



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Maliki welcomes forming demonstrators' negotiation delegation (Aswat al-Iraq)**

25 Mar. 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Premier Nouri al-Maliki welcomed today the formation of a negotiation delegation formed by the demonstrators to end the current crisis.

In a statement by Maliki's office, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, Maliki welcomed the initiative as "an attempt to bury the incitement who, some, tried to utilize the situation for personal or political gains".

The welcoming speech comes after one day of announcing the intention to form a negotiating team with Baghdad.

Anbar, Ninewa and Salahal-Din provinces witnessed massive demonstrations since 22 December 2012, demanding the release of innocent prisoners and detainees, endorsement of the general amnesty, stop neglecting the Sunni sect and toppling Premier Nouri al-Maliki's government.

- **Tomorrow's cabinet session for demonstrators' demands (Aswat al-Iraq)**

25 Mar. 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi Cabinet shall allocate tomorrow's session to discuss the demands of the demonstrators in Anbar, Ninewa and Salahal-Din provinces, as reported in breaking news by semi-official Iraqiya TV today.

Anbar, Ninewa and Salahal-Din provinces witnessed massive demonstrations since 22 December 2012, demanding the release of innocent prisoners and detainees, endorsement of the general amnesty, stop neglecting the Sunni sect and toppling Premier Nouri al-Maliki's government.

- **Anbar protestors form committee to choose negotiators with the government (NINA)**

25 Mar. 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Head of Anbar Protestors' Political Committee, Abdul Razak al-Shimary, announced the formation of a 15-member body charged to negotiate with the Government.

Shimary told NINA on Monday, March 25, that Protestors in Anbar, under the supervision of the Coordination Committee, have formed a 15-member body of scholars and tribal chiefs to choose a negotiation committee to negotiate, with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, the Anbar protestors' demand and coordinate with protestors in other provinces.

He added that the delegation that will be formed within the next few days will negotiate 14 legal and constitutional demands, mainly bring the killers of Falluja and Mosul peoples to courts in Ramadi and Niniveh to be tried there according to the law.

He pointed out that protestors in Anbar are peaceful people and their demands are legal and constitutional; they expect from Maliki and the Government to comply with their demands.

- **Five-Side Committee meets at Mutleg's office to set final drafts of some laws (alliraqnews)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Five-Side Committee held a meeting at the office of the Deputy

Premier, Salih al-Mutleg, in Baghdad, on Monday, to set the final drafts of the laws related to the demonstrators' demands to be endorsed by the Council of Ministers during its Tuesday session and then to be ratified by the Parliament later.

A statement by Mutleg's office received by AIN cited "The meeting was attended by the Minister, Hadi al-Amiri, and the head of the State of Law Coalition bloc, Khalid al-Atiya, as well as the Minister of Education, Mohamed Timim, in addition to MPs, Falah Hasan Zedan and Qais Shather."

"The attendants of the meeting agreed upon the final drafts of the General Amnesty Law, Justice and Accountability Law, Secret Informer Law in addition to releasing the women detainees as well as canceling the laws of 76 and 88 related to seizing the properties and to sustain the balance in the State institutions," the statement concluded.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=30908:](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30908)

- **Allaq: Tuesday CoM session to be devoted for discussing**

## **demonstrators' demands (alliraqnews)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Secretary General of the Council of Ministers, Ali al-Allaq, assured “The session of the CoM of next Tuesday will be devoted to discussing the demonstrators’ demands and to result reached by the Ministerial Commission formed to follow up the demonstrators’ demands.”

He stated to AIN “The CoM will listen to the comprehensive report of the Commission over its achievements in the former stage as will discuss some law projects accomplished by the Five-Side Committee over the demonstrators’ demands.”

The CoM announced that the Ministers of the Iraqiya Slate will attend its next Tuesday session. /End/

- **Anbar tribal council calls on Ministers boycotting cabinet to resume attending meetings to discuss the demonstrators demands (NINA)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad / NINA /-- Anbar tribal council called on Ministers who boycott the cabinet meetings to resume attending the meetings of the Ministers Council, especially for a session that will discuss the demands of the demonstrators.

The semi-official Al-Iraqiya TV channel said today : “The tribal council of Anbar province called on the government and parliament to respond to the legitimate demands to end the sit-ins and create a suitable climate for elections.

The Council also called on the protesters to elect a negotiating committee and take advantage of the positive atmosphere achieved after the recent visit of elders of the province to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

- **Lack of neutral mediator behind escalated disputes, says Shimmari (alliraqnews)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Kadhim al-Shimmari, of the White bloc pointed out “The lack of the neutral mediator among the heads of the political blocs is behind the escalated disputes.”

He stated to AIN “The political disputes among the powerful blocs are repeated in like a routine according to the events and the stances.”

“Reconsidering the former years show that lack of the neutral, local or international mediator caused the escalation of the crisis,” he continued.

“The accord and the dialogue are no more possible among the heads of the blocs because the lost trust in each other,” he concluded

- **Hakim calls not to turn electoral competition into political strife (alliraqnews)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, called not to turn the electoral competition into political strife among the participating political blocs.

A statement by the SIIC reported "Hakim stressed, during receiving Al Masoud tribe's chieftains, the electoral competition should be devoted for how to present services to the citizens," noting "The good choice for the characters and

the slates is a victory for the Citizen Coalition regardless of whichever slate will win the elections."

- **Anbar people ready to participate in next local elections, says official (alliraqnews)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Iraqi Presidency Council, Nasir al-Ani stressed that "Anbar people are fully ready to participate in the next local elections."

A statement by Ani's office quoted him as saying during his official visit to Ana district of Anbar province "The security situation in Anbar is more stable than the other Iraqi provinces where the province's people are fully willing to give their votes in the upcoming local elections."

"The political situation in most of the Iraqi provinces is very serious therefore all the political blocs and the tribal figures should exert efforts to upgrade the country's general situation," he added. /E

- **Ninewa Council's meeting changed venue because of suspected bomb (Aswat al-Iraq)**

25 Mar. 2013

NINEWA/ Aswat al-Iraq: Ninewa Provincial Council was obliged to change the venue of its meeting for suspicions of a bomb in the meeting's site.

Aswat al-Iraq correspondent said the meeting was to discuss the mechanisms of the elections and the postponement reasons.

Iraqi Cabinet decided last Tuesday the postponement of the elections in Ninewa and Anbar provinces, for utmost period of six months.

- **Barzani meets today with Erdogan in Ankara (NINA)**

25 Mar. 2013

Arbil / NINA /--The head of Kurdistan Regional Government Nechirvan Barzani is scheduled to met Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara today.

Press secretary for Nechirvan Barzani bureau said in a statement today: "The head of the provincial government will meet this evening in Ankara with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss a number of issues, including the

Kurdish issue and the peace process in Turkey."

- **OIC calls on Iraqi government to restore security ( Anatolia News Agency)**

25 March 2013 18:39

OIC head said Iraqi government should ensure the security and stability in the country

JEDDAH

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), called on Iraqi government to ensure the security and stability in the country.

Ihsanoglu expressed his concerns about the deteriorating political situation in Iraq. Common effort and national consensus are necessary to prevent escalating violence in the country, Ihsanoglu addressed political and religious leaders in Iraq.

Ihsanoglu said that OIC was ready for every type of cooperation.

Meanwhile, Ihsanoglu left for Qatar to attend the 24th Summit meeting of Arab

League that will take place on March 26 and 27.

<http://www.aa.com.tr/en/news/147701--oic-calls-on-iraqi-government-to-restore-security>

- **Khuzaie up to Doha (NINA)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baghdad/ NINA /--Vice president of the republic Khudair Khuzaie arrived to Doha the Qatari capital to head the Iraqi delegation to the Arab summit and the twenty-fourth ordinary session of the Arab summit, which begins its work at Doha on Tuesday.

Iraq is heading the actual term of the Arab summit since the twenty-third session which held in Baghdad in March 2012 .

The Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari handed over yesterday the presidency of the Arab summit to Qatar during the preparatory ministerial meeting for the summit,.

- **Turkey is a crucial country for Iraq (Anatolia News Agency)**

25 March 2013

Israeli apology, first in history: Iraqi parliament speaker says

BAGHDAD

Iraqi Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi on Monday said that the Israeli apology to Turkey last week was the "first in history".

In an exclusive interview with the Anadolu Agency (AA), Nujaifi underlined that Israel had an aggressive attitude not only against the "Mavi Marmara" aid ship that was on its way to providing assistance to Palestinians but also all sides in the region.

"Israeli apology to Turkey was a success for the Turkish and Arab worlds," Nujaifi stressed.

Pointing out that Turkey did not have a (negative) attitude on Iraq's territorial integrity and the Iraqi people, Nujaifi emphasized that Turkey had good relations with all groups in Iraq, including the Shiites, Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds.

"Turkey is a crucial country for Iraq. Iraq needs to review its policy of cooperation with Turkey," Nujaifi said.

Nujaifi called on certain circles in Iraq to end labelling Turkey as an enemy country.

Nujaifi also said that they were in constant touch with Turkish President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, and Turkish Parliament Speaker Cemil Cicek.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized to the Turkish people on March 22 during a phone conversation with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for an Israeli raid on the "Mavi Marmara" aid ship which resulted in the killing of nine Turks in May 2010.

<http://www.aa.com.tr/en/rss/147681--turkey-is-a-crucial-country-for-iraq>

- **Iraqi Kurds pledge support for peace talks in Turkey (Anatolia News Agency)**

IRBIL, 25 Mar. 2013 (AA) - Sefin Dizai, spokesperson for the regional administration in north of Iraq, said on Monday that "what was important was the arrival of peace and brotherhood in Turkey".

Speaking to the Anadolu Agency (AA) on the process of solution in Turkey, Dizai underlined that they were ready to do whatever was necessary for the process of solution in Turkey.

Some members of terrorist organization PKK are not Turkish citizens, Dizai noted.

"There are citizens of Iran, Syria and Iraq within PKK. The problem should be solved in such a way that those citizens of other countries should be able to return to their own countries," Dizai underlined.

Touching on a new oil pipeline between Turkey and Iraq, Dizai stressed that the oil pipeline would not be erected to divide Iraq or for Kurdistan as the Baghdad administration argued.

"The new oil pipeline would be erected for the interests of the whole population of Iraq," Dizai stated.

"The map of our region changed 100 years ago during World War I. We are in a similar period. Dreams sometimes come true or become nightmares. Kurdish politicians and Kurdish leaders should not

let the dream turn into a nightmare," Dizai also said.

Source: Anadolu (also known as Anatolia) news agency, Ankara, in Turkish 25 Mar 13

- **Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan to Further Expand Trade Cooperation (Fars News)**

25 Mar. 2013

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran and Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) are keen to further expand their trade cooperation, an Iranian official said after Tehran resumed exports of goods to the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Exports of goods from Qasr-e-Shirin border city to Iraqi Kurdistan region was resumed after halt due to Nowrouz holidays.

"A total of 70 trucks loaded with Iran's export commodities passed from Parviz Khan and Khosravi border check post of Qasr-e-Shirin to reach Iraqi Kurdish cities," Governor of Qasr-e-Shirin Hossein Parvin said on Sunday, stressing both sides' interest in further development of trade ties and cooperation.

Qasr-e-Shirin has two official border check posts of Parviz Khan and Khosravi with Iraq.

Iran and the Iraqi Kurdistan region have enjoyed growing ties ever since the overthrow of the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, during the 2003 US invasion of the Muslim country.

A senior Iraqi Kurdish official announced in July that the value of the trade ties between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan region will exceed \$4bln this year thanks to the two sides' growing cooperation.

"This year, the maximum value of our trade activities will exceed \$4bln and such a boost is certainly the result of further cooperation," Representative of the Iraqi Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Nazzem Dabbaq told FNA at the time, adding that the value of bilateral trade ties with Iran was \$100 million in 2000.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107155516>

- **Turkish jets fly over PKK camps in northern Iraq 'for observation' (Hurriyet Daily News)**

DIYARBAKIR - Doğan News Agency 25 Mar. 2013

Five F-16 fighter planes took off from a Diyarbakır Air Force base before conducting flights over outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) camps in northern Iraq, according to Doğan news agency.

The jets flew over Hakkari's Çukurca district and over PKK camps near the border.

The flights had no offensive nature but were conducted to check the camp sites, Doğan news agency reported, adding that they were set to be repeated frequently to discover and follow movements occurring in PKK camps.

The jets will not bomb the areas unless an armed attack against Turkey occurs, officials said, adding that their sole purpose was to inspect the areas.

[http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-jets-fly-over-pkk-camps-in-northern-iraq-for-](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-jets-fly-over-pkk-camps-in-northern-iraq-for-observation.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43605&NewsCatID=341)

[observation.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43605&NewsCatID=341](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-jets-fly-over-pkk-camps-in-northern-iraq-for-observation.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43605&NewsCatID=341)

- **5 killed, 13 injured in Iraqi violence (Xinhua)**

BAGHDAD, March 25 (Xinhua) -- Four people were killed and 13 others wounded in separate attacks in Iraq Monday, while an al-Qaida militant leader was shot dead in a raid, the police said.

In Iraq's eastern province of Diyala, two policemen were killed when a roadside bomb struck a joint police-army patrol in the western part of the provincial capital city of Baquba, some 65 km northeast of Iraq's capital Baghdad, a provincial police source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

Five policemen and three soldiers, including an officer, were wounded by the blast, the source said.

In a separate incident, a paramilitary member of local Awakening Council group was killed and three others wounded when gunmen, believed to be affiliated to al-Qaida network in Iraq, attacked their checkpoint at a village some 35 km northeast of Baquba, the source said.

The Awakening Council group, also known as Sons of Iraq, consists of armed groups, including some powerful anti-U.S. Sunni insurgent groups, who turned their rifles against al-Qaida after the latter exercised indiscriminate killings against both Shiite and Sunni communities.

Also in the province, an Iraqi army and police force shot dead Abu Jihad, a suspected al-Qaida leader, when they raided his safe house at the village of Makheisah, some 30 km northeast of Baquba, the source said.

Abu Jihad is believed to have been involved in many attacks against Iraqi military patrols in Diyala province, he added.

In addition, two soldiers were wounded when gunmen attacked their checkpoint in the same village, he said.

In Salahudin province, a policeman was killed when a sticky bomb attached to his car detonated while he was driving in north of the provincial capital city of Tikrit, some 170 km north of Baghdad, a

provincial police source anonymously told Xinhua.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-03/26/c\\_124501725.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-03/26/c_124501725.htm)

- **A leading member of al Qaeda killed, another one wounded northeast of Baquba (NINA)**

25 Mar. 2013

Baquba / NINA /-- A leading member of al Qaeda killed another one wounded in an armed clash that brook out northeast of Baquba this afternoon.

A security source said to NINA reporter : " A joint security force of police and army carried out a search operation in the orchards area around Mukhisa village of Abu Saida county northeast of Baqub capital of Diyala province, noting that two members of al-Qaida managed to flee but search process is underway for the fugitives who fled into dense orchards on the banks of Diyala River."

- **6 Killed, wounded in Tikrit (NINA)**

25 Mar. 2013

Tikrit (NINA) – Police officer and his relative killed and four civilians wounded

when an improvised explosive device, attached to the officer's car, went off on Monday evening, March 25, in downtown Tikrit, Salaheddin province.

Police source told NINA that an improvised explosive device went off on Monday evening, on a car belonged to a police officer, lieutenant Mizher Ahmed, and one of his relatives, while parking it in downtown Tikrit, killing the officer and his relative, as well as wounding four civilians; the car burned down along the two bodies and damaging nearby vehicles. /

A policeman killed in Samarra (NINA)

25 Mar. 2013

Tikrit / NINA /--A policeman killed, on Monday evening, by a sniper in central Samarra, south of Tikrit capital of Salahuddin province.

A security source said to NINA : "A sniper fired on a police checkpoint central of Samarra, killing a policeman immediately."

/ End

- **Exxon to invest more in Iraq's West Qurna 1 (Reuters)**

Mon Mar 25, 2013

By Aref Mohammed

(Reuters) - Exxon Mobil has allocated \$1.65 billion to develop Iraq's West Qurna 1 oilfield in 2013, up from \$1.6 billion last year, the head of the joint management committee for the field said.

An Iraqi oil ministry official said the budget indicated Exxon's commitment to developing the southern field in 2013, which it offered to sell out of last year after riling Baghdad by signing six deals with the autonomous Kurdistan region.

Baghdad rejects contracts granted by the northern enclave as illegal and told Exxon it had to choose between the \$50 billion West Qurna-1 project and its Kurdish assets, offering the U.S. major sweeter terms in a bid to keep in the south.

"Under the work programme approved for 2013 by the oil ministry, Exxon has set \$1.65 billion to develop West Qurna 1," Madhi Abdul Razzaq of the management committee told Reuters.

In line with Iraq's service contract terms, oil companies must submit a work plan

including development budget to the oil ministry before the start of the year for approval.

"If Exxon were not interested to keep working in West Qurna then it will not spend a huge investment of \$1.65 billion to keep developing the field," the oil ministry official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Indonesia's Chief Economic Minister said earlier this month the country's state-owned oil and gas firm Pertamina was in talks to buy 10-20 percent of Exxon stake in West Qurna-1.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/25/iraq-exxon-idUSL5N0CH2AJ20130325?rpc=401>

## 2. IRAN

- **New Delhi to Provide Insurance Services to Indian Importers of Iran's Oil**

TEHRAN (FNA)- New Delhi announced plans to provide Indian importers of the Iranian oil with their needed insurance

services, a senior Indian official announced.

"According to the proposal, public sector insurance companies and the Oil Industry Development Board under the petroleum ministry would contribute money for the fund that would provide reinsurance for the state-owned insurers," Secretary for India's Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas Vivek Rae said on Sunday.

The measure is reportedly aimed at countering the effect of sanctions imposed by the European Union, banning the bloc's members from purchasing Iran's oil or extending insurance coverage for tankers carrying its crude. The EU bans entered into force on July 1, 2012.

"What will be the size of this fund, how much we are required to contribute, whether it is enough to cover reinsurance -these are the details that insurance companies have to work out," Rae added.

Indian refiners HPCL, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL) and Essar are the main clients of Iranian crude oil.

Under pressure from the United States, the EU foreign ministers approved new sanctions against Iran's oil and financial sectors last January.

The sanctions, which prevent EU member states from purchasing Iran's oil or extending insurance coverage for tankers carrying Iranian crude, came into effect on July 1.

On August 1, 2012, the US Congress approved more illegal embargoes against Tehran, which seek to punish banks, insurance companies and shippers that help Tehran sell its oil.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107155654>

- **Legislator: Almaty Talks No Prelude to Negotiations with US**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The recent talks between Iran and the six world powers in Almaty, Kazakhstan, cannot be considered as a prelude to negotiations between Tehran and Washington since the US officials' deeds don't match their words, an Iranian MP said.

"What happened in talks with the G5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) cannot be considered as a prelude to talks between Iran and the US, because the behavior and literature used by the US has proved that the White House officials' words do not match their deeds," Member of the parliament's Presiding Board Seyed Sharif Hosseini said on Monday.

The last round of the talks between Tehran and the six world powers was held in Almaty on February 26-27.



During the talks Iran and the world powers agreed to hold an experts meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, on March 17-18 and then continue their talks at the level of their top negotiators in Almaty on April 5-6.

"The US behavior and action in the region is...aimed at diverting the public opinion. Therefore the US green light for talks with

Iran must not be taken seriously," Hosseini said.

The Iranian lawmaker pointed out that to make talks with Iran possible, the West must remove anti-Iran sanctions, stop bullying policies, and withdraw its military forces from the region.

His remarks came a few days after Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei questioned the US honesty in its offer of talks with Iran, and stressed that talks will be meaningless as long as Washington continues its hostile policy towards Iran.

"Through different ways and messages, the Americans try to negotiate with us on the nuclear issue, but I am not optimistic about these talks," Ayatollah Khamenei said, addressing Iranian people in Northeastern holy city of Mashhad on Thursday.

"I am not opposed to talks with regard to the nuclear issue, but certain issues must be clarified," the Leader said.

The Leader pointed to the US claim that they intend to be honest in their talks with

Iran, and noted, "We have repeatedly asserted that we do not seek nuclear weapons but you do not believe this honest word; why should we accept your word?"

"Negotiation is an American tactic for deceiving the public opinion and if it is otherwise the Americans should prove it," the Leader stated.

He pointed to the talks between Iran and the Group 5+1, and said that Washington does not want the talks to come to a conclusion.

"With regard to the nuclear issue, Iran only wants the recognition of its rights to enrichment."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107155678>

- **India to insure Iran crude tankers**

TEHRAN, March 25 (MNA) – A senior Indian official says New Delhi plans to establish a fund for insurance companies providing cover for importers of Iranian crude in order to counter Western sanctions against Tehran.

"According to the proposal, public sector insurance companies and the Oil Industry Development Board under the petroleum ministry would contribute money for the fund that would provide reinsurance for the state-owned insurers," Vivek Rae, Secretary for India's Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, said on Sunday.

The measure is reportedly aimed at countering the effect of sanctions imposed by the European Union, banning the bloc's members from purchasing Iran's oil or extending insurance coverage for tankers carrying its crude. The EU bans entered into force on July 1, 2012.

"What will be the size of this fund, how much we are required to contribute, whether it is enough to cover reinsurance -these are the details that insurance companies have to work out," Rae added.

Indian refiners HPCL, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL) and Essar are the main clients of Iranian crude oil.

The US, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing

non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Using the unfounded allegation, the US and its European allies have imposed unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

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

<http://www.startv.com.tr/dizi/behzadc/vid-eo-galeri/sayfa/1/behzadc-89-bolum/2>

- **India to insure Iran crude tankers**

TEHRAN, March 25 (MNA) – A senior Indian official says New Delhi plans to establish a fund for insurance companies providing cover for importers of Iranian crude in order to counter Western sanctions against Tehran.

"According to the proposal, public sector insurance companies and the Oil Industry Development Board under the petroleum ministry would contribute money for the

fund that would provide reinsurance for the state-owned insurers," Vivek Rae, Secretary for India's Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, said on Sunday.

The measure is reportedly aimed at countering the effect of sanctions imposed by the European Union, banning the bloc's members from purchasing Iran's oil or extending insurance coverage for tankers carrying its crude. The EU bans entered into force on July 1, 2012.

"What will be the size of this fund, how much we are required to contribute, whether it is enough to cover reinsurance -these are the details that insurance companies have to work out," Rae added.

Indian refiners HPCL, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL) and Essar are the main clients of Iranian crude oil.

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

Using the unfounded allegation, the US and its European allies have imposed

unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

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

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819147>

- **South Korea and US sign new military pact**

TEHRAN, March 25 (MNA) – The United States and South Korea have signed a military deal enabling a joint response to what they call provocations by North Korea, official sources say.

South Korea's Defense Ministry spokesman, Kim Min-seok, said Monday that the new pact provides for the response to even low-level provocative moves conducted by Pyongyang

The limited acts of provocation envisaged in the pact, signed on March 22, include maritime border incursions, shelling of border islands and infiltration by low-

flying fighter jets or by Special Forces units.

The new accord also guarantees Washington's support for Seoul's retaliatory actions against the North. It further allows South Korea to request any additional US military force it considers necessary.

"This allows both nations to jointly respond to the North's local provocations, with the South taking the lead and the US in support," Kim said.

"It will have the effect of preventing the North from daring to provoke us," the spokesman added.

General Jung Seung-jo, the chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, also said the new protocol permits a "strong retaliation" that would make Pyongyang "bitterly regret" any act of provocation.

Many say the recent military deal will amount to fresh outrage in North Korea, which has been censuring joint South Korea-US military exercises over the past weeks.

On March 21, South Korean and US forces successfully completed an annual war game codenamed 'Key Resolve', amid high military tension with North Korea, announcing that they would continue to maintain high alert in the wake of fresh threats of attack from Pyongyang.

North Korea, however, condemned the maneuvers as a launch pad for a "nuclear war."

The United Nations also approved a fresh round of sanctions against Pyongyang following its nuclear test in February, a move that added to Pyongyang's escalating rhetoric against Washington and Seoul.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819149>

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<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/25/295129/india-to-insure-importers-of-iran-oil/>

- **US, Israel cyber attacks on Iran act of force: NATO**

NATO's cyberwarfare center says cyber attacks launched against the Islamic Republic of Iran by the US and Israel constituted "an act of force" and were illegal under international law.

According to The Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare, commissioned by NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Estonia, "Acts that kill or injure persons or destroy or damage objects are unambiguously uses of force," The Washington Times reported on Sunday.

Michael D. Schmitt, the manual's lead author and professor of international law at the US Naval War College in Newport, said the group of researchers who wrote the manual all agreed that the use of Stuxnet virus, that attacked Iran's cyber structures in 2009, was an act of force.

Washington and Tel Aviv are believed to have jointly developed the malware, although neither has accepted responsibility for the attack.

Iran has been the target of several cyber attacks over the past few years.

In June 2012, a report by the Washington Post said the US and the Israeli regime had cooperated in creating the computer virus Flame to spy on Iran. US National Security Agency, the CIA and the Israeli military worked together to create the Flame virus, the paper added.

In addition, the New York Times also revealed in the same month that US President Barack Obama secretly ordered a cyber attack with the Stuxnet computer virus against Iran in 2010 to sabotage the country's nuclear energy program.

"From his first months in office, President Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities, significantly expanding America's first sustained use of cyber weapons," the report said.

In response to such attacks, Iran launched a cyber defense headquarters tasked with preventing computer worms from breaking into or stealing data from the country's maximum security networks,

including nuclear facilities, power plants, data centers, and banks.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/25/295109/nato-cyber-attack-on-iran-act-of-force/>

- **Iran's defensive might serves interests of regional states: MP**

An Iranian lawmaker has reaffirmed defensive nature of Iran's military maneuvers, calling on regional states to take advantage of Iran's defensive potential and capability.

"These maneuvers [are aimed to] convey the message of peace and friendship and the [need for the] establishment of [regional] security by the regional countries," member of Iran Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Ahmad Shohani said on Monday.

The lawmaker added that in addition to showing its might to regional countries, Iran should also prove its readiness to protect the regional security.

He emphasized that if regional states took part in Iran's military exercises, their results could be much better.

The legislator added that despite the West's propaganda, Iran has never attacked any country and has always defended its own territory.

Shohani stated that the Western countries spread propaganda against Iran's maneuvers to spread fear and concern among regional states.

Iran is not a threat to regional countries but will always stand by them, the Iranian lawmaker pointed out.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defense capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially its neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, since its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/25/295163/iran-might-serves-regional-states/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel, Turkey begin talks on compensation for Marmara victims**

Ankara's Deputy PM calls start of negotiations 'a big success of Turkish foreign policy'

Israeli and Turkish officials met on Monday to discuss the terms of Israel's compensation to victims of the 2010 raid on the Mavi Marmara.

"Officials delegated by the two sides will work on the compensation issue. We gave the kickstart for it today," Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting.

Arinc called the talks "a big success of Turkish foreign policy."

The negotiations began three days after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan and apologized for "operational errors" made during the raid on the Marmara, a vessel seeking to break Israel's blockade of Gaza, in which nine Turkish activists were killed by naval

commandos who were attacked when they boarded.

The call came in the final minutes of US President Barack Obama's visit to Israel last week, having been brokered by the Americans. Erdogan accepted Netanyahu's apology and the two agreed to return their respective ambassadors and pledged to overcome differences.

In an apparent backtrack, however, the Turkish premier said Sunday that normalized relations with Jerusalem would only happen if Israel implemented its side of an ostensible new bargain with Turkey that he said included Israel lifting its blockade on Gaza — something which Netanyahu did not agree to do in the phone conversation.

On Sunday, President Shimon Peres urged Turkey to restore normalized relations with Israel, citing mutual interest and common history as two of several factors that require the mending of ties between the former allies.

"I can think of a thousand reasons why Turkey and Israel should be friends," Peres said in a special interview at the

President's Residence with CNN Turk. "I cannot find one reason why they shouldn't be friends."

"Both countries wanted to put an end to this misunderstanding and return to the good relations that existed between Turkey and ourselves for many good years," the president said, adding that he hoped to travel to Ankara and shake hands with the Turkish leader soon.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-turkey-begin-talks-on-compensating-raid-victims/>

- **Billboards in Ankara: 'Israel apologized, thank you Erdogan'**

Deputy FM Arinc says Israeli apology for deadly 2010 raid on Gaza-bound ship 'a big success of Turkish foreign policy;' talks on compensation for victims' families begin

Large billboards were put up by the Ankara municipality on Monday to thank Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan following Israel's apology for the deadly 2010 raid on a Gaza-bound ship.

"Israel apologized to Turkey. Dear prime minister, we are grateful that you let our country experience this pride," the billboards read.

Israel and Turkey began talks Monday on compensation for the families of victims of the raid, for which the Jewish state apologized last week, ending a near three-year diplomatic rift.

"Officials delegated by the two sides will work on the compensation issue. We gave the kickstart for it today," Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting.

Ties between Israel and Turkey plummeted in May 2010 when Israeli commandos staged a pre-dawn raid on a six-ship flotilla to the Gaza Strip, killing nine Turkish nationals.

The assault triggered an international outcry and a bitter diplomatic crisis between Turkey and Israel, with Ankara demanding a formal apology and compensation for the families of the victims.

Until last week, Israel had refused. But on Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized to Turkey for the raid - a breakthrough brokered by US President Barack Obama during his visit to the Jewish state.

"This is a big success of Turkish foreign policy," Arinc said.

He said that Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, "held talks with the other party and expressed the necessity to swiftly solve the issue."

In remarks over the weekend, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the country's future diplomatic relationship with Israel - including the appointment of a new ambassador to Israel - would depend on the Jewish state.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4360875,00.html>

- **3 workers injured in Gaza tunnel explosion**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Three workers were injured Tuesday when a gas canister exploded in a smuggling tunnel under the Gaza-Egypt border, a Gaza official said.

Civil defense spokesman Muhammad al-Mathana told Ma'an that a fire broke out after a gas canister being transferred to Gaza exploded.

Three workers suffered serious burns and were taken to a hospital in Gaza, al-Matahan added.

In January, al-Mezan Center for Human Rights urged the Gaza government to implement better safety measures and assess the benefits of the network as a whole, saying 232 people had been killed in collapsing tunnels.

"Most of the people who work in tunnels are from very low-income backgrounds and have been forced to undertake this kind of work to provide for their families under the difficult socio-economic conditions caused by the Israeli siege on Gaza," the group said.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=578888>

- **Israel to unblock Palestinian funds: Netanyahu's Office**

Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu authorises the transfer of Palestinian revenues to the PA

Israel is to resume the transfer of revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, frozen last year in retaliation for the Palestinians winning upgraded UN status, the premier's office said on Monday.

The decision came after a visit last week by US President Barack Obama to Israel and the West Bank and follow-up meetings with both sides by Secretary of State John Kerry, who has pushed for the funds to be released since taking office in February.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "has decided to authorise the transfer of fiscal revenues to the Palestinian Authority," his office said, adding that finance ministry officials had already been instructed to renew the transfer of funds.

A spokesman for Netanyahu said the decision was to take effect "immediately".

Israel in early December announced it would not transfer tax and tariff funds it

collects for the severely cash-strapped Palestinians, in response to their successful UN campaign which the Jewish state had fiercely opposed.

Netanyahu authorised what he called a one-off release of \$100 million at the end of January, with an aide citing the Palestinians' "very difficult financial situation."

Ahead of Obama's visit, the Palestinian Authority urged the world to step up financial aid and press Israel to allow economic development, over fears of "political collapse" due to Israeli fiscal barriers.

On Friday, as Obama left Jerusalem for Amman, a top official in Washington said the US had quietly unblocked almost \$500 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority which had been frozen by Congress for months.

"To date, we have moved \$295.7 million in fiscal year 2012 money... and \$200 million in fiscal year 2013 assistance," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters.

The Palestinian bid for observer state membership of the UN -- a resolution that passed with overwhelming international support -- had also angered Washington, which said the move undermined efforts for bilateral talks.

A UN report last week said Israel must ease financial restrictions on the Palestinian Authority.

"Israel should refrain from withholding and/or delaying the transfer of clearance revenue owed to the PA," said the office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry.

He also warned that "Palestinian state-building achievement was at increased risk and the PA was facing ever greater political and financial pressure."

Israel usually transfers tens of millions of dollars in customs duties each month levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports. They constitute a large percentage of the Palestinian budget.

The transfers are governed by the 1994 Paris Protocols which govern economic

agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

But Israel often freezes the transfer of funds as a punitive measure in response to diplomatic or political developments it deems harmful.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/67709/World/Region/Israel-to-unblock-Palestinian-funds-Netanyahus-off.aspx>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Libya denies depositing \$2 bn in Egypt's central bank**

Libyan senior official denies reports that the state will be giving Egypt \$2 billion  
Bassem Abo Alabass, Monday 25 Mar 2013

On Sunday's evening, Turkish news agency Anadolu quoted Mohamed Fayez Jebri, the soon-to-be-appointed Libyan ambassador to Egypt, as saying that his country would deposit \$2 billion in the CBE to boost the Egyptian economy.

"The GNC hasn't yet ratified Jebri as the new ambassador to Egypt, so his

statements are neither official nor associated with the Libyan government," Mohamed Douma, the head of foreign affairs committee at GNC, the highest legislative authority in Libya, told Ahram Online. "Ashour Bourashed still stands as the current Libyan ambassador to Egypt."

The reports of the deposit followed the arrest of three former Libyan officials related to Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Cairo last week.

Among those who were arrested, Ahmed Gadhaf Al-Dam –a cousin of and former close aide to toppled ruler Gaddafi –was arrested at his residence in Zamalek, reportedly after a small clash between his guards and the police.

Oil-rich Qatar deposited roughly \$4 billion in the CBE over the past two years.

Qatar's deposit aimed at bolstering Egyptian net foreign reserves, which currently stand at critical levels, worth some \$13.5 billion.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/67655/Business/Economy/Libya->

[denies-depositing--bn-in-Egyptys-central-bank.aspx](http://denies-depositing--bn-in-Egyptys-central-bank.aspx)

- **UN offices looted in Central Africa: Spokesman**

Looters raided UN offices and staff homes when rebels overran the capital of the Central African Republic, a spokesman said Monday.

"It seems from our assessment so far that there is still some gunfire and that there is still some looting in Bangui," Nesirky told reporters.

"Several United Nations offices and residences of staff members, both national and international, have been looted," he added.

The 15-nation Security Council is expected to release a statement calling for a return to constitutional order after President Francois Bozize fled the rebel advance on Sunday.

"There is a new president, self-proclaimed in a totally unconstitutional way and the question we are all asking is how to come back to a constitutional situation, how to have elections as quickly as possible,"

France's UN ambassador Gerard Araud told reporters as he announced the meeting.

"In the coming days we are going to see what we can do to convince the new president to organize elections," Araud added.

Seleka rebel coalition chief Michel Djotodia has named himself the new leader of the Central African Republic. He told Radio France Internationale that he planned to hold "free and transparent" elections within three years.

France, the United States and UN chief Ban Ki-moon have called on the rebels to respect a January 11 peace accord that set up a national unity government. So far the prime minister, Nicolas Tiangaye, has been kept in place.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/67732/World/International/UN-offices-looted-in-Central-Africa-Spokesman.aspx>

- **Cairo protests against summons of opposition activists**

Opposition to protest in front of High Court in Cairo on Tuesday after prosecutor-general summons activists for their alleged incitement of clashes at Muslim Brotherhood HQ on Friday

Protesters will gather at the High Court in Cairo on Tuesday in solidarity with five opposition activists summoned by the prosecutor-general for questioning over their alleged incitement of clashes at the Muslim Brotherhood headquarters on Friday.

Police have stepped up their presence outside the court in preparation for the expected demonstrations.

On Monday evening, the office of Prosecutor-General Talaat Abdullah summoned renowned blogger Alaa Abdel-Fattah, Popular Current member Ahmed Doma, National Salvation Front member Hazem Abdel-Azim, Constitution Party member Ahmed Eid, activist Karim El-Shaer, and journalist and blogger Nawara Negm for questioning.

Alaa Abdel-Fattah has said he will respond to the summons in order to protect his family from further police harassment. But

the other summoned activists have said their will not respond.

The summons were made after Brotherhood lawyer Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Maksoud filed a complaint with the prosecutor-general against 169 individuals – including party heads, politicians and "thugs" – whom he accused of inciting the violence on Friday.

Among the political figures summoned for questioning were Egyptian Social Democratic Party leader Mohamed Abul-Ghar, Free Egyptians Party member Mahmoud El-Alaily and former Revolution Youth Coalition member Khaled Telima.

The liberal Constitution Party and No to Military Trials group called for Tuesday's protest.

Police have so far failed to arrest three Brotherhood workers accused of attacking anti-Brotherhood protesters on Friday.

Nationwide clashes between supporters and opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood on Friday left at least 200 people injured.

The protests on Friday took place in response to earlier attacks on anti-Brotherhood protesters by Brotherhood members outside the Islamist group's headquarters.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/67750/Egypt/Politics-/Cairo-protests-against-summons-of-opposition-activ.aspx>

- **Egypt's Morsi should head up new govt: Presidential advisor**

PM Qandil government should be replaced with new one better able to realise objectives of Egypt's 25 January Revolution, presidential advisor tells Kuwaiti press

A new government headed by President Mohamed Morsi is the solution to Egypt's current political turmoil, Ahmed Omran, Morsi's advisor for development issues, asserted in a Monday interview with Kuwaiti daily Al-Jarida.

Omran said that the current government of Prime Minister Hisham Qandil was "incapable" of taking the necessary economic and political steps needed to

realise the goals of Egypt's 25 January Revolution.

He added that a new Morsi-led government could circumvent the inevitable differences that arise when ministerial portfolios are divided among different political groups. He also stressed that a cabinet reshuffle was necessary now, especially since parliamentary polls weren't likely to begin before several months.

On 6 March, Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court overturned a presidential decree calling for parliamentary elections to begin on 22 April, questioning the constitutionality of the laws regulating the polls.

Numerous clashes between protesters and security forces have erupted in Egypt within recent months, reflecting the country's unstable political climate.

The government's critics accuse it of being incapable of resolving political unrest and economic malaise, as retail prices continue to rise and shortages of basic commodities – such as fuel – become increasingly commonplace.

Nevertheless, as criticism mounts against Morsi – who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood – and his government, Omran believes this will not affect the proportion of Islamists in Egypt's next parliament.

While the Muslim Brotherhood may lose ground, the Islamist vote as a whole won't be affected, he said, asserting that elections would be in the interest of proponents of Egypt's "Islamist project."

Egypt's last parliament was dissolved last year by the then-ruling Supreme Military Council, after the High Constitutional Court ruled the assembly unconstitutional.

The Muslim Brotherhood had won roughly half of the seats in the People's Assembly, parliament's lower house. Another quarter of the assembly's seats were held by other Islamist parties.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/67721/Egypt/Politics-/Egypst-Morsi-should-head-up-new-govt-Presidential-.aspx>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Deputy to NOW: Elections to be delayed at least 3 months**

Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party MP Akram Chehayeb said that the parliamentary elections due to take place in June will be "technically" postponed at least three months.

"Parliamentary elections will be technically postponed at least three months, and after that it all depends on the issue of dialogue and the government," Chehayeb told NOW reporter Karen Boulos on Monday.

On the reasons behind now caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati's recent resignation, Chehayeb said it was due to the political vacuum caused by the inability to reach an electoral law and the security vacuum caused by the inability to extend some security leaders' terms."

"In my opinion, the main issue is the Syrian one, for there is a clear stance taken by Miqati and [President Michel] Suleiman to condemn military attacks executed by the Syrian regime on Lebanese towns in addition to caretaker

Foreign Minister [Adnan Mansour's] policy which has also contributed to the resignation," he added.

Earlier in March, Lebanon's foreign minister called on Arab foreign ministers gathered in Cairo to allow the Syrian government to retake its seat at the Arab League, from which it was suspended in 2011. His statements caused a wide range of condemnation from the Lebanese opposition figures, while March 8 praised his stance.

Asked about who the PSP will suggest for heading the next cabinet, the MP stated that "he must not belong to neither the March 8 nor the March 14 groups. The next prime minister has to be neutral, someone all parties can reason with and who will be able to link them together."

Lebanon's government fell on Friday evening after Miqati resigned from his office, dropping a political bombshell on a country suffering a week of sectarian strife that saw intense clashes explode Thursday night in Tripoli.

His resignation came after the cabinet failed to approve the formation of a

supervisory electoral body and did not vote on the extension of the tenure of Internal Security Forces chief Ashraf Rifi, who like Miqati is a prominent Sunni figure from Tripoli.

About the fear from security chaos following the fall of the government, Chehayeb said that “the hope today resides in calling for dialogue,” adding that “there will be very tough conditions on the formation of the new government but the important thing now is for political parties to meet at the dialogue table as soon as possible.”

As for the accusations being made against Miqati and the Future Movement for allegedly providing a political cover for armed men in Tripoli, the PSP official said that all the Tripoli leaders are trying to restore calm in the city.

“I do not think that local leaderships are the ones threatening to destroy Tripoli, this is a threat that goes beyond the Lebanese borders. The Syrian regime wants to transfer its crisis to Lebanon in any way possible.”

Gun-battles erupted between the Alawite district of Jabal Mohsen and the neighboring Sunni areas Friday night following Najib Miqati’s announcement that he was resigning as premier.

Lastly, regarding the rumors about Hezbollah checkpoints being put up in the streets of Beirut, the parliamentarian said that “nobody has any interest in creating strife except the Syrian regime.”

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/deputy-to-now-elections-to-be-delayed-at-least-3-months>

- **Berri says dialogue should precede new government**

Lebanese Speaker Nabih Berri called for holding a national dialogue session prior to the formation of a new government.

“Without an agreement a new government will not be formed even 15 years from now. Dialogue should be held before the parliamentary consultations in order to reach consensus on some essential issues that would facilitate the formation of a government,” Berri said in remarks published by Al-Hayat newspaper on Tuesday.

“Our presence at the dialogue session will diffuse the tension and help in calming the security situation.”

The speaker also voiced support for the formation of a national unity government as opposed to a cabinet of technocrats.

“What will we have done if we formed a technocratic government? [The ministers] will refer back to the [political] leadership that nominated them. I prefer a national unity government formed by the political factions.”

Lebanon’s government fell on Friday following Prime Minister Najib Miqati’s resignation after the cabinet failed to approve the formation of a supervisory electoral body and did not vote on the extension of the tenure of Internal Security Forces chief Ashraf Rifi.

Talks have emerged since regarding the nature of the new cabinet, with the Kataeb Party calling for a salvation government, the Free Patriotic Movement backing a coalition cabinet, the Future Movement advocating the formation of a neutral government.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/cabinet-falls/berri-says-dialogue-to-precede-new-government>

- **Geagea calls for technocrat govt with March 14 figures**

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea called for the formation of a technocrat government comprised of March 14 officials and independents.

“Forming a technocrat government comprised of March 14 officials and centrists would help stage the elections, which will be slightly delayed,” Geagea said in a press conference held on Monday.

Asked if such a technocrat cabinet would be possible given Hezbollah's presence, Geagea said that “given the choice of being killed a slow death or an immediate one, then we would choose the latter.”

“Is it wrong to propose that the March 14 coalition and independents take their turn in the cabinet after the March 8 forces had their chance in power for the past two years?” he asked.

The LF leader added: “We are free to make our own suggestions. I see no other solution to the failure of the previous cabinet,” adding that “Hezbollah can react in whichever way it wants, but we should not be afraid.”

“There is no other suggestion that would save Lebanon because Hezbollah only cares about fighting alongside the Syrian regime,” he stated.

Lebanon’s government fell on Friday evening after now caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati resigned from his office, dropping a political bombshell on a country suffering a week of sectarian strife that saw intense clashes explode Thursday night in Tripoli.

Miqati’s resignation came after the cabinet failed to approve the formation of a supervisory electoral body and did not vote on the extension of the tenure of Internal Security Forces chief Ashraf Rifi, who like Miqati is a prominent Sunni figure from Tripoli.

On the issue of national dialogue the LF leader said that “claims that Lebanon's

salvation resides in dialogue is a waste of time.”

“Parliamentary discussions should begin to appoint a new prime minister,” he continued.

Geagea also announced that a petition will be submitted to Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri on Tuesday to urge him to call for a parliamentary session in order to extend Rifi's term.

Last week, Berri said that following Miqati’s resignation, which the March 14 group has been demanding since last October as a strict condition to participate in dialogue, “the road is open to dialogue under the auspices of President [Michel] Suleiman.”

Late October, the March 14 opposition coalition announced that it was cutting all ties with Miqati’s government following the assassination of Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces intelligence chief Wissam al-Hassan on October 19 in Beirut’s Ashrafieh.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/cabinet-falls/geagea-calls-for-forming-march-14-and-independent-officials-govt>

## 6. SYRIA

- **US backs Syria opposition despite chief's resignation**

The resignation of the "courageous" chief of Syria's opposition is regrettable but will not affect the US government's support for the rebels, officials said Monday.

Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib's abrupt decision to step down from the National Coalition has underscored divisions among the opposition, but US officials said Washington would not withdraw its backing for the group.

"We're sorry to see him go," White House deputy press secretary Josh Earnest told a press conference.

But he said that "Khatib's announcement does not change the US policy of support for the Syrian opposition and the Syrian opposition coalition."

The United States backed "the coalition's vision for a tolerant, inclusive Syria that respects the rights of all Syrians.

"And the opposition to [President Bashar al-Assad'] brutal rule is bigger than one person, and that movement will continue," he said.

The White House spokesman praised Khatib as "a courageous and pragmatic leader who has a strong sense of Syrians' hopes and fears.

"The opposition has been well-served by his leadership, and the Syrian people will continue to benefit from his service in whatever capacity he chooses to provide it."

Khatib's surprise resignation, announced on Sunday, has highlighted concerns in the West that hardline elements are gaining influence among the fractured opposition fighting to oust Assad.

The National Coalition, set up in Doha in November, is a dissident group recognized by dozens of states and organizations as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Khatib's move came just days after the first election in Istanbul of a rebel prime minister, Ghassan Hitto, and just over two years after the outbreak of a popular revolt against Assad inspired by the so-called Arab Spring.

An opposition source in Doha, where the Arab League is to hold a summit on Tuesday, told AFP that Khatib accused "certain countries, notably Qatar, of wanting to control the opposition" and of having imposed Hitto.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/us-backs-syria-opposition-despite-chiefs-resignation>

- **Army: Syria rebels seal Jordan border posts**

Rebels fighting to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime on Monday sealed off the country's only two border posts with Jordan, a military official said.

"The Free Syrian Army closed the two crossings of Daraa and Naseeb from their side after they took control of them," the Jordanian official told AFP on condition of anonymity. He declined to elaborate.

The development comes after the rebels seized a 25-kilometer strip of land stretching from the Jordanian border to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Observatory said the rebels' advances came days after they took control of a border crossing on the frontier with Jordan, home to more than 450,000 refugees from the two-year-old conflict in Syria.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/army-syria-rebels-seal-jordan-border-posts>

- **Army: Syria rebels seal Jordan border posts**

Rebels fighting to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime on Monday sealed off the country's only two border posts with Jordan, a military official said.

"The Free Syrian Army closed the two crossings of Daraa and Naseeb from their side after they took control of them," the Jordanian official told AFP on condition of anonymity. He declined to elaborate.

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<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/army-syria-rebels-seal-jordan-border-posts>

- **Resigned Syrian rebel chief to speak at Arab summit**

Syria's resigned opposition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib said he would address the Arab summit in Doha "in the name of the Syrian people," in a statement on Facebook.

The opposition's envoy in Qatar Nizar al-Haraki told AFP that Khatib will head the opposition delegation filling the seat of

Syria, which has been suspended from the Arab League, at the Tuesday summit.

"After performing ... prayers and consulting many trustworthy figures among them Nizar al-Haraki, I have decided to make a speech in the name of the Syrian people at the Doha summit," Khatib said in a statement on his Facebook page.

"This is not linked to the resignation which will be later discussed," he added.

Haraki told AFP that Khatib "will head the eight-member Syrian delegation at the summit and will occupy Syria's seat." The delegation will also include Syria's interim prime minister Ghassan Hitto.

Khatib resigned his post on Sunday, five days after the controversial election in Istanbul of Hitto, who pledged to form an interim government for the large swathes of territory inside Syria that have fallen into insurgent hands.

An opposition source told AFP that Khatib accused "certain countries, notably Qatar, of wanting to control the opposition" and of having imposed Hitto.

But Haraki said Monday that "the resignation has not been accepted and he is still coalition chief," adding that "what's between him [Khatib] and Hitto is a difference in opinions but not a dispute."

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/resigned-syrian-rebel-chief-says-to-speak-at-arab-summit>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Oman praised by rights groups for pardon of protesters**

Muscat: International rights groups and others are hailing Oman's decision to pardon all activists jailed for offending the nation's ruler or joining protests.

The move by Oman's leader, Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed, runs counter to widening social media crackdowns by other Gulf Arab states.

Dozens of people have been charged in recent months across the Gulf for blogs, Twitter messages and other posts deemed insulting to rulers or threats to state security.

Amnesty International on Sunday called Oman's decision a positive step and urged authorities to further lift restrictions on freedom of expression. The Omani Lawyers Association also praised the blanket pardon announced last week.

"The Sultan's pardon is a very welcome step and we are delighted that dozens of prisoners of conscience on whose cases we have been campaigning are back at liberty and able to rejoin their families and friends," said Philip Luther of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa programme.

"However, individuals peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression should never have been put in prison in the first place, nor tried on charges that criminalise freedom of expression.

"The pardon should act as a spur for the Omani authorities to lift restrictions on freedom of expression by repressive laws," he said.

The prisoners were expected to be freed beginning Sunday. No figures were given,

but dozens have been jailed on -nternet-  
or protest-linked charges since early 2011.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/oman-praised-by-rights-groups-for-pardon-of-protesters-1.1162129>

- **Saudi Arabia warns citizens against Syria jihad**

Has information about presence of Saudi fighters in Syria, but does not know how many

Dubai: Saudis fighting the regime of Bashar Al Assad in Syria will be detained immediately upon their return to the Kingdom, a Saudi interior ministry official has said.

In comments published by Saudi media, Major General Mansour Turki, spokesman at the Saudi interior ministry, said participation in the fighting in Syria is in violation of Saudi laws, and that anyone who is proven to be intending to travel to Syria to join the fight against the regime there will be investigated and barred from travelling, adding that some who had been involved with Al Qaida in foreign countries may be heading to Syria or elsewhere to wage war.

The warning follows recent reports in the Saudi press about deaths of Saudi fighters in Syria. International news outlets have reported that hundreds of Saudi youths have entered Syria via Turkey and Jordan to fight.

Turki said that Saudi Arabia has information about the presence of “some Saudi citizens” in Syria, but did not know their numbers, as quoted by Saudi media.

Asked about Iran’s denial of association with an alleged ring of spies uncovered in Saudi Arabia last Wednesday, Turki said that Saudi Arabia did not name the country the spy ring had been working on behalf of, “so the question should be directed to Iran as to why it volunteered to issue a denial”, he said, as quoted by Al Watan newspaper.

Turki said that Saudi Arabia did not name the country because it needed “hard evidence” to do so. “We cannot ask a state to stop conspiring against us... announcing the name will not stop this conspiracy,” he said. He added that Saudi Arabia does not point fingers hastily or

arbitrarily and only does so after conducting an investigation.

The kingdom, he added, prefers to deal with such issues diplomatically. He added that the results of the investigation will be revealed as soon as it concludes. Saudi Arabia alleged that the spy ring consisting of Saudis, Iranians and Lebanese, had been gathering intelligence.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-warns-citizens-against-syria-jihad-1.1162463>

- **Disagreement over Bahraini hunger strikers**

Rights group says 2 refusing fluids while minister says only one on hunger strike

Abu Dhabi: Two jailed activists on hunger strike in Bahrain are also refusing fluids in protest at being denied visits from their family, a rights organisation said on Monday.

But the Bahraini government said Zainab Al Khawaja was accepting fluids and denied that her father, leading Shiite activist Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, was on any form of hunger strike.

Bahrain has been in turmoil since 2011, when the Shiite-led opposition intensified demands for an end to alleged discrimination and for full powers for parliament.

Zainab Al Khawaja was sentenced to three months in jail this month, accused of insulting a public official, after an appeal court overturned her earlier acquittal.

She has been on hunger strike since March 17 and began refusing fluids on Sunday, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights said in an e-mailed press release. It said her father, who is serving a life sentence for his role in the 2011 uprising, was also on hunger strike.

“Both Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja and his daughter Zainab Al Khawaja were denied family visits for the second time this weekend, prompting them to start a dry hunger strike [on] 24 March,” the centre said in the statement.

The Bahraini government said only Zainab was on hunger strike, which she began on March 18. “But she is taking all kinds of fluid,” Sameera Rajab, Bahrain’s

information minister, said by telephone from Manama.

“She is in good health and is receiving 24-hour health care. Her father is not on hunger strike,” Sameera said, adding the pair had been denied family visits because they refused to wear the prison uniform.

“They break the rules and then they go on hunger strike,” she said.

The human rights centre said some detainees, among them Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, had until recently not been required to wear the uniform and that enforcing the rule was “a new tool used to humiliate prisoners of conscience and identify them as criminal prisoners”.

Bahrain’s opposition and government resumed reconciliation talks last month for the first time since July 2011, but little progress has been reported in several sessions of negotiations.

<http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/disagreement-over-bahraini-hunger-strikers-1.1162821>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • Taliban suicide attack coincides with Kerry’s visit to Afghanistan

Eight Taliban suicide bombers attacked a police headquarters in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad on Tuesday, officials said, killing five officers and wounding four others.

The pre-dawn, three-hour attack in the country’s largest city coincided with the visit of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

To initiate the attack, an insurgent in a bomb-laden car detonated his vehicle in front of the Jalalabad Police Quick Reaction Force headquarters. This was followed by another seven assailants wearing bomb vests who stormed the compound, police said. Three of those attackers triggered their explosive vests inside the compound while the other four were shot by police during a gunfight that lasted more than an hour.

Nangarhar provincial police chief Mohammad Sharif Amin said some of the attackers were wearing uniforms resembling those worn by the U.S.-led NATO coalition.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack.

After his visit in Jordan and the region, Kerry arrived to Kabul on an unannounced visit amid concerns that Afghani President Hamid Karzai may be jeopardizing progress in the war against extremism with anti-American rhetoric. After a private meeting, Kerry said he and Karzai were “on the same page” on security and reconciliation issues and brushed aside suggestions that relations were in peril.

Karzai infuriated U.S. officials earlier this month by accusing Washington of colluding with Taliban insurgents to keep Afghanistan weak even as the Obama administration pressed ahead with plans to hand off security responsibility to Afghan forces and end NATO’s combat mission by the end of next year.

Insurgents have in recent months been carrying out complex attacks involving car bombs and gunmen in bomb vests against government and police buildings around the country.

The attacks are expected to intensify as the traditional spring fighting season gets underway. Heavy snow and bad weather conditions usually put a damper on fighting during the harsh Afghan winter.

On March 14, the Afghan intelligence service seized a massive truck bomb packed with eight tons of explosives on the eastern outskirts of Kabul. They also killed five suspected suicide bombers and arrested two others during a raid to seize the truck.

The truck was apparently meant to carry out an attack on a NATO facility in the capital. According to Afghan intelligence, the truck bomb bore the hallmarks of the Haqqani network, which is known for conducting spectacular attacks.

Affiliated with the Taliban, the network is run by the Haqqani family and is based across the border in Pakistan.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/2013/03/26/Suicide-attack-kills-5-police-in-east-Afghanistan-.html>

- **Kerry Makes Surprise Visit to Afghanistan**

John Kerry

Washington believes contributed to the president's outburst.

Scott Stearns

VOA News

March 25, 2013

There is agreement on a gradual withdrawal of U.S. special forces from Wardak province, something U.S. officials say is a positive sign of how Washington and Kabul are resolving issues in the interest of Afghan sovereignty.

KABUL — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is in Afghanistan for talks with President Hamid Karzai on security cooperation and preparations for next year's elections. The unannounced visit follows agreement on the transfer of the last Afghan prisoners held by U.S. forces.

There is also agreement on the transfer of the last prisoners held by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, with U.S. officials saying they believe that "detainees of most concern" will be held securely, humanely, and in accordance with Afghan law.

This is John Kerry's sixth trip to Kabul since President Obama took office, and U.S. officials say they are counting on his personal history with President Karzai to overcome some of the obstacles in this often-contentious relationship.

As a senator, John Kerry was directly involved with Afghanistan's 2009 vote. So as secretary of state he is looking to engage President Karzai in talks on 2014 elections as the international security force here prepares to wind down by December of next year.

Most recently, President Karzai said U.S. forces and Taliban fighters were colluding to destabilize Afghanistan.

Senior State Department officials traveling with Secretary Kerry say he is not here to "lecture or chide" Karzai and is working instead to "move beyond this incident," in part, by resolving some of the irritants

On Afghan reconciliation, U.S. officials say they continue to support the Taliban opening an office in Doha, Qatar, and join President Karzai in calling on the Taliban to join the peace process, so long as they break with al-Qaida, lay down their

weapons, and embrace Afghan constitutional protections for women and minorities.

Secretary Kerry wanted to go to Pakistan on this trip as well, but decided against it because of the ongoing political transition there.

Instead he met in Jordan late Sunday with Pakistani military chief General Ashfaq Kayani on a range of bilateral security issues, including counter terrorism and combating safe havens along the Afghan border.

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

- **US Hands Full Control of Bagram Prison to Afghanistan**

VOA News  
March 25, 2013

Afghanistan has taken full control of a controversial detention center from the United States.

Bagram military prison was handed over to Afghanistan in a ceremony Monday.

The transfer was scheduled to happen earlier this month, but was abruptly

anceled just before a ceremony was to begin.

A NATO spokesman said then that the transfer would proceed once the two sides had reached a "full agreement."

A deal was finally clinched Saturday in a phone conversation between U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The U.S. partly handed over the high-security prison and around 3,000 suspected Taliban fighters to Afghan control last year.

However, Afghanistan's full control over the detention center has been repeatedly delayed over U.S. concerns that hundreds more Taliban fighters still in U.S. custody would be released.

Monday's transfer of control of Bagram prison comes a day after Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry announced President Hamid Karzai will visit Qatar to discuss the possibility of opening a Taliban office in the Gulf state.

Authorities say an office for the militants could help facilitate the negotiation of an end to the 11-year war in Afghanistan.

The meeting in Qatar is expected to take place within weeks.

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

- **2 Afghan civilians killed in blast in N. province**

MAIMANA, Afghanistan, March 25 (Xinhua) -- Two Afghan civilians were killed and five were wounded in a roadside bombing in the country's northern province of Faryab on Monday, police said.

"Two civilians were killed and five others wounded when a civilian vehicle touched off a roadside bomb in Khwaja Sabz Posh district early Monday morning," provincial police chief Nabi Jan Mullahkhil told Xinhua.

He said the injured were shifted to a hospital in provincial capital Maimana city in the province 425 km northwest of capital Kabul.

The police official blamed insurgent Taliban for planting the bomb. The Taliban

insurgent group uses Improvised Explosive Device (IED) or roadside bombs and suicide bombers in their attacks which also inflicted casualties on civilians.

A total of 2,754 Afghan civilians were killed in conflict-related violence in 2012, 12 percent down compared with 2011, according to a UN report released in Kabul last month.

The UN report attributed 81 percent of the civilian deaths to the attacks of Taliban and other armed groups, another 8 percent of the deaths were attributed to Afghan and NATO-led forces and 11 percent were unattributed.

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

- **Taliban abduct 10 Afghan soldiers, 1 doctor in Badakhshan**

By GHANIZADA - 25 Mar 2013, 11:13 am

Khaama Press

According to local authorities in north-eastern Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, Taliban militants abducted at least 10 Afghan national army soldiers along with a doctor in this province.

Provincial governor spokesman Abdul Maroof Rasukh confirming the report said the individuals were abducted by Taliban militants during a military operation in Wardoj district around 3 days back.

Mr. Rasukh further added that negotiations have been started to free the army service members along with the doctor from the Taliban hostage.

This comes as Taliban militants abducted at least 20 Afghan national army soldiers a few weeks back and murdered 16 army personnel in Wardoj district. The remaining army soldiers were released by Taliban militants following negotiations by tribal elders.

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

- **Kidnapped German aid worker freed in northern Afghanistan**

By MEENA HASEEB - 25 Mar 2013, 10:58 am

Khaama Press

According to local authorities in north-eastern Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, Afghan security forces freed

a German citizen from the unknown hostage takers in this province.

Provincial security chief Gen. Imamuddin Mutmaein confirming the report said the German citizen used to work in a non-governmental organization in the central city of Faizabad.

Gen. Mutmaein further added that the unknown gunmen had kidnapped the German citizen from Batash village on Sunday.

He said Afghan security forces managed to free the kidnapped German citizen following a military operation conducted in Argo district at Danishmandan village on Sunday night.

At least three suspected individuals were also arrested in connection to the incident.

This comes as unknown gunmen kidnapped at least five foreigners including 2 female doctors in remote mountains of Faizabad district earlier last year.

The aid workers employed by Swiss-based aid group Medair were making their way from Faizabad city in rugged northeast Badakhshan province to visit flood-stricken areas when they were abducted about half-way to their destination.

The kidnapping of foreigners has become relatively common in parts of Afghanistan since U.S-backed Afghan forces toppled the Taliban government in 2001, heralding a 10-year anti-insurgent war.

In 2010, 10 foreign medical workers, including six Americans, were killed in Badakhshan in an attack blamed on insurgents.

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

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*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not*