



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 km (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

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.

Montazeri



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)

'Saudi air strikes kill 54 civilians'

DUBAI, Dec 20, (AFP): A spokesman for Shiite rebels in Yemen on Sunday accused Saudi forces of killing 54 civilians in air strikes against a border town between the two Arab countries.

There was no independent confirmation of the claim made by the spokesman, who identified himself only as Ali, in a telephone call to AFP in Dubai.

"There has been a massacre committed by the Saudis in the district of Razeh in the (northern) Saada province, this morning (Sunday)," the spokesman said.

Continued on Page 43



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Photo by Hamdy Shawky

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

See Page 52

Continued on Page 43

