



Special Service
24 Hours
670 39 807
670 39 728
For ARAB TIMES Subscribers

Iranian troops leave oil well ... 'still in Iraq'



insight

The Arab Times, continues its weekly series "Insight" which appears every Monday and takes a close look at Kuwait's society, politics, science and technology. In today's article, Hayat Alyaqout, (above), an author, has definitive views on important social and political issues and expresses herself in no equivocal terms.

— Page 12

Joint team to begin border demarcation

AMARA, Iraq, Dec 20, (Agencies): Iranian troops who for three days controversially occupied a disputed border oil well left the facility during the night but remain on Iraqi soil, Iraq's government spokesman said Sunday.

"The Iranian forces have pulled back 50 metres (yards) from the well and have taken their flag but we now demand they return to where they have come from and that negotiations begin on the demarcation of the border," said government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh.

A senior Iraqi security official, who declined to be named, told AFP that "according to military norms, this is not a full withdrawal."

"We will continue to act diplomatically," the official said, adding the army did not issue any statement concerning the incident to avoid "any escalation."

The facility, known as Well 4, lies in disputed territory about 100 metres

from the Iranian border, according to Iraqi officials. Iran says the oil well falls within its borders.

Earlier, Mayssam Lafta, chief of security and defence of Iraq's Maysan province where the well is situated, said the Iranian troops had departed from the facility.

"The Iranian troops left overnight and the workers of the oil company returned to the well on Sunday," he said, but later he clarified that the workers were in fact a full 4 kms (about 1.3 miles) from the well.

According to Lafta, the Iranians are positioned 50 metres east of the well while Iraqi forces are 500 metres to the west, adding the whole area has been declared a "military zone."

Meanwhile, Iran's parliament speaker Ali Larijani said the situation had been blown "out of proportion."

Continued on Page 43

'140 million' Arabs live in poverty: UN

CAIRO, Dec 20, (Agencies): Nearly 140 million Arabs live below the poverty line, according to a report published on Sunday by the United Nations Development Programme and Arab League.

The joint report stressed "there has been no decrease in the rates of poverty in the Arab region over the past 20 years," with some countries actually showing an increase.

"Overall poverty remains high, reaching up to 40 percent on average, which means that nearly 140 million Arabs continue to live under the upper poverty line."

The document entitled "Development Challenges for the Arab Region: A Human Development Approach" also indicated youth unemployment was "the highest in the world" in Arab countries.

"The proportion of young people of the total unemployed population is more than 50 percent for most Arab

Continued on Page 43



Due to the deep cold, plants covered with ice at the border of the Geneva Lake in Lausanne, Dec 20. Temperatures in Switzerland reached minus 34.2 degrees Celsius (minus 29 Fahrenheit) in western Switzerland overnight. (AP)

Quest for soft power

West worries on Turkey drift east

ANKARA, Dec 20, (AFP): Unprecedented activism in the Middle East has raised Turkey's regional profile and boosted trade links, but some in the West are concerned that a long-time Muslim ally may be drifting away.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan heads to Syria Tuesday for the second time in six months, several days after his foreign minister visited Damascus and the president hosted Egypt's leader following a trip to Jordan.

Such a flurry of visits has become commonplace recently as Erdogan's Islamist-rooted government pushes ahead with a quest for "soft power" in a region its Ottoman forebears ruled for centuries.

It has mended fences notably with Syria and Iran after decades of enmity.

The drive towards the East gathered steam amid growing frustration with European opposition to Turkey's EU bid.

But some observers in the West — and inside Turkey itself — were dismayed to see the leaders of a Nato country in warm embraces with the heads of Iran or Sudan.

Ankara says it remains committed to EU membership, arguing that increased regional influence will raise Turkey's strategic value in European eyes.

It rejects charges that the new vision focuses on Islamic nations, pointing to

Continued on Page 43

Top Iranian dissident cleric Montazeri dies

Opposition called to streets

TEHRAN, Dec 20, (Agencies): Top Iranian dissident cleric Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri has died, his office said on Sunday, stirring calls for opponents of the hardline Islamic regime to gather on the streets of Tehran.

Montazeri, 87, a fierce critic of President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad, died of a natural illness on Saturday night and is set to be buried on Monday, said his office in the holy city of Qom, where he had been based for several years.

"He was diabetic and had been using insulin for years ... He had also some lung problems and asthma. In fact he was suffering from several diseases," his doctor told state television.

The grand ayatollah was an inspiration to rights advocates and pro-reform groups and was considered by his followers as the highest living authority of Shiite Islam in Iran.

According to the opposition website RaheSabz.net, opposition supporters called for a gathering to mourn the cleric at Tehran's Mohseni square later on Sunday, adding that "sporadic gatherings" were already seen in the capital.

Meanwhile, Internet connection slowed to a crawl, as has been the case whenever the authorities anticipate opposition demonstrations.

Montazeri is to be buried in the shrine of Masoumeh, a revered Shiite figure, in Qom, his office told AFP. Foreign media have been banned from covering the ceremony.

Once designated as the successor to the founder of the 1979 Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Montazeri came out in bold support of the Iranian opposition when it rejected the re-election of Ahmadinejad in June.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei offered condolences to his family although Montazeri was also critical of him and questioned his credentials for being the country's highest religious authority.

"He was an accomplished theologian and a prominent teacher who spent a large part of his life for Imam's (Khomeini's) cause," Khamenei said in a statement carried by state television's website.

He also asked divine forgiveness for Montazeri over a "difficult ordeal" that the late cleric had undergone, alluding to his fallout with Khomeini.

The cleric had long been critical of the concentration of power in the hands of the supreme leader and called for changes to the constitution which he helped draw up after the 1979 Islamic revolution, to limit the leader's authority.

Montazeri had often criticised hardliner Ahmadinejad over his domestic and foreign policies, including Tehran's nuclear standoff with the West.

Continued on Page 43

29 killed in Poland

Crippling cold grips Europe

WARSAW, Poland, Dec 20, (AP): Snowstorms and subfreezing temperatures have battered Europe, killing 29 people in Poland alone and wreaking havoc on air, train and car travelers from the Nordics to Italy on the last weekend before Christmas.

France's civil aviation authority ordered the cancellation of 40 percent of flights out of Paris' Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports Sunday through mid-afternoon.

The authority later said it was asking airlines flying out of Charles de Gaulle to cancel 20 percent of flights planned Monday morning because of forecasts of intermittent snowfall.

Belgium was also badly hit, while travelers at Amsterdam's Schiphol air-

port faced delays and cancellations. In western Germany, Duesseldorf airport was closed because of heavy snowfall, with flights canceled or rerouted.

Flights at Manchester Airport, Britain's busiest outside the London area, resumed after its only runway was briefly closed for snow clearance.

In Brussels, passengers lined up for several hours in an effort to rebook flights.

"There's been no information, no people to ask, no nothing," said Monica Estaban, a 21-year-old student returning home to Barcelona for Christmas. "I can't wait to get out of here. I'll take whatever flight I can."

There was trouble on the railways

Continued on Page 43



Montazeri



Barcelona soccer players being received at Kuwait International Airport Sunday evening. Barcelona play Kazma Monday evening.

See Page 52

NewsWatch

TEHRAN: Iran on Sunday detained a documentary filmmaker for "insulting officials" of the Islamic republic, the ISNA news agency reported.

Mohammad Nurizad "was summoned and after arraignment ... bail was set for him but since he couldn't afford it, he was sent to prison," the Tehran public and revolutionary prosecutor's office said, quoted by ISNA.

"The Tehran prosecutor had previously advised that the prosecutor's office will deal with those who insult the country's officials," ISNA quoted prosecutor Abbas Jafari Doulatabadi as saying.

Nurizad, 57, has made documentaries and movies on the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, mosques and the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988.

On his weblog, mohammadnurizad.blogspot.com, Nurizad wrote on Saturday that he had been summoned to the prosecutor's office accused of "insulting the head of the judiciary."

Nurizad was referring to one of his weblog posts on Dec 17 in which he slammed the "low, illegal, furious, inept,

Continued on Page 43

Festive Times

AN ARAB TIMES SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT WITH THIS ISSUE
DON'T MISS YOUR COPY

Dear God!!
Shower us with your Blessings,
Happiness, Wealth
& Health...

Alfares Jewellery
Mubarakiya.: 22433366
Shuwaikh. : 24826704
Avenues. : 22598086