



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

Energy Security

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1. IRAQ

• Iraq on edge ahead of elections (UPI)

BAGHDAD, April 15 (UPI) -- Iraqi voters need to be able to take part in Saturday's provincial elections in a violence-free environment, U.N. special envoy Martin Kobler said.

Members of Iraqi security forces cast ballots early ahead of the overall Saturday vote, the first since parliamentary elections in 2010. More than 15 million Iraqis are eligible to vote. At least 8,000 candidates are competing for 378 provincial council seats.

Kobler said that all eyes are focused on the Saturday election now that Iraqi police and military personnel have voted.

"It is of the utmost importance that voters turn out in an orderly and safe environment free of violence, threats and intimidation," he said in a statement.

His comment preceded a series of attacks Monday. Those attacks left at least 25 people dead and more than 170 others injured. Most of the attacks targeted

Shiite areas of Baghdad, security sources told CNN.

Al-Qaida in Iraq, a Sunni group, claimed responsibility for many of the attacks in recent months.

Kobler, in a weekend statement, condemned the assassination of Najm al-Harbi, leader of the Iraqiya political coalition in Diyala province. Iraqiya challenged Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, in 2010 elections.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2013/04/15/Iraq-on-edge-ahead-of-elections/UPI-28311366037136/

• Sorting and counting centers in Iraqi provinces start clearing and matching operations (Alsumaria TV)

15-04-2013 -

Head of the election directorate in the Independent High Electoral Commission, Moqdad Al Sherifi, said on Sunday April 14 that the clearing and matching operation have started according to the sorting and counting centers' regulations ratified by the commissioner's council.

“Sorting and counting centers spread across Baghdad and other provinces have started today the clearing and matching operation after all election boxes from special election centers have been delivered”, said Al Sherifi in a statement to Alsumaria.

“A small presentation about work procedures will be made within the areas where sorting and counting centers are located so that political entities’ agents and observers be able to follow up on the work”, he added. “These centers will remain open throughout the night for 24 hours until the work is finished”, he highlighted.

Al Sherifi invited observers and political entities “to monitor the sorting and counting work, as an endeavor to stress the transparency and the professionalism the Commission enjoys”. He also mentioned that “all special election boxes were delivered by election centers to sorting and counting centers in Baghdad and other provinces”.

Head of the election directorate in the Independent High Electoral Commission, Moqdad Al Sherifi, said on Saturday April

13 that the participation rates in the special elections were quite high in most of the provinces where elections are conducted. He revealed that the participation rates were as follows: Ad Diwaniyah 85%, Misan 83.8%, Al Muthana 83%, Dhi Qar 82.8%, Babel 80.7%, Karbala 80%, Diyala 77%, Al Basra 75%, Waset 75%, An Najaf 74%, Al Rasafa’s section of Baghdad 72%, Al Karakh’s section of Baghdad 62%, Salahuddine 70%, Kirkuk 60%, Al Anbar 52.4% and Nineveh 35.2%.

Al Sherifi also revealed that 422 special election centers across the country welcomed on Saturday April 13th, security forces for voting, emphasizing that some election centers were crowded due to the great number of voters that the centers couldn’t accommodate.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/74456/sorting-and-counting-centers-in-iraqi-provinces-st/en>

- **Nujaifi: assassination of Alharbi attempt to make silent the voices combating injustice, corruption and authoritarianism (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad/ NINA/-- Speaker Osama Najafi, described the assassination of the candidate if Iraqiya Slate for Diyala province, Najm al-Harbi as a blatant targeting of national symbols and attempt to make silent the combating voices against injustice, corruption and authoritarianism

He demanded in a statement the security apparatus in Diyala to "open an immediate and urgent investigation and give quick results and clear statement of the reasons for its inability to protect citizens and the national symbols.

Alharbi the candidate for the Iraqiya – Arabiya coalition headed by Saleh al-Mutlaq, in Diyala province, killed when a roadside bomb targeting him went off northeast of Baquba yesterday.

- **Doubts about security forces' electoral numbers, Sadrism Trend (Aswat al-Iraq)**

15 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: When the Election Commission announced that the electoral participation in the special voting of the armed and security forces reached

to 72%, the Sadrism Trend shed doubts on the number of the participants.

Sadrism Ahrar bloc MP Jawad al-Jbouri said, in a statement to Al-Sharq al-Awsat daily, that the announced figures were 750.000 members who took part in the elections, while their real figure reached to two millions, "which means that one million and quarter did not vote".

"If the figure of the army and security forces were real, why they did not vote", he questioned.

- **Iraqia Sat channel's stakeholders to be investigated, says MP (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Ali al-Timimi of Ahrar bloc within the Sadr Trend accused the official Iraqia Sat Channel of non-neutrality and double-dealing with the political blocs.

Timimi said on Monday "Iraqia Sat Channel is a channel of single party and single character, criticizing it for its promoting for the electoral slate of the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki and covering all the ceremonies associated to his coalition

which represents serious electoral breach."

He added "There are contacts to summon or investigate the bosses of the Iraqi Media Network to clarify this sheer bias."

- **Candidate house detonated in Mosul (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Nineveh, Mosul (AIN) –A house belongs to a candidate in the elections of the provincial councils to the west of Mosul city was detonated.

Security source reported to the correspondent of AIN "Unidentified gunmen detonated the house belongs to, Talib Abdul Karim, who is a candidate of the Building and Justice Slate in Rufai neighborhood of western Mosul."

"The explosion caused material damages to the house without any human casualties," the source added

- **Call for Maliki's resignation, Mutahidoun Bloc (Aswat al-Iraq)**

15 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Mutahidoun Bloc denounced here today the series of explosions that hit Baghdad and a number of Iraqi provinces.

The Bloc described the attacks as "criminal" and called for the resignation of Premier Nouri al-Maliki.

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, the bloc added that "this security failure was expected due to Maliki's policies and neglect of the security affairs for attacking his foes".

Baghdad and some other provinces witnessed a number of explosions that happened within a terrorism wave at time of nearing the provincial elections and amid continued political crises.

- **MP mocks Maliki's lack of seriousness in punishing neglectful security commanders (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Hakim al-Zamili, member of the parliament Security & Defense Committee, mocked the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki's lack of seriousness towards punishing the neglectful security leaders.

Zamili stated to All Iraq News Agency "Maliki has stated that he will change and punish the security commanders whom in their areas security breaches had occurred, but, up to now, no one of those leaders was changed or punished, this proves lack of seriousness in changing and punishing the neglectful leaders and the security plans."

"All the alleged investment projects are nothing but for electoral propaganda," he added stressing that "Maliki is supposed to stay in Baghdad instead of wandering around the provinces for electoral propaganda."

- **Karbala PC's head denies his arrest on corruption charges (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Karbala (AIN) -Karbala Provincial Council's chairman, Mohamed al-Musawi, denied on Monday, the reports which referred to his arrest in compliance to judicial order over charges related to corruption.

Musawi told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The news which reported about my arrest by a police force is groundless and I'm still holding my position."

"These manners adopted by some media outlets are advocated for electoral purposes," he added describing them as inappropriate."

Some media outlets have reported on Monday that a police force arrested Musawi on judicial order over corruption charges.

- **Kuwaiti minister receives Iraqi compensation official (KUNA)**

Kuna news agency website, Kuwait, in English 15 Apr 13

["Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Receives Paac Director, Uncc Delegation ..." - KUNA Headline]

Kuwait, 15 April - Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for Municipality Affairs, Shaykh Muhammad Abdualah al-Mubarak al-Sabah, received on Monday at his office in Al-Sayf Palace, Director of the Public Authority for Assessment of Compensation Resulting From Iraqi Aggression (PAAC), Khalid Ahmad al-Mudhaf, accompanied by a delegation of the United Nations

Compensation Commission, on occasion of their visit to the country.

The two sides reviewed several topics linked to the work of The United Nations Compensation Commission.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah welcomed the visiting commission, highly praising efforts of the PAAC and all achievements made that serve the objectives of its establishment.

- **Khuzai, Egypt Minister of Tourism discuss common interest (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Vice President, Khudhaiyr al-Khuzai discussed with the Tourism Minister of Egypt, the Iraqi-Egyptian bilateral relations.

A statement by Khuzai's office reported on Monday "During receiving the Egyptian Minister of Tourism, Hisham Za'zua, Khuzai stressed Egypt's leading role in the Arabic world, emphasizing Iraq's full support for Egypt and the Egyptian people."

He added "It is necessary to facilitate the entry of the Iraqi tourists to Egypt," noting "After 2003, the Iraqis started to head towards the tourism around the world in general and to Egypt in particular."

"Both Iraq and Egypt are leading and pivotal countries in the Arabic world, therefore their closeness to each other establishes the integration of the Arab and Islamic world. Hence, Egypt should approach to Iraq because this involves the common interest between both countries," he concluded

- **UK renews commitment, support to Iraq (KUNA)**

LONDON, April 15 (KUNA) -- British Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Alistair Burt renewed on Monday his country's commitment and support to the Iraqi government and people for their strive toward stability and democracy.

Burt reacted in press remarks on terrorist attacks which took place in Iraq earlier today, and resulted in killing 30 people and injuring more than 200 others.

Burt expressed shock and sadness to this "cowardly act," and express his condolences to the families of the victims and speedy recovery to those injured.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2304775&Language=en>

- **Iraq urges Russia to re-open mutual flight route (Aswat al-Iraq)**

15 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi transport undersecretary called Russia to reopen the flight rout between the two countries due to its importance on the economic, medical and scientific spheres.

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, undersecretary Salman al-Bahadli met with the Russian ambassador to Iraq, where they discussed mutual cooperation, particularly in aerial transport.

The Russian ambassador promised to extend all possible assistance to Iraqi businessmen, students and sick people wishing to visit Russia.

- **Nujaifi and the Swedish Ambassador discuss cooperation between the EU and Iraq (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad / NINA /--Parliament Speaker Osama Najafi discussed with Suwaidi Ambassador to Iraq ,Georgine Lenström the preparation for the upcoming meeting to be held by the European Union on 22 April , which will discuss the issue of joint cooperation between Iraq and the EU countries.

Nujaifi office said in a statement that Nujaifi received today Lenström and discussed with him the relations between the two countries and ways of developing them to ensure the common interests of the two friendly countries as well.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the two sides stressed the importance of continuing the exchange of views between the two sides to deepen relations, particularly at the parliamentary level, according to the statement.

- **Sihail, Romanian Ambassador to Iraq discuss bilateral relations (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The First Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Qusai al-Sihail, received the Romanian Ambassador to

Iraq, Aikob Brand, where they discussed the bilateral relations between both countries and means of developing them.

Qusai's media office reported on Monday "Sihail discussed with the Romanian Ambassador, the bilateral relations and ways to upgrade them on all levels."

"The two sides reviewed the political situation in Iraq as well where Sihail confirmed the need to intensify all efforts to rebuild the country and distance it from the foreign interferences," the statement concluded.

- **Iraq attacks kill 55 less than a week before vote (AP)**

By ADAM SCHRECK
Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) -- Insurgents in Iraq deployed a series of car bombs as part of highly coordinated attacks that cut across a wide swath of the country Monday, killing at least 55 on the deadliest day in nearly a month.

The assault bore the hallmarks of a resurgent al-Qaida in Iraq and appeared aimed at sowing fear days before the first

elections since U.S. troops withdrew. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but coordinated attacks are a favorite tactic of al-Qaida's Iraq branch.

Iraqi officials believe the insurgent group is growing stronger and increasingly coordinating with allies fighting to topple Syrian President Bashar Assad across the border. They say rising lawlessness on the Syria-Iraq frontier and cross-border cooperation with a Syrian group, the Nusra Front, has improved the militants' supply of weapons and foreign fighters.

The intensifying violence, some of it related to the provincial elections scheduled for Saturday, is worrying for Iraqi officials and Baghdad-based diplomats alike. At least 14 candidates have been killed in recent weeks, including one slain in an apparent ambush Sunday.

"Of course we are concerned about the violence in the country that has been increasing in the last weeks," United Nations envoy Martin Kobler told The Associated Press. He condemned the bloodshed and urged Iraqi officials to push ahead with the elections.

"They should be free and fair, and every voter should go to the polls free of intimidation and fear," he said.

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_IRAQ?SITE=FLPET&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

- **Victims of Sadr City explosion hit 66 deaths, injuries (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The number of Sadr City car bomb explosion's victims hit more than 60 deaths and injuries.

Security source told All Iraq News Agency on Monday "The explosion that took place in Sadr City of eastern Baghdad on Monday evening killed 11 persons and wounded 55 others while the police cordoned off the incident spot in anticipation of another attack."

A car bomb has exploded on Monday near Motor Show in Sadr City resulted in killing and injuring dozens of civilians."

- **Sunni Endowment denounces Monday bombings in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Sunni Endowment strongly condemned the heinous bombings that took place in Baghdad and a number of other provinces, calling on the Iraqis to consolidate the national unity to confront the wicked forces which wish evil for this country.

The Sunni Endowment reported on Monday "Another wave of criminal bombings hit our dear capital, Baghdad, which targeted the innocent people, where dozens of them were killed while many others left wounded."

"We call on the Iraqis to show further unity and solidarity in face of these mean and cheap plans which attempt to disrupt the national unity of the Iraqi people, wishing the injured people speedy recovery and for the dead persons' families patience and solace," the statement concluded.

Baghdad and a number of Iraqi provinces witnessed a spate of bombings on Monday that led to dozens of deaths and injuries.

- **Sadr: Explosions take place while the ruling party busy campaigning for election (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Najaf (NINA) – Leader of the Sadrist Trend, Muqtada al-Sadr, condemned Monday's explosions that hit parts of Iraq and resulted in tens of innocent casualties.

In a statement on Monday evening, Apr. 15, Sadr said, "Today's explosions occur while the ruling party busy in campaigning for the election in Basra province."

He added, "The State of Law ought not to meet in Basra celebrating, while the peoples' blood is being shed."

He called for cleaning the security agencies from Baathists and those running after money, authority and the power of occupation.

Sadr renewed his calling for security official to subpoena before Parliament to find out and arrest those responsible; he also called on the Prime Minister to testify against those behind and are responsible for the explosions.

- **Kurdistan's Presidency condemns Monday's explosions considers them dangerous developments (Aswat al-Iraq)**

15 April 2013

Erbil (NINA) – The Presidency of Kurdistan Region condemned the explosions that took place on Monday, Apr. 15, in many parts of the country, considering them a dangerous development.

A statement issued by the Region's Presidency said that today's strings of explosions in Kirkuk, Baghdad, Tuz-Khormato and other cities and towns, regrettably resulted in tens of civilian casualties and heavy damages to properties.

The statement quoted the call of the Region's Presidency on the Federal Government and all security agencies to seriously stand against such actions and look for deep rooted solutions that would safeguard citizens' lives and property.

The statement concluded with conveying the Region's Presidency condolences to the victims families and wishing the wounded speedy recovery.

- **US Condemns Monday's explosions (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – The United States condemned the terrorist attacks that took place in Iraq on Monday, Apr. 15.

A statement issued by the Media Bureau of the United States Embassy in Baghdad said that intentioned attacks against innocent civilians is a distasteful act, and the United States will continue in its commitments of supporting Iraq's efforts to overcome terrorism.

Throughout the day, Baghdad and a number of provinces witnessed chain of explosions resulted in tens of innocent civilian victims.

- **Sihail: Monday bombings aim at affecting upcoming elections in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

15 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The First Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Qusai al-Sihail condemned the terrorist bombings that targeted a number of Iraqi provinces on Monday.

Statement by his office cited "The terrorist groups launched another spate of criminal operations which led to dozens of deaths while many others were left wounded in an attempt to affect the electoral process that will be conducted on next Saturday."

"This surge of violence necessitates boosting the intelligence efforts and changing the security plans and set long-term strategies for security," he added.

Baghdad and a number of Iraqi provinces witnessed a spate of bombings on Monday that led to dozens of deaths and injuries. /End/

- **Officer killed, 2 soldiers wounded in western Anbar (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – An officer killed and two soldiers wounded on Monday evening, Apr. 15, in an armed attack in western Anbar province.

Security source told NINA that gunmen opened fire from a moving car at an officer, at the rank of captain, along with two soldiers, in another car in the Sabeen area, northwest of Rutba district, western Anbar.

The source added that the attack resulted in killing the officer and wounding the two soldiers.

- **An explosive device targeting an army patrol south of Fallujah (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Ramadi / NINA /--A bomb exploded at an army patrol south of Fallujah this afternoon.

A security source said to NINA reporter : " The bomb exploded in the Nuaimiya / 2 km south of Fallujah / soon after an army patrol passed without casualties only damaging the targeted vehicle . / End

- **Civilian killed in Falluja (NINA)**

15 April 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – A civilian killed in an armed attack on Monday evening, Apr. 15, in Falluja, Anbar province.

Security source told NINA that gunmen opened fire from a moving car at a civilian in Mashatil Street, western Falluja.

The source added that the attack resulted in the killing of the civilian; police closed

the area and started looking for the attackers.

- **Iran Increases Oil Production From Joint Field with Iraq (ENERGYTRIBUNE.com)**

Dehloran oil field is located 22 kilometers from a city of the same name in Ilam Province and contains nearly 4 billion barrels of in-place oil.”

Iran has enhanced production from an oil field it shares with its western neighbor Iraq by 5,000 barrels a day, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) says.

Crude oil production from Dehloran Oil Field is 5,000 barrels higher in the current Iranian calendar year — which started on March 21 — compared with the previous year, the NIOC said on Friday.

Last year, Managing Director of Iranian Central Oil Fields Company (ICOFC) Mehdi Fakour announced that the company planned to develop the second phase of the field to increase its output by 25,000 barrel per day.

Dehloran oil field is located 22 kilometers from a city of the same name in Ilam

Province and contains nearly 4 billion barrels of in-place oil.

Iran shares oil and gas fields with most of its neighbors, including Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar as well as Oman and Turkmenistan.

<http://www.energytribune.com/75836/iran-increases-oil-production-from-joint-field-with-iraq>

2. IRAN

- **Iran, UAE Keen to Expand Mutual Cooperation**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar and Emirati Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Affairs Minister Mansur bin Zayed Al Nahayan in a meeting underlined the need for bolstering and reinvigorating bilateral ties and mutual cooperation.

They made the remarks in a meeting in the United Arab Emirate's (UAE) capital, Abu Dhabi, on Monday.

Mohammad Najjar pointed to the current status of relations between Iran and UAE, and said, "Tehran-Abu Dhabi ties are improving."

The Emirati deputy prime minister, for his part, underscored the necessity for expansion of bilateral ties between and Iran and UAE.

Mohammad Najjar conferred with his Emirati counterpart Saif bin Zayed Al Nahayan yesterday. Najjar and Saif discussed the bilateral security ties.

The Iranian interior minister embarked on a three-day visit to UAE on Sunday in a bid to discuss expansion of bilateral ties with the Emirati officials, specially his counterpart.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107161190>

- **2020 students invite former MP Zakani to run for president**

TEHRAN, Apr. 16 (MNA) – Two thousand and twenty university and seminary students have written a letter to former MP Ali Reza Zakani inviting him to stand as a candidate in Iran's upcoming presidential election.

In the letter, the students called Zakani a politico competent enough to run the

country and loyal to the causes of the Islamic Revolution and the principle of velayat-e faqih (rule of the supreme jurispudent).

They also called on the former lawmaker to announce his future plans and consult experts about them if he decides to contest the election.

The 11th presidential election is scheduled to be held on June 14.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820091>

- **Ban Ki-moon sends letter of appreciation to Iran FM**

TEHRAN, Apr. 15 (MNA) – In a letter sent to Iran’s FM, UN Secretary-General has appreciated Salehi’s letter on the necessity of inspections on the use of chemical weapons by Syrian rebel fighters.

Ali Akbar Salehi sent a letter to Ban Ki-moon, and in it, the Foreign Minister believed that it was necessary to investigate the use of chemicals by Syrian rebel fighters.

In response, the UN Secretary-General sent a letter, expressing his thanks, and emphasized that “the UN has frequently stated that the use of chemicals is a horrible crime and absolute abomination.”

The UN Secretary-General said that the purpose of the investigations was finding the truth about the claims, and providing a report to member states, and expressed his hope that these investigations send powerful message in support of international conventions in prohibition of using chemical weapons, and improve joint attempts to prevent further use of such weapons.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820078>

- **Iran’s Bushehr NPP startup work in final stage: Russia’s Rosatom corporation**

The Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) is located about 18 kilometers (11 miles) south of the provincial capital and about 160 kilometers (100 miles) away from the areas that were recently hit with a strong earthquake.”

Russia’s Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation says final work is underway at

Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) for the facility to start generating electricity.

The official Russian news agency RIA Novosti quoted Rosatom's Director General Sergei Kiriyenko as saying on Monday that startup operations for the Iranian power plant had entered the final stage.

Kiriyenko also stated that the recent earthquake that struck Iran's southern province of Bushehr had not affected the operations at the NPP.



The Russian official said the power plant had been constructed to withstand an earthquake with a magnitude of even nine Richters.

On April 9, a strong earthquake measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale struck the town of Kaki, some 90 kilometers southeast of the provincial capital, Bushehr, at a depth of

12 kilometers. Over 35 people were killed and more than 850 others were injured.

Meanwhile, Atomstroyexport, the Russian contractor of the power plant in Bushehr, said that the earthquake "in no way affected the normal situation at the reactor" and that "personnel continue to work in the normal regime and radiation levels are fully within the norm."

The Bushehr NPP is located about 18 kilometers (11 miles) south of the provincial capital and about 160 kilometers (100 miles) away from the quake-stricken areas.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/16/298523/bushehr-npp-startup-work-finalizing/>

- **Era of atomic bombs over: President Ahmadinejad**

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says the era of atomic bombs is over and the use of nuclear weapons will no longer influence political equations.



“The era of the atomic bomb is over. Atomic bombs are no longer useful and have no effect on political equations. Atomic bombs belong to the last century, and anyone who thinks he can rule the world by atomic bombs is a political fool,” Ahmadinejad said during his visit to Benin on Monday.

Ahmadinejad added that imperialism is what currently threatens the world, not nuclear weapons.

The Iranian president said world powers seek to maintain their monopoly over nuclear energy and are using propaganda tools to insinuate the idea that nuclear energy equates a nuclear bomb - which is “a big lie.”

“Nuclear energy is one thing and an atomic bomb is another. This useful energy must belong to all nations,” Ahmadinejad stated.

“We are fighting so that all nations could use peaceful nuclear energy,” the Iranian president said, adding that although monopolists were resisting, they would fail against the struggles of independent countries such as Iran, and African and Latin American states.

Those countries that possess large stockpiles of nuclear weapons deceptively claim that they are against the use of such arms, Ahmadinejad said. He added that if those countries oppose the use of nuclear weapons, they must not be in possession of the weapons.

Ahmadinejad left Tehran for a three-day tour of Africa on Sunday at the head of a high-ranking delegation.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/16/298498/era-of-atomic-bombs-over-ahmadinejad/>

- **Iran military ready for swift reaction: Cmdr.**

In his message on the occasion of Nowruz (Iranian new year) on March 21, Ayatollah Khamenei said Iran will raze Tel Aviv to the ground if Israel launches a military strike against the Islamic Republic.

A deputy chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces says the Iranian military is prepared to deliver a swift response to any attempted attack by the Israeli regime.

“The Armed Forces are completely ready to act according to what the Leader [of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei] said in his remarks in the shortest possible time,” Brigadier General Mohammad Hejazi said Monday.

The commander expressed hope that the Israeli regime would not commit such a folly.

In his message on the occasion of Nowruz (Persian New Year) on March 21, Ayatollah Khamenei said Iran would raze Tel Aviv to the ground if Israel attempts a military strike against the Islamic Republic.

“Israel’s leaders sometimes threaten Iran, but they know that if they do a damn thing, the Islamic Republic will raze Tel Aviv and [the occupied city of] Haifa to the ground,” the Leader stated.

Israel has threatened to attack Iran's nuclear facilities based on the unfounded

allegation that the Iranian nuclear energy program has been diverted towards military purposes.

Iran rejects the allegations against its nuclear energy program, arguing that as a committed signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/15/298424/iran-military-ready-for-swift-reaction/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel can strike Iran nuclear targets alone, IDF head says**

Benny Gantz says intense discussions underway between military and political leadership over Iran, warns Gazans to keep south quiet

Israel can strike any Iranian nuclear installation on its own and is holding intense discussions between military and political leaders to prepare for the eventuality, Israel Defense Forces chief

Benny Gantz said in an interview aired Tuesday.

The interview with Israel Radio was one of several Gantz gave to a number of Hebrew-language news outlets as part of a media blitz for Israel's 65th Independence day celebrations Tuesday.

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Gantz addressed a laundry list of regional security issues, including Iran, Gazan rockets, Hezbollah, Syria, Sinai and developments in the West Bank. He also apologized over the recent flag controversy at a ceremony ahead of Remembrance Day, and blasted proposed budget cuts to the Defense Ministry.

Gantz told Israel Radio that Israel had the capabilities to strike Iranian nuclear targets on its own if no country came to its aid, and that intense, thorough discussions between the military and political leadership on the matter were ongoing.

“The Iranian challenge is very significant and we must approach it with a responsible long-term strategy. We will do what is necessary when it is necessary,” Gantz said, adding that Israel was following nuclear developments in Iran closely.

Gantz also acknowledged the quiet on the frontier with Gaza, which he called the fruits of Israel Operation Pillar of Defense in November, but said if it did not continue, Gaza “would hurt” and Israel would not hesitate to repeat its actions or expand its operations in the Strip in order to achieve that quiet.

“If there are rockets, it’s because Hamas either enabled it or didn’t exercise its control of the area. It’s Hamas’s responsibility and we will hold it responsible,” he warned.

The IDF chief of staff also cautioned that the security situation on the border with Egypt was “not good” and terror organizations were continuing to flourish there, even as the IDF improved its capabilities in the area over the past two years and Egypt continued to crack down on terror in the Sinai.

In the West Bank, where clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters increased in the past few months, Gantz expressed concern that things could escalate further but posited that there didn't seem to be a "vibe" for a third intifada characterized by the violence by the first or second ones.

Similarly, Gantz urged Lebanon's Hezbollah to tread carefully, calling Israel's deterrent capability vis-a-vis the terror group "significant."

"Hezbollah knows very well what would happened to it if war breaks out. Lebanon knows what will happen if war breaks out. Therefore, I believe they are deterred," said Gantz.

With Syria, the situation was more complicated, he warned, adding that Israel was prepared for war with the country should the need arise.

"We see that the rebels are increasing their efforts against the Assad regime's forces and they are gaining power. It's clear that there will be a 'second war,'; it could be between the rebels themselves,

or it could be against us," Gantz told Army Radio.

Speaking on the proposed cut to the defense budget as part of Finance Minister Yair Lapid's plan to rein in Israel's NIS 39 million deficit, Gantz said that Israel must invest in defense in correlation with the challenges it faces.

"We are in a multi-theater reality and an event that occurs in any place has the potential to have dramatic effects on other theaters, therefore we need to be cautious," he told Ynet News.

Gantz also issued an apology for the incident last week in which he allegedly skipped over a non-Jewish soldier's grave while placing ceremonial flags ahead of Remembrance Day. He promised to examine the separation between Jewish and non-Jewish graves at military cemeteries.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-can-strike-iran-nuclear-targets-alone-idf-head-says/>

- **What next as Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad resigns?**

Jon Donnison By Jon Donnison BBC News,
Ramallah

Salam Fayyad Salam Fayyad is an
independent politician and a former
official at the IMF

Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian prime
minister in the West Bank - now caretaker
prime minister - is no stranger to
resignation.

When the 61-year-old again announced he
was quitting on Saturday night, it was at
least the third time he had resigned since
he was first appointed to the job in 2007.

That is not to mention all the threats of
resignation over the past six years.

And yet Mr Fayyad is still doing the job, at
least in a "caretaker" role.

Such had been the extent of unfulfilled
rumours of his demise, most Palestinians
might have been entitled to raise a
sceptical eyebrow when they heard over
the weekend that this time he really was
going.

But is he?

On the face of it, it would seem yes.

Temporary measure

The Palestinian Authority President
Mahmoud Abbas accepted Mr Fayyad's
offer to go and said he would quickly
begin the process of appointing a new
prime minister.

Salam Fayyad (I) and Palestinian president
Mahmoud Abbas The Palestinian PM is
said to have disagreed with President
Abbas over the Palestinian economy

Initially, President Abbas's office said a
new appointee would be named within a
matter of days.

The projected timespan has already
officially increased to two to three weeks
and privately Palestinian officials are
saying it could take up to two months.

Until then, it would seem Mr Fayyad will
have his feet under the prime ministerial
desk.

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même
chose," (the more things change, the more
they stay the same) says Ahmad Aweidah,

the multi-lingual chief executive of the Palestinian Stock Exchange.

"Let's wait two or three weeks. In fact, lets wait two to three years, I imagine Mr Fayyad might still be in the job," he says.

"People forget that Salam Fayyad was already a caretaker prime minister at the head of a caretaker government and has been for years."

He's referring to the fact that when Mr Abbas first appointed Mr Fayyad almost six years ago it was only ever meant to be as a temporary measure.

It followed the national emergency created by the violent conflict between the two main Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas that erupted in 2007.

That division left the Islamist movement Hamas to govern in Gaza and its secular rivals Fatah in power in parts of the West Bank.

Salam Fayyad's appointment was never approved by the Palestinian parliament, which has been unable to sit since the Fatah-Hamas split.

Mr Fayyad, who's an independent politician, is not well liked by supporters of either Fatah or Hamas, the two movements that dominate Palestinian politics.

'Frustrated'

In March 2009, Mr Fayyad resigned in order to pave the way for a government of national unity in an effort to end the political division.

The unity never came and he kept his job.

In 2011 after a reconciliation deal was signed between Fatah and Hamas, it was announced that a new interim government of technocrats would be formed in order to prepare for the fresh parliamentary and presidential elections.

The new government was never formed (Fatah and Hamas couldn't agree who to put in it) and the long overdue elections never happened either.

Salam Fayyad again kept his job.

US President Barack Obama met Salam Fayyad during a visit in March US support

for Salam Fayyad may have damaged Salam Fayyad rather than helped him

Some though believe he has now had enough.

Those close to him say Mr Fayyad has become increasingly frustrated with Fatah officials and others within the government trying to undermine him.

There are said to be disagreements with Mr Abbas over the handling of the struggling Palestinian economy.

One Palestinian official told me he believes Mr Fayyad has bigger ambitions, possibly to replace Mr Abbas, and wants to leave the job of prime minister in order to try and build his personal popularity.

If he is to go, it would be a serious blow to the United States, which has recently re-launched efforts to try to breathe life into a comatose Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Mr Fayyad, a US-educated economist and a former official at the International Monetary Fund, is widely perceived as

being a moderate whom America and the international community could work with.

The prime minister met with President Barack Obama just last month and with the American Secretary of State John Kerry as recently as last week.

Mistake

It's hard to believe that his resignation was part of the US plan.

"Would I prefer that he weren't leaving? Sure, because you have continuity," Mr Kerry told reporters this week.

Continue reading the main story

“Start Quote

Salam Fayyad has been the punch bag to take all the criticism especially over handling of the economy”

Ahmad Aweidah Palestinian Stock Exchange

"We will continue to work with this, and hope that President Abbas finds the right person to work with him in a transition and to work with us, and establish confidence."

But last week, State Department officials were reportedly hitting the phones to Ramallah trying to get Mr Fayyad to stay.

One Palestinian official, who did not want to be named, told me the Americans had handled things badly if they wanted Mr Fayyad to remain in the job.

"On the contrary, the American strategy didn't help Fayyad. They made a mistake."

He said that by so publicly declaring their support for the prime minister and declaring him "their man", they made it difficult for President Abbas to keep him without appearing to be "in the pocket" of the Americans.

Ahmed Aweidah agrees.

"Abbas had to act so as not to be seen as a US lackey," he says.

A Palestinian official also said the US support came too late.

"Over the years the West supported the status quo but they never supported what Salam Fayyad wanted: the end of Israel's occupation."

Problematic

President Abbas now faces some choices.

He could, as has been suggested before, take on the role of both president and prime minister himself as part of a unity government aimed at finally ending the dispute with Hamas.

But there's no guarantee that Hamas would accept that.

It would presumably require Hamas's prime minister in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, to also resign and the setting of a date for future Palestinian elections.

But up until now, neither Hamas nor Fatah has been able to agree when and how those elections should take place. Alternatively, Mr Abbas could signal a shift away from unity efforts by appointing a replacement for Mr Fayyad who would only have authority in the West Bank.

Among those who have been named as possible candidates are Mohammad Mustafa, an economist who heads the Palestinian Investment Fund, and Rami

Hamdallah, the president of a Nablus University in the West Bank.

Muhammad Shtayyeh, a Fatah official has also been suggested by some.

But Ahmad Aweidah says all those choices would be problematic.

"He cannot appoint a PM exclusively to the West Bank. This would send signal the end of Palestinian unity efforts."

And Mr Aweidah says Mr Fayyad's resignation poses another problem for Mr Abbas.

"Salam Fayyad has been the punch bag to take all the criticism especially over handling of the economy," says Mr Aweidah.

"Its extremely convenient for the Palestinian Authority to have a punch bag to take the blows."

So the deliberations for President Abbas could take time.

It will be interesting to see how long Salam Fayyad remains in his caretaker

prime minister role and whether he'll continue to take the blows.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22154759>

- **Israel heritage plan exposes discord over West Bank history**

By Raffi Berg BBC News, West Bank

Israel is launching a Year of National Heritage, to coincide with the country's independence day. As part of this push to celebrate heritage, Israel is progressing with a five-year project promoting Jewish ties to ancient sites in Israel and the West Bank. Israel says it is a purely cultural endeavour, which will help save sites from ruin; but Palestinians have criticised it as politically driven - highlighting deep historical differences fuelling the conflict.

On a peak in the archaeological park of Tel Shilo, finishing touches are being put to a new multi-million dollar visitors' centre, due to open in a few weeks' time.

The rotunda overlooks a rectangular stone outline of what many believe to be the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant, brought here by the Israelites who made

Shilo their capital. Excavations there will resume in the summer.

"Who knows what they'll find," says Ncoom Gilbar, a translator who has lived in the Jewish settlement of Shilo, which contains the park, for 22 years. "It's a very exciting prospect."

The ruins scattered around Tel Shilo are testament to the recognition through the ages of its significance as a Biblical site - "it's a whole jumble of periods", says Mr Gilbar.

Behind us, archaeologists and workers delicately excavate the ground around a 4th Century Byzantine church, dusting stones by hand and pushing wheelbarrows of rubble. Nearby stand the remains of an 8th Century mosque, built on top of another, earlier church.

In the past couple of years the number of tourists visiting Tel Shilo has grown exponentially, a trend set to continue since the government designated the park a national heritage site last year.

This means Tel Shilo, along with other ancient West Bank sites, will receive

special government funding for their development and upkeep.

"Is there an attempt to bring more people here? Yes," says Mr Gilbar. "Is that wrong? No. This is where our history in the Land of Israel began."

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the \$190m National Heritage Sites project in 2010, he said Israel's existence depended "first and foremost" on educating future generations about Jewish culture and connection to the land.

While the vast majority of the places earmarked on the project are in Israel, at least eight are in the West Bank, where many of the events recounted in the Hebrew scriptures took place.

Israel has occupied the area since the 1967 Middle East war, and its designation of sites there as part of its national heritage has drawn criticism.

Israeli national heritage sites in the West Bank

"The West Bank is an integral part of the history of Palestine," says Hamdan Taha,

director of the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. "Netanyahu's heritage plan is an aggression against the cultural right of Palestinian people in their own state," as the West Bank's status is considered to be by many Palestinians.

Mr Taha says the Israeli government's emphasis on the Jewish historical aspect of some sites is "an ideological misuse of archaeological evidence".

"Jewish heritage in the West Bank - like Christian or Islamic - is part of Palestinian heritage and we reject categorically any ethnic division of culture."

According to official Israeli and Palestinian data, there are between 6,000 and 10,000 known archaeological sites in the West Bank, the remains of thousands of years of settlement by civilisations since Neolithic times.

Critics of the heritage plan say Jewish history is only one part, and that Israel is focusing on this to the detriment of other eras.

"If you want to learn about the history of this land, it's about the different layers,

the different civilisations that have been here - it's not just about one," says Yoni Mizrachi, a former Israel Antiquities Authority archaeologist.

"Archaeological sites are part of the character of this land and should not be mentioned as something nationalistic - it's beyond that."

The heritage project itself focuses solely on Jewish history but only for a particular educational purpose, the government says.

"These sites are an integral part of our heritage and this is what the programme is intended for - education about our heritage and preservation of the sites' critical importance to our national history," says David Baker, spokesman for the Israeli prime minister's office, which runs the heritage sites project.

Israel says it never discriminates in the field of archaeology, and that detractors are using the issue to undermine evidence of Jewish history in the West Bank.

The Archaeological Department of the Civil Administration (ADCA) - the Israeli

body in charge of archaeology in Israeli-administered parts of the West Bank - points to the fact it has unearthed thousands of remains from all periods of settlement, not only Jewish.

It has also opened several non-Jewish archaeological sites, such as the Inn of the Good Samaritan and the Monastery of Euthymius, to the public.

Digging rights

Mr Mizrachi, whose organisation Emek Shaveh opposes the "politicisation" of archaeology, says according to international conventions Israel does not have the right (apart from in exceptional circumstances) to conduct any archaeology in the West Bank.

This is a view firmly rejected by Israel.

"The right of Israel to execute archaeological work in the region is well-embedded in international law and interim agreements with the Palestinians," says Hananya Hizmi, head of the ADCA, which operates according to pre-existing Jordanian law.

The issue is complicated by the fact that there is no single law dealing with archaeology in the West Bank, but rather a series of conventions, inherited laws and treaties.

The main international treaty which governs archaeology in occupied territories is the Hague Convention of 1954, which deals by-and-large with the preservation of culturally significant sites. A 1999 protocol prohibits archaeological excavation other than essential survey or salvage work, but Israel is among dozens of countries which are not signatories.

With so many sites scattered across the West Bank, the matter had to be addressed when the area was divided up under the Oslo Accords in 1995. Israel and the Palestinians agreed they would be responsible for archaeology in their respective areas and set up a joint committee on the issue, but currently there is no archaeological co-operation between the two sides.

'Totally political'

Religious and political sensitivities surrounding the status of ancient sites run deep, and even symbolic adjustments

have elicited angry reactions from both sides, deeply suspicious of each other's motives.

Last year, Israel condemned as "totally political" a successful bid by the Palestinians to get the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank city of Bethlehem listed by Unesco as a World Heritage Site "in Palestine", for the first time.

Two years earlier, Palestinians rioted when Israel added the Tomb of the Patriarchs, known to Muslims as the al-Ibrahimi Mosque, in Hebron, and Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem, to its national heritage list. Both places are venerated by the three major faiths.

"From the Palestinians' point of view, when the Israeli government contributes money to these two sites, which are in the West Bank, they see it as an Israeli attempt to take it all over," says Dr Yitzhak Reiter, an expert in conflict resolution at sacred sites.

"If you invest money in developing and renovating a place, it looks like you have

some intention in the future to claim it, and this is a very delicate issue.

"Holy places are being employed by the two parties, each for its own interests. The problem is, as much as they succeed to infiltrate their ideas into society, future reconciliation and compromise become much more difficult to achieve."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21973708>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Youth protests continue in southern Algeria**

By Nazim Fethi in Ghardaia for Magharebia – 15/04/2013

Jobless youth from across southern Algeria rallied Saturday (April 13th) in Ghardaia.

According to the National Committee for Protection of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC), some 1,000 people turned out for the demonstration.

The protest was peaceful from beginning to end, just as organisers wanted it to be.

CNDCC members were determined to distance themselves from the violence in nearby Ouargla last week. Clashes over social housing distribution left one young man dead Friday from tear gas asphyxiation.

Tahar Belabbes, the national co-ordinator for the CNDCC, expressed disapproval over the clashes that erupted in his hometown of Ouargla.

"We have criticised and warned against the risk of young people being manipulated into becoming violent. Our movement is a peaceful one and will remain so," he added.

May 1st Square was bedecked with national emblems and CNDCC slogans. For more than two hours, young people chanted their usual slogans and demanded concrete and feasible measures to solve the problem of unemployment in the south.

Like the demonstrations in other southern towns, the demonstration in Ghardaia

attracted the same political figures that supported the movement from the outset.

Belabbes noted that his movement was apolitical and added that he could not turn away representatives of parties or organisations affiliated with political parties.

"Whether they are left-wing, right-wing, Islamist or secular, they are welcome," he said.

The next demonstration is scheduled to take place in Djelfa.

Belabbes said that the protests would not stop until the authorities engaged in a frank and transparent discussion with representatives of the unemployed. He noted that the CNDCC had representatives in all 48 provinces.

"If the authorities intend to play the violence card to discredit us, they will need a whole army across all 48 provinces of the country to manipulate young people and spur them to commit acts of violence and counter-violence," he said.

While it waits for the dialogue so fervently desired by the CNDDC to begin, the movement is growing day by day and refining its working methods.

Its leaders made no secret of their ambition of positioning themselves as an alternative to the traditional system of local representation and were targeting local elected representatives and prominent figures, who the group said had no right to speak on behalf of young people.

"It is a demonstration about the dignity of the unemployed," CNDDC member Hamdane Abdesselam said.

Young people of Ghardaia also claim that companies do not comply with the latest order issued by the prime minister.

The directive to prioritise recruitment of southerners must be put into practice, Abdesselam added.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/15/feature-02

- **Moroccan Parliament reconvenes**

Moroccan parliamentarians will tackle employment and legislative performance during their spring session, which opened on Friday (April 12th).

House of Representatives Speaker Karim Ghellab said that the Parliament and the government should co-ordinate efforts to implement the provisions of the new constitution.

"This is a very important session on the legislative front," he said. "We must make great efforts to implement the expected texts."

According to several parliamentarians, the government must pay more attention to legislative proposals from the parliamentary groups.

The new constitution has strengthened the legislative role of Parliament, Rally of Independents leader Rachid Talbi Alami said.

"Yet so far, priority is not being given to legislative initiatives of parliamentarians," he added.

MPs and the government must take up the challenge of implementing organic laws including the long-awaited text on the organisation of the government, regionalisation, as well as the Amazigh project, political scientist Jamal Farhane said.

"We are also waiting for the projects relating to the organisation of the next elections whose date has not yet been set. The session will, in fact, probably be punctuated by debates on the anticipated elections that are being delayed for political reasons," he said.

He also noted that Parliament will address the major structural reforms including the compensation and pension funds.

"These are two major issues that will keep the legislative institution busy because they affect the daily lives of citizens," Farhane added.

In addition, there is the issue of unemployed graduates who continue to demonstrate their anger before Parliament.

They say that parliamentarians are too passive on the issue and that they do not support their access to the labour market.

"We expect parliamentarians to defend the causes of the population and the issue of graduate employment is one," Hicham Mridi said. "Members are required to give priority to the issue of unemployment which continues to become more complicate over time."

Parliamentarians however, stressed that members were aware of the importance of this issue, which the government must address and expressed their solidarity with the unemployed.

"We must look at the real problem, the adaptation of training to the needs of the labour market," Employment Minister Abdelouahed Souhail said.

He noted that the government alone could not provide work for each young graduate. He pointed out the need to explore opportunities for vocational training and the development of relations between universities and businesses.

"An observatory on employment will be launched before the end of this year," he added.

"The goal is to produce reliable and relevant information for a better understanding of potential employment," he said.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/15/feature-03

- **Egypt court orders release of Mubarak in killing protesters case**

Court orders release of former president Hosni Mubarak but he will remain in jail pending investigation into corruption charges

A court has ordered the release without bail of former president Hosni Mubarak over charges of complicity in the killing of protesters during Egypt's revolution.

The decision came after defence lawyer Fareed El-Dib submitted a memorandum stating his client had already spent two years in provisional detention, which is the maximum allowed under Article 143 of the criminal procedures law.

The prosecution agreed with El-Dib's argument, saying there is no need to keep Mubarak in detention.

The judge said Mubarak could go home so long as he is not wanted for other crimes. However, he will remain in prison pending investigations into separate corruption cases.

Last June, Mubarak received a life sentence for failing to protect peaceful protesters during the January 25 Revolution, but in January was granted a retrial due to procedural irregularities in the initial trial.

On 7 April, Prosecutor-General Talaat Abdullah announced Mubarak would be detained for an additional 15 days pending investigations into new charges related to the illegal use of state funds.

The judge overseeing the retrial recused himself on Saturday and referred the case to the Cairo Appeal Court. The new date of the retrial is still unknown.

Also facing retrial for their role in the killing of protesters during the revolution

are former interior minister Habib El-Adly, and six of his aides.

Since his detention in April 2011, the ousted president has complained of health problems and has been moved back and forth from the hospital at Tora Prison to Maadi Military Hospital.

On Saturday, Prosecutor-General Abdullah requested that Maadi Military Hospital transfer Mubarak back to Tora Prison hospital if his health permits.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/69256/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-court-orders-release-of-Mubarak-in-killing-p.aspx>

- **IMF concludes visit to Egypt, no loan deal reached**

Despite IMF saying its mission to Cairo made progress in discussions with Egyptian officials, parties fail to reach an initial deal on \$4.8 billion loan

A team from the International Monetary Fund concluded a two week visit to Egypt on Monday without signing a deal on a much-anticipated \$4.8 billion loan, but the

international lender said progress with Egypt was achieved.

"The mission made progress in the discussions with the Egyptian authorities on their economic programme and possible financial support from the IMF," Andreas Bauer, mission chief for Egypt, said in a statement issued a little after Monday midnight Cairo time.

The last time an IMF technical team was in Cairo in November 2012, a 'staff level agreement' on the same \$4.8 billion facility was signed. The loan deal did not come through, however, at the Egyptian government's request due to domestic instability at the time.

This round of negotiations, however, seems to be a little more difficult than its predecessor as an agreement was not reached right away.

"Discussions with the authorities will continue with the objective of reaching agreement on a possible standby arrangement in support of Egypt," Bauer added.

Egyptian officials played down the setback, saying talks would continue this week in Washington, and in Cairo after that, and the two sides were closing in on a deal.

"We are travelling to the spring meetings [in Washington] in the next two days and are going to be there in the coming week and will complete the negotiations there, and after we return, the mission will come again for us to complete some of the negotiations," Planning Minister Ashraf El-Arabi, one of the Egyptian negotiators, said in a television interview, Reuters reported.

"But the talks are difficult," he told the privately owned CBC channel on Monday night.

The IMF mission arrived in Egypt on 2 April and met with top Egyptian officials including the prime minister, the central bank governor, ministers of finance and planning as well as leaders of several political parties.

Discussions were based on an economic programme that Egypt prepared to secure the loan, which involves measures to

tackle the budget deficit. The IMF team had nothing but praise to say about the plan.

"The authorities have already taken valuable first steps to improve the targeting of energy subsidies and are seeking to broaden their revenue base," Bauer said.

The reforms Egypt plans to implement was reflected in the country's draft budget for the coming fiscal year 2013/14, which shows the subsidy bill growing by just 12 percent; a meager amount compared with other spending items such as wages which is planned to grow by 21 percent.

Neither side said why agreement had eluded them but analysts said the ruling Muslim Brotherhood did not want to risk unpopular measures that could hit poor and middle-income Egyptians before parliamentary elections expected from October.

"I don't think they will do any meaningful reform before the elections. That's the bottom line," said Samir Radwan, who was the first finance minister after the

overthrow of former president Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

Radwan negotiated a \$3.2 billion IMF loan with fewer conditions at the time but the military council that ruled Egypt then vetoed it.

Since then, foreign reserves have more than halved to the critically low level of \$13.4 billion, the Egyptian pound has lost about 10 percent against the dollar, tourism and investment have withered and the country faces fuel shortages and power cuts.

An IMF programme could help stabilise the economy in the rocky transition to democracy, unlocking up to \$15 billion in aid and investment to improve a dismal business climate.



Egypt secured \$5 billion in stopgap financial support from Arab allies Qatar

and Libya last week, removing some of the sense of urgency about obtaining the IMF loan.

Economists said the government could muddle through for several months with funding from Arab sources, but only an IMF agreement would restore business confidence and investment.

"It comes down to the fundamental question of whether Egypt can reform and achieve an economic recovery over the medium-term and that comes down to an IMF-backed programme, which is the key to restoring the confidence of investors, who will not come back without an IMF deal," said Brahim Razgallah at JP Morgan.

The IMF's conditions for lending were milder than past terms for Latin American and Asian countries, not least because the fund's main shareholders, the United States and European nations, see the strategic importance of stabilising Egypt.

By contrast Tunisia, where the ousting of dictator Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 helped inspire the Egyptian uprising in what became known as the Arab Spring, is set to sign a \$1.78 billion loan deal with

the IMF on Tuesday, a government source in Tunis told Reuters.

"The IMF and the international community want to help but are really frustrated that Egypt isn't doing as much as it should to help itself," said Angus Blair, chairman of the Signet Institute, an economic think-tank for the Middle East and North Africa region. "I expect there is significant frustration."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/69337/Business/Economy/IMF-concludes-visit-to-Egypt,-no-loan-deal-reached.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Bassil bemoans attempts to form "elections government"**

Lebanese Energy Minister Gebran Bassil said that a new government formed for the sole purpose of overseeing the upcoming parliamentary elections would be counterproductive.

"There is no such thing as an elections government. If a security incident occurs in the country, would the elections government stand by and watch?" Bassil

said in remarks published by Al-Akhbar newspaper on Tuesday.

"We are living in the shadow of the Syrian crisis and there are one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The Israeli threat is ever present amid concerning signs... Won't the elections government deal with all that?"

The minister also urged consensus over the formation of the new government, "the same way consensus underlined the nomination" of Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam.

Bassil – a member of March 8's Free Patriotic Movement - also warned that Lebanon will be facing an "explosion" if a new government was not installed to coincide with an agreement over a new electoral law before the end of May when election nomination deadlines expire.

Lebanon is awaiting the formation of a new government after caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati announced his resignation last month citing differences within his March 8-dominated cabinet over electoral and security issues.

PM-designate Tammam Salam held talks last week with the country's parliamentarians and consulted with them over the shape of the government that he will attempt to form.

However, Lebanon's different political parties have expressed conflicting points of view regarding the form of Salam's government.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/bassil-bemoans-attempts-to-form-elections-government>

- **Lebanon must stop Hezbollah attacks in Syria, opposition says**

Syria's main opposition National Coalition called on Lebanon to control its frontiers, after rebels said they fired across the border in retaliation against the powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah.

"The Syrian Coalition calls on the Lebanese government to exert control over its borders and put an immediate stop to Hezbollah's military operations on Syrian territory," the group said late Monday.

"We call upon the Lebanese government to take action against Hezbollah's

aggressions and do everything within their means to ensure the safety of the innocent civilians on the Syrian-Lebanese border," it said in a statement.

"For weeks now, forces belonging to Hezbollah have targeted villages inside Syria, located on the border of Syria and Lebanon. Hezbollah deployed forces into some border villages and took control of those areas."

"The [rebel] Free Syrian Army was forced to respond to these repeated aggressions," it said.

The statement comes after Lebanon said it would submit to the Arab League a letter of protest condemning the spillover of fire from Syria onto its territory.

The Coalition is recognized by dozens of states and organizations -- among them the Arab League -- as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Beirut has adopted a policy of "disassociation" in the conflict in neighboring Syria, and has been reluctant to publicly blame either rebel or regime forces.

The rebels claimed to have fired shells on Lebanon at the weekend, blaming Hezbollah for firing from Lebanon and positions inside Syria on rebel-held areas in the strife-torn Qusayr area, near the border.

A rebel commander told AFP on Monday they were "giving the Lebanese authorities an opportunity to respond, to take practical steps to put a stop to [Hezbollah's] shelling", while threatening to launch new attacks should the Shiite group continue to target rebels in Syria.

Though 30 years of political and military domination by Damascus over Lebanon ended in 2005, Syria's regime has continued through its Hezbollah-led allies to exert significant influence over its smaller neighbor.

Lebanon is sharply divided over Syria's two-year conflict, with Hezbollah and its allies supporting President Bashar al-Assad, and the Sunni-led March 14 movement backing the rebels.

Cross-border shellfire from the Syrian war has regularly hit Lebanon, on occasion

killing Lebanese. On Sunday, however, two people died for the first time in Hezbollah strongholds of the border region.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/lebanon-must-stop-hezbollah-attacks-in-syria-opposition-says>

- **Gemayel: March 8 wants hegemony over new cabinet**

Kataeb Party leader Amin Gemayel lashed out at March 8 accusing them of seeking to dominate the upcoming government.

"March 8 is now attempting to secure its hegemony over the government of Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam by all means and under the pretext that they want a national unity government," Gemayel said in remarks published by Kuwaiti daily As-Seyassah on Tuesday.

He also warned that Lebanon's current situation "does not allow for a long period without government."

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within his March 8-dominated cabinet over electoral and security issues.

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Gemayel also addressed the latest Syrian shelling to hit Lebanon's border.

"The Syrian shelling of Lebanese territory is a dangerous [escalation]."

"We have repeatedly warned against the Syrian violations, especially since Syria does not recognize the Lebanese border and object to its demarcation, while, today, it is attacking the Lebanese border towns."

Two people were killed and at least four others injured in northeastern Lebanon on Sunday in rocket attacks purportedly perpetrated by Syrian rebels.

On Monday, Lebanon's top political and security officials held an emergency meeting at the Baabda Presidential Palace to discuss measures to be taken following the fatal Syrian border shelling and asked the foreign ministry to send a memorandum to the Arab League regarding the incident.

Hezbollah has been reportedly fighting on the side of the Syrian regime against rebels in the Homs province and outside Damascus, with news outlets in the past week reporting that a number of party members had been killed in fighting in Syria.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/gemayel-march-8-wants-hegemony-over-new-cabinet>

- **LF leader slams March 8 stance on new government**

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea slammed the March 8 alliance for objecting to the formation of a neutral government.

"I am disappointed at the illogical and unacceptable way in which the March 8

group is behaving, since this group is objecting to the formation of a neutral government in which neither March 8 nor March 14 are parties,” Geagea said on Monday during a meeting with a delegation from the Order of Engineers and Architects.

“It has become clear that March 8 wants to live life enjoying the spoils of power as happened in the previous two years.”

The LF, a prominent member of the March 14 coalition, is advocating the formation of a neutral government.

Lebanon is awaiting the formation of a new government after caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati announced his resignation last month citing differences within his March 8-dominated cabinet over electoral and security issues.

PM-designate Tammam Salam held talks last week with the country’s parliamentarians and consulted with them over the shape of the government that he will attempt to form.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lf-leader-slams-march-8-stance-on-new-government>

- **Jordan seeks UN help to counter impact of Syria war**

Jordan's premier said the impact of the war in neighboring Syria is threatening the kingdom's security and that Amman will seek the United Nations Security Council's help in tackling the fallout.

"The Syrian crisis and its impact on Jordan are becoming a threat to national security," Prime Minister Abdullah Nsur told parliament in a policy statement late on Sunday, a transcript of which was released on Monday.

"Jordan will go the UN Security Council to present the situation of the Syrian refugees in the kingdom," the prime minister said.

"The world should shoulder the humanitarian and security responsibility [of the refugees] and form a clear policy to deal with the crisis."

Jordan says it is hosting around 500,000 Syrian refugees and that more people from war-torn Syria are entering Jordan daily.

"Thousands of Syrians continue to seek refuge in Jordan, creating more pressure on the country's economic, social, health, educational and environmental infrastructure," Nsur told the MPs.

"What makes things become more dangerous is that the Syrian crisis is not expected to end very soon, and therefore Jordan is likely to face more pressure in the coming months."

He insisted that Jordan is "ready to face any deterioration of the situation in Syria ... and to preserve the kingdom's security and interests," calling for a political solution to the conflict.

The UN estimates that around 385,500 Syrians have sought refuge in Jordan, including nearly a quarter of a million children. Jordan put the overall figure at around 500,000.

A UN spokesperson has said that its agencies expect the number to surge to

around 1.2 million by December -- equivalent to about one-fifth of Jordan's total population.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/jordan-seeks-un-help-to-counter-impact-of-syria-war>

- **UN envoy meets with Hezbollah official**

The UN's special coordinator to Lebanon met Monday with Hezbollah International Relations Department chief Sayyed Ammar Moussawi Monday to discuss developments in Lebanon and the region.

Derek Plumbly spoke about the crisis in neighboring Syria, expressing his concern about the shelling from Syria that claimed the lives of two Lebanese in the Beqaa on Sunday, according to a statement issued by his office.

Plumbly reiterated his and UN Security Council's support for Lebanon's "territorial integrity and sovereignty" and the need for all parties to "respect Lebanon's policy of dissociation and the Baabda Declaration."

Hezbollah has been accused of fighting on the side of the Syrian regime against Syrian rebels, which would be a violation of the Baabda Declaration agreed on in 2012 between Lebanon's parties to avoid entanglements in foreign crises.

The Shiite party has acknowledged that its members living in Syrian villages on the border with Lebanon have taken part in battles against "armed groups" in self-defense. However, it refuses to discuss allegations by Syrian rebels that it has sent fighters from Lebanon to bolster the forces of its ally, Syria's President Bashar al-Assad.

Plumbly also "welcomed the consensus over the designation of Prime Minister-designate Tamam Salam" and encouraged the formation of a new government "as soon as possible."

Regarding the current battle over a new electoral law, Plumbly expressed hope that an agreement could be reached soon "in accordance with Lebanon's constitutional requirements."

Lebanon is awaiting the formation of a new government after Najib Miqati

announced his resignation last month citing differences within his cabinet over electoral and security issues.

Salam held talks last week with the country's parliamentarians and consulted with them over the shape of the government that he will attempt to form.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/un-envoy-meets-with-hezbollah-official>

6. SYRIA

• Syria's Assad issues new general amnesty, SANA says

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has issued a general amnesty for crimes committed in the war-torn country prior to Tuesday, state news agency SANA reported.

"President Assad has issued decree number 23, granting a general amnesty for crimes committed before April 16, 2013," said the agency.

Under the decree, "the death penalty will be replaced with a life sentence of hard labor," it added.

Assad has issued several amnesty decrees since an uprising against his regime erupted in March 2011.

The latest will not apply to people found guilty of smuggling weapons or drug-related crimes, but those convicted of joining the rebellion would get lighter sentences, said the text of the decree published on SANA.

"Syrians who joined a terrorist organisation will only have to serve a quarter of their sentences," said the decree.

"The decision does not apply to those who avoided conscription," the text added

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriai/nthepress/syrias-assad-issues-new-general-amnesty-sana-says>

- **Syria TV to air Assad interview**

Pro-regime television channel Al-Ikhbariya will air an interview with Syria's President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday, the broadcaster said.

"Syria's Al-Ikhbariya has conducted an exclusive interview with President Bashar al-Assad... and it will be broadcast on Wednesday... at 9:30 p.m.," the channel said on its Facebook page.

Al-Ikhbariya published a photograph showing Assad seated in an office with two journalists.

In his last public appearance, Assad told two Turkish media outlets that the fall of his regime would produce a "domino effect" that would destabilize the region "for many years".

"The whole world knows that if Syria is partitioned, or if terrorist forces take control of the country, there will be direct contagion of the surrounding countries," he said on April 5.

Troops loyal to Assad have been fighting an insurgency that erupted after forces loyal to Assad unleashed a brutal crackdown on an uprising that broke out in March 2011.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people and driven more than five million

others from their homes, including more than one million refugees.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/syria-tv-to-air-assad-interview>

- **Lebanon protests to Arab League over Syrian rebel aggressions**

Lebanese government condemns spillover of fire from Syrian rebel, regime forces onto its territory, says it will protest to Arab League.

BEIRUT - Lebanon on Monday condemned the spillover of fire from Syrian rebel and regime forces onto its territory and said it would protest to the Arab League.

The decision comes after two Lebanese citizens were killed by artillery fire from Syria on Sunday.

"The safety of every Lebanese citizen and village is the responsibility of the Lebanese state, and any attack from any side is unacceptable," Social Affairs Minister Wael Abu Faour said after a ministerial meeting.

He said Lebanon's foreign ministry would "undertake all necessary measures and

communications to ensure all sides bear their responsibilities and do not repeat such attacks."

Abu Faour said the measures would include "the preparation of a memorandum to the Arab League," which would "protest... any attack regardless of which party was responsible for it."

The decision, taken by select ministers of the Hezbollah-dominated caretaker government, comes a day after two separate incidents of fire from Syria spilling into Lebanon.



Shells have regularly strayed into Lebanon from Syria, on occasion killing Lebanese citizens, but Sunday's incidents resulted in the first deaths in Hezbollah-strongholds in the border region, reportedly by rebel fire.

Security sources said the artillery fire continued on Monday, with two shells landing in the town of Qasr, where one person was killed a day earlier.

Lebanon, which has officially followed a policy of "dissociation" from the Syrian conflict, has been reluctant to publicly blame either regime forces or rebel fighters for fire hitting its territory.

The war in neighbouring Syria has exacerbated existing tensions in Lebanon's multi-confessional population and fractious political system.

Abu Faour said the military was taking unspecified measures "to protect Lebanese citizens from any attack," without detailing whether the army would return fire across the border.

After the attacks on Sunday, the Lebanese army said its units "were deployed widely across the area and took measures in the field necessary to protect people and respond to the source of the attack as appropriate."

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58142>

- **Brotherhood tries to cover sun with one finger: There is no extremism in Syria**

Syria's Brotherhood seeks to defuse fears that extremists are seizing Syrian territory, denies it controls SNC.

ISTANBUL - Syria's Muslim Brotherhood sought here on Monday to defuse fears that Islamist extremists were seizing Syrian territory, saying that a "united front" controlled land captured by the rebels.

"It is not true that extremists are in charge of liberated lands," their leader Mohammad Riad Shakfa said at a press conference in Istanbul. "The land ... belongs to a united front of the opposition."

Speaking in Arabic, he added: "As far as I know, there is no extremism in Syria."

His comments came days after the jihadist Al-Nusra Front, one of the fiercest forces battling the Syrian regime, pledged fealty to Al-Qaeda, sounding alarm bells in the West and triggering concerns among the main opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC).

Western powers have been cautious in how they aid the opposition amid fears they could bolster Islamist extremists.

The powerful Muslim Brotherhood also denied it controlled the SNC, saying such claims were "manufactured" by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as part of a "defamation campaign."

"What we are up against is a campaign to defame us," Shakfa said. "We make up less than 10 percent of the SNC and we have never influenced its decisions," he added.

Shakfa was particularly referring to the election of Syria's rebel Prime Minister Ghassan al-Hitto last month in a majority vote that had exposed rifts in the SNC.

"They claim Mr. Hitto was elected because he is our representative... We didn't even know him before he was elected," he said.

The brotherhood, a strong Islamist component of the fragmented Syrian opposition, supported Hitto because he was "more in tune with the wish of the majority," according to Shakfa.

On Sunday, the SNC said Al-Nusra's alleged merger with al-Qaeda would "only serve the goals of the Assad regime," and called on the group "to stay within the ranks of the nationalistic Syrians.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58137>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Kuwaitis protest over jailing of opposition leader

Thousands of Kuwaitis demonstrated Monday night after the lower court sentenced key opposition leader Mussallam al-Barrak to five years in prison for insulting the emir.

Around 10,000 people gathered at Barrak's residence southwest of the capital Kuwait City and marched on the nearby central jail, where Barrak could serve his jail term, disrupting traffic at a major highway without any police interference.

Barrak, a nationalist former MP, was handed the jail term over remarks he

made at a public rally on October 15 and deemed offensive to Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah.

Ahead of the march, 15 former opposition MPs and prominent activists repeated most of the speech for which Barrak received the jail term in a show of solidarity with him. They plan to do the same every day.

Criticizing the emir is a crime in Kuwait that carries a maximum penalty of five years in jail.

Barrak earlier told supporters at his residence that the "ruling is illegal but I will give myself up to police if they come to pick me up."

Last week, Barrak's defense team walked out of court after the judge refused requests to hear defense witnesses who included the Kuwaiti premier and two former opposition MPs.

The information ministry however defended the ruling and Kuwait's judicial system.

"Kuwait has a transparent and independent judicial system. All citizens, regardless of their position, are equal in the eyes of the law," the ministry said in a statement sent to AFP.

"Anyone accused of a crime in Kuwait will get a fair trial with a comprehensive legal defense and open appeals process," it said.

The verdict came two days after the Kuwaiti opposition threatened to stage street protests and call for civil disobedience if Barrak was denied a fair trial and jailed.

Barrak is also facing trial on several other charges including storming parliament and participating in protests.

Several opposition tweeters and former MPs have been sentenced to jail on charges of insulting the emir.

Kuwait's opposition has been staging protests to demand the dissolution of the parliament elected last December on the basis of an electoral law that had been amended by the emir.

The opposition charged the change was illegal and aimed at electing a rubber stamp parliament.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwaitis-protest-over-jailing-of-opposition-leader>

- **HRW urges Kuwait to drop charges of "offending emir"**

Human Rights Watch on Tuesday urged Kuwait to drop charges against people accused of offending the emir, a day after a former MP was handed a jail term for insulting the Gulf state's ruler.

"The Kuwaiti authorities should drop criminal charges against dozens of online activists, journalists, and politicians for legitimately exercising their rights to freedom of expression," HRW said in a statement.

The New York-based group also said the authorities in the oil-rich country should withdraw charges and overturn the sentences for at least 10 people already convicted in such cases.

On Monday, the lower court sentenced key opposition leader and former MP

Mussallam al-Barrak to five years in prison for "insulting" Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah during a public rally on October 15.

Thousands of Kuwaitis demonstrated late Monday to protest the sentence which defense lawyers have described as illegal.

"No one should ever be prosecuted solely for expressing peaceful criticism," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at HRW.

"The Kuwaiti authorities should not be jailing opposition activists and journalists on charges of 'offending the emir' but instead scrapping the criminal code provision that makes this a crime, and upholding their international obligation to protect free speech," she said.

Kuwait has clamped down on opposition activists, sending dozens to court for allegedly insulting the emir following a political crisis that began a year ago after dissolving an opposition-dominated parliament.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/hrw-urges-kuwait-to-drop-charges-of-offending-emir>

- **Alwaleed bin Talal: Women driving can breathe life into Saudi economy**

Saudi prince says lifting of ban on women driving will be quick first step to reduce kingdom's dependence on millions of foreign workers.

DUBAI - Billionaire Prince Alwaleed bin Talal has indicated support of allowing women in Saudi Arabia to drive.

The Gulf Arab state is a monarchy ruled by the al-Saud family in alliance with clerics from the strict Wahabi school of Islam. Women must be covered from head to toe in public and are not allowed to drive.

But the ruling family has been facing calls from activists and liberals, empowered by protests across North Africa and the Middle East, to allow some political reforms in the absolute monarchy that has no parliament.

Using social media, activists have called on King Abdullah to allow women to

participate for the first time in municipal elections expected later this year.

Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, a nephew of King Abdullah and advocate of his reforms, said the kingdom could send some 750,000 foreign drivers home if women could drive.

"The question of allowing women to drive in Saudi Arabia will save more than 500,000 jobs in addition to the social and economic benefits," the prince wrote Sunday on his Twitter account.



Thousands of foreign workers have been fired from their jobs and then deported, part of a government campaign against foreigners who illegally reside and work in the kingdom.

Last week King Abdullah gave workers three months to try to legalize their

presence. There are more than 8 million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia.

"A lot of Saudi women want to drive their car in line with strict regulations and wearing a headscarf. But now they need a driver ... This is an additional burden on households," he said.

"The Saudi society wants fewer foreign labourers ... so why the hesitation, why this hesitation (with women driving cars)? I want answers," he said.

A ban could only be lifted by the government in consultation with the country's top Islamic scholars.

Saudi women are subject to a male "guardianship" system which requires they show permission from their guardian -- father, brother or husband -- to travel or, sometimes, work.

Religious police patrol the streets regularly to ensure gender segregation and that women are dressed modestly.

The rulers of the world's top oil exporter have wrestled with the issue of

moderating the country's strict adherence to an austere version of Islam.

King Abdullah, a reformist, has replaced hardline clerics with moderate ones but must balance their needs with those of the religious elite who helped found the kingdom in 1932.

He unveiled handouts worth \$37 billion last month in a bid to insulate the kingdom from Arab protests reaching the kingdom's borders in Bahrain, Yemen and Jordan, but has given no hint whether the ruling family will allow political reforms.

More than 17,000 people have backed a call on Facebook to hold two demonstrations this month, the first on March 11 but activists say it is impossible to say how many will defy a ban on protests.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58140>

- **Saudi feared religious police storm Al Janadriyah UAE pavilion**

Member of Saudi religious police objects to presence of Emirati singer Aryam in her country's pavilion, fights with visitors.

RIYADH - A member of the Saudi feared religious police, known as Mutawa, stormed the UAE pavilion at National Festival for Heritage and Culture, also known as Al Janadriyah, but was forced out by the Gulf Kingdom's national guards.

The incident took place when the Mutawa member objected to the presence of the Emirati singer Aryam in her country's pavilion.

A brief U-Tube film showed several guards surround the member of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice before they escorted him out of the pavilion at the annual festival in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

The Saudi Arabic language daily Sabq, which published the film, said the Commission members went into the UAE stand to protest some of its contents but was forced to leave by national guards who are in charge of security at the week-long festivities.

"The national guards chased the Commission member into the UAE stand, grabbed him and forced him out to the

applause of scores of visitors, mainly women," the paper said without giving further details.

Prince Khalid Bin Bandar Bin Abdallaziz, Governor of the Riyadh province, ordered an investigation into the incident.

Speaking of her participation in Al Janadriyah, Aryam said, "I didn't sing. I just greeted the Saudi audience with a bouquet from the Emirati folklore. My participation didn't exceed 20 seconds, and I was not accompanied by a band."

She added in remarks published in the Saudi daily Al Asharq, "I respect our Arab Gulf customs and traditions."

The United Arab Emirates' pavilion witnessed large crowds of visitors after the inauguration of the Festival.

The Women Market has lured families who have come to find out about the Emirati handicrafts, made by creative Emirati hands. Visitors also flocked to the UAE's Information Desk to become acquainted with tourist destinations in the UAE and get instruction leaflets that are

aimed at helping them when they travel to the UAE.

The families enjoyed the folklore bands performances in Al Ittihad yard inside the pavilion that was raised on a three-dimensional form, 50% the real size of Al Hosn Palace in Abu Dhabi.

The pavilion's goals are to shed light on the important phases of the UAE's history, and put emphasis on the Emirati heritage so as to reflect the different aspects of the rich traditional life in the country.

According to the visitors, the success of the UAE's pavilion at Al Janadriyah is due to Emiratis' ability to present the country's legacy with its values and originality.

This year's Emirati participation in Al Janadriyah, prepared under the supervision of the Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi), is considered as one of the biggest since the launch of the Festival.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58106>

- **Bahrain soccer chief faces tough questions in AFC election**

Sheikh Salman will have to come up at his meeting with journalists with convincing program that holds out promise of greater transparency, accountability of troubled Asian body.

By James M. Dorsey - Singapore

Widely viewed as frontrunner

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC), struggling to restore credibility after two scandal-riddled years involving allegations of financial mismanagement and corruption, has had a foretaste of questions and issues that are likely to be raised if Bahrain Football Association head Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa , widely viewed as a frontrunner, wins the group's May 2 presidential election.

Sheikh Salman is one of four candidates running to replace Mohammed Bin Hammam, the disgraced and banned former president of the governing Asian soccer. Sheikh Salman lost to Mr. Bin Hammam four years ago in a bitter election campaign and is the only current

candidate who is not associated with the Qatari national.

Mr. Bin Hammam was last December banned for life from involvement in soccer by world football body FIFA on charges of multiple conflicts of interest that violated the group's code of ethics. An earlier internal AFC audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) had concluded that he had used an AFC sundry account as his personal account.

It also raised questions about his further financial and commercial management of the group, including the negotiation and terms of a \$1billion master rights agreement (MRA) with Singapore-based World Sport Group (WSG). WSG has taken legal action against this reporter in a bid to squash reporting and silence sources.

The AFC and Sheikh Salman, who is backed by the powerful Olympic Council of Asia headed by Kuwaiti Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahad Al-Sabah, got an inkling of issues involved in the Bahraini's candidacy when Manchester United soccer legend Dennis Law this month visited the Gulf island state.

A human rights group, Human Rights First, charged this week that a Bahraini medical doctor, Dr Fatima Haji, had been arrested, beaten and electrocuted two years ago during a brutally squashed popular uprising for asking Manchester United to hold a minute's silence for 15-year-old Ahmad Shams, who was shot and killed during the uprising wearing a Manchester United shirt.

Mr. Law and Manchester United have so far avoided addressing the issue. The club's website quoted Mr. Law as saying: "I have been overwhelmed by the number of United fans who have greeted me here today. It is my first time in Bahrain and the welcome I have received has been fantastic."

Nevertheless, the squashing of the revolt that involved the arrest and/or dismissal of some 150 Bahraini athletes and sports officials, including three national team soccer players, continues to haunt the country as well as Sheikh Salman, a member of Bahrain's royal family.



Companies sponsoring Formula One motor racing have shown significantly less willingness to fund this week's Bahrain Grand Prix after last year's race failed to move criticism of the country's human rights record and continued protests out of the limelight. This week's race is likely to again focus attention on Bahrain's domestic tensions.

Thomson Reuters and Diageo's Johnnie Walker whisky brand, which is culturally sensitive in a Muslim nation, opted out of this year's Bahrain Grand Prix. Vodafone decided to use the logos of its Middle East partner Zain rather than its own. Oil company Shell said its involvement in Bahrain would be limited to sending three technicians to offer support on fuel and lubricants while Swiss bank UBS would not host any of its clients at the Bahrain race.

Hesitancy towards Bahrain is reinforced by the fact that two years after the squashing of the revolt with the help of a Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation (GCC) force protests continue unabated. Few expect talks between the government and the opposition to resolve the crisis with hardliners within the royal family on the ascendancy and despite indications that Saudi Arabia is concerned that the situation on the island, a mere 45-minute drive from its predominantly Shiite, oil-rich Eastern Province, could again get out of hand.

Sheikh Salman is likely to be questioned at a news conference in Dubai this week about his failure to stand up for the soccer players who were arrested, denounced as traitors, allegedly tortured and charged. The charges were ultimately dropped under pressure from FIFA. "Sheikh Salman has taken a hard-liner on football players accused of protest activity during the uprising, but most likely he was simply the executor of this crackdown," said Justin Gengler, a Doha-based Bahrain analyst.

With his competitor's -- Yousuf al Serkal of the United Arab Emirates, Worawi Makdudi of Thailand and Hafez Al Medlej

of Saudi Arabia – promising reform of the AFC, Sheikh Salman will have to come up at his meeting with journalists with a convincing program that holds out the promise of greater transparency and accountability of the troubled Asian body.

Sheikh Salman drafted in February a seven-point program entitled United for Change that pledged to fight match-fixing, doping and illegal betting; ensure full financial transparency by introducing international accounting standards and externally audited yearly reports; and guarantee equality in the distribution of AFC commercial revenues.

Mr. Serkal has since then unveiled a platform that promises to publish “all allowances and benefits given to me by the confederation, and expenditure incurred by my office,” establish a whistle-blower hotline encourage the exposure of wrongdoing, make all the AFC’s commercial contracts available to its members for scrutiny, and hire auditors to look at current agreements.

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Würzburg’s Institute of Fan Culture, and the author of The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer blog.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58116>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Karzai Orders Removal Of Pakistani Border Gate

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

April 15, 2013

KABUL -- Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Zahir Azimi has accused Pakistan of violating “international norms” by installing a border gate and checkpoint along a disputed border line between the two countries.

Azimi told reporters on April 15 that Kabul will consider "all options" to remove the installations.

In a national security council meeting on April 15, Karzai instructed his ministries of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs to take "immediate action" to see the

removal of the installations along the British-drawn Durand Line.

Karzai also sought clarification from the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan on whether it assisted Pakistan in the building of the installations.

Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman General Zahir Azimi said of the new border gate that it was erected without coordination with Kabul.

"Establishing a gate or any other construction must be in conformity of both sides," Azimi said. "Without conformity, establishing a gate on the Durand Line and inside Afghanistan is against all international norms and it's against all the roles and relations of both sides."

He added: "We have all options at hand to remove this [Durand Line] gate and protect Afghanistan's sovereignty."

Pakistan views the Durand Line -- established by British India and the Kingdom of Afghanistan in 1893 -- as an international border.

Kabul, however, has consistently refused to recognize the Durand Line, a boundary that cuts through the ethnic Pashtun heartland.

The United States also considers the Durand Line the modern-day border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The arrival of the British in northern India in the 19th century posed a major challenge to the Afghan and Turkic powers that had dominated the subcontinent for centuries. After losing a major war to the Afghans in 1842, the British eventually captured parts of Afghanistan and formally annexed them through an arbitrary treaty in 1879. Their forces occupied Kabul at the time.

The contentious 1893 treaty between Afghan King Amir Abdur Rahman and Mortimer Durand, the foreign secretary of British India, formalized the areas under the control of the two governments.

With additional reporting by khaama.com and online.wsj.com

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

- **Pakistani army says differences with Afghanistan resolved over border post construction**

ISLAMABAD, April 15 (Xinhua) -- Pakistani army said on Monday that differences with Afghanistan over the construction of a border post were resolved in a meeting of military officials of the two countries.

Afghan defense minister earlier protested against what it called the "unilateral construction of facilities" by neighboring Pakistan along its eastern border.

Afghan Defense Ministry Spokesman General Zahir Azimi told reporters at a joint press conference in Kabul that the recent construction of a gate and other facilities along the border took place without any coordination with Afghanistan.

Pakistan army said that a high-level Afghan military delegation met with Pakistani officers in Rawalpindi and all ongoing cross border coordination issues including Border Post construction in Mohmand Agency were "discussed and amicably resolved."

A military statement said that both sides agreed on continuation of such bilateral interactions to enhance border coordination and reduce space for detractors.

A delegation of Afghan army officials, headed by Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Afghan National Army Major General Afzal Aman, met Major General Ashfaq Nadeem Ahmed, Director General Military Operations Pakistan Army for talks over border coordination with Pakistani officers.

Pakistan earlier rejected Afghan government's claim that Pakistani military had started unilateral construction and was engaged in physical reinforcement activities along the bordering areas.

Pakistan also stated their forces were renovating an old border post and had also informed Afghan authorities.

In Kabul, President Hamid Karzai ordered the country's defense and interior ministries to take immediate action to remove a newly constructed gate, checkpoints and other installations recently built by Pakistan along the border

in Goshta district in the eastern province of Nangarhar with Jalalabad as its capital, 120 km south of Kabul.

Azimi said Afghanistan will use all options to prevent such issue as he said according to agreements between the two countries, before constructing any facilities closer to border areas, the two sides must inform each other.

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

- **Afghanistan demands halt to NATO airstrikes in residential areas**

Press TV

April 15, 2013

Afghanistan has called on the US-led NATO forces in the country to halt airstrikes carried out in residential areas, Press TV reports.

The Afghan Defense Ministry said in a statement on Monday that the foreign forces should stop airstrikes on residential areas, which are conducted under the pretext of targeting militants, since such assaults cause “more civilian deaths.”

The appeal came after the recent US airstrike on a village in the eastern province of Kunar, which killed 17 civilians including a dozen children and four women.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on April 13 that Washington violated international human rights when the US military carried out the deadly airstrike.

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

Washington claims that its airstrikes target militants, but local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 as part of Washington’s so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains across the country, despite the presence of thousands of US-led troops.

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

- **Afghans hold anti-US demo in Jalalabad**

Press TV

April 15, 2013

Afghan protesters have held an anti-US demonstration in the eastern city of Jalalabad to condemn the US-led airstrikes that kill civilians, Press TV reports.

Shouting anti-US slogans, the protesters, including hundreds of university students, took to streets of the capital city of Nangarhar Province on Monday. They carried an effigy of US President Barack Obama and burnt an American flag during the demonstration.

The protesters also expressed opposition to the presence of US-led foreign forces in the war-torn country.

The demonstrators have been particularly outraged over the killing of civilians in the recent US airstrike on a village in the eastern province of Kunar, which killed 17 civilians including a dozen children and four women.

Also on Monday, The Afghan Defense Ministry said in a statement that the

foreign forces should stop airstrikes on residential areas, which are conducted under the pretext of targeting militants, since such assaults cause “more civilian deaths.”

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on April 13 that Washington violated international human rights when the US military carried out the deadly airstrike in Kunar.

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- **Seven members of Afghan family killed in roadside bomb blast**

Press TV

April 15, 2013

Seven members of an Afghan family have been killed in a roadside bomb explosion in Mali Zai region of Zabul Province in southern Afghanistan.

The family was travelling in a trailer towed by a tractor when their vehicle hit the bomb just after the daybreak on Monday, the Afghan Interior Ministry said in a statement.

Four other people were also injured during the incident, the statement said.

No group has yet assumed responsibility for the incident, though the ministry has blamed the explosion on Taliban.

Roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices are by far the most lethal weapons Taliban militants use against Afghan forces, foreign troops, and civilians.

Violence continues to plague Afghanistan despite the presence of thousands of foreign forces, more than a decade after the US-led invasion of the country in 2001.

In the first six months of 2012, over 1,140 Afghan civilians were killed and around 2,000 were wounded, mostly by roadside bombs, according to statistics released by the United Nations. Thirty percent of the casualties were women and children.

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

- **Conflicts, blasts claim 30 lives in Afghanistan in 2 days**

KABUL, April 15 (Xinhua) -- Continued skirmishes and violent security incidents have claimed the lives of 30 people including Taliban fighters and police since Sunday in the conflict-ridden Afghanistan, officials confirmed Monday.

As part of mounting pressure, Afghan and the NATO-led forces launched mop-up against Taliban militants in Bati Kot district of the eastern Nangarhar province on Sunday. The operation which concluded Monday had left 19 militants including a senior commander Jamal Farouqi dead.

"Afghan National Security Forces (Special Units) and Coalition Forces conducted a clearance operation in Chaharda village, Bati Kot district of Nangarhar province Sunday. During the operation which concluded Monday leaving a senior commander of Taliban named Jamal Farouqi along with his 18 fighters dead," Interior Ministry said in a statement released here on Monday.

Five Taliban militants sustained injuries and 10 others were arrested with 15 PK machine guns and 40 AK-47 rifles, the statement contended.

Elimination of Farouqi is a major setback to the Taliban militants, according to the statement.

Taliban militants who have been fighting the Afghan and NATO- led troops are yet to make comment.

Earlier, on Sunday, the Afghan security forces backed by the NATO-led troops targeted and killed a Taliban key commander Safiullah alias Shafiq in Wardak province 35 km west of Kabul, spokesman for Wardak provincial

administration Atallah Khogyani confirmed.

The official described Shafiq's elimination as a major blow to the Taliban militants in Wardak province, but the outfit has yet to confirm the claim.

Six more Taliban militants lost their lives in Naw Bahar district of Zabul province on Sunday as their explosive device went off accidentally, deputy to Zabul provincial governor, Mohammad Jan Rasoulyar said.

The militants, he said, were planting the explosive device on a road to target security forces but the device exploded prematurely killing six on the spot.

Meantime, a roadside bomb organized by Taliban outfit struck a police van in Musa Qala district of Helmand province Sunday killing four police and injuring three others, Nimatullah, governor of Musa Qala district said Monday.

<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.*

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