



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **If the opportunities arise, we will establish a Kurdish state: Iraq's Kurdistan govt**



A senior Kurdish official said that if the opportunity were to arise, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) would push for an independent Kurdish state.

In an interview with BBC Arabic, the head of the KRG's Department of Foreign Relations, Falah Mustafa, spoke of a Kurdish state, the Syrian crisis and the Kurdish government's role in the war.

Regarding the possibility of an independent Kurdish state, he said: "It's every Kurd's dream, but the current situation makes it difficult. If we get the opportunity then we will establish a Kurdish state".

"But there is a big difference between dream and reality, and the KRG respects the Iraqi constitution and its federal system," Mustafa added.

The Kurdistan Region is a semi autonomous region located in northern Iraq. It consists of three provinces, [www.Ekurd.net](http://www.Ekurd.net) and it has its own government and parliament, as well as its own forces (Peshmerga) and flag.

Mustafa believes the Kurds of Iraq should use their own experience to help in the development of the Kurdish region in Syria. Thousands of Kurdish Syrian refugees have crossed the border into the Kurdistan Region since the start of the conflict.

"In the Kurdistan Region we like to know that everyone can solve their problems through peaceful dialogue. Every part of Kurdistan is unique, but we hope that they will benefit from the Iraqi Kurdish model," said Mustafa.

Regarding claims that KRG forces have been training Syrian Kurds, Mustafa said: "Not a single Kurd from the Kurdistan Region has gone into Syria. The Syrian crisis is no longer an internal issue, and

many countries have intervened, but we are not one of them”.

<http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/artides/misc2013/10/state7409.htm>

- **Local Official: Political Scores from Across Iraq Being Settled in Kirkuk**



ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Political disputes – both local and from across Iraq -- are being violently settled in Kirkuk and adding to insecurity in the multi-ethnic province, complained Rebwar Talabani, deputy-head of its provincial council.

“Regional as well as domestic political affairs have a direct impact on the security situation in Kirkuk,” Talabani told Rudaw. “The groups try to settle their political scores in Kirkuk,” he said.

Over the past 10 years Kirkuk has suffered some of the deadliest attacks by insurgent and radical Islamist groups, who often

target crowded markets and offices of political parties.

Talabani said that Kirkuk’s open borders were a problem, allowing freedom of movement to “terrorist groups.”

In the latest violence, seven people were killed and several injured in an attack on a game center in Tuz Khormatu. The provincial town lies in a swathe of territory that is claimed by both the autonomous Kurdistan Region in the north and the Arab central government in Baghdad.

Kirkuk lies in the heart of Iraq’s disputed territories, claimed by both Erbil and Baghdad. But the Kurds, with 26 seats in the provincial council, also occupy the main security and police positions.

Talabani said that, even though Kirkuk is under Baghdad’s jurisdiction, it has not received much support from the central government on improving security.

“The government sometimes does not support us,” he said. “The interior ministry, which is responsible for security, does not have any good security plans,” he added, complaining that local

authorities themselves are left the task of drawing up a security strategy. “Now each province has to make its own security plans.”

Talabani said that a 3.5 billion Iraqi dinar project to dig a security trench around the city of Kirkuk, to reduce violence in the provincial capital, will mainly focus on areas connecting it with places like Tikrit and Hawija.

Kirkuk is within close proximity of Iraq’s predominantly Arab Sunni areas, which have been hotbeds of insurgent groups such as Ansar al-Sunnah and other al-Qaeda affiliates.

<http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/201020131>

- **Kurdistan-Indonesia Relations to Improve**



A delegate from the Kurdistan Regional Government has visited Indonesia.

The main aim of the visit of the Kurdish delegate was to participate in the yearly Indonesian Business exhibition, which took place today October 20, 2013.

A source from the delegate has informed PUKmedia that besides of participating in the exhibition, the delegate will hold meetings with government officials and heads of investment companies in the country.

The delegate will encourage investment companies to participate in investment in the Kurdistan Region, and this will enhance the political and economic ties between both Kurdistan and Indonesia.

It is noteworthy that now Kurdistan Region is the center of investment for many foreign companies, and this has developed political and economic relations between the Kurdistan Region and other countries.

[http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN\\_Direje.aspx?Jimare=15417](http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=15417)

- **Yokhana: US to benefit from implementing Strategic Pact with Iraq**

Baghdad (IraqiNews.com) MP, Emad Yokhana, of al-Rafideen bloc stated that the United States of America to benefit from implementing the Strategic Pact with Iraq.

In a statement received by Iraqi News (IraqiNews.com) “The US to benefit from implementing the Strategic Pact with Iraq due to the role of Iraq in the region that could contribute in settling the regional crises,” noting that “Many countries such as Iran, want to develop their relations with the USA.”

He stressed the necessity of “Implementing the Strategic Pact between the two sides and to develop the intelligence system to sustain security.”

<http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/yokhana-us-to-benefit-from-implementing-strategic-pact-with-iraq/#axzz2iLLE XgFi>

- **Iraqi Kurdistan should contain Kurdish PJAK rebels: Iranian lawmaker**



TEHRAN,— A senior Iranian lawmaker has called on the Iraqi Kurdistan officials to increase their effort in fighting the Iranian Kurdish Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) and securing the area, Iranian Presstv reported.

Hojatollah Soori, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Iran’s Majlis, said on Saturday, “They must find a solution to provide security for this area as soon as possible,”

Soori said Iraqi Kurdistan’s inability to control and contain PJAK has allowed the group to continue their activities in Iran.

The PJAK is one of the most active militant Kurdish nationalist group and based in the remote border area between Iraq's Kurdistan and Iran's Kurdistan that has been carrying out attacks on Iranian forces in the Kurdistan Province of Iran (Eastern Kurdistan).

PJAK is a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (Koma Civaken Kurdistan or KCK), which is an alliance of Kurdish groups and divisions led by an elected Executive Council.

Led by Haji Ahmadi (Rehman Haci Ehmedi), the PJAK's objective is to establish a semi-autonomous regional entities or Kurdish federal states in Iran, [www.ekurd.net](http://www.ekurd.net) Turkey and Syria similar to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq.

Since 2004 the PJAK took up arms for self-rule in Iraq's Kurdistan. Half the members of PJAK are women. The PJAK has about 3,000 armed militiamen.

Members of the PJAK group regularly engage in armed clashes with Iranian security forces along the country's western borders with Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

The Iranian lawmaker added that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), however, has fortunately been successful in fighting the rebel group over the past few years.

ISNA reported on October 11 that five members of the IRGC were killed in Banah city in Iranian Kurdistan and two other were injured in a clash with PJAK forces near the country's western borders.

Referring to the presence of PJAK ringleader Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi in Germany, Soori said the "Terrorist" cell is able to regroup once and again despite receiving blows from the IRGC due to the support of Western countries.

Estimate to over 12 million Kurds live in Iranian Kurdistan.

<http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/artides/misc2013/10/irankurd980.htm>

- **63 Bahraini pilgrims in hotel blaze**



Bahraini pilgrims narrowly escaped death after fire broke out in their hotel in Karbala, Iraq.



Several suffered hand and leg injuries as they smashed windows in their rooms and communal corridors in the panic to escape.

Iraqi firemen rushed to the scene and helped evacuate guests and prevented the fire from spreading.

It happened on Friday evening.

Bahrain's Ambassador to Iraq Salah Al Maliki yesterday confirmed all the Bahrainis involved were safe.

"There were 63 Bahrainis, including families, staying at the hotel which caught fire because of a short-circuit, based on the information we have gathered," he told the GDN from Baghdad.

"Some citizens were injured but they are in a good condition and we have arranged for their travel."

Mr Maliki said the embassy had issued a dozen emergency exit documents for the Bahrainis, whose passports were destroyed in the fire.

He said the belongings of some Bahrainis were damaged in the fire but the embassy was helping them to continue with their planned journeys.

"The 63 pilgrims are on their way to Najaf, while the others are travelling by land to Kuwait and will then return to Bahrain," the envoy added.

Officials from the travel agent Hamlat Leewa Al Abbas that organised the trip could not be reached for comment.

Karbala is a popular destination for Bahraini pilgrims who travel to the city year-round to honour Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed.

The GDN reported last month that Bahraini pilgrims visiting Iraq were taking huge risks by travelling there amid a rising tide of violence.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) consulting senior fellow for the Middle East Dr Toby Dodge said a surge in violence posed a major threat to hundreds of Bahraini Shi'ites, who visit religious shrines in Iraqi cities.

More than 4,000 people have been killed during the last five months, according to UN reports.

The Foreign Ministry set up hotlines to assist pilgrims travelling to Iraq in June and urged them to "exercise caution" and comply with safety guidelines issued by Iraqi authorities. Bahrainis were urged to avoid crowded areas and popular markets, particularly in the capital Baghdad, as well as stay vigilant when travelling from one governorate to another.

<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=363290>

- **Attacks across Iraq Kill 45**

BAGHDAD— a suicide bomber slammed his explosive-laden car Sunday night into a busy cafe in Iraq's capital, part of a day of violence across the country that killed 45 people, authorities said.

The bombing at the cafe in Baghdad's primarily Shiite Amil neighborhood happened as it was full of customers. The cafe and a nearby juice shop is a favorite hang out in the neighborhood for young

people, who filled the area at the time of the explosions.

The attack killed 35 people and injured 45 others, Iraqi officials said.

Violence has been on the rise in Iraq following a deadly crackdown by security forces on a Sunni protest camp in the northern town of Hawijah in April. At least 385 have died in attacks in Iraq so far this month, according to an Associated Press count.

In a village north of Baghdad, a car bomb targeted a police officer's house, killing his father, brother and five nephews, officials said. Six others were wounded in the blast, which happened when the officer wasn't home.

Security forces meanwhile foiled an attack on the local council of the western town of Rawah by five would-be suicide bombers disguised in police uniforms, said Muthana Ismail, head of the local security committee.

Mr. Ismail said two attackers were shot while the rest blew themselves up outside. Two police officers and an official

were killed, while 20 people were wounded, he said.

Rawah is about 200 miles northwest of Baghdad.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Sunday's attacks, though car bombings and gun assaults are favorite tactics of al Qaeda's local branch. It frequently targets Shiites, whom it considers heretics, and those seen as closely allied to the Shiite-led government in Baghdad.

Hospital officials confirmed the casualty figures for all attacks. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to journalists.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/artides/SB10001424052702304402104579147713153254366>

- **26 killed, 45 wounded in bombing attacks in Iraq's capital**

BAGHDAD, Oct. 20- At least 26 people were killed and 45 others wounded in three bombing attacks in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on Sunday, police said.

A suicide bomber detonated his vest of explosives in a popular cafe in the Amil area in southwestern Baghdad, killing at least 24 people and wounding 36 others, a police source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

Two people were killed and four others wounded when a roadside bomb struck a civilian car travelling on the highway near the Amiriyah area in western Baghdad, the police source said.

Five people were injured when another roadside bomb exploded in the Ghazaliya area in western Baghdad, he added.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attacks, but the al-Qaida front in Iraq, in most cases, was responsible for such massive attacks, raising fears that the terrorist group and other militiamen could return to widespread violence, particularly as Iraq is trying to fend off the spillover of the escalating violence in neighboring Syria.

Iraq is witnessing its worst eruption of violence in recent years. According to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, almost 6,000 Iraqis were killed and over 14,000

others injured from January to September this year.

<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/>

- **Gunmen assassinate a mosque's Imam in Baghdad**

Unidentified gunmen assassinated on Sunday 20, Oct a mosque's Imam south of Baghdad.

A police source told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / the gunmen opened fire today on the Rahman Mosque's Imam in Abu Disher area, killing him on the spot and then fled.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GKIGFE](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GKIGFE)

- **Joint Operations: Four suicide bombers wearing police uniforms killed western Anbar**



Joint Operations Command announced on Sunday , the death of three suicide bombers wearing police uniforms as they tried to storm the police station and local council building in Rawa district western Anbar province.

“The security forces managed to kill three suicide bombers who tried to storm the police department in Rawa district and the building of the local council western Anbar province , while a fourth suicide bomber blew himself in front of the local council of the district ,” According to a statement issued by the leadership received by “Shafaq News”.

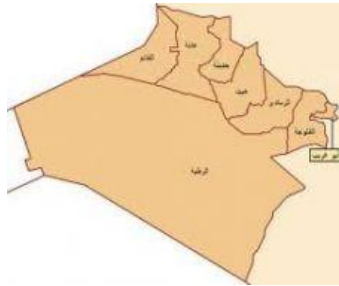
“The security forces killed two suicide bombers tried to attack the police department of Rawa district, as the incident resulted in the injury of a police officer”.

“The suicide bomber was killed while the other blew himself up in front of the local council of Rawa district , the operation resulted in the death of three people and injury of seven others ,” adding that “all the suicide bombers were dressed in police uniforms ,” the statement added.

Anbar province in western Iraq has witnessed over the past years attacks by car bombs, roadside bombs and silencer weapons against the forces of the army and police, local officials and civilians, as security forces were unable to control the situation despite the operations carried out against armed groups.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/security/7630--joint-operations-four-suicide-bombers-wearing-police-uniforms-killed-western-anbar.html>

- **Armed clashes erupted between gunmen, security forces in Shurqat**



Armed clashes erupted between security forces and gunmen in Shurqat district within Salah-il-Din province.

Security source reported to AIN "The gunmen attacked headquarter of Shurqat Emergency Station," noting that "The

police headquarter suffered shelling by mortar shells but they did not explode."

"The Explosive Ordinance Disposal Experts Unit dismantled the mortar shells and lifted it without any human casualties or material damages," the source concluded.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43101:armed-clashes-between-gunmen-police-elements-in-fallujah&catid=36:security&Itemid=37](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43101:armed-clashes-between-gunmen-police-elements-in-fallujah&catid=36:security&Itemid=37)

- **Curfew imposed in Rawa again**

The Jazira Operations Command imposed a new curfew in Rawa district of western Anbar province as a precautionary step of more terrorist attacks in the district.

Security source reported to AIN on Sunday "The curfew is imposed on Sunday noon till another announcement," noting that "The curfew includes movement of persons and vehicles."

Five suicide bombers have detonated their explosives inside the police department and the municipal council of Rawa district of Southern Anbar province.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43061:curfew-imposed-in-rawa-again-&catid=36:security&Itemid=37](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43061:curfew-imposed-in-rawa-again-&catid=36:security&Itemid=37)

- **Fiscal privileges cancelled in Basra law as Iraq's economic capital**



The parliamentary economy and investment committee revealed on Sunday, that the amendments introduced on Basra Law, Iraq's economic capital has deprived it from financial privileges to ensure passing it in the parliament and not to be appealed by the government.

Basra is Iraq's second largest city, located in the far south of Iraq on the west bank of Shatt al- Arab as it is the waterway that consists of the confluence of Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Qurna.

Basra is considered Iraq's only port and its main sea exit, it is also rich in with oil fields, including Rumaila , Shayba, West Qurna , Majnon , Nahran Amr fields.

The member of the Committee , Qusay Jumaa told "Shafaq News" that " The parliament has received earlier a letter from the Council of Ministers that include in its content to wait from the enactment of Basra law, Iraq's economic capital because of the financial consequences in the law".

"The Committee has worked to modify many of the paragraphs to make it free of financial privileges and focus on the legitimacy of Basra to demand for legal legislations that would ensure the recovery of the economic reality after obtaining the approval from the government."

Jumaa, the member of al- Iraqiya list of Basra province added that his list will vote in favor of the law , in addition to State of Law coalition and Kurdistan Alliance and we will ensure that the law won't be appealed by the government after the lifting all paragraphs related to financial consequences ".

Basra law, Iraq's economic capital has been submitted in the previous parliamentary session but did not receive a political consensus to pass it.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/business/7628-fiscal-privileges-canceled-in-basra-law-as-iraqs-economic-capital.html>

- **CBI Sunday auction session of USD sales exceeded \$ 153 million**

The Central Bank of Iraq announced that the US dollar sales of Sunday auction session exceeded \$ (153) millions.

The CBI reported in statement received by AIN "During the auction session of Sunday, the CBI sold USD (153,244,000) at a price of (1166) with the participation of (17) banks."

"The price of the US Dollar cash sales reached (1179) including the commission deducted by the CBI while the price of bank transfers reached (1171)," the statement added.

"The CBI will continue selling USD in return to (1166) Iraqi dinar along with same commission," the statement concluded.

Statistics prepared by AIN regarding the USD sales of the CBI revealed selling USD

(5,275,645,000) during September which is an increase comparing to USD sales during August where it reached (4,563,000,751).

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43068:cbi-sunday-auction-session-of-usd-sales-exceeds-153-million&catid=37:economy&Itemid=41](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43068:cbi-sunday-auction-session-of-usd-sales-exceeds-153-million&catid=37:economy&Itemid=41)

- **[Japan] trade, energy firms increase activity in Iraq**

October 21, 2013- The Yomiuri Shimbun Japanese trading companies and energy-related businesses are reinforcing business activities in Iraq 10 years after the end of the Iraq War.

Because progress has been made in reconstruction work, the Iraqi consumer market is expanding and demand for improvement in infrastructure is growing.

In late September, Sumitomo Corp., a leading trading company, gained a 45 percent stake in a major Iraqi car dealer company through the injection of ¥300 million in capital.

Sumitomo officials said it was the first investment by a Japanese company in a private company in Iraq since the end of the war in 2003.

The company plans to open seven business bases in Iraq by 2014 to sell Japanese cars, such as Toyota Motor Corp.'s Corolla.

In 1966, Sumitomo opened an office in Baghdad and sold mainly Toyota cars. The company withdrew from the country in 1991 due to the Gulf War and resumed business in 2009.

New car sales in Iraq are estimated to be from 120,000 to 150,000 units annually.

The Japanese companies' market share is 20 percent to 30 percent. Sumitomo, which has demonstrated high levels of maintenance and repair services, aims to sell 20,000 units in 2014 and 100,000 units in 10 years' time.

Japan Petroleum Exploration Co., a major resources development company, started production of crude oil in the Garraf oil field in southern Iraq in late August, the first time a Japanese company has begun commercial production of crude oil in Iraq

since the Iraq War. JAPEX officials said it is possible that crude oil from Iraq will be exported to Japan from 2014.

The reentry of Japanese companies into the country is due to the expectation that the Iraqi economy will grow rapidly, partly because of increasing demand for reconstruction.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the country's economic growth between 2014 and 2018 is expected to be 6 percent to more than 9 percent annually.

In November last year, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) opened booths for Japanese companies in an international business fair in Baghdad for the first time in 23 years.

For this year's business fair, JETRO secured space six times larger than the space used last year to promote Japanese companies.

Turkey and South Korea have also expanded business activities in Iraq since around 2007; in the apparent belief social security conditions in the country had begun improving.



An official of a major Japanese trading company said, “Even in city centers that are said to be relatively safe, we always provide guards for our employees.”

Thus it is uncertain whether Japanese companies will be able to make up for lost time while also ensuring the safety of their workers.

<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000735202>

- **Kurdish director chosen as head of jury at film festival in Morocco**



The management of “Waha Cinema ” Festival which will be held in Kingdom of Morocco, has chosen the Kurdish filmmaker , Nawzad Shikhani , as the head of the jury of the official competition.

The festival is scheduled to be held in the Moroccan city of Tata in the period between October 29 till the second of

next November under the slogan " by the language of cinema Sahara is Moroccan” according to local Moroccan news briefed by "Shafaq News”.

"The festival management attributed the reason for choosing the Iraqi Kurdish filmmaker to “his privileged position of Shikhani in the film scene, professional competence and integrity and his ability to distinguish between businesses and choose the best to win prizes," the news agency added.

It is hoped for the film festival to witness film participation from each of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, as well as the organizing country.

This event will also witness technical organizing of a national contest to award Miss Henna by technical standards especially the practices for the seventh art.

The festival will conclude with diverse artistic ceremony and various awards in the ceremony competitions, and honor the Moroccan artist; Latifa Ahrar in

recognition for what she has gave to art throughout her career

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/community/7629--kurdish-director-chosen-as-head-of-jury-at-film-festival-in-morocco.html>

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43106:muhamadi-expects-adopting-former-elections-law&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43106:muhamadi-expects-adopting-former-elections-law&catid=42:2011-11-19-15-21-51)

- **Muhamadi expects adopting former elections law**



Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Waleed al-Muhamadi, of the Iraqiya Slate expected adopting the former elections law, ruling out conducting the vote on the new elections law draft during the next session.

He stated to AIN "Two articles within the former elections law will be amended as requested by the Federal Court."

He wished "The parliament to settle the disputes over this law during its next session."

## 2. SYRIA

- **Peace envoy pushes for Syria talks as bomb strikes Damascus**



UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi on Sunday kept up his regional push for peace talks on Syria, where a suicide car bombing and assault on a key Damascus checkpoint killed 16 Syrian soldiers.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a suicide bomber from the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front detonated an explosives-packed car at the checkpoint between Jaramana and rebel-held Mleha.

Fighting raged for much of Saturday, with rebel mortar fire hitting Jaramana and regime aircraft striking back, according to the Britain-based Observatory, which relies on activists and medics on the ground.

At least 16 soldiers and 15 rebels were killed, it said.

One resident said the fighting was “unprecedented” since Syria’s conflict erupted in March 2011, telling AFP by telephone: “It is very violent. We can hear automatic weapons fire, mortar rounds, bombardments.”

The conflict, which erupted after President Bashar Al Assad launched a bloody crackdown on Arab Spring-inspired democracy protests, is believed to have killed more than 115,000 people.

Millions more have been forced to flee the country and hundreds of thousands are trapped by the fighting.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos on Saturday called for a ceasefire in the Damascus suburb of Moadamiyet al-Sham, where thousands of people were evacuated last week and where she said

“the same number or more remain trapped.”

The founder of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, living in exile in Britain, said it published the grim toll of the civil war to draw the world’s attention to the “endless bloodbath”.

“Our objective is to release the truth about what is happening in Syria. We document, we verify and we report,” said Rami Abdel Rahman, adding: “Our only agenda is defending human rights and reaching a democratic state.”

In another sign of Syria’s growing misery, the World Health Organisation said it had detected two possible cases of polio in the eastern Deir Ezzor province which, if confirmed, would be the country’s first known cases since 1999.

Meanwhile, nine Lebanese pilgrims seized by Syrian rebels 17 months ago and two Turkish Airlines pilots kidnapped in Beirut in August arrived back home late Saturday under an exchange deal mediated by Turkey and Qatar.

And at the United Nations Arab ambassadors called on Saudi Arabia to

rethink its decision to reject a seat on the Security Council in protest over its handling of the Syrian conflict.

But prospects for a peace conference remain dim, with Syria's opposition divided and due to vote next week on whether to take part, and Assad's government insisting he will not bow to the rebels' chief demand and step down.

The push for the Geneva talks will also be high on the agenda of US Secretary of State John Kerry, who heads to Europe to attend a 'Friends of Syria' meeting in Britain on Tuesday.

The renewed push for peace talks comes after Damascus accepted in September a US-Russian deal to hand over its chemical arsenal for destruction.

But the political opposition remains divided amid recent clashes between mainstream fighters, as well as growing rifts between rebels fighting on the ground and the external opposition.

The main National Coalition opposition bloc said members will decide next week whether to attend the Geneva talks, while the Syrian National Council, a coalition

member, has threatened to quit if they do.

The nine Lebanese pilgrims, who were kidnapped by Syrian rebels last year as they were returning from visiting holy sites in Iran, were welcomed home in Beirut late Saturday.

The Turkish pilots, seized in Lebanon to push Turkey to put pressure on the Syrian rebels it supports to release the pilgrims, were freed and returned to Istanbul.

Syrian rebels also had demanded the release of some 200 prisoners from Syrian jails in exchange for freeing the pilgrims. It was not immediately clear if those releases went ahead.

[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?section=middleeast&file=data/middleeast/2013/October/middleeast\\_October200.xml](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?section=middleeast&file=data/middleeast/2013/October/middleeast_October200.xml)

- **Syria crisis: Damascus blast by rebels 'kills 16 soldiers'**



Syrian rebels assaulted a checkpoint in a pro-government suburb of Damascus on Saturday, setting off a suicide vehicle bomb that killed 16 soldiers, activists said.

The violence came a day after nine Shi'ite pilgrims from Lebanon kidnapped in Syria last year were freed as part of a negotiated hostage deal that could see two Turkish pilots held by Lebanese militants and dozens of Syrian women held in Syrian government jails released.

Lebanese Interior Minister Marwan Charbel said that the Syrian opposition had demanded that the female detainees be taken to Turkey. He said once that that issue was resolved then the complicated, multilateral exchange would be complete.

"We are speaking with the Syrians about this issue and, God willing, when this logistical matter ends the whole process will end," Charbel told the Al-Manar TV channel of Lebanon's Hezbollah group.

While details about the deal remained murky, it appeared to represent one of

the more ambitious negotiated settlements to come out of Syria's civil war, now in its third year, where the contenting sides remain largely opposed to any bartered peace.

The pilgrims, who according to Charbel crossed into Turkey late on Friday, were part of a group of 11 hostages taken by a rebel faction in northern Syria in May 2012. Two were later released, but the nine had been held since, causing friction in the region and sparking the August kidnapping in Beirut that saw two Turkish Airlines pilots abducted.

The two Turkish Airlines pilots, previously identified as Murat Akpınar and Murat Ağca, were kidnapped after flying into Beirut from Istanbul on 9 August. Lebanon's state news agency reported that a group called Zuwaar al-Imam Rida, a name implying a Shiite affiliation, claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. The group said the pilots "will only be released when the Lebanese hostages in Syria return," referring to the Shiite pilgrims.

The pilgrims were kidnapped while on their way from Iran to Lebanon through Turkey and Syria. Militants kidnapped

them shortly after they crossed the Turkish border into Syria.

Meanwhile, outside Damascus, rebels led by the al-Qa'ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra or Nusra Front set off the bomb while assaulting a checkpoint near the town of Mleiha adjoining the suburb of Jaramana, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. It reported heavy fighting after the blast.

The state news agency SANA confirmed the suicide blast in Jaramana and said it wounded 15 people, most of them seriously.

Rebels control much of the countryside around Damascus but Jaramana, a Christian and Druse area, is mostly loyal to President Bashar Assad. Opposition fighters have previously targeted it with bombings and mortar rounds.

Assad has drawn support from Syria's ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians and members of his Alawite sect. The rebels are dominated by Syria's Sunni Muslim majority.

At least 100,000 Syrians have been killed in the civil war.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-damascus-blast-by-rebels-kills-16-soldiers-8891241.html>

- **Bashar Al-Jaafari: “Syria pioneer in enabling woman in Arab and Islamic countries ~ A woman in Syria assumed the vice-president post, while in some countries she is prevented from driving the car”**



Syria's Permanent Representative to the UN, Bashar al-Jaafari, stressed that Syria is one of the pioneering countries in the Arab and Islamic worlds in ensuring all requirements for enabling women and improving their situation.

“The crisis in Syria has exuded odd and inhuman phenomena which contradict with the Syrian people's values and the international charters”, al-Jaafari said in a speech at the UN Security Council's

session on the “Women, Rule of Law and Transitional Justice” on Friday.

He added that the woman in Syria assumed the vice-president post, while in some countries she is prevented from driving the car.

Al-Jaafari asserted that those countries will spare no effort through offering money and racial ignition to undermine the socio-economic, security and legislative progress in Syria for subjugating its independent national political decision.

“One of the dangerous fatwa against women in Syria was the “jihad by marriage” which was issued by some idiots who were supported, financed and backed by some gulf countries, mainly Qatar and the Saudi Arabia”, Al-Jaafari said.

He added “this fatwa is considered as an insult for the Arabs and Islam as it urges the Muslim women to practice prostitution in the name of religion”.

The Syrian representative to the UN stressed that Syria’s delegation sent a detailed report to the UN Secretary-General on that fatwawhere the report

was issued as a formal document by the UN, calling all those who are concerned in human rights to get acquainted with it.

He pointed out that the Syrian authorities, due to its keenness on punishing those who committed these crimes, is documenting these dangerous violations, arresting them and held them accountable before the Syrian national law.

Al-Jaafari expressed Syria’s deep concern over the deterioration of the security situation in the camps which host the displaced Syrians in the neighboring countries, indicating that the Syrian women and girls are suffering highest levels of insecurity as well as they are exposed to violations against humanity like rape and illegal marriage.

He asserted that all those violations were proved and documented in the UN, international and the Western media reports.

“Those who are deliberately tampering with the tragedy of the displaced Syrians aim at harming the image of Syria and the Syrians”, al-Jaafari said, asserting that Syria informed the UN competent authorities, particularly the UN Security

Council and the General Assembly, about these facts through sending a big number of reports and formal letters.

He expressed regret over the UN weakness towards this issue despite the pivotal role it can play for achieving justice and putting an end to those ugly unethical phenomena.

<http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2013/10/20/bashar-al-jaafari-syria-pioneer-in-enabling-woman-in-arab-and-islamic-countries-a-woman-in-syria-assumed-the-vice-president-post-while-in-some-countries-she-is-prevented-from-driving-the-car/>

- **37 civilians martyred, dozens injured in Hama terrorist suicide bombing**



Thirty civilians were martyred as dozens were injured when a suicide terrorist

blew up a truck near the Agricultural Mechanization Company at the outskirts of the central province of Hama.

An official source said that a suicide terrorist bomber blew himself up in a truck loaded with 1.5 tons of explosives at the eastern entrance of Hama towards al-Salamiyeh area, martyring thirty citizens and injuring dozens.

The number of martyrs is likely to rise due to the critical cases among many injured people, according to the source.

The terrorist bombing took place amidst heavy traffic when a truck filled with gas cylinders for domestic use was passing by, which led to their burst, in addition to causing heavy material losses to more than 32 cars and residential and trade buildings in the area, the source added.

<http://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2013/10/20/37-civilians-martyred-dozens-injured-in-hama-terrorist-suicide-bombing/>



- **230 AlQaeda Militants Eliminated in Qalamon in One Shot**



When the Obama regime sends millions of US dollars worth advanced drones to kill a US citizen across the planet without trial the mainstream media & western people praises him, when the SAA kills tens of foreign radical Al-Qaeda Wahhabi Cannibal Sex Jihadists inside Syria, this never get noticed.

That what happened when Obama killed Anwar Awlaki and his young child, and this what happened when the Syrian Arab Army killed at least 230 terrorists from Nusra Front, the Levant version of Alqaeda, in an ambush near Nabk city north of Damascus last week.

After the preemptive military operation carried out by the SAA in Eastern Ghouta, Damascus countryside on 19 August 2013, just 2 days before the

'chemical craze', the operation which secured the failure of the 'liberation of Damascus' from its people and ended with killing more than 4,500 terrorists out of the total of 6,500 highly trained by CIA suicide freedom fighters, after this preemptive operation and after the realization of the Obama regime and their stooges that there won't be any military strike against Syria to aid the leftover terrorists in the countryside, herds of the terrorists flocked to the Qalamon area in strongholds fortified by the rough mountainous area and linked with the Lebanese concentrations of Al-Qaeda, namely Aarsal on the other side of the mountains.

Syrian Armed Forces which left a corridor as usual for terrorists to escape hoping some of them might change their mind and drop their quest for 72 virgins, kept a watchful eye on the terrorists fleeing, and followed their footsteps. The noose was tightened on the terrorists in Qalamon and squeezed on them in Yabroud, one of the cities known for its thriving smuggling business between Syria and Lebanon, and one of the first towns to aid the terrorists against the Syrian state. A very active SAA checkpoint is set on the Damascus-Homs international highway near the town of Nabk, and on a certain day with a firm plan, the checkpoint was moved, a large

group of terrorists not less than 300 took the bait and tried to cross the road near Taybah restaurant.

Trying to stay low, the highly trained AlQaeda militants hid in a semi-natural trench awaiting the right time to cross into Nabk city on the other side of the road just to meet their end of their filthy life at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army men. Not less than 230 Wahhabi Jihadists were eliminated immediately, some put the figure at 250, and the rest were crippled, literally.

Western mainstream media might have included the killed terrorists in the toll of 'civilians killed by the regime' they keep a record of, I'm not sure whether they did count them, but our sources confirm the operation and crossed with sources from locals, the blow was so severe that the terrorists leftovers are trying to flee Yabroud to the outskirts of Dayr Attiyeh near the hills in groups of 2 or 3 maximum to evade their inevitable death.

SAA, the Syrian Arab Army definitely deserves a world's prize more worthy than the Nobel Peace Prize for its hard work in cleaning our planet from its ever

filthiest threat against humanity, civilization and future, and ending the presence of such filth in the tens of thousands not in individuals like the operations carried out by the world's biggest armies.

<http://www.syrianews.cc/230-alqaeda-militants-eliminated-in-qalamon/>

- **Syria peace talks: Maybe yes, maybe not**

Peace talks could be held November 23, but not without 'credible opposition' participation, top diplomats say.



DAMASCUS - Syrian peace talks could be held November 23, but not without "credible opposition" participation, top diplomats said Sunday, as a truck bomb in central Syria killed more than 30 people.

After a meeting with UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, the point man for international efforts to end Syria's nearly three-year civil war, Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi said the so-called Geneva 2 talks would be held November 23.

But Brahimi, speaking to reporters in Cairo, cautioned that the meeting would not be convened without a "credible opposition representing an important segment of the Syrian people" opposed to President Bashar al-Assad.

A truck bomb meanwhile struck in the government-controlled city of Hama, killing at least 31 people, the day after a major assault involving a suicide car bomb killed 16 soldiers in a key Damascus suburb and kicked off several hours of fierce clashes.

The mixed messages about the so-called Geneva meeting reflected concerns that the increasingly divided opposition would refuse to take part in talks with Assad's regime, which insists his resignation is not on the table.

The renewed push for peace talks comes after a rare US-Russian accord compelled Syria to agree to destroy its chemical arsenal this month, but much of the opposition panned the deal because it averted punitive US strikes on the regime.

The main National Coalition opposition bloc said members will decide in the coming days whether to attend the Geneva talks, while the Syrian National Council, a key coalition member, has threatened to quit if they do.

The rift among the exiled opposition comes amid a surge in fighting among rebels on the ground, with the mainstream Free Syrian Army (FSA) clashing with the Al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

US Secretary of State John Kerry will head to Britain to attend a "Friends of Syria" meeting on Tuesday in which Western and Arab governments are expected to press the opposition to come together and attend the talks.

But even if the National Coalition attends the Geneva meeting, it is unclear whether it can enforce any agreement on the ground, after 13 prominent rebel brigades rejected the umbrella group last month.

Rebels on Sunday carried out a second major suicide bombing in as many days, this time in the Orontes Valley city of Hama, the site of a 1982 massacre of some 10,000 to 40,000 people ordered by president Hafez al-Assad during a crackdown on an earlier revolt.

"At least 31 people, including regime troops, were killed when a man detonated a truck laden with explosives at a checkpoint near an agricultural vehicles company on the road linking Hama to Salamiyeh," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The number of victims is expected to rise, "as there are dozens of wounded, some of them in critical condition," added the Britain-based group, which relies on a network of activists and medics across the war-torn country.

The attack came a day after rebels from the Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda-linked group, set off a car bomb and launched a major assault on a checkpoint near the mixed Christian-Druze neighbourhood of Jaramana in Damascus.

Fighting raged for much of the day, with rebel mortar fire hitting Jaramana and regime aircraft striking back, according to the Observatory, which said at least 16 soldiers and 15 jihadists were killed.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos on Saturday called for a ceasefire in another embattled Damascus suburb, Moadamiyet al-Sham, where thousands of people were evacuated last week and where she said "the same number or more remain trapped."

The southwestern district was one of a number of suburbs hit in an August 21 sarin gas attack, blamed by the opposition on the regime, which led to the deal to dismantle Syria's chemical arsenal.

Fighting raged around Deir Ezzor city early Sunday. Activists of the Syrian

Revolution Coordinators' Union reported four air strikes on rebel-held areas of the provincial capital.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=62049>

In the north, the air force carried out new strikes on rebel fighters around Aleppo central prison, which they are trying to wrest from government control, the Observatory said.

### 3. IRAN

- **11 Terrorist Attacks Foiled in Southeastern Iran**

Inmates issued "calls to the Red Crescent to bring food into the jail, after a prisoner died on Saturday as a result of acute malnutrition."



Meanwhile, nine Lebanese Shiite pilgrims seized by Syrian rebels 17 months ago and two Turkish Airlines pilots kidnapped in Beirut in August arrived back home late Saturday under an exchange deal mediated by Turkey and Qatar.

TEHRAN (FNA)- Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari announced on Sunday that his forces have thwarted 11 foreign-backed terrorist plots, including suicide attacks, in the Southeastern parts of the country this year.

The Syrian rebels had also demanded the release of some 200 prisoners from Syrian jails in exchange for freeing the pilgrims. It was not clear if those releases went ahead.

"This year, the terrorist groups and hirelings of the arrogant powers have sought to carry out 11 different operations, including a suicide attack, in the Southeastern parts of Iran which were all defused as a result of the efforts made

by the IRGC forces," Jafari said in the holy city of Mashhad, Northeastern Iran today.

He warned Washington and other countries which support the terrorist groups against Iran that their puppet terrorists might one day betray them, and said, "If these puppet groups stand against the US, they will be able to carry out their suicide and savage operations at the very heart of the US."

For the last three decades, the US has been training, arming and supporting anti-Iran terrorist groups on the other side of Iran's borders both in the East and the West.

In April 2012, the Jundollah group - a CIA backed terrorist organization with a long record in staging terrorist operations in Iran - failed to stage a series of terrorist blasts due to the prompt action of the IRGC.

Commander of the IRGC Ground Force Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour announced at the time that the Pakistan-based Jundollah planned to launch a wave of terrorist operations by blasting suicide vests and explosive-laden cars in Iran.

The General said the IRGC forces managed to disband a team and kill a number of the terrorists sent by the US-backed Jundollah group to stage terrorist operations and create insecurity in Iran.

After the detention of the members of the group, it was revealed that each of them was equipped with suicide vests filled with 20kg of explosives to be detonated among the public and in important parts of the country, he said.

In addition to using suicide vests, the terrorists were also due to plant bombs in stolen cars to blast them in key points, but the IRGC's swift action foiled their plots, he added.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920728000892>

- **Iran Strongly Condemns Israel's Sacrilege of Al-Aqsa Mosque**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marziyeh Afkham strongly condemned the Israeli regime's attempt to destroy and defragment Muslims' Al-Aqsa Mosque in a bid to Judaize al-Quds (Jerusalem), and called on the Muslim states and the international bodies to show proper reaction to the Israeli aggression.

Afkham condemned the Zionist regime's measures and the use of violent force against Palestinian worshippers, and called on the international and Muslim organizations to fulfill their grave duty and take resolute measures to stop the sacrilege of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israel.

The Iranian foreign ministry's reaction came after a report, leaked by the Al Aqsa Foundation, revealed that the Israeli authorities have a plan to divide the Al Aqsa mosque compound.

The report showed the Israeli Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs plans to build a new Synagogue in the Eastern Wing of the Al Aqsa Mosque compound.

The plan would divide the compound taking one fifth for the Jews in order for

them to perform their religious rituals there.

Top Hamas officials have spoken out against the move and have called for a large-scale intervention from the Arab States. Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal said that the old city is part of East Jerusalem and remains under illegal occupation by the Israelis, and that the Israelis are using the turmoil in the Arab world to sneak their plans for the Al Aqsa compound.

Other Palestinian politicians have also slammed the new plans stating that this is part of Tel Aviv's aggressive steps that confirm their designs on the Islamic sanctuary in their first steps towards demolishing al Aqsa and deleting Muslim history in the area.

The Israeli Press responded to the report, with one publishing and celebrating Tel Aviv's new plans for the synagogue and stating that this has been practically urged by the US State department.

On Saturday, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh condemned Israel's efforts to judaize al-Quds and the al-Aqsa Mosque. In a televised speech yesterday, Haniyeh also slammed Israel's expansionist policies

and the regime's crimes against the Palestinian nation, saying the liberation of Palestine is a national duty.

He called on all Palestinians to act against the expansionist measures of the Tel-Aviv regime across the occupied territories, particularly in al-Quds.

Haniyeh also asked Palestinians to protect the city's mosques, especially the al-Aqsa Mosque, against Tel Aviv regime's excavation plans.

The situation at the al-Aqsa, which is one of Islam's holiest sites, has been tense over the past week.

Over the past decades, Israel has tried to change demographic makeup of al-Quds by constructing illegal settlements, destroying historical sites and expelling the local Palestinian population.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, and annexed East al-Quds, where the holy al-Aqsa Mosque is located, a move not recognized by the international community.

Over half a million Israelis live in over 120 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli

occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds. The international community considers the settlements illegal.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920728001467>

- **Russian Commander Admires Iran's Ability to Optimize S-200 Defense System**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Russian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Viktor Bondarev praised Iran for its ability to optimize the Russian-made S-200 long-range air defense missile system to cover mid-altitude flying targets, Commander of Iran's Khatam ol-Anbia Air Defense Base Brigadier General Farzad Esmayeeli said.

"We briefed the Russian Air Force commander on the changes we have made in the (S-200) system and he admired these capabilities," Esmayeeli



told reporters after a meeting with Bondarev in Tehran on Sunday.

"We told him that the system was a long-range system completely made by Russia, but we could add up to its capabilities to cover mid-altitude threats by changing the structure and protocol of the S-200 system and using Sayyad-2 missiles and we also told him that this (new) capability has proved successful on the scene of practical tests," Esmayeeli added.

Iran announced in August that it has used the latest home-made missile production, Sayyad (Hunter) 2, in its sophisticated S-200 anti-aircraft system.

Speaking to reporters in August, Esmayeeli said that the country had used "Sayyad 2 missiles in its S-200 defense systems", and pointed out that the restructuring of the system was the result of the industrious efforts made by experts at the Iranian defense industries and his base.

In similar remarks in July 2011, Esmayeeli had announced that the country's experts have been able to optimize the Russian-made S-200 anti-aircraft missile system so well that the Iranian version of the system has stunned Russian experts.

In November 2010, Iran successfully test-fired its sophisticated S-200 anti-aircraft missile systems.

Iran's S-200 system is a very long range, medium-to-high altitude surface-to-air missile (SAM) system designed to defend large areas from bomber attack or other strategic aircrafts. Each battalion has 6 single-rail missile launchers and fire control radar. It can be linked to other, longer-range radar systems.

Each missile is launched by 4 solid-fueled strap-on rocket boosters. Maximum range is between 200 and 350 km depending on the model. The missile uses radio illumination mid-course correction to fly towards the target with a terminal semi active radar homing phase.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920728001376>

- **Science Academy President Blasts West's Scientific Sanctions on Iran**



TEHRAN (FNA)- President of Iran's Science Academy Reza Davari Ardakani in separate letters to his counterparts in different world states protested at the western countries' scientific sanctions against Iranian researchers and scholars.

The letters were sent to the academies of sciences of France, Austria, Germany, Britain, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Croatia, the US, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Serbia and Sri Lanka.

"At the dawn of the new academic year in Iran and all over the world, I would like to bring an issue to your kind attention so that, with your help and that of the other esteemed academicians, we may jointly address and solve this problem. As you may know, Iranian scientists, scholars and research fellows rank among the best in the world in their respective fields and hence have contributed a lot to the progress and advancement of science and

technology, especially in the Muslim world," the letter said on Sunday.

"Nevertheless, in recent years, under the banner of the imposed sanctions against the people and government of Iran, some publishers of scientific journals and periodicals have unfortunately started refusing the publication of the Iranian articles, which is in fact very disdainful. To give but one example, on the 30th April 2013, the Elsevier website in Holland instructed all its editors to refrain from publishing articles authored by Iranian scholars."

"As you are aware, the freedom of scientific endeavor along with universal justice and human right require equal treatment of all scholarly activities of research fellows all over the world, including the appraisal and publication of the Iranian scholars' papers. Since free access to scientific papers is the right of every scholar all over the globe, it is up to the well-known academicians of distinguished countries to pursue this right of the Iranian scholars as well."

"The existing friendly relations between our two academies encouraged me to

seek your valuable cooperation in this regard," Davari Ardakani concluded.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920728001328>

- **Iran proposal aims to protect N-rights: Araqchi**



A top Iranian nuclear negotiator says the country's proposal tabled in the latest talks between Tehran and the six world powers in Geneva is aimed at protecting the Islamic Republic's peaceful nuclear rights.

"The defined goal is that we safeguard our nuclear rights; both [uranium] enrichment and production, and that the other side is assured that our use of nuclear energy is peaceful and, in return, the sanctions are totally lifted," Abbas Araqchi was quoted as saying by Spokesman of Majlis (Iran's Parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy

Committee, Mansour Haqiqatpour on Sunday.

Araqchi, who is the Iranian deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, made the comments while briefing the Majlis committee on the two-day discussions between Iran and the six powers -- the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany -- in Geneva on October 15-16.

On the first day of the closed-door negotiations, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif presented Tehran's new proposal titled "Closing an Unnecessary Crisis, Opening New Horizons" to the participants. The two sides have agreed to keep the details of the proposal confidential for the time being.

The Iranian diplomat further told the Majlis body that the Islamic Republic "has not made any commitments" during the Geneva talks, stressing, "We will never negotiate the red lines of the [Islamic] establishment."

"Araqchi stated that the [Iranian] negotiating team strongly emphasizes the country and the nation's inalienable rights

and feels obliged to protect them,” said the Iranian lawmaker, adding that he strongly rejected some Israeli media reports about the content of Iran’s nuclear talks with the six powers.

Tehran and the six powers have agreed to meet again in Geneva on November 17-18. Sanction and nuclear experts of the two sides will meet before the next round of talks in the Swiss city.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/10/20/330435/iran-proposal-aims-to-protect-nrights/>

- **UN Syria envoy Brahimi to visit Iran next week**



TEHRAN, Oct. 21 (MNA) – UN-Arab League Special Envoy for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi is scheduled to pay a visit to Tehran in the coming days, an Iranian deputy foreign minister announced on Sunday.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, said Brahimi will visit Tehran next week to hold meetings with Iranian officials.

According to reports, Brahimi had planned to visit Egypt, Syria, and Iran as part of efforts to push for holding peace conference on the Syrian crisis which is due take place in Geneva on November 23-24.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829497>

- **IRGC foiled 11 terrorist operations in past months: general**



TEHRAN, Oct. 21 (MNA) – According to a senior IRGC commander, terrorist groups had planned to carry out 11 terrorist operations, including suicide attacks, in the southeastern parts of Iran which were foiled by the forces of the Islamic

Revolution Guards Corps during the past seven months.

Today the people of the southeastern areas have exceptional sense of security, IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari told a gathering in Mashhad on Sunday.

He also said that at the present time the United States does not even dare to verbally threaten Iran with military action.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829498>

- **It is logical to keep details of nuclear talks confidential: MP**



TEHRAN, Oct. 21 (MNA) – MP Ahmad Tavakkoli says it is logical to keep the content of the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the six major powers confidential.

Iran and the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) held nuclear talks in Geneva on October 15 and 16. Afterwards, the two sides issued a joint statement describing the talks as “substantive and forward-looking”.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who is also the country’s chief nuclear negotiator, said the Iranian negotiating team’s decision to refrain from disclosing the details of the nuclear proposal they presented during the Geneva talks is a sign of its sincerity and seriousness.

“Wisdom entails that it should be so... (and) the confidentiality of negotiations is sensible,” Tavakkoli told reporters when asked about the rationale behind keeping the details of the negotiations secret.

He said it is unreasonable to make a commotion about diplomatic negotiations before they produce results.

“You and I should help this government, which the people have voted for, and (also) the ministers who received a vote of confidence from the Majlis, and let the

administration air views about this issue (nuclear negotiations).”

He added, “We are all worried” about the negotiations, but withdrawing support for the administration would be a “wrong” move, and “we should trust (the government) and see what will happen.”

Tavakkoli also said he is optimistic about the talks.

Reports have surfaced that the negotiating partners asked Iran to sign the additional protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which allows unannounced inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities.

“According to the Constitution, the decision on joining the protocol rests with the Majlis, and the Majlis will not accept this without gaining concessions, which is the right of the Iranian people.

“Basically, we are not worried about accepting the additional protocol, but on condition that we enjoy its benefits. In that case, the Majlis will make a proper decision,” Tavakkoli stated.

On Saturday, MP Mansour Haqiqatpour, the deputy chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said the Majlis would only study the implementation of the additional protocol after the West lifts all the sanctions imposed on Iran.

“Signing the additional protocol is a complicated issue. If we sign it, they may ask to inspect... the Parchin site, which is a military facility. So I think the Westerners should take the necessary confidence-building measures and lift all sanctions so that, after winning our full trust, we will study the protocol,” Haqiqatpour told the Mehr News Agency.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, who led the Iranian delegation at the Geneva talks, recently said, “Neither of these issues [including signing the additional protocol] are within the first step [of the Iranian proposal], but form part of our last steps.”

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829493>

- **Leader pardons, commutes sentences of 1,241 prisoners**



TEHRAN, Oct. 21 (MNA) – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has pardoned and commuted the sentences of 1,241 prisoners, reports said on Sunday.

Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani had previously made a proposal to grant clemency to a number of inmates on the occasions of Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Qadir.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829494>

TEHRAN, Oct. 20 (MNA) – An Iran’s National Tanker Company official has denied that China seized Iranian oil tanker.

He told Mehr News that the Company did carry no oil for North Korea. East Asian media reported yesterday that China had seized Iranian oil tanker carrying oil to the North Korea.

“No Iranian tanker of the Company has been seized by China, or by any other country,” he added.

“The news story in Japanese daily Asahi Shinbun is unfounded,” said this official. Asahi Shinbun had quoted the Chinese sources in its report.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829484>

- **Official denies China seized Iranian tanker**



- **'China seizes Iranian oil tanker'**



China has seized Iranian oil tanker carrying oil to the North Korea, Japan's daily Asahi Shimbun reported.

Mehr News quoted Japan's daily Asahi Shimbun report that China had seized Iran's oil tanker bound for North Korea after Tehran and Pyongyang signed agreement to trade oil and gas fluids. Chinese sources said that Iranian tanker was carrying oil to North Korea.

The oil carried is part of the agreement to export 500,000 tons of light crude. The agreement was signed in close cooperation of one of China's greatest oil companies. The Japanese daily wrote that reportedly Iran has been dispatching tankers under different flags to North Korea, but Chinese authorities ordered their seizure upon their approaching to Chinese ports in Yellow Sea.

The report said that the tankers were sent to Dalian port (Liaoning Province) and King Dao (Shandong Province), and the oil in these tankers was seized.

China has reportedly demanded US \$ 2m (about CH ¥ 196m) from North Korea for maintenance expenses of the oil tankers. Asahi Shinbun quoted diplomatic sources

informed on China-North Korea relations that when China felt North Korea would depend on Iranian oil, it embarked on different options to mount pressures on North Korea.

The agreement stipulated that North Korea would pay Iran for oil and gas; however it would be paid to a Chinese state oil company before reaching Iran.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829482>

#### 4. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israeli PM calls for more pressure on Iran**



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for more pressure on Iran until a complete dismantlement of



the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program.

"I think the pressure has to be maintained on Iran, even increased on Iran until it actually stops the nuclear program... I think that any partial deal could end up in dissolving the sanctions," Bibi said.

In an interview with American TV channel NBC on Sunday, the Israeli premier also called for a complete dismantlement of the program.

"There are a lot of countries that are waiting for a signal, just waiting for a signal, to get rid of their sanctions regime. And I think you don't want to go through halfway measures," he added.

Earlier in the day, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the US and British delegates had travelled to Tel Aviv to brief the Israeli regime about the substance of recent talks held in Geneva over Iran's nuclear energy program.

In mid-October, Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the United States, China, Russia, France and Britain - plus Germany held two days of negotiations over Tehran's

nuclear energy program behind closed doors in the Swiss city of Geneva.

During the talks, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif presented Tehran's proposal titled "Closing an Unnecessary Crisis, Opening a New Horizon" to EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, and the representatives of the six countries.

The Sunday's report added that French and German officials had already briefed their Israeli counterparts by phone.

Meanwhile, a high-ranking Israeli delegation is travelling to Washington to be updated about the talks held between Iran and the six world powers.

The delegates are Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz accompanied by a team of officials from Israeli spy services and foreign and military affairs ministries.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-

Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

Since 1958, when Israel began building its Dimona plutonium- and uranium-processing facility in the Negev desert, it has secretly manufactured numerous nuclear warheads, making it the only player in the Middle East that possesses nuclear weapons.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/10/20/330445/israel-calls-for-more-pressure-on-iran/>

- **US, Britain brief Israel on Iran nuclear talks**



US and British delegates have travelled to Tel Aviv to brief the Zionist regime about the substance of recent talks held in Geneva over Iran's nuclear energy program.

The Israeli paper Haartez reported on Sunday that French and German officials have already briefed their Israeli counterparts by phone.

Meanwhile, a high-ranking Israeli delegation is travelling to Washington to be updated about the talks held between Iran and the six world powers.

The Israeli delegates include officials from Israeli spy agencies as well as foreign and military officials.

In a related development, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeated his unfounded allegations against Iran's nuclear program, calling for intensified pressure on Tehran.

"I think that in this situation as long as we do not see actions instead of words, the international pressure must continue to be applied and even increased [on Iran]," Netanyahu said on Sunday.

He also called for the dismantling of Iran’s nuclear energy program, claiming that it has diverted toward military objectives.

Netanyahu added that “the correct approach” towards the Islamic Republic was to “increase the pressure.”

The Israeli prime minister’s allegations come days after the world welcomed the latest round of talks between Iran and six world powers in Geneva in view of finding a solution to Iran’s nuclear issue.

In mid-October, Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the United States, China, Russia, France and Britain - plus Germany held two days of negotiations over Tehran’s nuclear energy program behind closed doors in the Swiss city of Geneva.

During the talks, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif presented Tehran’s proposal titled "Closing an Unnecessary Crisis, Opening a New Horizon" to EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton, and the representatives of the six countries.

The two sides agreed to keep the details of the proposal confidential for the time being.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program, with the US and the European Union using the unsubstantiated claim as an excuse to impose illegal sanctions against Tehran.

Iran has categorically rejected the allegation, stressing that as a committed member of the International Atomic Energy Agency and a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is entitled to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/10/20/330429/us-britain-brief-israel-on-iran-talks/>

- **French activists call for boycott of Israeli products**



Activist in Paris staged a demonstration to urge shoppers to boycott Israeli products.

The demonstration was organized by the campaign group Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), and was held at a major supermarket in the French capital.

The BDS seeks to increase pressure on the Israeli regime to stop its occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The campaign was launched in 2005 by over 170 Palestinian non-governmental organizations.

The demonstration comes as the European Union recently banned all the 28 member states from using any EU funds for projects in the illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.

In addition, from 2014 all bilateral contracts between EU member states and Tel Aviv must include a clause stating that East al-Quds (Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the occupied Syrian territory of the Golan Heights are not a part of Israel.

The Israeli regime has tried to persuade the European Union to abolish the rules without success. Tel Aviv says it will not join EU projects unless the Union sets up agreements, which do not force Tel Aviv to acknowledge the borders recognized by the EU and the United Nations.

Last month, over a dozen former high-ranking EU officials and politicians, including former EU foreign relations chief Javier Solana, urged the Union not to give in to Israeli and US requests to modify the new bans on funding projects in settlements built on Palestinian territories.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1829496>

- **Hamis says it's responsible for tunnel under Gaza-Israel border**



Spokesman for Islamist group's armed wing says tunnel dug in effort to force Israel to release prisoners

Hamas Islamists in the Gaza Strip claimed responsibility on Sunday for a tunnel that Israel said was found beneath the heavily fortified Israel-Gaza frontier.

A website for a Hamas radio station called Al-Aqsa said the group's armed wing was responsible for what it called the "Khan Younis Tunnel," named for a part of the coastal territory where the subterranean passage was found.

Abu Ubaida, spokesman for the Islamist group's military wing, said in an interview broadcast by the station that the movement's armed brigades "dug the tunnel, they were responsible for it."

Ubaida said the tunnel had been dug in an effort to try and force Israel to release some of the thousands of prisoners it holds in its jails. In 2011, Israel freed 1,400 inmates for the return of soldier Gilad Shalit, who terrorists had captured and spirited across the Gaza border in 2006 through a tunnel.

Israel announced a week ago the discovery of the latest tunnel, which is 2.5 km (1.5 miles) in length, along the Gaza frontier, and accused Hamas of being behind its construction.

The Israeli military said the tunnel, dug in sandy soil, had been reinforced with concrete supports. Israel responded by halting the transfer of building material to Gaza.

For years, Israel had refused to allow these goods into the territory because it said terrorists would use them to build fortifications and weapons.

In 2010, as part of its easing of its internationally-criticized Gaza blockade, Israel gave foreign aid organizations the green light to import construction material for public projects. Last month, Israel resumed the transfer of cement and steel to Gaza's private sector.

Hamas seized the Gaza Strip in 2007, a year after winning a Palestinian election, from forces loyal to Western-backed President Mahmoud Abbas. The movement is shunned by the West over its refusal to renounce violence and recognize Israel.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4443293,00.html>

- **Netanyahu unlikely to meet Pope Francis in the Vatican**

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is unlikely to meet Pope Francis when he travels to Italy this week.

His office had initially announced that such a meeting would take place on Tuesday or Wednesday.

But on Sunday, an Israeli official clarified that the notice had gone out before the meeting was confirmed.

Pope Francis, who was ordained in March of this year, met in the Vatican with Israel's President Shimon Peres in April and with Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein earlier this month.

The pontiff did grant an audience to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas last Thursday.

Both Peres and Abbas have invited the pontiff to visit the Holy Land. Pope Francis had already told Peres he wanted to come to Jerusalem but no date has been set for such a visit.

Netanyahu heads to Rome this week, where he will meet with Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta on Tuesday and with US Secretary of State John Kerry on Wednesday.

<http://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/Netanyahu-unlikely-to-meet-Pope-Francis-in-the-Vatican-329258>

- **Palestinian attempts to stab Egged bus passenger and flees scene**

A Palestinian man attempted to stab a bus passenger on board a vehicle traveling near the Beitar checkpoint which is north west of Bethlehem, the army said on Sunday evening.

There were no injuries in the incident. The attacker has fled the scene and the army has launched a large scale search.

<http://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/Palestinian-attempts-to-stab-Egged-bus-passenger-and-flees-scene-329255>

- **Haniyeh: Oppose Israel negotiations based on US 'blackmail'**



GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Prime minister of the Hamas-run government in the Gaza Strip Ismail Haniyeh on Saturday called on Palestinians to oppose any new negotiations with Israel, arguing that they "jeopardize the Palestinian issue and the Palestinian people's rights."

"These negotiations mark the violation of the Palestinian national consensus as negotiations are carried out as a result of US pressure and blackmail," he said, urging Palestinians to protect Jerusalem and never abandon any Palestinian right, especially the right of return of refugees.

Haniyeh made the comments during a speech delivered in Gaza City on the

second anniversary of the prisoner swap between Hamas and Israel which saw 1,027 Palestinian prisoners freed in a deal for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

In order to ensure the protection of Palestinian rights, "negotiations must stop and the Oslo approach must be ignored. Political forces must together find a new national strategy adopting diverse visions and means," he continued.

"To confront any dangers or possible compromises emerging from negotiations," added Haniyeh, "Palestinian factions and dignitaries should get together and build a Palestinian national strategy."

This strategy, Haniyeh said, must include all possible options including armed resistance and popular resistance in addition to political and diplomatic means including academic and diplomatic divestment using all regional and international platforms.

Haniyeh also reiterated that his movement remained committed to reconciliation with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority on the basis of the

agreements reached through Cairo dialogue.

Any regional scenario or plan related to the Gaza Strip which "is not based in the realities and the specific nature of liberation issues in Palestine will fail," said Haniyeh.

It is realistic from a political point of view, added Haniyeh, to point out that disagreements in the Palestinian arena cannot be denied or ignored. Despite that, we should not go on with our disagreements or continue to take things to unknown ends, "especially as some believe they can reproduce the plans taking place in the region in Gaza."

"However, we hereby draw attention to the fact that any scenario that is unrealistic and not taking into account the privacy of the liberation path will fail. Such a scenario can never penetrate the resisting and unbreakable Palestinian arena which will remain tough in the face of occupation and chaos."

Haniyeh asserted that the Hamas movement would continue to extend a hand to an agreement to end the state of disagreement and to restructure the

Palestine Liberation Organization on democratic and nationalistic grounds.

This, according to Haniyeh, will create real reconciliation, unite the Palestinian institutions and correct the Palestinian political and national path leading eventually to one, united government in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip once again.

The Hamas PM reiterated that his government would not accept any external intervention in the internal affairs of Arab and Islamic states, and that Hamas will also oppose any hostilities initiated by outside powers against any Arab or Islamic country.

Commenting on media outlets which have argued that Hamas is facing a severe crisis in light of the ongoing changes and troubles in the region, particularly the recent developments in Egypt, Haniyeh responded that these outlets were leading a "hectic" campaign against Hamas that was based on the dissemination of prophecies and illusions, and not facts on the ground.



The campaigns trying to tell that Hamas has lost its allies and political ties, he argued, are "sheer lies and illusions."

Those who disseminate such fabrications wish to see Hamas in such a situation, he continued, "but the truth is completely different, as the movement is still united in its political decisions, views and approach to all issues and events both in Palestine and in the region."

"Hamas doesn't flatter anybody, nor does the movement beg, show regret or apologize about its honorable positions just to please any side. Hamas does not feel it is experiencing a crisis, and so it will not pay any toll so as to end that crisis."

The Gaza Strip has been under a severe economic blockade imposed by the State of Israel since 2007. The blockade was imposed following the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian elections and the subsequent 2007 clashes between Fatah and Hamas, which left Hamas in control of the Strip and Fatah in control of the West Bank.

The blockade has severely limited the imports and exports of the Gaza Strip and

has led to frequent humanitarian crises and hardship for Gazans.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=639462>

- **Settlers attack olive harvest near Nablus**



NABLUS (Ma'an) -- Settlers on Sunday attacked a group of Palestinians and international volunteers harvesting olives in the Nablus village of Burin, a Palestinian Authority official said.

Ghassan Daghlas, who monitors settlement activity in the northern West Bank, told Ma'an that settlers from the notorious Yizhar settlement raided the neighboring Palestinian village of Burin and attacked the group with iron rods.

Nemr Issa al-Tirawi, 29, and his brother Qusai, 27, were lightly injured in the attack together with two international

volunteers from the Israeli rights group Yesh Din.

According to a 2012 report on Israeli settler violence released by the Palestine Center, a Washington-based nonprofit, every year the olive harvest period sees the highest peak in attacks on Palestinian civilians and property.

In 2012, there were 353 incidents of settler violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Over 7,500 olive trees were damaged or destroyed by settlers between January and mid-October in 2012, according to OCHA.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=639484>

- **Journalists rally in Ramallah to reopen Gaza media offices**



RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- A group of journalists rallied in Ramallah on Sunday to launch a petition to reopen the Gaza bureaus of Ma'an News Agency and al-Arabiya.

The petition stated that the closure of the media offices violates Article 19 of the Palestinian Basic Law, which entitles the freedom of opinion, and Article 27, which allows anyone to operate a media outlet.

Rally leader Omar Nazzal said the petition aims to pressure Hamas to reopen the media offices, adding that the closures were a "slap in the face" for freedom of expression.

Nazzal called on intellectuals and writers to sign the petition.

Ma'an's Gaza bureau has been closed since July 25.

The attorney-general in the Hamas-run government ordered the closure after

Hamas officials accused Ma'an of deliberately publishing "false news reports seeking to incite against Gaza."

Ma'an Network announced in early October that it would stop working in the Gaza Strip as it seeks to recoup financial losses from the Hamas government's closure of its Gaza City office.

In a statement, Ma'an said that the Hamas government had seized control of its office and equipment in the weeks since the closure and it could therefore no longer justify paying expenses toward the operation.

The statement also reiterated "complete confidence in our colleagues in Gaza" and insisted it remained committed to its "administrative and financial commitments" toward them.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=639632>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Geagea reveals meeting with Suleiman, reiterates call for speedy cabinet formation**

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea revealed in remarks published Monday that he made an undisclosed visit to President Michel Suleiman and discussed the various political developments.

"The meeting was long. We tackled several issues and I voiced [the LF's] point of view that the government formation needs to be expedited, because delaying it further has begun [destroying] the constitution and the constitutional rights," Geagea told Al-Akhbar newspaper.

"If the situation continued as it is, we will end up without a constitution and without a republic," he added.

Geagea also revealed that he and Suleiman shared many points of view.

"The meeting was very good and the atmosphere was friendly. Despite the differences in some points of view, we have shared the same point of view regarding the current situation and the intention to form a new cabinet," Geagea said.

Also, regarding the plenary parliament session scheduled for Wednesday, October 23, Geagea reiterated that his party's bloc and its allies will boycott it.

"The session is unconstitutional. The schedule has not changed, and [as a result], our stance has not changed either," Geagea said.

A contentious parliamentary session is scheduled for Wednesday, October 23, with at least 52 legislations listed on its agenda.

A number of parliamentary blocs, including the Lebanese Forces, the Future bloc, the FPM and independent Christian MPs have repeatedly boycotted the parliament plenary session, saying that the house, in its extended term, should only deal with urgent legislations.

As a result, the session was postponed several times due to lack of quorum.

Berri is still insisting on the same schedule.

However, Geagea revealed that the LF bloc would attend the parliament session

on Tuesday, October 22, to vote for new members for parliamentary committees.

Tuesday's session is also set to hold a vote to elect new members to the parliament's bureau.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/geagea-reveals-meeting-with-suleiman-reiterates-call-for-speedy-cabinet-formation>

- **Tuesday's parliament session consensual, Berri says**

Speaker Nabih Berri said that there is a consensus among the Lebanese parties to attend the parliament session, which is scheduled for Tuesday, October 22.

In remarks published Monday by Al-Joumhouria newspaper, Berri also ruled out the possibility that any change might occur to the aforementioned session.

The parliament is due to meet on October 22 to vote for new members for parliamentary committees.

The session is also set to hold a vote to elect new members to the parliament's bureau.

However, the speaker also tackled the plenary session that is scheduled for Wednesday, October 23, and said that he would not change its controversial schedule.

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A number of parliamentary blocs, including the Lebanese Forces, the Future bloc, the FPM and independent Christian MPs have repeatedly boycotted the parliament plenary session, saying that the house, in its extended term, should only deal with urgent legislations.

As a result, the session was postponed several times due to lack of quorum.

However, Berri is still insisting on the same schedule.

"The quorum for the plenary session is available, but it would be better if all parties participated in it and [approved] of its schedule," Berri said.

"I can be tolerant with the powers of the parliament, but I am not ready to be tolerant with my powers as the speaker of the parliament," he added.

I can be tolerant with the powers of the parliament, but I am not ready to be tolerant with my powers as the speaker of the parliament.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/tuesdays-parliament-session-consensual-berri-says>

- **Freed Lebanese pilgrims, Turkish pilots arrive in Beirut, Istanbul**



"The situation was much worse than you can imagine and we have paid a very high price."

The nine Lebanese Shiite pilgrims who were abducted in Syria's Azaz last year and two Turkish pilots who were kidnapped in Lebanon in August arrived in

Beirut and Istanbul respectively on Saturday.

General Security Director General Abbas Ibrahim, who accompanied the pilgrims from Turkey to Lebanon, said after arriving in Beirut that “what happened is a victory for Lebanon.”

“We thank Qatar, Turkey and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad,” he also stated, adding that “the case is not over yet, we are still awaiting the release of the two Orthodox bishops abducted in Syria.”

Earlier in the day, President Michel Suleiman phoned the Qatari Prince Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad and thanked him for the efforts he made to release the Lebanese pilgrims.

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati expressed his joy for the “happy ending of this humanitarian issue,” and thanked “all the officials and states who have played a role in reaching this happy ending.”

Abbas Sheayb, one of the released pilgrims, said upon his arrival to Lebanon: “The situation was much worse than you can imagine and we have paid a very high price.”

Another one of the released men said in a televised interview: “We were detained in a humid room, near the Turkish borders,” adding that “nobody can imagine the amount of suffering we went through.”

Meanwhile, two Turkish pilots, who were abducted in Lebanon, were freed in exchange for the Lebanese pilgrims’ release.

They arrived in Beirut’s Rafiq Hariri International Airport where Turkish Ambassador to Lebanon Inan Ozyildiz received them and accompanied them back to Turkey.

Following the pilots’ release, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu tweeted: “I thank Lebanese Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati and caretaker Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour with whom I have met several times in the past two months.”

“Also, my friend the Qatari Foreign Minister Khaled bin Mohammad al-Atiyah has made a lot of effort for the pilots’ release and had a big part in this joyful result.”

Qatari mediation had secured the release of the Lebanese pilgrims abducted in Syria on Friday evening, Qatar's foreign ministry said.

In May 2012, eleven Lebanese pilgrims were abducted in Azaz in the Aleppo district while returning from a pilgrimage to Iran, two of whom were released in following months.

The families of the pilgrims accused Turkey of sponsoring the kidnapping and the Lebanese government of inaptness in this regard.

After repeated failures to secure the release of the pilgrims, a group kidnapped a Turkish Airlines pilot and his co-pilot on August 9 on the Beirut International Airport road to demand Turkey use its influence with Syria's rebels, who it backs, to free the nine Lebanese Shiites.

Following the release of the pilgrims, Turkey said the detention of two Turkish Airlines pilots kidnapped in Beirut in August was close to ending.

“Very favorable developments are under way concerning the two Turkish pilots.

This matter has been largely settled,” Davutoglu said on local television on Friday.

The relatives of the nine Lebanese pilgrims have denied responsibility for kidnapping the pilots.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/freed-lebanese-pilgrims-turkish-pilots-arrive-in-beirut-istanbul>

- **Religious leaders, politicians hail release of pilgrims**



BEIRUT: Lebanon's religious leaders and politicians Sunday praised the release of nine Lebanese hostages held captive in Syria as an event that had brought the Lebanese together in a rare show of unity.

Meanwhile, Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Walid al-Moallem contacted caretaker Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour to congratulate him on the the pilgrims' safe

return to Lebanon, the National News Agency reported.

Moallem stressed that “Syria will spare no effort in helping Lebanon,” the NNA reported.

Mansour thanked Syria for its stance and cooperation which resulted in the release of the nine.

President Michel Sleiman thanked regional countries for their efforts in securing the release of pilgrims, who were held hostage by Syrian rebels for 17 months.

Sleiman contacted Turkish President Abdullah Gul to congratulate him on the safe return of the two Turkish Airlines pilots and thanked him for his efforts in releasing the Lebanese.

He highlighted “the solidarity of the Lebanese and their united humanitarian and national feelings on this matter away from any political or sectarian alignment.”

In congratulating the Lebanese hostages on their return home, Sleiman said: “The state had exerted all its efforts to secure

the release of the Lebanese kidnapped in Azaz.

“There is big joy today with the success of these efforts which brought them back to their families and beloved ones under the wing of the beloved homeland.”

He thanked caretaker Interior Minister Marwan Charbel, the ministerial committee tasked with the case and Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, head of General Security, for maintaining contacts with Turkish, Qatari, Syrian and Palestinian authorities which all cooperated to finalize the conditions of the swap agreement.

Speaker Nabih Berri and Ibrahim also thanked Qatar for its role in helping the release of the nine Lebanese.

Sleiman expressed hope for the release of Aleppo’s Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim, who were abducted in April by armed men near the Turkish border. He also called for determining the fate of thousands of Lebanese who went missing during the 1975-90 Civil War.

A three-way swap deal resulted Saturday in the release of the nine Lebanese, two



Turkish Airlines pilots kidnapped in Beirut in retaliation for the Lebanese' abduction and over 100 female detainees in Syrian prisons.

Eleven Lebanese Shiite pilgrims were abducted near the Aleppo district town of Azaz on May 22 last year as they traveled home from a pilgrimage in Iran. Two of the pilgrims were released last year.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri also hailed the release of the hostages, praising Qatar, Turkey and Ibrahim especially for their role.

Former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora also congratulated the hostages on their freedom, while criticizing their kidnappers, saying such actions undermined the Syrian revolution.

“The abduction was not in the interest of the Syrian revolution and did not serve the cause of the wounded and oppressed Syrian people,” said Siniora, the head of the parliamentary Future bloc. He said the abduction benefited the Syrian regime, which used “this deplorable crime” to launch campaigns against the rebels.

Grand Mufti Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani, Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea all expressed their joy over the release of the pilgrims, but called for the two bishops to be freed as well, urging the Lebanese government to make necessary contacts to secure their freedom.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Oct-21/235189-religious-leaders-politicians-hail-release-of-pilgrims.ashx#axzz2iL8ZqNaP>

- **GAM seeks to restore prestige to Amman**



AMMAN — The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) will work “relentlessly” to address all “accumulated mistakes” that harmed the worldwide reputation of the capital in terms of services, scenery and cleanliness, according to the mayor.

Expressing his reservations over a report published recently by www.acityguides.com classifying Amman as the world's third ugliest city, Amman Mayor Aqel Biltaji said on Saturday that GAM will increase its efforts to clean and organise the capital to restore its prestige as a historic ancient city.

Although he disagreed with some of the report's observations, Biltaji ascribed the decline in Amman's image to the "accumulated mistakes and wrong practices" by various segments.

"All in all, we are obligated to take practical steps to address the observations mentioned in the report," the Jordan News Agency, Petra, quoted him as saying.

The mayor added that the cleanliness and beautification of Amman is not only GAM's job, but also the responsibility of residents and other institutions based in the capital, calling on citizens to engage in "voluntary initiatives" and implement joint projects to clean the capital.

In the report, Amman was classified as the world's third ugliest city after Guatemala

City and Mexico City, in terms of its "chaotic streets and ugly buildings".

"The capital of the country with one of the world's most fascinating historical sites (magical Petra) should simply be an arrival and departure point on your travel itinerary, unless you enjoy dirty, chaotic streets and ugly buildings looking like they're crumbling on top of each other," the report said.

<http://jordantimes.com/gam-seeks-to-restore-prestige-to-amman---mayor>

- **King Abdulla of Jordan to visit Saudi Arabia tomorrow**



His Majesty King Abdulla II of Jordan will tomorrow (Monday) pay a work visit to Saudi Arabia during which he will meet Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdulla bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud as part of constant coordination between leaders of the two countries.

The two leaders will hold talks on bilateral relations, ways of bolstering cooperation and latest developments in the Middle East.

<http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/5846>

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HM the King described the chamber as a quantum leap forward, wishing officials in charge of (BCDR-AAA) every success.

Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments Affairs minister attended the audience.

<http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/5846>

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## 6. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **HM King Hamad receives (BCDR-AAA) Executive Director and Prof. Paulsson**



His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa today received at Al-Safriya Palace Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution (BCDR-AAA) Executive Director Nassib G. Ziadé and Professor Jan Paulsson.

He commended the role of (BCDR-AAA) in consolidating laws and encouraging investments in all fields.

- **Saudi Arabia declines UN Security Council seat**



Riyadh, Asharq Al-Awsat—Saudi Arabia declined to take up the non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council on Friday, citing “double standards” in the international organization hampering its ability to end international conflict. Riyadh cited a number of international issues precluding it from joining the UN Security Council, including the Palestinian Cause and the Syrian crisis, calling for the Security Council to be reformed to allow it to carry out its responsibilities in

maintaining international peace and security.

A Saudi Foreign Ministry statement, published by the state Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said: “First of all, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is pleased to extend its sincere thanks and deep gratitude to all the countries that have given their confidence in electing it as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the next two years.”

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a founding member of the United Nations, is proud of its comprehensive and enduring commitment to the purposes and principles of the UN charter, believing that the commitment of all member states—honestly, truthfully, and accurately, as stipulated in the Charter—is the real guarantee for world security and peace.”

However the Saudi Foreign Ministry statement added: “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes that the manner, the mechanisms of action, and double standards, existing in the Security Council prevent it from performing its duties and assuming its responsibilities towards preserving international peace and

security as required, leading to the continued disruption of peace and security, the expansion of injustice, the violation of rights, and the spread of conflicts and war around the world.”

“In this regard, it is unfortunate that all international efforts that have been exerted in recent years, in which Saudi Arabia has participated very effectively, did not result in reaching the reforms required to enable the Security Council to regain its desired role in the service of peace and security in the world,” the statement added.

“The continuation of the Palestinian Cause without a just and lasting solution for 65 years, resulting in several wars that threatened international peace and security, is irrefutable evidence and proof of the Security Council’s inability to carry out its duties,” the Foreign Ministry statement said.

“The failure of the Security Council to make the Middle East a region free of all weapons of destruction, its inability to subdue the nuclear programs of all countries in the region without exception...is more irrefutable evidence of

its inability to shoulder its responsibilities,” it added.

“Allowing the ruling regime in Syria to kill and burn its people through the use of chemical weapons, while the world stands idly by, without applying any deterrent sanctions against the Damascus regime, is also proof of the Security Council’s inability to carry out its duties and responsibility,” the Foreign Ministry statement said.

“Accordingly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, based on its historic responsibilities towards its own people, and Arab and Islamic nations, as well as towards all people aspiring for peace and stability across the world, announces its apology for not accepting membership of the Security Council until the body is reformed and enabled, effectively and practically, to carry out its duties and responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security,” the statement concluded.

<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/10/article55319608>

- **Kingdom of Bahrain supports Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in its Stance**



Kingdom of Bahrain’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its full support for Kingdom of Saudi Arabia represented in its decision of not accepting the non-permanent seat at U.N. Security Council.

The Ministry asserted that such unprecedented stance for Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a clear message in addressing the international double standards on issues of the Middle East, as well as a reflection of the necessity to reach an international decision to reform United Nations systems, particularly U.N. Security Council.

The Ministry said that Kingdom of Bahrain through supporting the courageous stance, calls on a supporting Arab and Islamic stance to attain the desired momentum to have influence on the international community to achieve the

desired reform, in the manner that reinforces peace and security of mankind.

<http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/584624>

- **Indian, Sri Lankan drown off Oman coast during Eid holidays**

Dubai: Two expatriates, an Indian and a Sri Lankan, drowned off the Oman coast while enjoying Eid holidays.

Valsakumar, 50, Indian, and Herathu, 50, Sri Lankan, both employed at a defence camp in Thumrait, a small town in southern Oman, were part of a 15-member group on a holiday trip to Taqa beach in Salalah, the capital of Oman's Dhofar province.

Six people got caught in the powerful waves and two drowned while the other four were rescued, the Times of Oman said.

"The retreating waves were very powerful. This might be the reason for the accident," one of the victims' friends said.

"Residents rescued our drowning friends using boats," they added.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/indian-sri-lankan-drown-off-oman-coast-during-eid-holidays-1.1245078>

- **Omanis soon to get UK visas online**

Muscat: Omanis will soon get visas online to visit the UK, according to Sayyid Badr Bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Secretary-General at the Sultanate's Foreign Ministry.

"The British government hopes to make procedures for getting British visas easier for Omanis," he said on the side lines of the "Oman and Sea" Exhibition currently being held in Paris.

Al Busaidi added that the steps were being taken to make visas available online to Omanis by the end of this year without visiting the British embassy for this purpose.

He pointed out that Omani-British relations were strong and historic and had witnessed remarkable development over the years.

“The two countries share mutual interests in various fields,” the senior Foreign Ministry official said.

He stated that the Sultanate of Oman is working with some European countries on the exchange of visas for those who hold diplomatic and special passports.

“Oman has [made] a lot of efforts to keep the visa procedures easy for Omanis who want to enter the Schengen Area,” he added, noting that there was positive response from European countries to this.

Al Busaidi added that he hoped that the next step would be the mutual waving of visa requirements between Oman and European countries. He said that such a step may take time to achieve but added that there is enthusiasm for it among European officials.

The Schengen Area is without internal borders, within which citizens, non-EU nationals, business people and tourists can freely move about without being subjected to border checks. Al Busaidi said that such visa procedures to enter Schengen Area may take some time and noted that there is a good response from

European countries to extend this facility to Omanis also.

The “Oman and Sea” exhibition which opened on Thursday at the French National Maritime Museum in Paris is organised by the ministry of heritage and culture jointly with the foreign ministry in Paris, under the joint auspices of the leaderships of Oman and France.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/omanis-soon-to-get-uk-visas-online-1.1245010>

- **Qatar recovers websites from Syria hackers**

Doha: Qatari authorities have restored several government websites attacked by hackers from the Syrian Electronic Army, who support President Bashar Al Assad’s regime, local media reported on Sunday.

Qatar’s Supreme Council of Information and Technology (ictQatar) said in a statement carried by local media that it has “recovered all government websites hacked on Saturday.”

It said it is ready to “deal with any similar future operations.”

“No financial losses have been caused” by the hacking that targeted websites with the “gov.qa” domain name, local media quoted ictQatar as saying on Twitter.

The Qatari interior ministry’s page was among the websites hit. But the ministry said on Twitter that “data registered on the website was not affected.”

Hackers who claim to support Al Assad, collectively known as the Syrian Electronic Army, have targeted high-profile websites in recent months, including one belonging to the US marines and the New York Times’s page.

Qatar, alongside Saudi Arabia, has openly supported rebels battling Al Assad’s regime since an uprising against his rule broke out in March 2011.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qatar-recovers-websites-from-syria-hackers-1.1245026>

- **Kuwait denies taking UN Security Council seat**



Manama: Kuwaiti diplomats have denied media reports that Kuwait would supplant Saudi Arabia at the United Nations Security Council.

Riyadh last week said that it rejected its rotating Security Council seat hours after winning it, saying that the council was incapable of ending wars and resolving conflicts in the Middle East.

Reports said that Kuwait was next on the list of Asian countries to take the two-year membership on January 1.

However, Kuwaiti daily Al Kuwaitiya on Sunday reported that “diplomatic sources denied the claims that Kuwait had accepted to take the Security Council seat.”

The daily did not identify the sources.

The Saudi position was backed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an alliance that brings together Bahrain, Kuwait,



Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In a statement released on Saturday, the GCC “commended the call by Saudi Arabia for reforming the Security Council and empowering it to effectively and practically to carry out its duties and to assume its responsibilities towards maintaining international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.”

GCC Secretary General Abdul Lateef Al Zayani stressed “the significance of the Saudi call to achieve fundamental reforms in the Security Council that will support its role as a United Nations body responsible for all the consequences of the main issues of global peace and security, particularly that our world today is in dire need of the role and international legitimacy of the Security Council amid political and security turmoil.”

Al Zayani attributed the Saudi decision to turn down the rotating seat to the ineptitude of the Security Council to carry out its duties to render its responsibilities, particularly towards Arab issues.

“The rejection is based on Saudi Arabia’s keenness on regional stability and its historic interest in Arab issues and concerns and as well as in international matters and global stability,” he said.

“The position of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reflects its commitment to international legitimacy and a sincere desire to activate the role of the Security Council and the various organs and institutions of the United Nations in order to respond to global calls in this regard, and make the world more cooperative, stable and secure,” Al Zayani said.

Arab League Secretary General Nabeel Al Arabi said that he backed the Saudi position and expressed hope that it would “stimulate the efforts that have been exerted for years to reform and enhance the Security Council.”

“We do stress the significance of the Saudi statement on the ineptitude of the Security Council to solve several vital issues, such as the Palestinian issue, to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy in Syria and to rid the Middle East of the weapons of mass destruction,” he said.

“The Security Council needs a comprehensive reform that includes determining the scope of the use or the threat to use the veto by its five permanent members,” he said.

In Doha, Khalid Al Attiya, the Qatari foreign minister, reportedly expressed his support in a tweet to his Saudi counterpart.

“My dear brother Prince Saud Al Faisal: When you get upset, you confuse the world. Thank you,” he posted on the microblog.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-denies-taking-un-security-council-seat-1.1244900>

## 7. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Bouteflika cartoons trial: Algeria court refuses bail for blogger**



Court refuses to release on bail blogger held for nearly one month for posting cartoons on Facebook lampooning president Bouteflika.

ALGIERS - An Algerian court on Sunday refused to release on bail a blogger held for nearly a month for posting cartoons on Facebook lampooning the president, his lawyer said.

The judge in Algiers "refused to release Abdelghani Aloui," Amine Sidhoum said, adding that he would appeal against the court's decision.

The 24-year-old blogger has been held since September 25 and is due to stand trial for "contempt" and "defending terrorism" after posting cartoons mocking President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal on his Facebook page.

He has also been charged with "attacking the person of the president," according to his lawyer.

The charge of "defending terrorism" relates to the fact that he was "in possession of a scarf on which was written

the phrase 'There is no God but God'" Sidhoum said earlier this month, referring to the Muslim declaration of faith.

In June 2012, another blogger received an eight-month suspended jail sentence and a 1,000 euro (\$1,350) fine after calling on the Internet for a boycott of Algeria's parliamentary election.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=62051>

- **Tunisia fights terrorism: Nine killed and two tonnes of explosives seized**



Defence Ministry spokesman says troops have captured one terrorist during operation to hunt down cell of some 20 jihadists blamed for killing of policemen.

TUNIS - Tunisian security forces killed nine "terrorists" and seized two tonnes of explosives Saturday in a military operation near where two policemen were killed

two days earlier, the defence ministry said.

The nine were killed in the Mount Taouyer area of the Beja region, some 70 kilometres (40 miles) west of Tunis, spokesman Taoufik Rahmouni was quoted as saying by the official TAP news agency.

Another ministry spokesman had earlier said troops had captured one member of the group during the operation to hunt down a cell of some 20 suspected jihadists blamed for the killing of the policemen.

Since the 2011 uprising that sparked the Arab Spring, Tunisia has seen a rise in attacks by jihadist groups suppressed by former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Some 15 soldiers and police have been killed since December as they track militants allegedly linked to Al-Qaeda along the border with Algeria, but Saturday's operation was the first of its kind in Beja, which is much closer to the capital.

The defence ministry has said it lacks the resources to combat militant groups and has struggled to contain them.

On Friday, in a sign of rising frustration over the costly fight against jihadists, protesting security forces drove Prime Minister Ali Larayedh and President Moncef Marzouki away from a memorial service for the policemen killed in Beja.

Tunisia has been locked in a political crisis since July, when prominent opposition lawmaker Mohamed Brahmi was shot dead by suspected jihadists, in circumstances similar to the murder of another opposition MP, Chokri Belaid, six months earlier.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=62043>

- **Car bomb targets military intelligence building in Egypt**



Blast wounds six soldiers, destroys part of military compound's wall and sets fire to several cars in area.

CAIRO - A car bomb exploded outside a military intelligence building in Egypt's Suez Canal city of Ismailiya on Saturday, wounding six soldiers, the army said.

The blast destroyed part of the military compound's wall and set fire to several cars in the area.

"This is the latest in a series of cowardly terrorist attacks by extremist elements against the people of Egypt and army installations," said military spokesman Colonel Ahmed Ali in a statement.

He said six soldiers were lightly wounded in the attack.

Security officials said a second car bomb was found in the area, but experts managed to defuse it.

Witnesses said they heard gunfire around the time of the explosion.

Ismailiya and surrounding areas have seen regular attacks on police and military personnel, especially since the military toppled Islamist president Mohamed Morsi on July 3.

More than 100 policemen have been killed across Egypt in attacks and clashes since then.

The military has been conducting an extensive operation in the Sinai Peninsula, east of the Suez canal to crack down on Islamist militants, who have killed dozens of soldiers and policemen.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=62042>

- **Libya: Military police chief killed in Benghazi**



Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat—The head of Libya’s military police force, Ahmed Al-Barghathi, was shot and killed by unknown gunmen outside of his residence in Benghazi on Friday, Asharq Al-Awsat has learned.

Friday’s assassination was the latest to hit the fragile Tripoli government struggling

to rein in Islamist militias who became influential following the fall of the Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in 2011.

Libyan military general command announced the death of Barghathi who was among the first officers to join the February 17 revolution. Following the Gaddafi regime’s fall, he was placed in charge of the country’s police apparatus.

Barghathi is the most senior military figure to have been assassinated thus far. His death comes in the week that Libya gears up to mark the second anniversary of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s execution.

The Libyan army’s General Command issued a statement pledging that it “will not hesitate to pursue the perpetrators and bring them to justice.”

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a Benghazi medical source informed Asharq Al-Awsat that Barghathi died in hospital after being shot twice in the head and chest.

No group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Military spokesman Ali Sheikhi told Asharq Al-Awsat that the army's chief-of-staff will hold an urgent meeting with military leaders on Sunday to discuss ideas and plans to ensure the security of Libya's military command.

"We cannot accuse one specific side only. There are several sides that do not want the army to rise because this will accelerate the development of the state and this does not serve their interests," Sheikhi told Asharq Al-Awsat.

As for which "sides" could be responsible for Barghathi's death, Sheikhi said that this includes "criminals and some former regime figures as well as extremist groups."

"Every day we lose military and security personnel and this must be stopped immediately," he said.

Sheikhi also informed Asharq Al-Awsat that the group that had kidnapped the son of minister of defense Abdullah Al-Thani said they would only release their hostage if Al-Thani resigned.

<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/10/article55319742>

- **Improvements indicate Egypt on right track: PM**



Hazem El-Beblawi says roadmap is bringing stability after period of turmoil, agrees to reconsider controversial protest law

Interim Prime Minister Hazem El-Beblawi says there are indications that Egypt is "on the right track," asserting that improvements are evident in terms of security, politics, and economy.

In an interview televised on the private satellite television channel CBC, El-Beblawi said that the Egyptian state is built on these three arenas, and as such these improvements will lead to stability.

On security, he said: "The state regains its status day by day, and the relationship between the police and people has warmed after a period of struggle lasting decades."

Under interior minister Habib El-Adly, who led the ministry from 1997 until 2011, police abuses had grown common, marking one of the major reasons behind the 2011 revolution's eruption and the subsequent overthrow of the Mubarak regime.

Following severe clashes between civilians and police during the 2011 uprising, the public's hostility with the police was further blemished. The ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi repaired the relationship, with law enforcement and the majority of Egyptians standing together against the former elected president.

There are still occasional clashes, however, between Morsi supporters, security forces and other Morsi opponents.

"The interior ministry exerted a huge effort while dispersing the sit-ins at Rabaa Al-Adawiya and Nahda," El-Beblawi stated, referring to the sites of two pro-Morsi sit-ins that were violently dispersed by police on 14 August.

"The health ministry has issued a detailed statement of the casualties, according to which the overall death toll, including that of the Muslim Brotherhood, does not exceed 1414 persons."

The Muslim Brotherhood – the group from which Morsi hails – and its supporters have repeatedly claimed that thousands, not just hundreds, were killed during the sit-ins' dispersal. They continue to insist on reinstating the unpopular leader amidst a political stalemate.

"As for political stability," El-Beblawi went on, "It is being achieved through the road map."

The roadmap, which was agreed upon by a number of political forces as well as Egypt's leading Sunni authority Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church, was enforced by the armed forces on 3 July following mass protests against Morsi's rule.

The roadmap included Morsi's ouster, the freezing of the Islamist-backed 2012 constitution pending amendments, and the dissolution of the Islamist-dominated parliamentary lower house, the Shura Council. It also entails presidential and parliamentary elections.

"The constitution-amending committee is about to finalise the amendments and put up the final draft for a public referendum [as per the roadmap]," El-Beblawi added.

Speaking on the deteriorated economy, he commented: "There are strong indicators that there is economic improvement, starting with the stock market gains in addition to some foreign investments, even if they are still weak."

The Egyptian economy was severely hit after the 2011 revolution, and has further deteriorated over the past three years due to continuing political upheaval.

On Sunday, Egypt's stocks hit a two-year high during trading as investors resumed their optimistic outlook on the country's political situation.

Protest Law can be amended

El-Beblawi also spoke about the controversial protest law that has been criticised across the political spectrum.

He said that he is ready to make amendments to the bill if necessary,

although he is "proud of what the government has achieved in that law."

The most controversial articles of the law are articles 6, 10 and 14.

Artide 6 states that a written appeal should be handed to the local police station 24 hours before any scheduled protest. The appeal must include the protest's location and purpose, the names and contact information of its organisers, as well as its demands and the proposed start and end time.

Artide 10 gives the interior minister or senior police officials the authority to cancel, postpone or change the location of a protest, although protesters can seek emergency judicial intervention against such decisions.

During Morsi's year in power, neither the interior minister nor senior police officials were able to issue a direct order to cancel a protest. Such a demand had to be issued by the judiciary.

Artide 14 states that governors have the power to designate "protest-free" areas of 50 to 100 metres around state and governmental premises, including



presidential palaces, headquarters of legislative authorities and the cabinet.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/84364/Egypt/Politics-/Improvements-indicate-Egypt-on-right-track-PM.aspx>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **US troop immunity in Afghanistan is 'ludicrous': analyst**



The US demand to retain legal jurisdiction over its troops in Afghanistan, which would give them immunity from Afghan law is “ludicrous” and “imperial delusion and hubris,” a political commentator in Missouri says.

United States insists that any US troops left in Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal of foreign forces from the

country must enjoy legal immunity from Afghan judiciary system.

“Any time a person commits a crime, the person probably should be prosecuted under the law of the country,” said Dean Henderson, a columnist at the Veterans Today website.

“This whole notion that US soldiers in Afghanistan would be immune from prosecution for committing crimes is kind of ludicrous and an imperial delusion,” Henderson added.

The thought that US occupying forces in Afghanistan should be “immune from prosecution is imperial hubris, only in the United States would that idea even come up,” he added.

“But again if they want to protect these soldiers from prosecution under the laws of Afghanistan, the best thing to do would be to get them out of Afghanistan as soon as possible.”

US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Thursday that the United States cannot agree to a deal to keep American troops in Afghanistan after 2014 unless it is granted

the right to try in the US its citizens who break the law in Afghanistan.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 under the pretext of war on terror.

The offensive removed the Taliban from power but more than a decade into the US-led invasion, Afghanistan remains gripped by insecurity despite the presence of thousands of foreign troops.

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

- **US won't withdraw from Afghanistan totally: Analyst**

An American political commentator says US-led foreign forces occupying Afghanistan will not withdraw from the country completely, but will stay there under one pretext or another.

Rick Rozoff, who is an investigative journalist and manager of the organization Stop NATO international, made the remarks during a discussion about the United States and its allies' planned troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 on

Press TV's program The Debate broadcast on Saturday.

Rozoff said that foreign troops would not "totally leave the country under any circumstances."

He added that "we do have to remember that the US and NATO expect to maintain from 8,000 to 14,000 troops in the nation under one pretext and another."

In addition, Rozoff said that the US would have troops at its upgraded airbases in Shindand, in Bagram, north of Kabul, and Kandahar and elsewhere in the country to have an eye on Iran, Pakistan, China and Russia.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but after nearly 12 years, the foreign troops have still not been able to establish security in the country.

There are currently over 100,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan. The US has announced plans to pull out all foreign combat troops by the end of 2014.

However, several US officials have also said that Washington would need to keep its troops in Afghanistan even after the end of the combat mission in 2014 due to the growing presence of al-Qaeda in the country.

Commenting on Washington's unending war on the west Asian country, Rozoff said that "the problem is you now have the longest war in America's history; it's in its thirteenth year; you have the longest war in the history of Afghanistan."

He stated that the people of Afghanistan have suffered "three and a half decades of uninterrupted armed hostilities" in their country, adding, "It is time to withdraw the last American and NATO troop from that country".

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

- **US drone strikes claim 18 lives across Afghanistan**

At least eighteen people have been killed and several others injured in a series of US

assassination drone attacks in Afghanistan over the past three days.

According to the latest reports, six Taliban militants were killed in the northeastern Kunar Province on Sunday. It was the fourth US drone attack over the past three days.

On Saturday, at least ten people were killed as two airstrikes ripped through the eastern Kunar Province near the border with Pakistan.

Two people lost their lives in a similar attack in the Nuristan Province on Friday.

The United States uses its killer drones in a number of countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, daiming the targets of the attacks are militants, but local officials and witnesses say civilians have been the main victims.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has repeatedly questioned the legality of the

US drone strikes and on numerous occasions has called on Washington to stop the attacks.

Many civilians have lost their lives in US-led strikes and operations in various parts of Afghanistan over the past decade, with Afghans becoming increasingly outraged at the seemingly endless number of the deadly assaults.

Civilian casualties caused by foreign forces have been a major source of tension between Kabul and Washington.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains high in the country.

The United Nations and several human rights organizations have identified the US as the world's number one user of "targeted killings" largely due to its drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The UN also says the US-operated drone strikes pose a growing challenge to the international rule of law.

Philip Alston, the UN special envoy on extrajudicial killings, said in a report in late October 2010 that the attacks were undermining the rules designed to protect the right of life.

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

- **Kabul, Islamabad agree on inmates issue**

Afghanistan and Pakistan have reportedly agreed upon the release of 2,500 Pakistani prisoners from jails in Afghanistan in the near future.

Afghan online newspaper Khaama Press reported that the announcement was made by former Pakistani senator and central deputy chief of the Jamiat Ulema

Islam Fazal (JUI-F) Maulana Gul Naseeb Khan.

The JUI-F member said the release of Pakistani prisoners was discussed in talks JUI-F chief Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman held with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. He said that the talks between the two sides were fruitful.

Maulana Gul Naseeb Khan was also part of the five-member JUI-F delegation that traveled to Afghanistan on a formal invitation made by Karzai.

During the meeting last week, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman met with Karzai and the Afghan High Council in Kabul.

Last month, Pakistan said it had released top Afghan Taliban prisoner, Abdul Ghani Baradar, who many say served as the group's second-in-command.

The former Pakistani senator said that some 2,500 Pakistanis were currently imprisoned in Afghanistan. He added that

the presence of US-led soldiers in Afghanistan beyond the 2014 withdrawal deadline was also discussed in the meeting.

Washington and Kabul remain at odds over US demands for the right to conduct unilateral military operations in Afghanistan.

The US forces have been engaged in clashes with Taliban militants in Afghanistan and pro-Taliban militants crossing the border from neighboring Pakistan since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

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

- **Karzai leaves for Dushanbe for talks on Bilateral issues**



KABUL (PAN): At the head of high level delegation, president Hamid Karzai on Monday leaves on a two-day official visit for Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, his office said.

Traveling on official invitation from Tajik president Imam Ali Rakhmanov, president Karzai is scheduled to discuss bilateral issues with his Tajikistani counterpart during his visit to the country, the statement from the presidential palace said.

On Sunday, the foreign ministry spokesman Janan Musazai told a press conference in Kabul President Karzai, heading a high level delegation, would leave for Tajikistan tomorrow.

He said Afghan and Tajik presidents are expected to sign agreements concerning demining efforts and border transport facilities between the two neighbours.

He noted Karzai and Rakhmanov would also discuss issues concerning bilateral

relations, regional security and enhanced economic and transit trade ties.

This was Karzai's 17th official visit to Dushanbe during his 10 years in office.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/10/21/karzai-leaves-dushanbe-talks-bilateral-issues>

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Firuze Yağmur Gökler**. 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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