commander Martin Kubel hand control over to Commander Johannes Schmidt-Thomee, watched by delegations from Lebanese and Germany armies.

Speaking ahead of the ceremony, Major General Wolf-Dietrich Kriesel praised his country’s contribution to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) which has come under domestic as well as international criticism in recent weeks.

“Our high expectations were not disappointed,” he told gathered troops. “I can assure you that this mission is being closely watched both in political and military circles in Germany. Your dedication and professionalism has earned much respect from the hosting nation.”

Germany contributes three vessels to the MTF’s eight-strong fleet, including two nautical minesweepers and a distribution frigate, stationed mainly at the Cypriot port of Larnaca.

Since the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon in August 2006, MTF troops – to which Germany contributes roughly 300 – have been training the naval wing of the Lebanese Army.

“Our main challenge for UNIFIL training of the Lebanese maritime units,” outgoing MTF German commander Martin Kubel told The Daily Star. “Of course there are challenges. Operations are getting better but there are some problems with capacity because many of the Lebanese ships are small.”

Although Lebanon currently operates over 40 military ships, many are of too small a berth to operate in the winter due to adverse weather conditions.

“The fact is that we can train many [naval personnel] to a certain level, but the material is not forthcoming at the moment. It’s important to have larger ships,” Kubel added.

Incoming commander Johannes Schmidt-Thomee said summer cooperation with the MTF was crucial for Lebanon.

“Our main aim is to support Lebanon. I would like to continue with the work we have already done and build on it. We have to focus on the summer months and make sure training is done properly,” he said.

“We can start now but when the winter comes UNIFIL will still be there. [The Lebanese Navy] has to learn to take over responsibilities.”

Another part of UNIFIL’s MTF mandate is to patrol Lebanese territorial waters and prevent the transfer of contraband goods to the mainland, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

“This part of the mission is quite successful,” Kubel said. “No one can enter Lebanese waters without being caught by UNIFIL vessels. We are in contact with the Lebanese Navy and advise them to take a look at certain ships.”

Commander A. Russ, from UNIFIL’s German contingent, said that popularity for the MTF had remained undimmed in the wake of recent attacks on peacekeeping patrols in southern Lebanon.

“One of our main tasks is to tell people what we are doing and find out opinions about UNIFIL,” he told The Daily Star.

“We also counter smuggling into Lebanon. Our force helps train the current members of the Lebanese Navy and give them expertise and make clear that if they want to control their sea they need a functioning navy.” (The Daily Star Lebanon)

6. SYRIA / SURİYE

- Chairman of the Iraqi National List Ayad Allawi met here on Monday the Leader of al-Sadr Movement in Iraq Muqtada al-Sadr.

In a press conference, Allawi described the meeting as important, during which the two sides discussed the Iraqi and regional situations, as well as the importance of getting Iraq out of the current impasse as soon as possible.

Allawi said there is a great deal of meeting points regarding many of the topics discussed, adding that the meeting is one of the positive and successful ones that would serve the Iraqi people and their unity. He added the meeting is part of the meetings with various Iraqi political components.

"We heard from His Eminence that he is willing to unify the ranks and efforts for the Iraqis to move to a state of stability and form a representative and comprehensive government that brings together all the political spectrums, in order to ensure the stability of Iraq and the Iraqi people first, and second for its important consequences on the stability and security of the region as a whole,"he added.

Allawi said the Iraqi List stresses its electoral and constitutional merits, adding, " We are committed to it based on our commitment to the Constitution...We hope such meetings and the ones taking place in Baghdad are final stops in moving Iraq from one state to a new one."

On whether there were specified points agreed upon with al-Sadr, Allawi said there was agreement on the importance of accelerating formation of a Cabinet with a clear platform that brings together all the Iraqi spectrums...One which assumes its responsibilities to get the Iraqis out of the crisis, mainly in the fields of services, security, stability, increasing resources of the Iraqi families and benefiting from Iraq's great resources.

He added that there was an agreement that all political powers in Iraq leave individualism behind and move forward to build an Iraqi government that unifies the Iraqi people.

Allawi indicated that he is due to meet Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Monday in Damascus.

For his part, Al-Sadr described the meeting as positive and fruitful, adding there is a will to end the crisis, assuring that there would be good results in the interest of the Iraqis soon.

"Our brothers in the Iraqi Bloc have a project to serve the Iraqi people and to offer some concessions to end the political crisis in Iraq to reach a solution to the complicated process", he added, expressing hope in a prompt solution and formation of an Iraqi Cabinet.

Al-Sadr voiced support to the endeavors of brotherly and neighboring countries and non-intervention in the Iraqi affairs, adding that the meeting with President Bashar al-Assad was good, and the Syrian government supports the speedy formation of the Iraqi Cabinet without further delay, given the repercussions of delaying it on Iraq and the region.

Al-Sadr said he supports mechanisms and platforms to form the Iraqi Cabinet, expressing readiness to push aside all the disagreements for getting the Iraqi political process underway.

He urged the Iraqi parties to form the Cabinet without delay and offer some concessions in the interest of Iraq.

On the Sadrist Movement's stance regarding any Syrian, Turkish or Iranian role to push towards formation of the Iraqi Cabinet, al-Sadr said, "There is a role for all countries in supporting the political process to preserve the independence and sovereignty of the Iraqi government and territories.

He added he will meet Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Damascus . (Syrian Arab News Agency-SANA)

- Damascus has witnessed Monday intensive political and diplomatic Arab and regional activities.

Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad al-Hariri, met with Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu; the talks during the meeting dealt with regional developments as well as with bilateral relations between Lebanon and Turkey.

The Turkish Minister Davutoglu met with Chairman of the Iraqi National List Ayad Allawi and with the Leader of al-Sadr Movement in Iraq Muqtada al-Sadr.

Talks during Davutoglu's meetings with Allawi and al-Sadr separately touched upon developments in the Iraqi arena and the importance of forming an Iraqi Government to unify the Iraqis and to safeguard Iraq's security, stability and unity. (SANA)

- President Bashar al-Assad received Sunday Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri, in presence of Premier Mohammad Naji Otri, a number of ministers, and Nassri Khouri, the Secretary General of the Higher Syrian-Lebanese Council.

President al-Assad was briefed by Premiers Otri and al-Hariri on what has been accomplished during today's meetings of the Syrian-Lebanese Follow-up and Coordination Commission, and on the agreements signed.

Assertion was laid on the importance of a strong joint will to push forward the prospects of cooperation, particularly in the economic field, and to double trade exchange between Syria and Lebanon in the interest of the brotherly people of both countries.

President al-Assad and al-Hariri underscored the necessity for mechanism of works and executive plans to be set as to change today's signed agreements into practical implementation, and to follow them up, eliminating obstacles which might hinder their implementation.

President al-Assad and al-Hariri also underlined the importance of searching for new horizons for cooperation, continuing the development of joint action mechanisms within the frame of a strategic vision for the achievement of integration between Syria and Lebanon.

Both sides voiced satisfaction over the formation of joint businessmen council, which would contribute to the bolstering of investment exchange between both countries, and create a network of interests between Syria and Lebanon away from politics and its fluctuations.

The meeting was attended by Syria's Ambassador to Beirut and Lebanon's Ambassador to Damascus. (SANA)

- Due to its correct interpretation of shifts in the international arena, Syria managed during the past ten years to benefit from the political winds in the Middle East to overcome complex international conditions and regional challenges, forcing others to respects its vision and acknowledge its main role in solving regional issues.

Syria was in the heart of the storm during the past ten years following the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing war led by the Administration of former US President George W. Bush on Afghanistan, its invasion of Iraq and attempts to redraw the region's maps through the Greater Middle East, particularly after the US occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the threats and pressures leveled by Washington against Syria to force it to change its political stances.

Most countries of the West went along with the White House agenda and began attempting to impose their terms on Syria to stop its support of the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine and to sever relations with Iran, but Syria confronted all these attempts due to its realization that protecting national rights and interests is above all other considerations.

In a statement to SANA, Palestinian researcher Bilal al-Hassan pointed out that Syria acted on the basis of Arab interests first, not on the basis of what pleases the United States, managing the struggle and the dispute professionally by adopting a political tactic based on firm stances and rejection of pressures, all of which relied on President Bashar al-Assad's political wisdom drawn from history's national history and considerable political experience.

The former US Administration increased attempts to impose pressures and dictations on Syria after the invasion of Iraq, with former US Secretary of State Colin Powell relaying a list of demands at the time that included ending support to the resistance and accepting the Israeli terms for peace, but Syria refused all the tempting and threatening offers and managed to change to formula to its advantage.

Egyptian researcher Dr. Mohammad al-Saiid Idris said that Syria's ability to overcome pressures exceeded expectations, noting that the Syrian leadership was aware of the country's central role and how it can disarm the challenges facing it.

Political Science Professor at Cairo University Dr. Hassan Nafia pointed out that Syria confronted massive challenges during this decade, refusing to offer any concessions despite the US attempts to isolate it and change its national behavior and directives.

George W. Bush's administration, along with other Western forces, used neighboring arenas to pressure Syria, with Lebanon being one of the arenas used to harm Syria and the Lebanese national resistance, but the Syrian leadership's strategic vision foiled these attempts.

Dr. Idris noted that UN Resolution 1559 targeted both Syria and the Lebanese resistance, but Syria took the correct step and withdrew from Lebanon, foiling those who relied on a

confrontation in Lebanon, and at the same time allowing Syria to rearrange its position and support the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine.

Lebanese political analysts Suleiman Taqqiddin said that Syria not only managed to disarm the pressures used against it, but also managed to claim recognition of its central role in regional issue, overcoming plots to integrate it into a regional system controlled by the US and Israel and thwarting attempts to shift Lebanon into the Western area of influence to make it an enemy of Syria.

Taqqiddin said all these achievements were made possible by President al-Assad's wise and brave vision based on adhering to national stances and Arab rights and relying on self-strength and confidence in the Syria people.

Dr. Nafia stressed that President al-Assad's political wisdom managed to confront the New Middle East project and the neoconservatives' attacks against Syria, who paid the price for supporting national resistance.

At the same time, Syria was open to neighboring countries and other international arenas, managing in cooperation with forces like Turkey and Iran to redraw the geopolitical map of the Middle East, preventing foreign attempts to turn Iran the enemy instead of Israel.

Dr. Idris said that Syria created a true balance of force in the Middle East through the square formed by Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq, adding that Syria's betting on good relations with Turkey made it an honest mediator in the indirect negotiations with Israel, and that this bet was proven correct after the Israeli attack on Freedom Flotilla, which caused Turkey to emerge as a major regional force that sides with Syrian stances and Arab rights.

Syria's regional movement was accompanied by movement in the international arena due to Syria's commitment to cooperating with emerging countries to change the new world order and make it more balanced and fair.

In this context, President al-Assad moved towards countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Austria, France, China and India, in addition to Latin American countries such as

Brazil which is cooperating with Turkey, Iran, India and South Africa to reform the UN Security Council.

Dr. Idris believes that Syria's efforts to bolster its relations with regional and distant countries aim at confronting the US unipolarity, adding that President al-Assad's visit to South American countries was the beginning of a new Syrian diplomacy based on cooperating with rising powers on the international arena.

Syria's international movement was never at the expense of the Arab nation, as Syria attempted to bring Arab viewpoints closer and manage disagreements among Arab countries, working during its presidency of the Arab Summit in Damascus and during the summits in Qatar and Libya to bolster Arab solidarity and rally support for the besieged Palestinian people in Gaza.

In this regard, Dr. Idris believes that Syria never relinquished its national role or the Arab interests, and instead remained strong in the face of pressures.

In turn, Dr. Nafia believes that President al-Assad achieved balance in relations that enabled Syria along with regional forces and the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance to achieve true success, which prevented the offering of concessions, strengthened the Palestinian cause, and revitalized Syrian-Lebanese relations.

Dr. Idris affirms that Syria's success isn't limited to politics and that despite years of pressures Syria remained strong both politically and economically, stressing that Syrian economy is among the strongest in the Arab nation and the improvement in the Syrians citizens' livelihood level surpasses those of citizens in countries that receives massive US aid.

Syria supports the language of dialogue and mutual respect, works on the basis that the region's countries are capable of resolving their problems, and connects with countries of the world to achieve security and stability in the Middle East through constructive cooperation based on justice, equality and restoring rights to their owners. (SANA)

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

- Chairman of Shoura Council Abdul-Aziz Abdul-Ghani discussed on Tuesday with the Syrian Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al-Abrash the bilateral relations between the two countries in the parliamentary field.

During the meeting, held on the sidelines of the 3rd World Parliament Speakers' Conference in Geneva, they focused on role of the two institutions of the two countries in developing bonds in all aspects.

The talks also shed lights on a number of Arab and international issues of common concern. (Yemen Saba News)

- Minister of Transport Khalid al-Wazir met on Tuesday with the International Maritime Organization (IMO)'s delegation, which is currently visiting Yemen.

Talks in the meeting discussed final actions for opening a regional center for coordination and exchanging information to combat maritime piracy and armed robbery against ships in the western Indian Ocean area and the Gulf of Aden off the Somali coast and its head office in Sana'a.

The two sides agreed on measures for receiving technical equipments of the regional center and specified January, 2011 as the date for opening the center, and that the required equipments for operating the center would arrive in next October.

They also dealt with arrangements for convening the regional meeting of Member States of Djibouti Code of Conduct, to be held in Sana'a during October 25-27, to discuss the approval of the regional center's administrative system as well as the mechanism of cooperation and integration between the regional center and the national centers in the member states, which amount to 11 countries including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, Kenya, Egypt, Somalia, Tanzania, Jordan and Yemen.

Al-Wazir confirmed Yemen's keenness to develop effective and expeditious solutions to solve the problem of maritime piracy in cooperation with the countries of the region and the IMO and the international community, explaining the steps and actions taken by Yemen to implement the obligations of Yemen in the Code of Conduct.

He expressed Yemen's appreciation for the efforts and support of the IMO, European Union and Japan for the regional center, stressing the importance of supporting Yemen's Coastguard Authority in this field.

The IMO's visited the regional center located in the new building of the General Authority for Marine Affairs in Sana'a and got acquainted with measures relating to its equipping in preparation for opening officially at the beginning of 2011. (Yemen Saba News)

- At least 33 people have been killed in four days of clashes between government-backed tribes and so-called Houthi rebels in Yemen, officials have said.

The fighting started after a government-allied tribe attacked a Houthi stronghold in the northern province of Amran, local officials and tribesmen said on Tuesday.

Medical and security officials told the Associated Press that 12 rebels and 21 tribesmen were killed.

The clashes were the deadliest since the government and rebels signed a ceasefire in February to end years of bloody conflict.

According to the rebel group, Yemen's army supports the tribal fighters, but Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president, blamed the clashes on zealous supporters from each side.

The Houthi rebels on Monday stated their support for a recent agreement signed between the country's ruling party and the opposition, aimed at creating a national dialogue between Yemen's political rivals.

The group said that the agreement, sealed between the ruling General People's Congress and a coalition of opposition parties, will pave the way for a "comprehensive dialogue which excludes no one".

It is said to be aimed at finding ways of implementing a February 2009 deal for national dialogue and postponing a parliamentary election until April 2011 to allow time to amend Yemen's constitution.

Qatari support

On Tuesday, the Houthis also voiced support for an offer by Qatar to help consolidate the truce between them and the Sanaa government.

"We welcome Qatar's initiative in promoting sustainable peace and... we have informed Qatar's emir of our welcome," Mohammed Abdul Salam, a spokesman for the Houthis rebels, told AFP news agency.

During a visit to Sanaa last week, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani told reporters his country was ready to help safeguard unity in Yemen, which is racked by tensions in the north and in the south.

"We would be happy to take part in finding a solution that helps the survival of the Yemen unity," he said after talks with Ali Abdullah Saleh.

"We are always with the Yemenis in their problems, unless they refuse that. Until now, they have not refused."

Qatar has been previously involved in the past in talks between the government and Houthi rebels.

Thousands of people have been killed in the conflict which first broke out in 2004, with the last battle ending in a February truce.

There are also tensions in the south where the Southern Movement, a coalition of opposition groups, has a range of demands from economic and social improvements to full independence for the regions of former South Yemen. (Al Jazeera)

8. SOUTH ASIA / GÜNEY ASYA

PAKISTAN / PAKİSTAN

- U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday pledged to deepen cooperation with Pakistan as part of efforts to bring peace to insurgency-hit Afghanistan, which he stressed would not be allowed to become a safe haven for militants to launch attacks against America and its allies. Obama, addressing a White House Conference with British Prime Minister David Cameron, also hailed this week's transit trade agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, saying the step will increase economic opportunity on both sides of the restive border.

The Kabul conference and Pakistan-Afghanistan agreement on economic opportunities will help create conditions needed for progress towards Afghans taking responsibility of their country.

He said the fight against Al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates is “not an easy fight, but a necessary one.”

“An even wider insurgency in Afghanistan would mean an even larger safe haven for Al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates to plan their next attack. We’re not going to let that happen.”

He claimed the United States has the right strategy.

“We’re going to break the Taliban’s momentum. We are going to build Afghan capacity so that Afghans can take responsibility for their future.”

“We are going to deepen regional cooperation with Pakistan,” he added.

The U.S. president called Tuesday’s Kabul conference as “historic, another major step-forward.”

“The Afghan government presented and its international partners unanimously endorsed concrete plans to implement President Karzai’s commitments to improve security, economic growth, governance and delivery of basic services.

“The Afghan government presented its peace and reconciliation plan, which the United States firmly supports. An agreement was reached on a plan in which responsibility for security in Afghan provinces would transition to Afghan security forces.

“In addition, Afghanistan and Pakistan reached an historic agreement to increase economic opportunity for people on both sides of the border,” he noted

“These are all important achievements and they go a long way towards help create the conditions needed for Afghans to assume greater responsibility for their country. Indeed over the coming years, the Aghans will take to lead in security and in July of next year we will begin to transfer some of our forces out of Afghanistan.”

The United States will remain a long-term partner for the security and progress of the Afghan people, Obama said. (Associated Press of Pakistan-APP

- Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Qamar Zaman Kaira on Tuesday said that under the Pak-Afghan transit trade arrangement, only transport of trade goods from Afghanistan would be allowed and that too up to Wagah border only while no Indian goods would be transported to Afghanistan through this route. While addressing a press conference at the Prime Minister Secretariat here, he said that only a Letter of Understanding has been signed for this purpose so far. “Confusion is prevailing from the very first day in this regard and reports, editorials and special reports contrary to the facts and against the interests of the country are being published,” said the minister.

“The Letter of Understanding has been signed for one way transit trade facility for Afghan goods up to Wagah border, and not for reverse trade from India. This would be a bilateral agreement under which Pakistan would allow Afghan goods export to India via Wagah border and Kabul will provide transit facility to Pakistani goods to Central Asians States (CARs),” he said.

Kaira said that it was regrettable that despite the fact that even though the government made it very clear right at the outset that the transit facility would only be for Afghan goods, now on the third day of the news, a section of press has carried editorial comments and special reports on the assumption that Indian trade through Pakistan would be against our interests.

To a question, he said that Pakistan Customs would evaluate the Afghan goods at the Torkham border, seal the containers and issue bank bonds which would only be returned after the goods are handed over to India at Wagah border.

He also made it clear that only a letter of understanding in this regard has been signed till now and an MoU would be signed only after approval of the cabinet after which it would become a bilateral agreement, but it has been decided that no Indian goods would be allowed to be imported from India through this route.

Further elaborating, Kaira said under this arrangement, Pakistan would benefit more because in Afghanistan there is no industrial set up, while our goods being exported to CARs by air cargo or by sea route would become more competitive by transit trade through Afghan land route.

He added that Afghanistan is also using Pakistani seas to export goods to India so it is not a new phenomenon.

To a question, the minister said the federal government has the authority to sign bilateral agreement with any country.

However, he said the government has taken into confidence PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif and other stockholders on the issue.

He said that Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani had talked to the Chief of PML-N and discussed various issues including Pakistan-Afghanistan transit trade and Pak-US strategic dialogue.

He said that he himself and Minister for Commerce Makhdoom Amin Fahim had already clarified the issue and even issued a press release to explain the factual situation but even after that the negative comments continued.

While responding to a query over the reservations of transporters, the minister said that the government would take the transporters into confidence on the issue. He opined that by transit trade through Afghanistan and Pakistani transporters would greatly benefit.

Kaira said that Pakistan also desires to enhance its trade with neighboring India but before that it was necessary to settle outstanding issues including Kashmir. (APP)

INDIA / HINDISTAN

- A global task force, which tracks money laundering and terrorist financing across national borders, has advised India's neighbours including Pakistan to improve legal measures to curb the criminalisation of its financial channels.

India is the latest member of the multi-national Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental organisation founded in 1989 by the G7 (Group of seven industrialised nations) to develop policies to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

"From India's point of view these recommendations by the powerful world financial body to India's neighbours is important as it will ensure a better and criminal free financial hub and network around the burgeoning economic power like us," a senior Revenue department official said.

"In June 2010, Pakistan made a high-level political commitment to work with the FATF and Asia Pacific Group (APG) to address its strategic Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating Financing of Terror (CFT) deficiencies.

"Pakistan has demonstrated progress in improving its AML and CFT regime, including enacting a permanent AML law. However, the FATF has determined that certain strategic AML and CFT deficiencies remain," the FATF said in its recommendations to the Islamic Republic nation.

Pakistan will work on implementing its action plan to address these deficiencies, including demonstrating adequate criminalisation of money laundering and terrorist financing, demonstrating adequate procedures to identify, freeze and confiscate terrorist assets, ensuring a fully operational and effectively functioning Financial Intelligence Unit.

The other measures that Pakistan need to work on, according to FATF, include "demonstrating effective regulation of money service providers, including an appropriate sanctions regime, and increasing the range of Money Laundering and Financing of Terror preventive measures for these services and improving and implementing effective controls for cross-border cash transactions."

India had successfully demonstrated these steps to combat criminalisation of money in it's financial channels during FATF's on-site visit to the country last year following which India became the 34th member of the body last month at Amsterdam.

The FATF has recommended similar measures for Indian neighbours like Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Nepal.

"The FATF encourages Pakistan to address its remaining deficiencies and continue the process of implementing its action plan," the body recommended.

The other prominent countries who have been suggested to work on their action plans include Indonesia, Thailand, Kenya, Morocco, Syria, Ecuador, Greece, Bolivia, Ethiopia and Turkey among others. (Times of India)

AFGHANISTAN / AFGANİSTAN

- Uluslararası Kabil Zirvesi, 70'i aşkın ülke ve kuruluşun katılımıyla bugün başlıyor

Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) ve Afgan hükümetinin birlikte düzenleyeceği Uluslararası Kabil Zirvesi, 70'i aşkın ülke ve kuruluşun katılımıyla yarın gerçekleştirilecek. İran'ı temsil edecek Dışişleri Bakanı Menuçehr Mutteki'nin yanısıra Türkiye'yi Dışişleri Bakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu temsil edecektir.

Öte yandan, ABD Dışışleri Bakanı Hillary Clinton, BM Genel Sekreteri Ban Ki-Moon ve İslam Konferansı Teşkilatı (İKT) Genel Sekreteri Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu da katılıyor.

Konferans için Afganistan'ın başkenti Kabil'e gelen dünya ülkelerin temsilcileri, uluslararası toplumun ülkenin gerçek sahipleri olan Afganlara sorumluluğun kademeli olarak devredilmesine hazır olduğu mesajını verilmesi bekleniyor.

Ayrıca, sürekli barış ve istikrarın sağlanması için ulusal uzlaş programı çerçevesinde şiddetten vazgeçen militanlara 'eve dönüş' yolu açılması ve bu kişilere maddi yardım ve iş imkanları sağlanması için çalışmalar ön görülecektir. (Mehr News Agency)

- Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, has received international backing for plans that would see Afghan forces to take over security across the country in four years.

Karzai outlined the plans at an international conference in Kabul attended by ministers and diplomats from around the world.

"I remain determined that our Afghan national security forces will be responsible for all military and law enforcement operations throughout our country by 2014," Karzai told delegates at the meeting in the Afghan capital.

It was the ninth conference on Afghanistan since the US-led war began there in 2001.

After hearing Karzai's speak, international leaders offered support for the plans he had outlined.

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, described the plan as "comprehensive" and said the conference marked a "turning point," while David Cameron, the British prime minister, said plans for a transition in four years were "realistic".

'Conditions, not calendars'

Ban Ki-Moon, the UN secretary-general who chaired the conference with Karzai, said the final communique reflected the determination of the international community. "Now we must focus all our energies on making this vision a reality," he said.

Meanwhile, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Nato secretary-general, said Nato would not withdraw from Afghanistan until Afghan security forces were able to provide their own security.

"Our mission will end when, only when, the Afghans are able to maintain security on their own," he said.

"Our transition will be based on conditions, not calendars."

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Rasmussen said he would not outline a timeline for when Nato forces might start to withdraw, or which provinces they would exit first.

Delegates had been expected to press Karzai to accelerate and improve the training of the Afghan army and police, to facilitate the withdrawal of thousands of Nato troops serving in the country.

Projects and programmes

Karzai also asked international donors to give his government more control over billions of dollars in aid. More than three-quarters of Afghan aid money is spent by NGOs and other organisations, not by the Afghan government.

The Afghan government wants 50 per cent of aid to be channeled through ministries in the next two years.

Nato secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen talks to Al Jazeera's James Bays

"Delivering our resources through hundreds of isolated projects will not achieve the desired results," Karzai said. "It is time to concentrate our efforts on a limited number of projects and programmes."

Also high on the agenda at the conference was Karzai's plan to offer jobs and cash to Taliban members in exchange for them laying down their weapons.

That plan was endorsed at the last major conference on Afghanistan, held in London in January.

Clinton said the United States has seen "positive steps" from Karzai's outreach to insurgents.

Omar Zakhilwal, the Afghan finance minister, presented a list of "national priority programmes," which will be the focus for international aid efforts. He pledged to create 300,000 new jobs over three years through agricultural programmes; to expand women's access to education; and to create infrastructure to tap into Afghanistan's billions of dollars in mineral wealth.

"We are expecting your full support and alignment," Zakhilwal said.

'Concrete steps'

Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary-general, has called for the Afghan president to unveil "concrete" steps to improve governance and promote national reconciliation.

"We expect President Karzai and his government would come up with a concrete action plan... about the way to enhance good governance, promote further reconciliation and also how he can improve the security situation in his country," Ban told the AFP news agency.

Karzai said the Afghan government currently has enough aid funding for the next three years. And Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, promised a lengthy international commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.

"We have no intention of abandoning our long-term vision," Clinton said. "Too many nations... have suffered too many losses to let this country slide backwards."

Clinton arrived in the Afghan capital late on Monday, following a visit to neighbouring Pakistan. On that leg of the trip, Clinton announced the first part of a \$7.5bn aid package for the country, including funds for energy and water projects. (Al Jazeera)

- Afghanistan and Pakistan have signed a major trade agreement that will allow Afghan lorries carrying goods to India to transit through Pakistan.

The agreement allows Afghan lorries to travel directly to the Indian border post at Wagah, or to Pakistani seaports like Karachi.

Under current law, Afghan drivers must unload their cargo at the border and transfer it to Pakistani lorries.

Pakistani firms, meanwhile, will be allowed to ship goods through Afghanistan to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, its three Central Asian neighbours to the north.

The deal does not allow Indian lorries to deliver goods to Afghanistan, owing to the long-standing conflict between Pakistan and India.

"A major step"

The agreement had been under negotiation for years. Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, and Asif Ali Zardari, his Pakistani counterpart, had once promised that it would be signed by the end of 2009, a deadline they missed.

US officials have conducted several meetings with both sides in recent weeks to encourage them to sign the deal.

Karzai hailed the deal as a "major step" for both countries in a statement released on Monday.

"Karzai congratulated people of both countries on the signing of the agreement, and called it a major step for the regional trade and for the path of its development," the statement said.

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state - currently in Islamabad for high-level meetings - attended the signing ceremony on Sunday night.

"Bringing Islamabad and Kabul together has been a goal of this administration from the beginning," Richard Holbrooke, the US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, said. "This is a vivid demonstration of the two countries coming closer together."

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, and much of its trade depends on neighbouring Pakistan. The long-standing Afghan Transit Trade Agreement already allows Afghan companies to import goods duty-free via Pakistani ports. (Al Jazeera)

**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Sercan Dođan. 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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