



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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1. IRAQ

- **Next Friday "Last Chance" for Maliki to meet demonstrators' demands (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

ANBAR/ Aswat al-Iraq: Official spokesman of Anbar demonstrators said today that next Friday prayers will be "the last chance" before Premier Nouri al-Maliki and his government to meet the demands of the demonstrators, otherwise "all demands shall be cancelled and more to be added according to Iraqi law and constitution".

Sheikh Saeed al-Lafi told Aswat al-Iraq that all components agreed to this terminology because Maliki's government is wasting time.

He stressed that the sit-in is peaceful and "will remain so", calling the government to stop inciting new crises and fabricated charges.

- **Anbar protestors signal they might demand overthrowing the regime (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Protestors in Anbar signaled that they might demand overthrowing the regime unless the government fulfills their demands.

Spokesman for Anbar protestors, Sheikh Sa'eed al-Lafi, told NINA on Wednesday, Mar. 6, "The Protest area has witnessed large public support and activities by protestors who demand Iraqiya ministers to resign to pressure the government fulfill their demands."

He added that Maliki's government has lost its legitimacy; it is a government for personal benefits, it does not want any good for the Iraqis.

Lafi went on saying that today is named "Rallying Wednesday" after large number of citizens gathered to take part in the protest and demonstrations; he pointed out that Friday will be called "Friday of Last Chance" being the last chance given to the government to implement the protestors' demands, or they will demand overthrowing the regime.

- **General strike in Salahal-Din province (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

SALAHAL-DIN / Aswat al-Iraq: Most of the cities in the province were empty for the general strike that resulted in closing the shops and the abstention of the students to go to schools, today.

Security sources told Aswat al-Iraq that most of the shops in different cities of Salahal-Din province were closed in implementation of the call for a general strike, though it was not officially announced by the Provincial Council.

Salahal-Din is one of the provinces that oppose the central government since 21 December, 2012.

- **Infiltrators arrested for trying to hijack Iraqi protests (al-shorfa)**

06 March 2013

By Saif Ahmed in Anbar

Iraqi forces from the Anbar provincial police and the counter-terrorism agency last week arrested 17 suspected al-Qaeda members who officials described as trying to exploit the demonstrations in Ramadi and Fallujah.

"The detainees had infiltrated the ranks of the demonstrators and were trying to exploit the protests in Ramadi and Fallujah

to launch terrorist and criminal actions," Anbar police commander Maj. Gen. Hadi Erzaj told Mawtani.

"The suspects were arrested following the receipt of precise intelligence information from al-Jazeera, al-Khalidiya and al-Rahaliyah," he said.

Erzaj said the detainees were "commanders and emirs of al-Qaeda".

All of them "were wanted by the Iraqi authorities for committing terrorist crimes against civilians and police members, with four of them were identified as having carried out the al-Nukhayb crime about a year ago", he said.

Erzaj said the protests taking place in Anbar and elsewhere in Iraq were peaceful and constitutionally sound, adding that security forces are working hard to protect the protestors and ensure they are not infiltrated by extremist groups.

"The central government in Baghdad is working hard to implement the demands raised by citizens," he added.

Col. Khalid al-Dulaimi of the Ramadi police counter-terrorism force credited the operation's success to the speed with which the intelligence was delivered and the resulting swift action.

The infiltrators "were planning to exploit the peaceful protests and demonstrations and kill the innocents and members of the Iraqi forces, as well as sabotage institutions and projects in Anbar", al-Dulaimi said.

"The detainees confessed during preliminary interrogations to the presence of a depot for weapons, explosives and rockets in the al-Wadi area of al-Khalidiya, west of Fallujah," he added.

http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/iii/features/2013/03/06/feature-01

- **Barzani, Alawi discuss political situation in Iraq (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish region president Masoud Barzani discussed today with head of Iraqiya bloc Iyad Alawi the political situation in the country, according to a presidential statement.'

The statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, said that the Barzani received Alawi and his accompanying delegation, including some parliamentarians.

It added that the views of the two sides were "identical on taking care of the interests of all country's components and the necessity to sort out the problems facing the political process".

- **INA seeks to collect 50 votes to pass Federal Budget's article No. 12, says MP (alliraqnews)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi National Alliance announced that the Alliance seeks to collect (50) votes of MPs to amend and pass the article No. 12 of the Federal Budget law for 2013.

MP Abbas al-Bayati of the INA told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "We seek to collect 50 votes to conduct the amendment on article No. 12 related to the Sahwa councils' salaries to be included within the federal budget of 2013."

- **MP : IS supports the KA stand relating to the state budget (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad/ NINA /-- MP, Raad Dahlaki for Iraqiya Slate coalition said : "IS supports the position of the Kurdistan Alliance regarding on the federal budget.

Dahlaki added in a statement to NINA : "The National Alliance did not find a solution to the dispute with Kurdistan Alliance over dues of the foreigner oil companies operating in Kurdistan region and the subject of financing the Peshmerga forces so far ."

- **Kurdistan Alliance threatens to resort to the Federal Court in case of approving the budget without political consensus (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad/ NINA /-- Kurdistan Alliance threatened to resort to the Federal Court in case of approving the state budget as is its current paragraphs under lack of political consensus on the budget terms.

Spokesman for the KA coalition MP , Moayad Tayib said at a press conference with a number of members of the KA today: "If the budget bill passed without a national consensus of all blocs and political components, we will be forced to

resort to the Federal Court to object on the decision accusing in the same time the deputies of State of Law of authoritarianism that threatening to the principle of national partnership .

The head of the House of Representatives Osama Nujaifi adjourned until tomorrow , Thursday's session for lack of quorum.

A parliamentary source said to NINA adjourned after the vote on favor of some paragraphs of the general budget for 2013, until tomorrow, Thursday.

- **MP for SL : allocating Kurdistan region 17% of the budget represent injustice to the other provinces (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad / NINA /-- MP, Fatima Hamidi for the State of Law coalition, said: "allocating to Kurdistan region 17% of the federal budget represent injustice to the other Iraqi provinces.

She said at a press conference today: "The continuation of giving Kurdistan region 17% of the federal budget, is a blatant unfairness and injustice for other provinces, stressing that the real share of Kurdistan does not exceed 13%, of the general stat budget which means that 4

billion dollars given to the province is the share of the other provinces."

- **Peshmerga Ministry of Kurdistan regional government rejects the formation of Aljazeera and Albadiya operation command in Sinjar (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Arbil / NINA /-- Peshmerga Ministry of Kurdistan Regional Government rejected stationing of troops of Aljazeera and Albadiya operations command in Sinjar district of Duhok province.

A statement of the Ministry of Peshmerga said today : "The formation of the this operation command in Sinjar is contrary to the policies of joint work between Kurdistan province and the federal government."

- **Supreme Population Council headed by Maliki formed (alliraqnews)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Minister of Planning and Development, Ali Yusuf al-Shukri, announced the formation of the Supreme Population Council under the chairmanship of the Iraqi Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, and membership of 11 ministers.

A statement by the ministry quoted Shukri as saying "The Supreme Population Council was formed according to the proposal of the Ministry of Planning presented in 2012."

He added that "The objectives behind establishing this council are to develop medium and long-term population's visions and prepare a strategy for the population to be adopted when identifying the goals of the national development strategy that ensures creating society free of population imbalances and enjoys the desired welfare.

- **Zebari chairs ministerial meeting for Baghdad Summit's resolutions (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiar Zebari chaired today the ministerial meeting to follow-up the resolutions adopted at Baghdad Summit.

The meeting was attended by Arab League Secretary General Dr. Nabeel al-Arabi.

The meeting, held in Cairo, was attended by Lebanese, Kuwaiti and Egyptian foreign ministers.

- **Iraqi govt. charged of supporting Syrian regime, Iraqiya bloc (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc, headed by ex-premier Iyad Alawi, charged the present government of Premier Nouri al-Maliki of supporting the Syrian regime in its fight against the opposition.

In a statement issued today, the bloc called a fact-finding committee to uncover the latest incident near the Iraqi-Syrian borders that led to Syrian and Iraqi killings.

"The bloc observes with great concern the silence of the Iraqi government on the events taking place west of Iraq and the media reports that said the Iraqi forces fought with the Syrian regular army in Yarubiya area", the statement added.

Unknown group attacked an Iraqi military convoy transporting Syrian soldiers from Mosul to Anbar province that led to killing 42 Syrians and a number of Iraqi casualties.

- **Mohammadi: Involving IA in Syrian situation proves politicizing it (alliraqnews)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Walid al-Mohammadi, of the Iraqiya Slate described involving the Iraqi Army in the Syrian situation as "An evidence on politicizing it."

In a press statement received by AIN, he said "Involving the IA in the Syrian issue is evidence on politicizing it where it will negatively affect the internal situation of Iraq because the borders are resided by families and tribes that do not accept to be violated."

"The Iraqi government assured that it is neutrally dealing with the Syrian situation in spite of the doubts over its stance, but it has to adhere to this stance because the Iraqi situation cannot bear any irresponsible action," he added.

"Involving the Iraqi soldiers in a lost war will result in dangerous consequences in the internal and external situations of Iraq," he pointed out, assuring that "We do not want to see the dead Iraqi soldiers as what happened in the Iraqi-Iranian war,

but we have to establish good relations with the Syrian people and not the Syrian regime that is about to end."

- **IS coalition urges the government to manifest a clear attitude toward the events in Syria (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad / NINA /--Iraqiya Slate coalition urged the Iraqi commander in chief of the armed forces and the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs to show a clear stand to the Iraqi people over the ongoing dramatic events in Syria, and explain the reasons behind the Iraqi government intervention in favor of Syrian Baathist regime.

He added in a statement today: "The Coalition is watching the governments conducts in this regard with a profound amazement expressing a grave concern due to keeping silence toward the bloodshed in western Iraq, as well as towards what recently has been circulated by the local and global media outlets about the circumstances concomitant the killing of a number of soldiers and Iraqi citizens, in addition to the news about the recent intervention by Iraqi army in fighting inside Syrian territory along with

the Syrian regime forces in Elierbeh border port , Thing that making Iraq a party of the bloody conflict in Syria , stressing that this is contrary to the obligations assumed by Iraq with the Syrian people, in addition to Iraq's international obligations as is still under Chapter VII, which the government failed to bring Iraq out of.

- **Vahidi: A safe Iraq leaves vital impacts on regional equations (IRNA)**

06 March 2013

Tehran, March 6, IRNA - Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmed Vahidi said on Wednesday that a safe Iraq would play a key role in regional and global equations.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Iraqi Interior Minister Adnan al-Assadi in Tehran on Wednesday.

Promotion of stability and security in Iraqi is the need of the time, he said adding that a secured and developed Iraq can leave crucial impacts on regional and global equations.

Hosting the G5+1 and Arab league conferences by Iraq proves this claim, he said.

"We are pleased to witness that Iraq has successfully overcome most of its problems which proved the capabilities of its domestic forces particularly after withdrawal of US troops from that country," he said.

Regional crises can be resolved through collective cooperation of the countries of the region, Vahidi said, adding that to materialize this goal, regional countries should sincerely made efforts to maintain stability and security of the region.

Any insecurity and instability in Iraq will harm the country's neighbors as well as other regional states.

The enemies try to weaken or annihilate resistance front in a bid to help the Zionist regime dominate the entire region and for this reason they have targeted Syria, he said.

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/Vahidi,-A-safe-Iraq-leaves-vital-impacts-on-regional-equations/80573656>

- **Tunisia to cancel visas for Iraqis (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Parliament Foreign Relations Chairman announced that Tunisia is intending to cancel visas for Iraqi diplomats and businessmen in a preliminary move to cancel it permanently.

Sheikh Humam Hammoudi disclosed that a Tunisian Presidential Envoy will arrive here on 10 March instant to discuss enhancing bilateral relations, as stated in a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq today.

The Tunisian envoy will discuss different issues, including the expansion of trade exchange and mutual airlines.

- **Japan contributes \$7.5 million for Syrian refugees in Iraq (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 March 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Japan announced today that it will contribute with the amount of \$7.5 million to assist the Syrian refugees in Iraq.

In a statement by the Japanese embassy in Baghdad, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, UNHCR will receive \$4 million for lodging, educational and health services.

\$1.5 million will be allocated to UNICEF programmes and \$2 million shall be allocated to IOM to develop the living of the Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, including Iraq.

- **Italy intends to open consulate in Kurdistan Region (NINA)**

06 March 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Head of Foreign Relations Department of Kurdistan Region's Government, Falah Mustafa, discussed with the Italian Ambassador to Iraq, Massimo Maruti, the role of the European Union and the UN in helping Iraqi sides to find solution to treat tension and current political crisis.

A statement issued on Wednesday, March 6, by the Kurdistan Region's Government said that Mustafa met with Ambassador Maruti and the Head of Italian Embassy's Office in the Region, Simoni Di Santi, discussing the situation in Syria and Syrian refugees situation in Iraq.

The statement quoted Maruti saying that the visit comes within the frame of following up the relations with Kurdistan Region toward consolidate the relations

between Italy and the Region, as well as to provide services to the citizens in the Region, in addition to promote trade, commercial, scientific and cultural relations.

Ambassador Maruti pointed out the intention of his country companies' to participate in the Region's construction and investment.

- **Iraqi Army Begins Military Buildup Near Border with Syria (fars news)**

06 March 2013

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iraq stationed several divisions of its troops along the borders with Syria after the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) terrorist group attacked the army's watchtowers in border areas. and killed six Iraqi soldiers.

Six Iraqi soldiers were killed in clashes with FSA armed rebels after the terrorists began firing at army's watchtowers in Rabia and al-Ba'aj regions along the Iraq-Syria border.

The bodies of the six Iraqi soldiers killed by FSA forces have been delivered to Sanjar Hospital in Iraq's Neynava province , al-

Sumeriya News website quoted an informed source as saying.

Syria's neighbors are concerned about the possible spread of crisis from the Muslim country.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011 with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

Hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed, when some protest rallies turned into armed clashes.

The government blames outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups for the deaths, stressing that the unrest is being orchestrated from abroad.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150720>

2. IRAN

- **AEOI Head: IAEA Should Convince Iran of Need to Parchin Site Visit**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Fereidoun Abbasi said Tehran would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to visit its non-nuclear military site in Parchin again only if the UN nuclear watchdog convinces it of the necessity of such a visit by presenting relevant documents.

"As I have said before, Parchin isn't a nuclear site and no nuclear activity is carried out in there," and if the IAEA believes that it should visit this site, it "should present its documents about nuclear activity in this site so that we can discuss the issue with our military officials," Abbasi told reporters in Tehran on Wednesday.



Also in April, Abbasi had said that the UN nuclear watchdog should explain why it intends to send its inspectors to the Parchin military site because the AEOI has

no station or activity in there and the site has already been inspected by the IAEA.

He pointed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s concern about Iran's refusal to allow an inspection of Parchin, and noted, "If we enter another country, would they allow us to visit (inspect) wherever we want?"

"We (AEOI) have no site in Parchin; Parchin has been repeatedly accused (by the IAEA of running suspected military nuclear activities) despite the fact that it has gone under inspection in the past," Abbasi said.

He reminded that the IAEA should have a strong argument to convince Iranian officials, including the defense minister, that inspection of Parchin is necessary, and said, "Our military commanders are rational people (and would allow IAEA access to Parchin if they are presented with a good reasoning), but the point is that we in the Atomic Energy (Organization of Iran) have not been convinced by the IAEA inspectors of the goal of such a visit."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150596>

- **Ahmadinejad to Attend Chavez Funeral in Caracas Friday**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad plans visit Venezuela to attend the funeral ceremony of late President Hugo Chavez on Friday.

President Ahmadinejad and his accompanying delegation will leave Tehran for Caracas on Thursday and the visit will last for two days.

Political figures and leaders from across the globe are expected to attend the late Venezuelan president's funeral procession in Caracas on Friday.



The Iranian government has declared Wednesday a day of national mourning on the occasion of the demise of the late Venezuelan President, the country also

plans to hold a commemoration ceremony to honor Chavez.

President Chavez died in a hospital in the capital city of Caracas on Tuesday.

Earlier today, President Ahmadinejad in a message to Venezuelan officials extended his condolences to the country's people and government over the death of President Hugo Chavez, and said Chavez will be alive as long as justice, love and freedom continue to exist.

"As long as justice, love and freedom are alive, Hugo Chavez will be alive as well. As long as faith, purity and humanity are alive, he will be alive too. As long as nations are alive and strive for the materialization of independence, kindness and justice, he will be alive too," Ahmadinejad said in his message.

President Ahmadinejad in his message also condoled with Venezuelan Vice-President and Caretaker of the Government Nicolas Maduro on the sad occasion.

The Iranian president expressed sympathy with Maduro, and also condoled with the

Venezuelan nation and government on Chavez's death.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150726>

- **Basij to Conduct Wargames in Kerman Province Next Week**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Basij (volunteer) Force plans to conduct military drills in the Southern Kerman province next week, an Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) commander announced on Wednesday.

"A total of 25,000 Basij forces will take part in the 'Towards Beitol-Moghaddas' wargames," Brigadier General Nouri said on Wednesday.

The commander noted that the military exercises will kick off on March 14.

The wargames are aimed at maintaining and strengthening defense and military preparedness of Basij units.

Towards Beitol-Moghaddas wargames have already been conducted in several Iranian provinces and they come in response to the recent soft and security threats against the country.

Last month, the IRGC conducted three days of wargames, codenamed Payambar-e Azam 8 (The Great Prophet 8). The massive wargames were staged in Iran's Southern and Southeastern regions of Kerman, Zarand, Shaabjareh, Siriz, Toghroljerd, Yazdanabad and Sang.

Lieutenant Commander of Basij Brigadier General Ali Fazli last month reiterated Iran's full preparedness to confront any possible enemy threat and aggression, and said that the country's military forces will give a swift and decisive response to any enemy threat.

"The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and Basij are in the best state of their preparedness and they will give a crushing response to any type of enemy aggressions," General Fazli told reporters on the sidelines of 'Towards Beitol-Moghaddas' wargames in Torbat Heidarieh region in Northeastern Iran.

He warned the enemies of the Islamic Republic that all their moves against Iran are being monitored on land, in air and on sea, and noted that they should expect Iran's firm and decisive response.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150722>

- **Ahmadinejad, Zardari to Inaugurate Construction of IP Gas Pipeline Next Monday**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari are slated to officially inaugurate the construction of the Pakistani side of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline next week.

President Ahmadinejad will travel to Pakistan next week to attend the inaugural ceremony of the project slated for March 11.

Political leaders, ministers and ambassadors of Muslim countries from across the world will also attend the ceremony.

Ahmadinejad and Zardari had previously sent separate letters of invitation to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al

Maktoum as well as other regional leaders to attend the ceremony.

On Thursday, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari wrapped up a two-day visit to Tehran during which the two sides finalized the remaining issues pertaining to the gas project.

During his stay in Tehran, the Pakistani president met Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and his counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

During his meeting with Zardari, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the gas pipeline which is due to take Iran's rich gas reserves to Pakistan as a crucially important instance of Tehran-Islamabad cooperation, and called for ignoring the opposition shown by certain actors to the development of Iran-Pakistan relations.



He reminded Pakistan's urgent need to stable and secure energy resources, similar to every other country, and added, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country in the region which enjoys secure energy resources and we are ready to supply Pakistan's need in this ground."

Last month, Iranian and Pakistani oil ministers inaugurated construction of the 781 km of Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline in Pakistan's soil.

An Iranian-Pakistani joint contractor has been commissioned to begin construction of the IP gas pipeline.

The Iranian oil minister and his accompanying delegation agreed with their Pakistani counterpart to set up a joint contracting company between the two countries in a bid to complete the construction of the IP gas pipeline in next 15 months.

The IP gas pipeline stretches from Iran-Pakistan border to Navabshah region in Pakistan and it covers 781 km of the total 1,881 km of the pipeline.

Apart from it, both countries also discussed the finances involved in the project. The interest rate for Iran's 500-million-dollar loan to Pakistan and the date for the start of the repayment of the loan by Pakistan were among other topics in the discussions.

Demand for natural gas in Pakistan has outstripped supply in recent years, putting existing reserves under immense pressure.

The 2700-kilometer long pipeline was to supply gas for Pakistan and India which are suffering a lack of energy sources, but India has evaded talks. In 2011, Iran and Pakistan declared they would finalize the agreement bilaterally if India continued to be absent in the meeting.

According to the project proposal, the pipeline will begin from Iran's Assalouyeh Energy Zone in the south and stretch over 1,100 km through Iran. In Pakistan, it will pass through Baluchistan and Sindh but officials now say the route may be changed if China agrees to the project.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150718>

- **Iran providing Iraq, Afghanistan with internet**

TEHRAN, March 7 (MNA) – Iran is currently providing Iraq and Afghanistan with internet, the Fars News Agency quoted Iranian Telecommunications Infrastructure Company official Ahmad Pourangnia as saying.

The company has a number of projects in hand to be an internet service provider in the region, he added.

In addition to providing regional countries with internet, another project has been designed to provide European countries with internet services, as well, he noted.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1818407>

- **NAM calls for nuclear talks with Iran without preconditions**

TEHRAN, March 7 (MNA) – In a statement read out at a meeting of the 35-member International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors in Vienna on Wednesday, the Non-Aligned Movement emphasized that the dispute over Iran's nuclear program should be resolved diplomatically through talks without preconditions.

“Diplomacy and dialogue is the only way to find a long-term solution to Iran’s nuclear issue, and negotiations should be pursued without any precondition,” part of the statement read.

The statement also welcomed Iran’s decision to continue cooperation with the UN nuclear agency and emphasized that the countries’ right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes should be respected.

The Iranian ambassador to the IAEA delivered a speech at the meeting in which he defended Iran’s peaceful nuclear program and said that the UN nuclear watchdog’s demand for access to the Parchin military site was unjustifiable.

“The agency’s director general’s repeated call for access to the Parchin before the conclusion of a modality is unjustifiable and has made the issue seriously politicized,” Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh said.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano told its 35-nation governing board on Monday, “Providing access to the Parchin site would be a positive step which would help

to demonstrate Iran’s willingness to engage with the agency on the substance of our concerns.”

The IAEA has called on Iran to sign and implement a structured approach document to resolve the issues and has stated that gaining access to the Parchin military site, which is located southeast of Tehran, is a priority for the UN nuclear watchdog.

Iran has made it clear that access to the conventional military site would not be possible before an agreement is reached on the structured approach document.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1818399>

- **Iran ready to help boost security in Iraq**

TEHRAN, March 6 (MNA) – Iran’s Minister of Defense has stated Iran’s preparation for helping boost security in Iraq and improving security and defense cooperation.

Adnan al-Assadiis Iraq's deputy interior minister who is visiting Tehran and heading a high-ranking delegation, has

met with Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, Iran’s Defense Minister. Vahidi pointed to the rise in security depth in Iraq after the US pulled out of Iraq. “We are pleased that Iraq has passed hard security times through overcoming problems with military might, which is indicative of sufficiency of local forces,” he added.

“solving regional crises is only through cooperation of countries in the region,” Vahidi said, and that “ countries in the region should use their capabilities in honesty and free from ethnic, religious, and even economic considerations to restore security and stability in Iraq, since any instability and lack of security will damage Iraq’s neighboring countries.”

The Defense Minister pointed to weakening of Resistance front and strengthening of the Zionist regime as main moving force behind the Syrian crisis. “The crisis benefited the Zionist regime the most. Islamic countries especially Syria’s neighbors should work in cooperation to stop the present trend in the region,” he added.

Vahidi also stated Iran’s readiness to help boost the security level and improving

security and defense cooperation between the two countries.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1818387>

- **Iran nuclear issue overhyped: Ex-IAEA chief Hans Blix**

On February 22, 2012, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Iran considers the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons “a grave sin” from every logical, religious and theoretical standpoint.

The Leader described the proliferation of nuclear weapons as “senseless, destructive and dangerous,” adding that the Iranian nation has never sought and will never seek atomic bombs as the country already has the conventional capacity to challenge the nuclear-backed powers.

A former chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has dismissed as “overhyped” the Western propaganda over the ‘threat of nuclear-armed Iran,’ saying there is no evidence that Tehran is even interested in producing weapons of mass destruction.

“So far Iran has not violated the NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons) and there is no evidence right now that suggests that Iran is producing nuclear weapons,” Hans Blix said in Dubai.

He added that no action can be justified against Iran’s nuclear activities on "mere suspicions or intentions that may not exist."



The former IAEA chief had previously said that Iran has been more open to international inspections than most other countries would be.

Iran has repeatedly expressed its strong opposition to any production, possession or use of nuclear weapons, saying such arms have no place in the Islamic Republic’s nuclear doctrine.

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

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the NPT and a member of the IAEA, it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Despite the IAEA's numerous inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities, the UN nuclear agency has never found any evidence showing that Iran’s civilian nuclear

program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/07/292318/iran-nissue-overhyped-exiaea-chief/>

- **Iran offshore oil production to see 40% raise by 2020**

Iran is planning to raise crude oil production from its offshore fields in the Persian Gulf by 40 percent by 2020, a senior oil manager says.



Mahmoud Zirakchian-Zadeh, managing director of the Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC), said on Wednesday that USD29 billion worth of agreements have been signed in the past couple of years for the development of 17 offshore hydrocarbon fields Iran shares with its neighbors in the Persian Gulf.

The official further noted that the Iranian oil company plans to produce 10 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas, increase oil recovery from its oil fields, and finalize oil field development during the fifth and sixth five-year economic development plans (March 2011-2020).

Iran's total in-place oil reserves have been estimated to be more than 560 billion barrels, with about 140 billion barrels of recoverable oil.

Moreover, heavy and extra-heavy varieties of crude oil account for roughly 70-100 billion barrels of the total reserves.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/06/292259/iran-to-up-offshore-oil-output-by-40/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Brotherhood to Hamas: Implement jihad in other ways**

Egyptian leadership urges Gaza rulers to follow its lead in attempt to convince international community of legitimacy. 'Take an example from us...we paved the way, we did the dirty work for you,' they say

When Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi rose to power in Egypt, Hamas hoped he would instill a new policy that would grant the terror organization more freedom on many fronts.

However, recently, the organization has been punctiliously expressing that the opposite is true – instead of removing hurdles from the path of the Gaza Strip's rulers, Morsi and his people have been sending Hamas a different message entirely: Take an example from us, say senior Muslim Brotherhood officials, and even if not publicly, "implement jihad in other ways."

The Egyptian movement takes pride in the image it has managed to portray, which has encouraged the international community to accept it as Egypt's legitimate leadership. Now the Muslim Brotherhood wants Hamas to follow the same path.

"We paved the way, we did the dirty work for you," claimed senior Brotherhood officials in their message to senior Gaza officials.

The Muslim Brotherhood's stance on Hamas is expressed in its approach to the smuggling tunnels between Egypt and the Strip. The Egyptian army has recently decided to flood the tunnels, a move that sparked resentment amongst Gazan officials, who view the tunnels as a comfortable means of smuggling goods and especially weapons from Sinai.

The Muslim Brotherhood was not fully supportive of the military decision, but it preferred it to the alternative – continued weapons smuggling from its territory.

A few days ago Issam al-Haddad, a senior Muslim Brotherhood official who serves as Morsi's adviser on foreign affairs, said that Egypt will not permit the flow of weapons via the tunnels, since that will undermine stability in the Sinai Peninsula. The Egyptian court is of the same opinion and it recently ruled that all tunnels on the Gaza border should be destroyed since they threaten Egypt's security.

In addition, any attempt to claim the opposite and support smuggling through the border, has yielded harsh criticism. Last November, for instance, during an emergency deliberation initiated by the

Muslim Brotherhood at the height of Operation Pillar of Defense, it was argued that Egypt should turn a blind eye to the entrance of weapons from the Gaza Strip and to the aid to Hamas and other organizations in the form of money and weapons. The stance was immediately denied by deputy chairman ("deputy supreme guide") of the Brotherhood, Khairat al-Shater, considered the strongest man in the movement.

"This cannot be overlooked since it will cause great embarrassment to the Egyptian president's office with the international community and especially opposite the United States, which has put pressure upon it to stop the escalation in Gaza," said al-Shater, who was replaced by Morsi as the Muslim Brotherhood representative in the elections after his candidacy was disqualified.

Al-Shater added in the same deliberation that "Egyptian support of the Palestinian factions by way of weapons is likely to incite a war between Egypt and Israel. The Egyptian presidential stance to return the Egyptian ambassador from Israel is the best position taken by an Arab, Islamic

state, and has led Egyptian citizens to take pride in their country."

The senior Muslim Brotherhood official also declared that "the entrance of Egypt into a war with Israel is not something that is accepted on the streets."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4353480,00.html>

- **Entebbe's Forgotten Dead**

Mention the name Entebbe to any Israeli and they will tell you the story of Yonatan (Yoni) Netanyahu, the heroic paratrooper and older brother of the current prime minister who died commanding the daring raid to free the 105 Israeli hostages hijacked to Entebbe, Uganda, in July of 1976. Popular myth has always held that save one Israeli woman, 74-year-old Dora Bloch, who was murdered in a hospital by Idi Amin's troops—every single other Israeli was spared thanks to the sacrifice of 30-year-old Netanyahu and the expertise of his elite Sayeret Matkel commando forces.

Within a year of the operation, two high-budget films and a made-for-TV movie

were produced that featured stars such as Elizabeth Taylor, Charles Bronson, Anthony Hopkins, Peter Finch, and, in one, a dashing Richard Dreyfuss as Yoni Netanyahu. The promos for the films focus on the heroism of the soldiers, particularly Netanyahu.

But for more than 35 years, three Israeli families have remembered the events of Entebbe not as a shining moment of national unity, but as a personal tragedy. That's because their family members—Jean-Jacques Mimouni, Pasco Cohen, Ida Borochovitsh—also died in Entebbe.

In newly released documentary, *To Live and Die in Entebbe*, filmmaker Eyal Boers tells the story of Entebbe's other victims and tries to explain why they have been forgotten by history. He focuses especially on what happened to 19-year-old Mimouni during the seven days of the hijacking, how he died in the raid, and why his family was never told the truth about his death.

"The Entebbe myth is a perfect one, made up of smarts, daring, self-sacrifice, dedication to the value of life, and loyalty," Boers, 37, told me as he sipped

tea in a popular Tel Aviv coffee shop late last month. "This mission wasn't about revenge or aggression. It was pure and it represented the best national qualities that we can be proud of."

But this mix of legitimate pride, horror, and desire for a glorious national narrative left no room for those whose death was less than glorious. "All nations," as Boers noted, "need myths. And often, when they tell their myths, they leave out the parts that are uncomfortable or sad."

Boers, who previously directed the documentary *Classmates of Anne Frank*, came upon the story of Entebbe by chance. He and Yonatan Khayat, a French-Tunisian-Israeli now living in Montreal, had been friends since their college days in Tel Aviv. Khayat once mentioned that his uncle, Jean-Jacques Mimouni, had died in Entebbe. "I was surprised, because I didn't know that anyone besides Netanyahu had died there. And then he told me that the family never found out how he died," Boers recalled. Together, beginning four years ago, Khayat and Boers set out to find the answers to the questions that have haunted Khayat and his family for decades.

The Mimouni family had come to Israel from Paris only four years before the Entebbe hijacking. Jean-Jacques's father, Robert, was a staunch Zionist who had served in the French resistance during World War II and then in the French police force. One of Mimouni's older sisters—Khayat's mother—remained in Paris when the family immigrated. Mimouni was on the Air France flight to Paris in order to see his nephew, Yonatan Khayat, then only two months old, for the first time.

At 9 a.m. on June 27, 1976, along with 227 other passengers, Jean-Jaques Mimouni boarded Air France flight 139 from Ben Gurion Airport to Charles DeGaulle, with a stopover in Greece. After take-off from Athens, the plane was hijacked by four Palestinian and German terrorists. After landing in Benghazi to refuel, they then flew on to the warm welcome of Ugandan despot Idi Amin in Entebbe. Soon afterward, the hijackers freed the French crew and non-Jewish passengers, while retaining 105 Jewish and Israeli hostages.

Back home in Israel, the families of the hostages were unable to sleep. But in the early hours of July 4, Mimouni's father,

Robert, woke the family: He heard about the operation over the radio, and they rushed to Ben Gurion airport to meet the victorious returning planes.

At that very moment, a military jeep was on its way to the Mimouni home, apparently to inform the family about what had happened to their son. Arriving at the airport, surrounded by joyful pandemonium, the Mimouni family was taken aside by military officials. They were told that their son had died of an asthma attack. Robert Mimouni insisted on seeing his son's body, which was being held in a room at the airport. The body was punctured with bullet holes, but no one ever offered them an explanation. Mimouni demanded to know the truth, but the family was quickly whisked away by government officials.

Over the years, Robert Mimouni tried to piece together the story, unsuccessfully trying to reach soldiers or witnesses. Family members recall that he even tried to make sketches of what might have happened, based on his own knowledge as a resistance fighter and policeman. But the government and the army stonewalled

him, according to Boers, and he passed away in 2011.

http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/126190/entebbes-forgotten-dead?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=entebbes-forgotten-dead&utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=entebbes-forgotten-dead

- **U.N. Finds Israeli Military Abuses Young Palestinians**

Palestinian children detained by the Israeli military are subject to widespread, systematic ill-treatment that violates international law, a report by the United Nations Children's Fund said. The Unicef report estimated that 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17, most of them boys, are arrested, interrogated and detained by the Israeli military, police and security agents every year in the occupied West Bank. The study found widespread mistreatment at each stage, including verbal and physical abuse and threats, along with coerced confessions. The Israeli Foreign Ministry said it had cooperated with the Unicef investigation and would study the report closely.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/world/middleeast/un-finds-israeli-military-abuses-young-palestinians.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&r=0>

- **Haredi media personalities call for settlement boycott**

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Israeli haredi Orthodox media personalities are calling for a boycott of West Bank settlement products in response to the Jewish Home party's position on drafting yeshiva students.

The leader of Jewish Home, Naftali Bennett, is a staunch advocate of West Bank settlements and is also fighting to end the draft exemption for haredi Israelis. Though Israel's Supreme Court outlawed the exemption last year, in practice haredi Israelis still are not being drafted into the army.

Radio commentators on the haredi Kol Baramah radio station said it was time for the haredi community to liberate itself from the settler movement, with which it has a "fake" relationship.

“We need to think twice about supporting those who hate us. It’s about time we stop being suckers,” commentator Avi Bloom said, according to the Times of Israel. “When Bennett cries about mothers not being able to sleep at night, you can come and ask him by what right does he not allow Tel Aviv mothers, and now ultra-Orthodox mothers as well, to sleep at night because of the need to protect some random outpost.”

Kol Baramah commentator Yaakov Rivlin echoed the sentiment. “It’s time to end all these relations with the real estate dealers in the West Bank territories,” he said.

A senior columnist for the Hamodia newspaper, Yisrael Hershkowitz, wrote, “The settlements will pay the price for the costly arrogance” of Bennett.

Hershkowitz said companies located in Jewish settlements in the West Bank or companies owned by settlers could go out of business if boycotted by haredim.

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2013/03/06/3121366/haredi-media-personalities-call-for-settlement-boycott>

- **Statement: Arab states are free to offer rebels military support**

CAIRO (Reuters) -- Arab states are free to offer military support to rebels fighting the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad if they wish, according a final statement of Arab League ministers on Wednesday.

The statement was issued at the end of a meeting of the League ministers in Cairo.

Previously the League had stressed that the Syrian opposition and rebels should be supported by humanitarian and diplomatic means.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=572265>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt court suspends April parliamentary elections**

A protester runs with a tear gas canister in Cairo. File photo Egypt has been wracked by political tension for months

A court in Egypt has suspended the parliamentary elections which had been scheduled to begin next month.

The Cairo Administrative Court said the electoral law promulgated by President Mohammed Morsi needed to be reviewed by the Supreme Constitutional Court.

Mr Morsi said he respected the ruling and that an appeal was unlikely.

He had announced last month that the elections for the People's Assembly would take place in four stages over two months, starting on 22 April.

The main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front (NSF), subsequently said it would boycott the polls because the electoral law favoured the president's Islamist allies - a claim the president denied.

The NSF also expressed concern that the elections would be neither free nor fair.

They were called by the president only weeks after more than 70 people were killed in clashes between security forces and opposition supporters at protests held

across the country to mark the second anniversary of the revolution which removed Hosni Mubarak.

On Wednesday, the security chief in Port Said was dismissed following renewed clashes between demonstrators and police. The coastal city has seen repeated outbreaks of violence since January, when death sentences were handed down to 39 people arrested after a riot at its football stadium last year which left more than 70 people dead.

'Respect for constitution'

The administrative court said it had ordered the elections to be suspended because the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament, the Shura Council, had not returned the electoral law to the Supreme Constitutional Court for final review after amending it in February.

Instead, the court said, the Shura Council had sent the law to Mr Morsi for ratification.

Mr Morsi's legal adviser initially said the presidency would appeal, but it later issued a statement saying it respected the court's decision.

"The Presidency respects Administrative Court ruling to suspend Lower House Elections & refer Elections Law back to the Constitutional Court," it wrote on Twitter in English.

Another tweet said: "The Presidency reaffirms its respect for the Constitution, Rule of Law and Separation of Powers."

Mr Morsi's opponents said the ruling was further proof that the president and his Muslim Brotherhood were mismanaging the country and seeking a monopoly on power.

"The mess continues courtesy of epic failure of governance," NSF leader Mohamed ElBaradei wrote on Twitter in English.

"Ignorance and manipulation of the essence of the state of law are the characteristics of a fascistic state. The president continues to speak about legitimacy," he added in Arabic.

The elections have been called because Egyptians voted in December in favour of a controversial new constitution, which

requires that the process begins within two months. The last polls saw the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), win 43% of the seats in the People's Assembly and 59% of the seats in the Shura Council.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21689545>

- **Egypt Court Cancels Parliamentary Elections**

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

CAIRO — A top court on Wednesday canceled pending parliamentary elections and referred the election law to the Supreme Constitutional Court, adding to the mounting uncertainty about a vote that had been scheduled to begin as early as April 22.

The decision once again plunged Egypt's political transition back into legal limbo, leaving the normally impotent upper house acting as the temporary legislature. It was unclear on Wednesday how long the constitutional court might take to rule or when other authorities might seek to set a new date.

The new legal questions added to doubts about the feasibility of even holding a vote in certain parts of Egypt that are still reeling with street violence, most notably the Suez Canal city of Port Said. At least four civilians and two security officers have died there this week in clashes between the police and protesters.

Dozens of others have been killed in clashes there since the end of January, when a group of local soccer fans were sentenced to death for their role in a deadly riot at a match there last year. Another related verdict is expected this weekend on the culpability of security officers in the same riot, and the anticipation of more violence has put both Port Said and Cairo on edge.

The main anti-Islamist political coalition had already declared that it would boycott the coming elections, demanding the restoration of stability before any vote as well as an overhaul of Egypt's new Constitution. The coalition's withdrawal effectively turned the vote into a contest among moderate, conservative and ultraconservative Islamists, while ensuring that anti-Islamists would continue to assail

the government's legitimacy whatever the outcome.

Wednesday's decision canceling the elections is also the latest in a series of confrontations between Egypt's prerevolutionary judiciary and its newly elected Islamist leaders, including President Mohamed Morsi. The top administrative court overseeing the executive ruled that, among other things, Mr. Morsi had wrongly declared a schedule for the elections without seeking the formal approval of his prime minister and cabinet.

A spokesman for Mr. Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood's political party, said in a statement that he would respect the court's decision.

The parliamentary poll faced some legal doubts even before the cancellation. The Egyptian courts have a history of striking down elections after the fact on procedural grounds and ordering the breakup of sitting Parliaments, most recently last spring.

The Supreme Constitutional Court ordered the immediate dissolution of Egypt's first

democratically elected Parliament after the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak, dealing a setback to the Islamists who led the chamber just as they were poised to win the presidency.

To avoid a repeat, the Islamist-led assembly that drafted the new Constitution required the constitutional court to vet the election system before any vote, rather than after. A few weeks ago, the constitutional court again found fault with the initial system devised for this spring's vote. Parliament rushed through revisions to the law in an attempt to meet the court's specifications.

But the court was not asked to approve the rushed amendments, leaving open the possibility that it still might again cancel the results after the fact.

Wednesday's decision at least remedied that uncertainty. The court sent the amended election law to the constitutional court before the vote, which would end the doubts about another judicial dissolution of another sitting Parliament

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/world/middleeast/egypt-court-cancels-parliamentary-elections.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

- **Security, jobs top Tunisian priorities**

Tunisians are putting the restoration of stability as a top priority for the new government's agenda.

By Monia Ghanmi in Tunis for Magharebia – 06/03/13

The talk on the Tunisian street is all about the new government, which by law must be announced by Saturday (March 9th).

Despite their differences over politics, citizens agree that the incoming leaders must focus on security and jobs.

"I expect the new government to restore national unity, open the door for dialogue and understanding between the different political factions, and to give priority to the language of consensus for the best interests of the country," day labourer Mohamed Ali Tabboubi said.

Tunisians need to unite in the coming days and put national interests above anything else to help the country get out of its economic crisis and social tensions, he told Magharebia.

"I hope that the new government will start by establishing security and dealing with the chaos that has worried citizens," retiree Zoubaida Hamrouni said.

She added that the government needed to find a solution to curtail arms proliferation and put an end to violence and thefts that have spread in Tunisian cities so tourists and investors could return to the country.

"Punishments must be toughened for all those who violate the law before violence, threats and use of arms turn into a habit and an acquired right for Tunisians," she told Magharebia.

"There will be no development, tourism or economy without security," she added.

Student Nouha Belghith concurred. "The biggest concern for us now is how to restore security and avert terrorist threats and violence which we now live from day to day," she said.

She told Magharebia that establishing security was the key for getting out of the strangling economic and social crisis facing Tunisians and would guarantee the progress of the democratic transition in good political and social circumstances.

Many challenges are awaiting the new Ali Larayedh government, the most important of which is security, given the tensions and continuous worries for their future that are now haunting Tunisians, journalist Mahmoud Hoheni.

"It seems that restoring security will be a priority for Larayedh's government, and there are no other priorities preceding it," he said.

Tunisians are also expecting that the new government start dealing with social conditions, especially unemployment among university graduates.

"I've been unemployed for two years now and I've been looking for a job," Tunis resident Sami Chaker said.

"I hope that this government will provide as many jobs as possible for unemployed

young people so they can contribute to the economic activities and distance themselves from extremist religious or political currents," he added.

Forming the government and the names that would head ministries were not as important as the government's programmes, bank employee Salima Ben Yedder told Magharebia.

"We look forward to having a pluralistic government that is open to all parties in the framework of social peace; a government that responds to people's demands about freedom, dignity and jobs and works as per a national, rather than partisan, programme," she added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/06/feature-01

- **Political tensions hurt Tunisia economy**

Credit rating agencies blame Tunisia's political instability for the latest downgrades.

By Mona Yahya in Tunis for Magharebia –
06/03/13

Precarious political and security conditions in Tunisia are taking a toll on the economy.

Standard & Poor's (S&P) and Moody's Investors Service recently downgraded Tunisia's credit rating because of the country's delay in forming a new government, Economic Affairs Minister Ridha Saidi confirmed on Friday (March 1st) at a cabinet meeting dedicated to the economic crisis.

"Political tensions are casting doubt over the government's ability to govern effectively, restore social stability and avert a worsening of already severe economic conditions," Moody's explained on February 28th after downgrading Tunisia's government debt rating to Ba1 from Baa3.

"In particular, the failure to form a technocratic government to speed up the country's democratic transition -- as advised by the country's outgoing government -- highlighted the deep divisions within the ruling coalition," the ratings agency said.

S&P also downgraded Tunisia's credit rating to BB- last month.

"The downgrades pose a danger to the Tunisian economy. They also means that loan interest rates will go up and entry into financial markets will be difficult," economic expert Mohsan Hassan told Magharebia.

"Foreign direct investments will drop because foreign investors resort to these agencies to learn about the financial and economic climate in the country they plan to invest in," he added.

In the absence of financial markets, Tunisia "will have only the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to talk to", he said.

Those financial institutions will require the Tunisian government to review its subsidy system, freeze wages and cut expenses, he warned.

"While these are all reasonable measures, their timing is not suitable because they will directly affect Tunisians," Hassan said.

Ultimately, the recovery of the Tunisian economy "hinges on consensus among different political parties, which alone is able to restore security and economic and social stability", outgoing Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali said at the March 1st cabinet meeting.

Nidaa Tounes party leader Béji Caid Essebsi echoed the call for political unity. In a speech last week-end to supporters in Sousse, Essebsi urged political factions to reach consensus and present a clear roadmap for the coming period.

"Forming the government as soon as possible, scheduling a date for elections and drafting the constitution will get the country out of its current crisis" and avert "higher unemployment and the disruption of development", Hassan said.

"In the future, we must think about finding a new development pattern that will create jobs. We must also reconsider the development of internal areas and look at a social policy targeting social categories that deserve subsidy," the economic expert added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/06/feature-02

- **Libya condemns Benghazi church attack**

By Essam Mohamed

The Libyan foreign ministry on Sunday (March 3rd) condemned an attack on a Coptic church in Benghazi, just days after 50 Christians were arrested and accused of proselytising.

The foreign ministry said it "strongly condemned Thursday's attack on the Egyptian church... and the aggression towards Father Paula Isaac and his deputy by the irresponsible armed men", AFP reported.

It expressed its deep sorrow and concern for what happened, and noted that the attack was a violation of the teachings of Islam, international human rights treaties, basic rights and respect of divine religions.

The foreign ministry said that the government formed a committee from the interior ministry, chief of staffs' office, and intelligence agency headed by Justice

Minister Dr. Salah al-Marghani to investigate the attack.

The Libyan authorities intend to deal with this incident very seriously and professionally, especially as the government has taken the necessary measures to secure the church.

It called on Libyans to help activate and create the culture of respecting expatriates who come from friendly and brotherly countries.

Libyan authorities also urged citizens to respect the beliefs of foreign workers in line with the necessary requirements to build a state of law and institutions and in implementation of Libya's obligations under international and regional human rights and basic freedoms treaties.

Also on Sunday, 23 Egyptians Christians accused of proselytising were released pending deportation. The Coptic Church in Benghazi intervened to assist them.

Meanwhile, 25 others remain in detention and are under investigation. The priest and his assistants were released after their heads were shaved.

A security source in Benghazi said that seven or eight of them rented shops at al-Jareed popular market at the heart of Benghazi. They were arrested and their houses searched, where bibles and religious books were allegedly found.

The source noted that investigations revealed that a number of them were without visas, others were without work permits, and three had hepatitis C. He said that this was a violation of Libyan law, and that they violated the immigration and labour laws.

A network printing books for proselytising was previously arrested at a house in Shanaba, near al-Salam neighbourhood in Benghazi, Libyan army chief of staffs' preventive security department spokesman Hussain Bin Hamid said.

He said that 70,000 books were printed there, and that 45,000 copies were found while 25,000 copies were distributed.

He added that the network was made up of four members, headed by an Egyptian, and included a South African, a Korean and a Swede. However, he did not disclose

their names and said that investigations were still underway.

Investigations led them to arrest the network and that one of the suspects entered the country illegally and wanted to have a residence, the spokesman said. He added that based on the on-going investigation, one or two of them could be acquitted.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/06/feature-03

- **The US and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: An exercise in pragmatism**

Despite the widely-held view that Washington supports the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's rise to political ascendancy, the reality is considerably more complex and is based largely on practical considerations

In his first visit to Egypt since taking office on 2 and 3 March, newly-appointed US Secretary of State John Kerry came to deliver the following message: that the protagonists in Egypt's political crisis – regime and opposition – must agree on a

political map aimed at breaking the deadlock and making the concessions needed to reach common ground to advance the current chaotic transitional period.

With this in mind, Kerry urged the main opposition bloc, the National Salvation Front (NSF), to reverse its decision to boycott upcoming legislative elections, set to begin on 22 April. In an effort to convince the stakeholders of the need to adopt such an approach, Kerry reminded them clearly that ‘political consensus’ was a precondition for the granting of a \$ 4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The loan is necessary for the release of financial aid promised by major donor countries, the United States in particular, to help Egypt out of its severe economic crisis.

But, furious with the US call to the opposition to participate in elections, which the latter considers an intervention in favour of the Muslim Brotherhood given the group’s expected electoral victory, some NSF leaders – including Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the Constitution Party;

Hamdeen Sabbahi, leader of the Egyptian Popular Current; and El-Sayed El-Badawi, chairman of the Wafd Party – refused to meet Kerry.

Their conviction of US support for the continuation in power of the Brotherhood is widespread among Egypt’s media, opposition and large segments of the public. The reality, however, is that the Americans played no role in the Brotherhood’s arrival to power and the advent of Egypt’s first Islamist president. Washington simply took note of the political ascension of Islamists in Egypt, as in other countries of the ‘Arab Spring,’ such as Tunisia.

Pragmatically, they wanted to establish a working relationship with Egypt’s new masters, as they had done with former presidents Hosni Mubarak and Anwar Sadat, in order to safeguard US regional interests – hence the impression that they support the Muslim Brotherhood.

Reason dictates that Washington should support secular forces, with which it shares political values, and not support Islamists, whose ideology is far distant – even incompatible – with its own. The

reality, however, is that the US has found the secular opposition divided and unable to provide an alternative to the Islamists, while the Brotherhood remains Egypt's most powerful and best organised political force.

The Americans therefore want to establish close collaboration with the group to defend US interests in Egypt and the region.

In this context, the US seeks to maintain Egypt's stability. And this was the actual content of the message delivered by Kerry. The US wants the continuation and success of Egypt's democratic transition and aspires to create the conditions for political stability necessary to the preservation of US interests in the Middle East.

These remain unchanged and relate first and foremost to the security of Israel and the maintenance of the peace treaty that binds it to Egypt, along with the security of oil supplies from the Gulf region through Egypt's Suez Canal. Within this context, Washington hopes to continue to benefit from the facilities that allow it to fly over Egyptian territory, along with the passage

of its warships into the Suez Canal, granted under the terms of US military assistance to Egypt.

In both cases, President Mohamed Morsi has so far pursued policies in accordance with US interests. First, he confirmed his respect for contractual commitments to Israel. In addition, he successfully mediated between Israel and Hamas to end hostilities in Gaza last November, earning him praise from Washington.

Meanwhile, the US has repeatedly stressed that the safety of the oil monarchies of the Gulf represented a red line, referring to the hegemonic tendencies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the latter's attempts to intervene in these countries' internal affairs.

Flirting with Iran since Morsi's arrival to power certainly displeases the US, although many internal and external barriers stand in the way of rapprochement between the two countries.

The recent tourist cooperation agreement, signed in Tehran on 27 February by the two countries' tourism ministers, should

not be overestimated. The agreement's timing, three days before Kerry's Cairo visit, suggests that it aimed to send a message to Washington regarding Egypt's willingness to pursue a more independent policy.

Nevertheless, the US remains aware of the limitations of Egypt-Iran rapprochement. From the total frostiness that has marked relations during the last three decades, relations between Egypt and Iran could improve in various fields without rising to the level of an 'axis' or 'alliance.'

Under such conditions, it is normal that – despite the objections of some members of US Congress who want to impose certain conditions – the White House is calling for the continuation of US assistance to Egypt: \$250 million in economic aid and \$1.3 billion in military aid. Military aid acquires special importance given the fact that Washington wants to continue its partnership with the Egyptian army, which remains a major player in the Egyptian political game and whose role is crucial to the pursuit of peace with Israel.

It is within this context that the delivery in late January of four US F-16 jetfighters to the Egyptian army – with an additional 12 aircraft scheduled to arrive within 18 months – must be seen.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/P/4/66213/Opinion/-The-US-and-Egypt-Muslim-Brotherhood-An-exercise-.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Nasrallah met Iranian cleric in Beirut, Hezbollah says

Report seemingly intended to refute speculation regarding terror leader's health

By Philip Podolsky

Hezbollah head Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah met with a senior Iranian cleric in Beirut Wednesday, Lebanese media reported.



The meeting came against the backdrop of rumors that Nasrallah might be seriously ill with cancer and in Iran receiving treatment.

Nasrallah met with Ayatollah Sheikh Mohsen Araki to discuss the latest developments in Islamic affairs, according to Hezbollah mouthpiece Al-Manar.

The TV report said that the meeting had taken place in Lebanon, a detail likely aimed to dispel reports that the Shi'ite Lebanese leader, who is 52, was recently flown to Iran for treatment.

Nasrallah made a public address via video feed last week in an attempt to dismiss rumors about his health. He dedicated most of his 50-minute speech to domestic Lebanese politics and to refuting accusations that Hezbollah actively supported the regime of Bashar Assad.

He said that rumors of his illness were part of a "media campaign" being waged against Hezbollah.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/nasrallah-meets-iranian-cleric-in-beirut-hezbollah-says/>

- **Lebanon Druze chief 'sides with devil' against Assad**

I support Al-Nusra Front against the Syrian regime, Lebanon's Druze leader says

Lebanon's Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has sided with the rebel Al-Nusra Front, a jihadist group which Washington lists as a "terrorist organisation", in the Syrian conflict.



"I support Al-Nusra Front against the Syrian regime," Jumblatt said in an interview with Al-Akhbar newspaper published on Wednesday.

"The Syrian people has the right to side with the devil -- except with Israel -- against the regime," said Jumblatt, a fierce

foe of President Bashar al-Assad although he was once an ally of his late predecessor and father, Hafez al-Assad.

"I am acting to protect the (Syrian) Druze. The Alawites (Assad's community) will go back to their mountain, but the Druze live in a sea of Sunnis," said Jumblatt.

While most anti-Assad rebels -- like the majority of Syria's population -- are Sunni, the country's minorities have mostly stayed on the sidelines of the two-year-old conflict in Lebanon's neighbour.

Among them are Syria's Druze, many of who live in the south, next to the majority Sunni area of Hauran.

The Alawites, meanwhile, come from the mountains of northwest Syria.

Lebanon's politicians and society are deeply divided over the war in Syria, with the Sunni-led opposition backing the revolt and Shiite movement Hezbollah along with its government allies supporting Assad's regime.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66263/World/Region/Lebanon->

[Druze-chief-sides-with-devil-against-Assad.aspx](#)

- **Future MP demands Miqati to clarify FM's Syria statements**

Lebanon's Future bloc MP Khaled Zahraman demanded that Prime Minister Najib Miqati clarify Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour's statements regarding Syria.

"The prime minister must clarify this issue because he had said that he is the one who determines the country's foreign policy and if he does not agree with [Mansour's stance], then he must demand a [justification] from Mansour," Zahraman told Free Lebanon radio station on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Lebanon's foreign minister called on Arab foreign ministers gathered in Cairo to allow the Syrian government retake its seat at the Arab League, from which it was suspended in 2011.

The opposition MP added: "This position is dangerous and will implicate Lebanon in the Syrian conflict."

He also demanded that “Miqati give us an answer because we have had enough and this minister [Mansour] no longer represents us.”

The Syrian crisis has split Lebanon’s political scene between pro-Syrian regime parties affiliated with the March 8 alliance – spearheaded by Hezbollah – and parties associated with the March 14 coalition – most prominently the Future Movement – who back the rebels.

Syria is witnessing a violent uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has so far killed more than 70,000 people since its outbreak in March 2011, according to figures released by the United Nations.

Regarding the current electoral law impasse, the Future MP said that “the ongoing debate concerning the country’s electoral law has caused a rift within the March 14 forces.”

“However, we are still together and we still agree on the principles that brought us together in the first place,” Zahraman continued.

Lebanon’s political parties are currently debating which proposed electoral law will be adopted for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Disagreement over the issue has caused tension to emerge within the March 14 alliance, after its main political party, the Future Movement, voiced its opposition to an electoral law based on proportional representation. This stance differs from Lebanon’s four major Christian parties—including the Future Movement’s allies the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb—who have expressed support for the Orthodox Gathering law which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonews/future-mp-demands-miqati-to-clarify-fms-syria-statements>

- **Future and PSP reach agreement on electoral law, sources say**

The Progressive Socialist Party, Future Movement and independent March 14 Christian MPs have reached an agreement on a mixed electoral law, sources told NOW.

The sources said Wednesday that the law is based on majoritarian voting in 26 electoral districts and proportional voting in 9 other districts.

The law is drawn up to ensure that 52 to 55 MPs will be elected by Christian voters, they added.

Lebanon's Christians parties have previously complained that the current 1960 electoral law allows for many Christian MPs to be elected by non-Christian voters.

Sources also told NOW that Jumblatt will inform Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri of this new electoral agreement.



LBC reported that Jumblatt met with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri late Wednesday and following the meeting Jumblatt reiterated Berri's refusal to put

any law to a vote in Parliament unless all parties agree on it.

"This means that we need to find a law that combines majoritarian and proportional representation in order to get us over the 1960 and the Orthodox law disputes," Jumblatt added.

In February, Lebanon's joint parliamentary commissions approved the Orthodox law that calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines. The law is supported by the country's major Christian parties and top March 8 parties but is rejected by the Future Movement and PSP as well as Prime Minister Najib Miqati and President Michel Suleiman.

Parliament's joint commissions approved the controversial law after weeks of deliberation at the end of which the country's competing political forces failed to reach a consensus on a proposal that would replace the 1960 law despite the cabinet's approval in September 2012 of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/future-ppp-march-14-christians-reach-agreement-on-electoral-law>

6. SYRIA

• Video of Syrians With Seized U.N. Vehicle in Golan Heights

Video posted on YouTube on Wednesday by a Syrian rebel group calling itself the Martyrs of Yarmouk Brigade, which claims to have abducted 20 United Nations peacekeepers in the Golan Heights.

As my colleagues Rick Gladstone and Alan Cowell report, 30 armed rebel fighters kidnapped a group of 20 United Nations peacekeepers in the Golan Heights on Wednesday and gave a 24-hour deadline before they would treat the peacekeepers “as prisoners of war.”

The abduction was announced in a video message posted online that showed two young-looking rebels, one carrying a rifle, standing in front of a captured United Nations vehicle. The video, which has since been removed from YouTube, did not clearly show any of the abducted United Nations personnel, although two figures seated in the cab of one of the

captured vehicles may have been peacekeepers.

The rebel group called itself the Martyrs of Yarmouk Brigade, and in the video, one young man does all the talking.

We are holding the forces of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force until the withdrawal of Bashar al-Assad’s forces from the village of al-Jamla and its outskirts to their positions. We ask America, the United Nations and the Security Council that Assad’s forces withdraw to obtain their release. We won’t release them until after the withdrawal of the forces of the regime of Bashar al-Assad from the outskirts of the village of al-Jamla, which is on the border with Israel. We ask them for the complete withdrawal of the forces back to their positions. If the withdrawal does not take place within 24 hours, we will treat them as prisoners of war, and praise be to God almighty.

A second video posted to YouTube does appear to show the abducted peacekeepers, although they are not the focus of the video. Several people in the signature light blue helmets and vests of

the United Nations are visible sitting inside the captured vehicles while their kidnappers energetically talk about the treachery of both the United Nations and the Syrian government.

Speaking about the United Nations, one rebel shouts, “They are agents of Israel, and the Syrian regime and the United Nations and all the European countries, and the Assad regime, they are all agents of Israel!”

He also calls Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, “an agent of Zionism and America” before the sound of gunfire is heard. “One of the tyrant’s snipers is shooting at us,” he said, before the video ended.

The abduction poses perhaps the most serious threat to the safety of United Nations personnel since the start of the two-year-old Syrian conflict. The European media director of Human Rights Watch posted an update on Twitter that said his organization was investigating the rebel brigade for its role in the execution of prisoners.

<http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/video-of-syrians-with-seized-u-n-vehicle-in-golan-heights/?partner=rss&emc=rss>

- **Talks under way to free 21 UN peacekeepers held in Syria – live updates**

An image grab taken from a video uploaded on YouTube on 6 March 2013 allegedly shows armed fighters standing next to United Nations Disengagement Force (UNDOF) vehicles in the Golan Heights ceasefire zone between Syria and Israel. Syrian rebels abducted 21 UN peacekeepers in the Golan Heights ceasefire zone, the United Nations said, as the frontiers of their war against president Bashar al-Assad spread further. An image grab taken from a video uploaded on YouTube on 6 March 2013 allegedly shows armed fighters standing next to United Nations Disengagement Force (UNDOF) vehicles in the Golan Heights ceasefire zone between Syria and Israel. Syrian rebels abducted 21 UN peacekeepers in the Golan Heights ceasefire zone, the United Nations said, as the frontiers of their war against president Bashar al-Assad spread further.

The Syrian National Coalition has praised British foreign secretary William Hague's announcement of £13.2m (\$20m) in non-lethal assistance to the rebels as a "commendable gesture" and expressed "deep gratitude" to the British government.

In an emailed statement, the umbrella group for the Syrian opposition – recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people by a number of Arab, Middle Eastern and western countries, including the UK – said Hague's move was a strong sign that Britain had recognised "the need to accelerate action to help Syrians and their cause".



The SNC also welcomed the Arab League's decision to give its Syria seat to the rebels instead of the government. "This move will help to accelerate efforts to end the humanitarian crisis perpetuated by a

dictatorial regime, and towards enabling Syrians to achieve a pluralistic and democratic society," the SNC's statement said.

I have asked the SNC if they are in contact with the rebel group holding the UN peacekeepers and whether they have told the group to let them go. I will post their reply when I get it.

The rebel Free Syrian Army is a loose collection of rebel groups that are not connected in a strict military hierarchy. The links between the SNC and the Free Syrian Army are similarly weak.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/middle-east-live/2013/mar/07/talks-under-way-to-free-21-un-peacekeepers-held-in-syria-live-updates>

- **Syria rebels seize UN peacekeepers, take key city**

UN chief calls rebels to respect the 'freedom of movement and security' of peacekeepers abducted in the Golan Heights ceasefire zone between Syria and Israel

UN officials said negotiations were under way Thursday with Syrian rebels who seized 21 UN peacekeepers in the Golan Heights ceasefire zone between Syria and Israel, as rebels took total control of the key northern city of Raqa.

Syrian rebels on Wednesday abducted the peacekeepers, who are from the Philippines, diplomats said, as the frontiers of their war against President Bashar al-Assad spread further.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon called for their "immediate" release and demanded the Syrian government and rebels respect their "freedom of movement and security".

The UN said it was trying to negotiate the release of the soldiers, while a rebel spokesman said the troops would be held until Assad's forces pull back from a Golan village.

Officials in Manila urged the troops, who are part of a 300-strong Filipino peacekeeping unit, to be released immediately. Philippine armed forces spokesman Colonel Arnulfo Burgos told

AFP the rebels were treating the hostages well.

"They are being treated as guests, not as hostiles," Burgos said, adding: "We have high hopes that they are going to be released soon."

Russia's UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin, who read the Security Council statement on the situation, said the rebels have made demands directed at the Syrian government, but gave no details.

The United Nations has reported a growing number of incidents in the Golan over the past year. It has sent extra armored vehicles and communications equipment to reinforce security for the mission.

The Britain-based watchdog Syrian Observatory for Human Rights distributed two amateur videos with statements by the rebel Yarmuk Martyrs Brigade claiming the capture.

A man identified as brigade spokesman Abu Kaid al-Faleh said the peacekeepers would not be freed until Syrian regime forces pull out of the area.

"If they do not withdraw, these men (UN troops) will be treated as prisoners," he said, accusing the UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) -- which monitors a 1974 ceasefire deal between Syria and Israel -- of working with the army to try to suppress the insurgency.

UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous told reporters after briefing the Security Council that negotiations are underway "and the matter is mobilizing all our teams".

Meanwhile, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres warned that one million Syrians have fled their homeland since the revolt erupted two years ago.

"With a million people in flight, millions more displaced internally and thousands of people continuing to cross the border every day, Syria is spiralling towards full-scale disaster," Guterres said.

"We are doing everything we can to help, but the international humanitarian response capacity is dangerously

stretched. This tragedy has to be stopped."

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) called for a political agreement to allow humanitarian aid to be distributed.

MSF also stressed the growing problems of Syria's neighbours, as each day 5,000 refugees, mainly women and children, reach crowded and poorly-equipped camps across the borders.

On the ground, the northern city of Raqa came under total rebel control on Wednesday, two days into battles with troops loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

"Raqa city is now out of the army's control, after military intelligence troops surrendered to rebels following fierce clashes that raged for two days," Syrian Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

"It is the first provincial capital out of regime control."

Earlier, an air raid on Raqa killed and wounded dozens of people, the Observatory said. Warplanes also

bombarded Homs in central Syria, on the fourth day of a major offensive in the country's third-largest city.

Near Damascus, the air force bombarded several rebel enclaves, said the watchdog which relies on a vast network of activists and medics on the ground.

The United Nations says at least 70,000 people have been killed since the start of the uprising, and the Observatory said at least 121 were killed on Wednesday.

Visiting the European Parliament in Brussels, the chief of staff of the rebel Free Syrian Army said Assad's regime could be toppled quickly if Western nations armed the insurgency.

"What we have now is little, very very little," said Brigadier General Selim Idriss. "If we have the weapons we need, we can bring down the regime in a month."

Britain's Foreign Secretary William Hague said London will provide body armour and armoured vehicles to the rebels, as part of "non-lethal" aid worth \$20 million.

"The fact remains that diplomacy is taking far too long and the prospect of an immediate breakthrough is slim," he told parliament after the European Union authorised the supply of non-lethal military gear and training to Assad's foes.

In Cairo, the Arab League called for the opposition National Coalition "to form an executive body to take up Syria's seat" and attend its next summit, in Doha on March 26-27.

Russia said its point man on Syria would meet his US counterpart and UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi in London on Thursday.

Moscow is upset with a US decision to also step up non-military support for the rebels, and opposes calls for Assad to quit before talks between the regime and opposition.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66327/World/Region/Syria-rebels-seize-UN-peacekeepers,-take-key-city.aspx>

- **Syria jets pound city captured by rebels**

Syrian fighter jets on Thursday pounded Raqa, a day after rebels took full control of the northern city, a watchdog said, raising concern for the fate of loyalists who surrendered.

The flag of the Islamist Al-Nusra Front, which led the rebel assault on Raqa, flew on the building housing the city's former feared military intelligence branch, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The rebels are believed to be holding the provincial governor, whom they captured during the battle, inside the building, which has now become their headquarters, the Britain-based Observatory said.

The rebels fought off the last pockets of regime resistance and took control of the military intelligence building on Wednesday after overrunning most of Raqa, capital of the province of the same name, two days earlier.

The capture of Raqa, near the border with Turkey, marked the rebels' biggest victory on the ground since the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad's rule erupted in March 2011.

The Observatory said "hundreds" of pro-regime-regime militiamen had surrendered to the rebels, adding that it feared for their fate.

Rights groups have accused regime forces and rebels alike of perpetrating atrocities against those they take prisoner.

Also on Thursday, the army rained shells down on the rebel-held Khaldiye district of the central city of Homs, the Observatory said.

The bombardment came a day after the army used helicopters, warplanes and rocket fire to strike Khaldiye.

Although the army now controls some 80 percent of Homs, several districts remain under rebel control despite a suffocating eight-month siege and several hundred civilians are trapped there.

The United Nations says at least 70,000 people have been killed since the outbreak of the uprising in Syria.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-jets-pound-city-captured-by-rebels>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Yemen's humanitarian crisis masked by faltering steps towards democracy

Meeting to address aid and accountancy instead focuses on reshaping Yemeni constitution despite severe malnutrition and widespread debt

Yemeni women recite prayers under a tree as they attend the weekly rally of pro-democracy protesters in Sana'a. Photograph: Khaled Abdullah/Reuters

To talk of Yemen's humanitarian crisis is to talk of politics. If any reminder were needed of that, it was delivered with sobering clarity at a gathering of Yemeni civil society representatives, NGOs and government ministers at London's Chatham House on Wednesday.

Billed as a curtain-raiser for the Friends of Yemen meeting in London on Thursday, where ministers will debate the Arab state's faltering progress towards

democracy and the need to make good on unfulfilled aid pledges, the meeting was meant to address aid and accountability.

But instead, the focus turned inexorably towards national politics, with the accent firmly on the national dialogue conference, starting on 18 March, that will reshape Yemen's constitution before elections scheduled for February 2014.

The difficulty is that Yemen faces a humanitarian crisis of a magnitude that could render political progress redundant. Figures compiled by the World Food Programme suggest almost half of Yemen's population of 25 million has fallen into debt as a result of buying food on credit (pdf). More than 10 million people do not have enough to eat, and chronic malnutrition is widespread among children. A million children are acutely malnourished, with 250,000 at risk of death without immediate assistance.

"Colleagues who work on food and hunger issues globally always come up short when they see the figures on Yemen," James Whitehead, Oxfam's regional programme manager for the Middle East, says. "They are shocking, and my worry is that that

becomes normalised, that we say 'That's just Yemen.'

"We're really concerned about ordinary families just getting enough food on the table. In the areas where we're working, we've seen that families are getting further and further into debt. The amount of debt related to just buying enough to get by has doubled since last year."

There is a real danger of these realities becoming submerged beneath the tide of political debate. As security concerns continue to grab headlines, an alarming funding shortfall continues. The UN has received just 2% of the \$716m it needs for 2013, and 78% of the \$8bn pledged at previous conferences has yet to materialise.

The Chatham House meeting ended with a video in which ordinary Yemeni people reflected on the issues facing their country. After two hours of politically charged discussion, their comments felt almost incongruous. They wanted peace and public services. They wanted aid that benefited the public rather than the military. Some were optimistic about the

national dialogue, others not. Several hadn't even heard of it.

What united them all, however, was a fear that their needs would be ignored by the fledgling political establishment, and the muted but incessant chatter of the Yemeni government ministers in attendance, who spoke among themselves rather than listen to the civil society speakers, did nothing to dispel those concerns. Apparently, though, their mere presence represented progress.

"They attended and that shows their seriousness, which is positive," Jamila Ali Raja, a Yemeni political and women's rights activist, said. "They were interested when they wanted to be interested."

Whether that will be good enough for the Arab world's poorest country is doubtful. The conclusion of Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33-year presidency in November 2011 was meant to herald a fresh start for Yemen. Instead, continued political and economic turmoil has been exacerbated by wide-ranging problems.

Even without the food crisis, the humanitarian picture is complicated, with

a lack of basic services a major issue. Adding weight to suggestions that Yemen may be the first country in the world to run out of water, 13 million Yemenis, out of an estimated population of nearly 25 million, lack access to clean water and proper sanitation. Basic healthcare is unavailable to 6 million people, with the absence of reproductive health services contributing significantly to a high maternal mortality rate.

"We came here to remind the Friends of Yemen that the humanitarian situation will be one of the biggest risks for Yemen's transition if it's not dealt with properly," Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, UN resident and humanitarian co-ordinator for Yemen, said. "What we are seeing is a lot of attention on the political agenda, and we acknowledge this is moving ahead.

"But, unfortunately, people seem to forget that there are 10 million people in need of food assistance – five million in need of extreme food assistance – and one million children suffering acute malnutrition. We need to remind the world that, while the national dialogue and preparations for the election are important, it's vital that we

deal with the current humanitarian situation."

One official argued that addressing humanitarian issues can help to foster political stability, but political stability will not solve the humanitarian crisis.

"If we don't receive support, there will be destabilisation in Yemen, and this is the main message we'll be emphasising at the Friends of London meeting," Ahmed said. "It's important for the world to realise that there will be no stability in Yemen if we don't deal with the humanitarian situation. There is more awareness of the magnitude of the problem, but it's not enough. If we don't intervene now, we may see some of the same images that have emerged from the Horn of Africa; the situation is comparable."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/mar/07/yemen-humanitarian-crisis-faltering-democracy>

- **Qaeda militant killed planting bomb: Yemen official**

A security official says Al-Qaeda militant was killed after failing to survive a bomb he exploded

An Al-Qaeda militant was killed Thursday when a roadside bomb he was trying to plant at a central market in the southern town of Loder exploded, a security official told AFP.

Witnesses in the town where a suspected Al-Qaeda suicide bomber killed 12 pro-government militiamen earlier this week said the militant's body was torn to pieces in the blast.

Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi has rejected efforts by clerics and tribal chiefs to broker a truce between the government and Al-Qaeda, insisting that the militants must lay down their arms.

The jihadists were driven out of most cities in Abyan province, including Loder, last June in an offensive by troops backed by militia, but Yemeni forces continue to hunt them in the rugged south and east, aided by US drone attacks.

The militants took advantage of a decline in central government control during a 2011 uprising that forced veteran president Ali Abdullah Saleh from power to seize large swathes of territory across

the south, including most of Abyan province, which they controlled for a year.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66326/World/Region/Qaeda-militant-killed-planting-bomb-Yemen-official.aspx>

- **High expectations as sixth round of talks opens**

The opposition has dropped a demand to have a representative of the king attend

By Habib Toumi Bureau chief

Mourners carry the flag-draped casket of Mahmoud Al Jazeeri, 20, during his politically charged funeral in Nabih Saleh on Tuesday, Pictures of the young man and his injury are attached to the casket, reading "Martyr Mahmoud Eisa Al Jazeeri." He died nearly two weeks ago after being shot in the head with a tear gas canister fired by riot police. A dispute between the government and the family over funeral plans delayed the release of his body, sparking days of protests and clashes.

Manama: Bahrainis are looking forward to another ray of hope as participants in the

national dialogue convene for the sixth round on Wednesday afternoon.

Launched on February 10, the talks have brought together a coalition of six opposition societies, a coalition of ten other societies, the parliament and the government to help heal political wounds that scarred the country and divided the society.

Following four rounds of talks at Al Areen resort in the deep south of the country, pessimism about reaching the first compromise prevailed with no breakthrough seeming possible.

However, the fifth round brought the much-anticipated news of an advance in the talks and a concrete nudge towards positive results.

“For the first time I am really optimistic,” Muneera Fakhro, one of the eight delegates for the coalition of the opposition societies, said during the fifth round of talks on February 27. “The conversations were very slow earlier, but today, I am optimistic about the future,” she said as she left the hall where the 27

men and women involved in the dialogue discussed several issues for four hours.

The breakthrough occurred after the participants agreed to set aside a request by the opposition coalition to have a representative of the king at the dialogue.

“We are requesting the presence of a representative of the king at the dialogue so that we can move forward,” the opposition had said at the fourth round of the talks on February 24.

However, the other coalition as well as the parliamentarians and the ministers said that the presence of a representative of the king was not required and insisted that the agreements endorsed by the participants during the second round specifically stipulated the presence of representatives from the government, not the king.

On Saturday, the royal court ruled out the participation of a representative of the king in the dialogue and said that the monarch “was for all and with all people and that he stood equidistant from all sides”.

“His Majesty the King views all participants in the dialogue as equals,” Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the minister of the royal court, said. “HM [His Majesty] sees them as citizens who are taking part in a patriotic act for the sake of their country. This means that no side at the dialogue represents HM the king against the other components,” he said.

According to Shaikh Khalid, the ministers taking part in the dialogue stood on equal footing with the other participants and had the same rights and duties.

In the Qatari capital Doha, US Secretary of State Jon Kerry told the media that his country supported the dialogue in Bahrain and that he discussed the talks with his Bahraini counterpart, Shaikh Khalid.

“We talked about the dialogue. The Foreign Minister made it clear to me that they remain committed to the dialogue, that they are engaged right now in advancing it, they’re at some important stages within it, progress is being made. And what I did was encourage him to continue that dialogue and to reach a resolution with respect to some of these

difficult issues,” Kerry said at a press conference.

“He assured me that they are going to continue in good faith, and obviously, all of us encourage that and look forward to some positive results.”

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/high-expectations-as-sixth-round-of-talks-opens-1.1154623>

- **Saudi Arabia frees 100 protesters held at demonstration: police**

Arrests were made at a sit-in demanding release of Islamist prisoners in Buraida

Riyadh: Saudi authorities have freed 100 protesters arrested last week while staging a sit-in to demand the release of Islamist prisoners in the ultra-conservative city of Buraida, police said on Wednesday.

One hundred people were released on Tuesday of the 176 people arrested in Buraida, capital of northern Qassim province, said police spokesman Colonel Fahd Al Habdan.

“Procedures are continuing to free nine more prisoners,” he said in a statement.

The official SPA news agency reported on Friday that Saudi police had arrested 176 people, including 15 women, for holding an illegal protest.

Article continues below

Authorities have accused the protesters of acting on behalf of “deviant groups” — a term they usually use to refer to the Al Qaida jihadist network.

Saudi rights activists say those jailed are extremist political prisoners.

Demonstrations are banned in Saudi Arabia, an ultra-conservative Muslim kingdom that has remained relatively untouched by the Arab Spring uprisings.

Small groups of women have gathered almost daily in Buraida, north of Riyadh, to demand the release of imprisoned Islamist relatives, and dozens of protesters held a rare sit-in outside the Buraida prison in September.

A wave of deadly Al Qaida attacks in the kingdom between 2003 and 2006 prompted the authorities to launch a

crackdown on the local branch of slain Saudi-born Osama Bin Laden’s group.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-frees-100-protesters-held-at-demonstration-police-1.1154688>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Taliban kill 17 captured Afghan soldiers: Officials

After being held hostage for four days, seventeen Afghan soldiers are killed in the northeast of the country

Taliban militants have killed 17 captured Afghan soldiers in the far northeast in one of the deadliest single attacks on local forces in recent years, officials said on Wednesday.

The men were taken hostage in Badakhshan on Saturday while guarding a convoy. Their bodies were discovered by local people in the relatively peaceful mountainous province, which borders Tajikistan, China and Pakistan.

"The enemy have executed 17 soldiers whose bodies were found last night," provincial deputy police chief Sayed

Jahangir Keramat said. "Seven other soldiers were released in exchange for some Taliban prisoners."

The attack came as local forces take over responsibility for tackling the Taliban from the NATO-led military coalition.

"Last night locals found 17 bullet-riddled bodies of Afghan soldiers in Warduj district," Abdul Marouf Rasekh, spokesman for the provincial governor, told AFP, confirming several others had been released after talks led by tribal elders.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack but said the deaths had occurred during fighting rather than after the soldiers had been captured.

"The soldiers were all killed in the battlefield," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said in a statement sent to AFP.

"A huge amount of munitions and two vehicles were also seized," he added.

[http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/66284/World/International/Taliban-](http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/66284/World/International/Taliban-kill--captured-Afghan-soldiers-Officials.aspx)

[kill--captured-Afghan-soldiers-Officials.aspx](http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/66284/World/International/Taliban-kill--captured-Afghan-soldiers-Officials.aspx)

- **Taliban Execute 16 Abducted Afghan Soldiers**

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

March 6, 2013

FAIZABAD, Afghanistan -- Afghan officials say Taliban militants have executed 16 Afghan soldiers in the country's northeast.

Badakhshan Provincial spokesman Abdul Maruf Raskh told RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan that the Afghan National Army soldiers were abducted by the Taliban on March 4.

He added that the abductors killed the soldiers in the Warduj district of Badakhshan on March 5.

Raskh said village elders and clerics were able to negotiate the release of another seven soldiers from the same district.

The mountainous, remote Badakhshan Province is generally considered immune from Taliban violence, which is concentrated in the eastern and southern

regions along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan.

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

- **2 Italian soldiers injured in west Afghanistan bombing attack**

Press TV

March 6, 2013

Two Italian soldiers with the US-led forces in Afghanistan have been injured in a bomb attack in western Afghan Province of Farah, Press TV reports.

The Italian military announced on Wednesday that two of its soldiers have been "slightly wounded" following an attack on their patrol by a roadside bomb in the Farah province.

The statement added that efforts are underway to find more details about the incident.

The injured foreign soldiers have reportedly been airlifted to a facility near where American troops are stationed in the area.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the move.

Casualties in the US-led war in Afghanistan commonly drop to a relative low during winter months, when snow and bitter conditions make fighting more difficult. A hike in armed violence, however, is expected starting the spring season.

Roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are by far the most lethal weapon used by Taliban militants against US-led and Afghan troops, as well as civilians.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of fighting terrorism. While the US-led invasion removed the Taliban from power, insecurity remains rampant across the war-torn nation.

The US-led war in Afghanistan, which has caused record-high civilian and military casualties, has become the longest military conflict in the American history.

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

- **US general urges keeping 13,600 troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014**

Press TV

March 6, 2013

A top US military commander has called for keeping more than 13,000 troops in Afghanistan after 2014.

On Tuesday, General James Mattis, the commander of the US Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington that 13,600 soldiers should remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

"I have made my recommendation... That recommendation is for 13,600 U.S. forces," Mattis stated.

He also said that his original proposal for the number of troops was 20,000.

White House spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said US President Barack Obama had not yet made a decision about the issue.

"The president is continuing to review a range of options for a possible US troop presence after 2014. We're not going to

discuss numbers at this stage," Hayden said.

On February 22, former US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told his European counterparts at a meeting of NATO member states in Brussels that 8,000 to 12,000 troops would stay in the war-ravaged country as part of a mission to train and support Afghan forces.

On February 12, Obama announced in his State of the Union Address that 34,000 US troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan within a year.

A total of 418 US soldiers died in Afghanistan in 2011. The year 2010, however, remains the deadliest year for US military casualties with a death toll of 499.

According to the latest figures released by the website icasualties.org, 3,258 foreign soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since the US-led war began in 2001.

The increasing number of military casualties in Afghanistan has caused widespread anger in the US and other

NATO member states, undermining public support for the Afghan war.

The US-led war in Afghanistan began in 2001. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across the country, despite the presence of about over 100,000 US-led troops.

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

- **U.S. not to leave Afghanistan: Ambassador to Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD, March 6 (Xinhua) -- The U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Richard Olson, on Wednesday said that the United States will not leave Afghanistan and will not repeat the mistake of late 80s, local media reported.

"Let me be clear, the United States is not leaving Afghanistan. The terms of engagement might change, but the commitment will not," the envoy said in a speech at a conference on the situation in Afghanistan post-2014 at the National University of Modern Languages.

The former Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan in 1989 after a 10-year invasion of the Muslim nation.

Afghanistan had spilled into a civil war shortly after the United States and its western allies turned back at the region, which led to Taliban rule in 1996. The United States invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 after the attacks in New York and Washington that were blamed on al-Qaeda.

"I must unequivocally dispel what I fear is a widespread, but wildly incorrect analogy: 2014 is not 1989. We recognize the mistakes of the past. The United States will not disengage from the region," Ambassador Olson said.

He said that as the U.S. mission changes and Afghan forces grow in capability and experience, international troops will continue to train, advise, assist the Afghans, and fight alongside them when needed.

"In that capacity, we will no longer be leading combat operations, but instead shift to a supporting role as Afghans have demonstrated their increasing capability

to lead combat operations across the country."

In order to facilitate a negotiated peace, he called for the United States and Pakistan to work together with purpose, noting, "For the sake of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region, Pakistan' s full support to an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process is needed now."

"The U.S. role is to help advance such a process, including by supporting an office in Qatar, where negotiations can take place between the Afghan High Peace Council and authorized representatives of the Taliban."

He referred to recent remarks by President Obama who reiterated this message in the State of the Union address, in which he said, "We will build an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, so that it is never again a source of attacks against America."

Ambassador Olson noted that, "The international community's financial and political commitment, and the nearly 20 billion U.S. dollars in pledges for security and development assistance that have

already been made through 2024, stands out as a defining difference between 2014 and 1989. The United States, and nations across the globe, have unambiguously committed to Afghanistan's future."

"As President Obama and President Karzai agreed in Washington, Afghan-led peace and reconciliation is the surest way to end violence and ensure the lasting stability of Afghanistan and the region," Ambassador Olson recalled.

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

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 those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar*



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