



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Proces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dışı Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



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22 APRIL 2013

NO: 1587

1. IRAQ.....	3
• BREAKING NEWS Hawija protestors: We will not leave the sit-in square alive	3
Iraqiya MP: We'll demand to replace Kobler if continues his / Non-neutral / approach	4
• Calls for the UN to intervene to lift the siege imposed on the protesters of Hawija.....	4
• Iraq counts votes from first polls since U.S. pullout.....	5
• Breaking News ... NGO's monitored breaches	6
Allawi: There are violations in the elections process	8
• Abdul Malik al-Sadi demands stopping the executions, warns that demonstrations might not remain peaceful.....	8
• Maliki: Iraqi participation in elections is a message to the enemies that we will not retreat.....	9
Iraqiya MP: We'll demand to replace Kobler if continues his / Non-neutral / approach	10
• Jafari in meeting with US Ambassador: Wining the election is not in number of seat rather in success of experiment.....	10
• Gen. Ghaidan: Maliki instructed the Army for restraint	11
• Iraqis see some irregularities in provincial vote.....	11
2. IRAN	13
• Supreme Leader's Aide: Iran's Influence Growing, World Powers in Decline.....	13
• Iran's Former Health Minister to Run for President.....	15
• Ahmadinejad Sees Western Sanctions as "Psycho War"	16
• Iranian Commander: US to Pay Price for Supporting Terrorist MKO	17
• Oil Minister: Iran, Iraq Main Rivals for OPEC Presidency	22
• Iran Urges Regional Cooperation to Confront Drug-Trafficking via Sea Routes	23
• Negotiator: Iran's Nuclear Stance Not Affected by Domestic Politics	25
• Senior MP Warns Israel against Consequences of Military Act against Iran.....	27
• 'US MKO support shows double-standard policy'.....	29
• Iran would not give up enrichment right	30
• Sanctions Intended to Foster Unrest: Clapper	31
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	33
• Jews, gentiles not equals in Israel	33
Knesset to reconvene after month break	33
• Fatah-Hamas animosity trumps calls for unity.....	35
• Israel military court to hold 'urgent' hearing for Issawi	37
• Hamas bloc to participate in Nablus student elections.....	38
• Israel Arrests 10 in West Bank, Summons 6 Others.....	38
• Ya'alon on Iran threat: Israel prefers diplomatic solution	39
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	40
• Morsi says he won't visit or warm ties with Israel	40
• 'At least 82 hurt' as Islamists, rivals clash in Cairo	41
• BREAKING: Court accepts prosecutor's request to keep Mubarak locked up	44
• Egypt proposes negotiations between Syrian regime, opposition	45



• Islamist party power erodes across Maghreb	46
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	50
• LF warns boycott of vote law committee	50
• Hezbollah: Nonpolitical government unrealistic	51
• Jumblatt: PSP ‘moderation’ to boost electoral law agreement	53
6. SYRIA.....	54
• Syrian army forces destroy large arms convoy in Idlib.....	54
• Assad: Army enjoys people’s support	55
• Syria activists report massacre near Damascus	60
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	62
• Saudi Arabia invites Hezbollah officials to Riyadh.....	62
• Saudi sends more tanks, arms to Bahrain	63
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	64
• U.S. special envoy, Pakistan army chief discuss Afghan reconciliation.....	64
• Afghans protest US-led civilian killings.....	65

1. IRAQ

- **BREAKING NEWS Hawija protestors: We will not leave the sit-in square alive**

Kirkuk (NINA) – Spokesman for Hawija sit-in protestors, Hamid al-Jabouri, said that protestors would not leave the sit-in square alive, though it is under siege, because they demand justice, not injustice.

In a statement to the press on Sunday, Apr. 21, Jabouri said that the protestors would not evacuate the sit-in square alive, even if it is stormed after a military siege by the 12th Division forces, since Friday noon.

He added, "We are surprised to be accused of having weapons we have confiscated from a checkpoint, instead of making the military accountable for imposing a siege on us. We are accused of being responsible for the siege, while the only thing we ask for is our legitimate rights."

Jabouri went on saying, "We asked Kirkuk's lawmakers, the military and the dignitaries of Hawija to come and search

the place and make sure that our protest is peaceful, legal and unarmed."

He went on saying that the statement of the Army Commander, Gen. Ali Ghaidan, contradicts facts, because the protestors do not have weapons, and when quarrel broke the military opened fire at the protestors, because it has been proven that bullets used in injuring the soldier belonged to the military.

Earlier, a high level security source at the Dijla Operations' 12th Division, in charge of Diyal, Kirkuk and Salaheddin provinces, said that military force has been sent to Hawija.

In statement to NINA, the source said that three emergency police regiments and two rapid reaction police regiments from Salaheddin province, in addition to a police brigade from Diyala province military force has been sent to storm the sit-in protest square in Hawija.

It is worth mentioning that the Commander of the Army, Gen. Ali Ghaidan, has given the protestors in Hawija an ultimatum, until Sunday

afternoon, to turn in those responsible for attacking the checkpoint.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHHDDM

Iraqiya MP: We'll demand to replace Kobler if continues his / Non-neutral / approach.

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Ibrahim al-Mutlaq the head of the UN mission in Iraq, Martin Kobler to demand to replace him if he continues what he described as "being not neutral with the Iraqi people."

He said in a press statement: "This person was not neutral in most cases, he is biased to the government in a manner far from humanitarian and human rights in order to achieve personal interests."

Mutlaq added: "We already drawn attention to this subject, and if Kobler continued in his approach in handling with the Iraqi people, it would be certain that we will demand to replace him."

He continued: "We have indications, not limited to the issue of residents of Liberty,

but belong to other things, after appeals and statements from the people of Anbar, Kobler began to boredom, and if he unable to change his approach, we will demand to replace him with another person."

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHHDF

- **Calls for the UN to intervene to lift the siege imposed on the protesters of Hawija.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Talal al-Zobaie asked the United Nations to intervene to lift the siege imposed by the security forces on the sit-in Square in Hawija, of Kirkuk province.



He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today 21. April : "The security forces surrounded protesters in Hawija two days ago and prevent the entry of water and food, which is alarming heavily

on this region and the political forces have to prevent what is happening before it takes other dimensions."

Zobaie called on human rights organizations to intervene as these practices are breaches of human rights.

It is mentioned that the President of the House of Representatives Osama al-Nujaifi expressed grave concern to what is happening in Hawija, calling for urgent solutions to the tragedy suffered by sitters and speed up to enter foods and water to the sit-in Square and end the siege.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHGMMHJ

- **Iraq counts votes from first polls since U.S. pullout**

IRAQ COUNTS VOTES FROM FIRST POLLS SINCE U.S. PULLOUT



Iraqi election officials were to begin counting votes on Sunday from the country's first elections since US troops departed, which served as a key test of its stability amid a spike in violence.

Attacks killed three people on election day, a fraction of those who died in a wave of violence preceding Saturday's polls, which seemed generally well-organized, according to diplomats touring polling stations and AFP journalists.

Turnout for the provincial vote was about 51 percent, according to officials from Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission.

But the credibility of the elections came into question, as 14 candidates were killed in attacks ahead of the polls and a third of Iraq's provinces -- all of them mainly Sunni Arab or Kurdish -- not voting due to security concerns and political disputes.

The vote for provincial councils, responsible for naming governors who lead local reconstruction, administration and finances, is seen as a key gauge of

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's popularity ahead of a general election next year.

Every Iraqi who votes "is saying to the enemies of the political process that we are not going back," Maliki said on state television after casting his ballot at the Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone.

Security was tight on Saturday, with voters searched before entering polling stations and numerous new checkpoints set up by soldiers and police in Baghdad.

For most of the day, only approved vehicles were allowed on the streets, which were largely deserted except for security forces, and groups of children who took the opportunity to play football. Despite heightened security in Baghdad and elsewhere, militants were still able to carry out attacks, although the death toll was much lower than the preceding six days, when an average of 20 people were killed daily.

Nine mortar rounds, four bombings and five stun grenades, all outside Baghdad, killed three people and wounded two, officials said.

And gunmen dressed in police uniforms entered a polling station near Baquba, north of Baghdad, burned boxes of ballots, then escaped.

The elections, which came a decade after U.S.-led forces ousted now-executed dictator Saddam Hussein, were the first since parliamentary polls in March 2010, and also the first time Iraqi forces secured elections without support from American or other international forces since 2003. U.S. troops withdrew in December 2011.

An estimated 13.8 million Iraqis were eligible to vote for more than 8,000 candidates, with 378 seats being contested.

Major issues affecting voters such as poor public services and rampant corruption were largely ignored during the campaign.

http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=4255

- **Breaking News ... NGO's monitored breaches**



Shafaq News / Two Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that monitored the provincial elections took place on Sunday, announced that the proportion of the total vote in the elections is 46% not 50% , as announced by the Independent Higher Electoral Commission.

A report by Tamouz and Shams Aab organization, read at a news conference attended by “Shafaq News”, that “The number of election observers is 7111 observers distributed on 7 thousand electoral centers and 45 thousand polling stations”, adding “300 electoral breaches have been monitored”.

“The propaganda within the centers and outside it and the exploitation of institutions and state mechanisms in the election campaign of some parties in addition to the absence of the names of many voters even though the names were present in the former

electoral elections are all of the violations that we have observed also “.

“NGO’s demanded to accelerate the announcement of the voting results to prevent manipulation,” pointing out “to the unstable security situation in some areas of Baghdad, Babel, Diyala and Salahuddin”.

“Despite the high disciplines shown by the security forces in the protection of the election centers, some of security elements were observed urging voters to vote for a specific list”.

“A number of security forces were present in some voting halls and this put pressure on voters and violates the voter’s privacy and they have prevented also many voters from participating under unconvincing pretexts,” NGO’s statements added.

Regarding the elections that took place on Saturday in the 12 Iraqi provinces, was marred by the reluctance of many voters from participating, according to the statement of IHEC, the 50% of eligible voters came to the polling stations in those provinces, while some sources said that the ratio is less than that.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/585-8-breaking-news--ngos-monitored-breaches-.html>

Allawi: There are violations in the elections process.

BAGHDAD / NINA / The leader of the Iraqiya coalition, Iyad Allawi confirmed the existence of violations in the election process in some areas of Baghdad.

Allawi said in a press statement: "There are electoral violations in the areas of Taji, Yusifiyah, Latifiyah and Meshahida carried out by the security services by preventing citizens from traveling to the electoral centers to cast their ballots."

He added: "These measures indicate a defect in conducting the elections, which come amid marginalization and exclusion for some of the components within Iraqi society."

Allawi criticized the performance of the government, stressing that the political process is going according to wrong bases because it was built on the basis of

sectarianism and marginalization of the other, but this situation will not continue.

Allawi considered the Prime Minister's statements to form a majority government as test balloon, indicating that it does not serve the political process in the country.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHGKHF

- **Abdul Malik al-Sadi demands stopping the executions, warns that demonstrations might not remain peaceful**

Baghdad (NINA) – Clergyman Abdul Malik al-Sadi demanded the authority to put a stop to the executions, raids and arrests, as well as to give up the policy of exclusion, which he described of being based on sectarianism.

In a statement on Friday, Apr. 19, addressed to the politicians of all sides, Sadi called on them to stand by the people, and to withdraw from the government.

He also called on members of the armed forces to stand by the oppressed and not to obey orders that harm the Iraqis.

Sadi appealed to Shiite authorities to declare a clear stand in supporting the demonstrators' demand and call for implementing them.

He called on the protestors and demonstrators to keep up their demands, and keep up their peaceful protests, as well as respect security forces, unless they are attacked.

Sadi condemned the explosions that are afflicting the innocent, accusing the Government of being fully responsible for them.

As for the elections, Sadi called for voting to the qualified and honest; not to vote in accordance to being relative or for interest and partisanship.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHGJFF

- **Maliki: Iraqi participation in elections is a message to the enemies that we will not retreat.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said Iraqi participation in provincial elections is a message to the enemies of the political process that we will not retreat.

He said in press statements following his vote in provincial elections that these elections are also reassure message that Iraq is okay and its people are determined to exercise this democratic experiment.

He added that he sends a message to all politicians that they have to prove to the world that they are the people to lead Iraq.

He explained that these elections is taking place for the first time after the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq, which means that the Iraqis are capable of holding the elections and ensure its success.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHGJLF

Iraqiya MP: We'll demand to replace Kobler if continues his / Non-neutral / approach.

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Ibrahim al-Mutlaq the head of the UN mission in Iraq, Martin Kobler to demand to replace him if he continues what he described as "being not neutral with the Iraqi people."

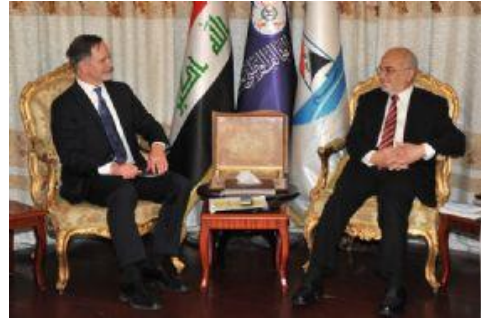
He said in a press statement: "This person was not neutral in most cases, he is biased to the government in a manner far from humanitarian and human rights in order to achieve personal interests."

Mutlaq added: "We already drawn attention to this subject, and if Kobler continued in his approach in handling with the Iraqi people, it would be certain that we will demand to replace him."

He continued: "We have indications, not limited to the issue of residents of Liberty, but belong to other things, after appeals and statements from the people of Anbar, Kobler began to boredom, and if he unable to change his approach, we will demand to replace him with another person."

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHHDF

- **Jafari in meeting with US Ambassador: Wining the election is not in number of seat rather in success of experiment**



Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jafari, discussed with US Ambassador to Iraq, Robert Beecroft, political issues and the election process witnessed by Iraq's provinces.

A statement on Sunday, Apr. 21, by Jafari's Office quoted him saying that the election achieved national success for Iraq's democratic experiment. He added that the real gain is not in number of votes and seats won, rather its in the success of the election process and Iraq's democratic process, as well as in offering best services

to the citizens. He stressed the necessity to provide best environment for elections in Anbar and Niniveh to succeed. / End.

For his part, Ambassador Becroft congratulated Jafari and the Iraqi people on the election, praising the National Alliance's role in bringing views of various political forces close together, expressing his country's support to provide services and contribute toward solving outstanding problems

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHHGDGE

- **Gen. Ghaidan: Maliki instructed the Army for restraint**

Baghdad (NINA) – Commander of the Army, Gen. Ali Ghaidan, denied that the Army intends to storm the sit-in square in Hawija.

In a statement to the press on Sunday, Apr. 21, Gen. Ghaidan said that, "Commander in Chief, Nuri al-Maliki, instructed the Army for calming and self-restraint." He added that the armed forces

surrounding the protestors' sit-in square in Hawija to prevent terrorists entering.

He added, "The Army is not politically or sectarian oriented, as some describe it, it is for all of Iraq." He warned anyone who would defame it.

Gen. Ghaidan went on saying that Hawija is now safe, no stranger enters it, and the Army is to protect it. He added that talks underway with tribal chiefs to peacefully turn in the elements that attacked the Army, with no need for bloodshed.

It is noteworthy that Commander of the Army, Gen. Ghaidan, gave protestors an ultimatum t until Sunday afternoon to turn in the military checkpoint's attackers, and return the weapons they have seized.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHHGDGD

- **Iraqis see some irregularities in provincial vote**



BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi election monitors on Sunday reported multiple irregularities in the country's first provincial vote since US troops left, but were unclear as to whether results would be affected.

In an initial report, two non-governmental organizations, Shams and Tamoz, said over 300 irregularities had been recorded by the 7,000 monitors they had sent across Iraq to cover Saturday's polls.

The vote was a key test of Iraq's short experience with democratic elections, because it was the first one run since the US withdrawal in December 2011. Allegations of vote fixing are not uncommon following elections in the country.

In one instance, Hoger Jato of Shams said some security force members had helped specific campaigns while on duty, with some advising voters at polling centers on who to support. Elsewhere, electoral commission employees reportedly failed to check the

identities of voters, allowing them to cast ballots on behalf of others.

Announcing the report at a news conference in Baghdad, the NGOs did not say whether the irregularities were widespread enough to significantly affect the election's outcome.

The reports came as Iraqis began counting votes, unloading hundreds of ballot boxes from trucks and tallying the figures in the heavily guarded counting centers. Employees of the country's independent electoral commission went through the ballots under supervision of political party representatives.

Votes are first manually sorted before being entered into a computerized system. Final results are expected in several days.

Despite widespread violence in the run-up to the election that left at least 14 candidates dead, Saturday's voting was mostly peaceful. A few mortar shells and small bombs struck near polling centers, wounding at least six people.

The turnout stood at 51 percent, the same as at the last provincial elections in 2009. When some eligible voters complained they did not find their names on the voting rolls, the

election commission blamed them for not updating their information.

Hours after closing the polls, the UN Special Representative, Martin Kobler, praised the vote as well-organized and peaceful.

“Credible elections are critical to the country’s stability,” Kobler said in a statement.

The voting took place in 12 of Iraq’s 18 provinces. Voting was not scheduled in the ethnically-mixed province of Tamim, where ethnic groups have not reached a power-sharing deal. The last election for local officials there was in 2005. Elections were also delayed in two provinces because of unstable security conditions, and the country’s autonomous three-province northern region was not included.

Thousands of candidates from 50 electoral blocs are vying for 378 seats on provincial councils. The Iraqi constitution does not give wide powers to provincial councils, but they have some say on security matters. They also negotiate local business deals and allocate funds.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/iraqis-see-some-irregularities-in-provincial-vote/>

2. IRAN

• Supreme Leader's Aide: Iran's Influence Growing, World Powers in Decline

TEHRAN (FNA)- The growing influence of Iran as a regional power has caused a decline in the world powers' clout in the region, a senior advisor of the Iranian Supreme Leader said, stressing that the country's power was shown to the world during the 8-day war in Palestine in late 2012, when an ally of Iran made Israel regret its assault on Gaza.



"We are the top regional power politically and the yardstick of this fact is the level of influence (that a given country has) on the powers, and I know no country which has the same influence and clout that Iran has," Supreme Leader's Advisor for International Affairs and presidential hopeful Ali Akbar Velayati said on Sunday.

He downplayed the recent war rhetoric by certain world powers and Israel against Iran, and said "no power can spread war into Iran today".

Underlining Iran's power, Velayati reminded the 2012 Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip during which Hamas missiles created horror among Israelis, and said, "A small group of our allies managed to make three million Israelis hide in the basements by means of (firing) a number of small rockets."

"They should know that they can no more speak about their 'Nile to Euphrates Plan' or adoption of the military option against Iran and they should know that Iran enjoys a transnational power and might," Velayati underlined.

Iranian officials have always voiced firm support for resistance groups in Palestine against Israel's hawkish and warmongering policies and measures.

Iran's technological support for Hamas and other Palestinian groups' weapons systems helped them defeat Israel on the 8-day onslaught on the Gaza Strip late 2012.

Political and military experts believe that Israel was shocked and later pushed to reassess its calculations after Palestinian groups responded to the Israeli army's aggression on Gaza with a stunning retaliation, hitting Tel Aviv, a move which eventually made Israel start an overture and change its war rhetoric about an impending ground incursion into Gaza to a tone of compromise in pursuit of truce.

Israel was surprised when Palestinians in Gaza targeted Tel Aviv, 70km away from the foremost Palestinian territories, for the first time. The longest range recorded by Palestinian missiles earlier had been 40km.

Things grew worse for Israeli rulers when Hamas targeted Herzliya, a city 11km North of Tel Aviv.

Targeting Herzliya meant that Palestinian resistance groups now had the capability to hit targets, at least, 80km away, much beyond the previously thought 40-km range for Palestinian missiles.

And this strategic weapon which changed the scene of the war between Israel and Palestinians is a rocket known as Fajr-5.

Fajr-class rockets, Fajr-5 (Dawn 5) in particular, are known and described by the world military experts, as a weapon system appropriate for asymmetric wars, where the military power of the conflicting sides differs significantly.

The two-stage version of Fajr-5 rockets are the most effective and longest range of the Fajr-class rockets and can be used against enemy targets such as command and control centers, logistics, radar, communication, airports, plants and economic and political centers.

Israel had called up thousands of reservists and massed troops along the border with Gaza, signaling a ground invasion of the densely populated seaside strip could be imminent. But the Palestinian groups' missile attacks on Tel Aviv and the areas in the vicinity of Jerusalem frightened the Israeli regime, making it drop its aggression plans and ask for third party mediation.

Eventually, a Cairo-mediated ceasefire agreement, which took effect on November 21, ended the Israeli attacks, which killed more than 165 Palestinians and injured about 1,269 others.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107162964>

- **Iran's Former Health Minister to Run for President**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Former Iranian Health Minister Kamran Baqeri Lankarani announced that he would run in the upcoming presidential election.



Baqeri Lankarani officially announced his candidacy here in Tehran on Sunday.

In September, the Iranian interior ministry announced that the country will hold the

11th presidential election on June 14, 2013.

The presidential hopefuls will register from May 7 to 11.

So far, Head of the State Inspectorate Organization of Iran Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, senior member of Iran Expediency Council Hassan Rohani, First Vice Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Mohammad Reza Bahonar, Vice Speaker of the parliament Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard, Secretary of the Expediency Council Mohsen Rezaei, Iranian Minister of Road and Urbanization Ali Nikzad, former intelligence minister Ali Fallahian, former foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki, and Member of the Iranian Parliament Alireza Zakani have declared their intention to run for president.

Iran's former minister of housing and urban development, Mohammad Saedi-Kia, declared his candidacy on March 18.

The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election and the Guardian Council vets the candidates for qualifications.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163302>

- **Ahmadinejad Sees Western Sanctions as "Psycho War"**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The western sanctions against Iran serve psychological purposes rather than being a measure of effective use, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Sunday, stressing that enemy moves like this can never deter Iran on its path of growth and advancement.



"The enemies of the Iranian nation try to block the nation's progress and they have waged a massive psychological war (on the country)," Ahmadinejad said, addressing people in the Southwestern city of Ahwaz, Khouzestan province, today.

He referred to the economic sanctions imposed by the US and its allies against Iran, and said similar to the case of the nuclear issue that enemies couldn't impede the country's progress, they will not succeed in countering the Iranian nation in the economic arena either.

Ahmadinejad underlined the necessity for people's partnership in implementing economic projects, and said, "If we cede control over economy to the people, we can take a major step and turn into the most powerful nation of the world in 4 to 5 years."

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions and the western embargos for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163092>

- **Iranian Commander: US to Pay Price for Supporting Terrorist MKO**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces for Cultural Affairs and Defense Publicity Brigadier

General Massoud Jazayeri condemned Washington for opening an office for the anti-Iran terrorist Mojahedin-e Khalq near the White House, and said the US will pay the price for supporting the terrorist group.



"Despite their grandiose mottos, the Americans showed that they don't care about the common human norms and values and human rights, and the human society will have no doubt that they will pay the price for this mistake both on the internal and international arena," Jazayeri told FNA on Saturday.

"It is a ridiculous reality that Americans are eager to negotiate with Iran on one scene and concurrently, shelter the terrorists who are the murderers of the Iranian nation's offspring and establish an office for them on another scene," he added.

The US recently allowed the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MKO, also known as MEK, PMOI and NCRI) to open its Washington office just a block away from the White House.

The opening of the office of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella group dominated by the MKO, was attended by several former US officials.

The US permission to the MKO to open its branch in Washington came as American officials have said that they "don't consider the MKO a viable Iranian opposition group or believe it can promote democratic values in Iran", Radio Free Europe said in a report.

Yet at the April 11 inauguration of the office, President Barack Obama's former national security adviser, US General James Jones said the opening of the office was an "important moment" and "a step in the right direction."

Former US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, former US Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley, former US Representative Patrick Kennedy, and the former deputy director

of the CIA's National Clandestine Service, John Sano, were also in attendance.

In the past, former US officials have reportedly been paid large sums of money to speak at the MKO's public events and lobby the State Department on its behalf.

Two former high-profile US officials acknowledged that they had been paid by the MKO to endorse de-listing the group from the US State Department's list of terrorist groups, a report said two years ago.

The report released by the Inter Press Service in early March, 2011 said that for years now, supporters of the anti-Iran terrorist group have lobbied in vain to have the organization taken off the US terrorism list.

"A growing number of high-profile defense and foreign policy big-wigs - from former Central Command Chief Anthony Zinni to former Congressman and think tank head Lee Hamilton - have given paid speeches either endorsing de-listing or questioning why the group remains on the list when it has not committed a known

terrorist act for many years," Inter Press Service stated.

Ray Tanter, a National Security Council staffer under Ronald Reagan and founder of the Iran Policy Committee, a group that has sought MKO de-listing since 2005, said there have been six recent panels of high-profile individuals dealing with the topic: two in Paris, where the MKO's political wing, the National Council of Resistance, is headquartered; one in Brussels, seat of the European Parliament; and three in Washington organized by a group called Executive Action LLC.

Executive Action head Neil Livingstone, a former member of the Iran Policy Committee, said another panel might be organized soon on Capitol Hill, the report by the Inter Press Service said.

"Iran-American cultural organizations" had approached him about doing the logistics for the meetings, he said, without giving specific names.

The report added that Zinni, who spoke before a Washington audience January 20, 2011 - along with a star-studded bipartisan cast that included former

national security adviser Jim Jones, former FBI director Louis Freeh and former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson - said in an interview that he was unaware of the group's cultist aspects but still felt it should be taken off the State Department list if it disavowed terrorism.

He also said that the US was responsible for the fate of more than 3,000 MKO members still at the Camp Ashraf even though the camp is now under Iraqi sovereignty.

Zinni acknowledged that he had been paid his "standard fee" for speaking at the Iran event but would not say how much that was. He said he was never told what to say about the MKO, although he clearly knew the views of those sponsoring the event.

Hamilton, a former chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee who headed the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Center for 12 years until last fall, told IPS that he had also been paid "a substantial amount" to appear on a panel Feb. 19, 2011 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington.

Hamilton appeared with Richardson, two former Joint Chiefs of Staff, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Walter Slocombe, former State Department counterterrorism coordinator Dell Dailey and ex-Senator Robert Torricelli of New Jersey, the report added.

At the event, while Hamilton did not call for removing the MKO from the list immediately, he said he was "puzzled" by why the group remained so designated.

In the subsequent interview, Hamilton - who once had access to classified information - said, "I haven't seen any reasons that are current" for the MKO to be branded as terrorist.

He also conceded, however, that he was not aware of the cult-like nature of the group.

"They presented me with a platform that was thoroughly democratic," Hamilton said. "Were they misleading me? You always can be misled."

The US formally removed the MKO from its list of terror organizations in early

September, one week after the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, sent the US Congress a classified communication about the move. The decision made by Clinton enabled the group to have its assets under US jurisdiction unfrozen and do business with American entities, the State Department said in a statement at the time.

An aide to former US Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed deep regret over the removal of the terrorist group from the US blacklist, stressing that MKO is still a terrorist group.

"I think delisting the MKO was a terrible move in all aspects," Colin Powell's Chief of Staff Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson said in an interview with Real News Network in November, 2012.

"A terrible move because it basically acknowledged a terrorist group is now not a terrorist group anymore, and they clearly certainly still are," he added.

The MKO, founded in the 1960s, blended elements of Islamism and Stalinism and participated in the overthrow of the US-backed Shah of Iran in 1979. Ahead of the

revolution, the MKO conducted attacks and assassinations against both Iranian and Western targets.

The group started assassination of the citizens and officials after the revolution in a bid to take control of the newly-established Islamic Republic. It killed several of Iran's new leaders in the early years after the revolution, including the then President, Mohammad Ali Rajayee, Prime Minister, Mohammad Javad Bahonar and the Judiciary Chief, Mohammad Hossein Beheshti who were killed in bomb attacks by MKO members in 1981.

The group fled to Iraq in 1986, where it was protected by Saddam Hussein and where it helped the Iraqi dictator suppress Shiite and Kurd uprisings in the country.

The terrorist group joined Saddam's army during the Iraqi imposed war on Iran (1980-1988) and helped Saddam and killed thousands of Iranian civilians and soldiers during the US-backed Iraqi imposed war on Iran.

Since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the group, which now adheres to a pro-free-

market philosophy, has been strongly backed by neo-conservatives in the United States, who argued for the MKO to be taken off the US terror list.

In September 2012, the last groups of the MKO terrorists left Camp Ashraf, their main training center in Iraq's Diyala province. They have been transferred to Camp Liberty transient facility near Baghdad.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107162590>

- **Oil Minister: Iran, Iraq Main Rivals for OPEC Presidency**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran and Iraq are in tight rivalry over the post of the Secretary General of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) after speculations about Saudi Arabia's retreat, Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi announced on Saturday.



"Saudi Arabia's firm decision to retreat its candidacy for the post of OPEC Secretary-General has not yet been announced, but it seems that Iran and Iraq are stronger candidates for the post than Saudi Arabia," Qassemi said in a press conference in Tehran today.

"I have heard some news that Saudi Arabia wants to retreat his nominee from the upcoming Secretary-General election in a bid to introduce him as its candidate for the post of the head of OPEC Research Institute," he added.

Qassemi underlined Iran's resolve to introduce a candidate, possibly Former Oil Minister Gholam Hossein Nozari, for the OPEC Secretary-General post, and said the country is having strenuous consultations with other members of the oil cartel in a bid to increase Nozari's chance.

Iran and Iraq have both nominated former oil ministers, Gholam Hossein Nozari and

Thamer Ghadban for the post. Saudi Arabia's candidate is reportedly Majid Moneef, the country's former representative on OPEC's governing board.

Iran has always been a price hawk, seeking to keep prices as high as the market will entertain, while the Saudis and the other Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf have generally sought to lower prices to support the western powers that are their main customers.

The recovery of Iraq's badly rundown oil industry since Saddam's downfall has thrust it back into the major producers' league and it needs high prices to generate the funds for its post-Saddam reconstruction.

So it has moved from its alignment with Saudi Arabia to stand alongside Iran within OPEC, adding significant weight to the price hawks.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107162600>

- **Iran Urges Regional Cooperation to Confront Drug-Trafficking via Sea Routes**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's drug combat police chief General Ali Moayyedi cautioned that drug-traffickers are making an increasing use of waterways due to the Iranian police's tight control over land borders, and asked the regional states to launch comprehensive cooperation to stop drug-trafficking via sea routes.



Addressing a meeting on campaign against drug-trafficking via sea routes here in Tehran on Sunday, Commander of the Iranian police's anti-narcotics squad General Ali Moayyedi pointed to the growing trend of drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan despite the US and NATO forces' presence in the country, and stated, "Today, a new front (of drug-trafficking) has been shaped in the sea that which necessitates greater

cooperation among the regional countries."

Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Iran Antonio De Leo was also present at the meeting.

As regards the reasons behind the change in drug-trafficking routes, the commander said the Iranian police measures along Iran-Afghanistan land borders, unidentified sea routes, the growth in the demand for narcotics in different countries, including the Persian Gulf littoral states, have encouraged drug-traffickers to resort to the sea for smuggling their drug cargoes.

He further pointed to Iran's proposals for stopping drug-trafficking via sea routes, and said these proposals include establishment of a data base on the traffickers operating through waterways, devising mechanisms for joint operations among the regional states and introducing joint liaison officers for further cooperation among regional states.

Iran shares open borders on the West with Iraq and Turkey, on the East with

Afghanistan and Pakistan, on the South with the Persian Gulf littoral states and the Sea of Oman, on the North with Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea, and on the North East with Turkmenistan.

Eastern Iran borders Afghanistan, which is the world's number one opium and drug producer. Iran's geographical position has made the country a favorite transit corridor for drug traffickers who intend to smuggle their cargoes from Afghanistan to drug dealers in Europe.

Speaking to FNA in October, Lieutenant Commander of Iran's Border Guard Forces General Ahmad Gravand said that Iran now has "all-out control" over the country's borders, specially in the East.

"(Controlling) the Iran-Afghanistan borders is a top priority of the Iranian police's border guards unit," he stated at the time, adding that police is digging canals and using optical electronic systems to monitor the bordering areas and prevent drug convoys from crossing the country's borderline.

In September, Commander of the Iranian Border Guard Units General Hossein Zolfaqari said that the country is closely monitoring its border regions through high-tech equipments, including optical and radar systems.

Speaking to reporters at the time, Zolfaqari underlined the significance of the use of high-tech equipments and technologies in border control, adding that Iranian border guard units are using radar and optic systems to control the country's borders.

Iran leads international efforts in fighting drug networks and narcotic traffickers. According to the statistical figures released by the UN, Iran ranks first among the world countries in preventing entry of drugs and decreasing demand for narcotics.

The United Nations credits Iran with the seizure of 89 percent of the opium netted around the world.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163014>

- **Negotiator: Iran's Nuclear Stance Not Affected by Domestic Politics**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran was ready to strike a final deal with the world powers in the latest round of talks in Almaty, but the sextet paused the negotiations in anticipation of a possible change in Iran's stance following the June presidential election, a negotiator said, and stressed that Tehran's position is irrevocable and is not influenced by developments on the scene of domestic politics.



Addressing a meeting with the diplomatic corps in Tehran on Sunday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araçchi, who is also a member of the Iranian team of negotiators, noted the latest round of negotiations between Iran and the six world powers in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and said, "The Iranian delegation in the talks was ready for continued negotiations until achievement of a final agreement, but it

was the opposite side which apparently lacked the necessary readiness and permission (to proceed with the negotiations) and needed to know the views of their capitals."

Araqchi, who is the foreign ministry's envoy to the talks with the world powers, said that Iran was ready to move on two paths towards a deal with the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany), which included continued talks in the form of step-by-step confidence-building measures, which is desired by the six world powers, but is long and time-consuming.

The other path is a shortcut in which the world powers recognize Iran's rights, specially uranium enrichment, avoid hostile moves and annul sanctions to reach results rapidly, he added, and explained that Iran is ready to move on either path, although it likes the second option.

He implied that the representatives of the world powers halted the talks to see the fate of the June presidential election in Iran anticipating that the country's new president might bring a change to

Tehran's nuclear stance, and stressed, "The internal political developments do not affect the trend of the nuclear talks."

He expressed the hope that the G5+1 would grasp a correct understanding of Iran's proposals and return to the talks with a positive approach.

Earlier this month, Iran and the G5+1 wrapped up two days of intensive negotiations in Almaty after the delegations of the world powers demanded further consultations with their capitals.

The Iranian team was led by Iran's Top Negotiator Saeed Jalili, who is also the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), and the G5+1's representatives were presided by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

Western media raised some speculations that the continuation of talks would depend on the upcoming presidential election in Iran, and that nothing substantial would take place under the present conditions.

Following the Almaty talks, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast described the meetings with the world powers in Kazakhstan as "positive", and said Tehran is waiting for the opposite side's response to its proposals.

"The two sides' comments described as positive the start of straightforward and serious expression of views, and to take a correct step, our officials expressed their views and the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) should now respond," Mehman-Parast said at a weekly press conference in Tehran.

"We are (now) waiting for Mrs. Ashton's response and her consultations with the G5+1," he added.

Iran had announced a day prior to the start of the talks that it would enter the negotiations with the G5+1 with clear, groundbreaking proposals.

Iran has so far ruled out halting or limiting its nuclear work in exchange for trade and other incentives, saying that renouncing its rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) would encourage the world

powers to put further pressure on the country and would not lead to a change in the West's hardline stance on Tehran.

Iran is under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment. The United States and the European Union have ratcheted up their sanctions on Iran this year to force it to curb its nuclear program.

Iranian officials have always shrugged off the sanctions, saying that pressures make them strong and reinvigorate their resolve to further move towards self-sufficiency.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163142>

- **Senior MP Warns Israel against Consequences of Military Act against Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian legislator warned Israel to stay away from military action against Iran, cautioning that such a folly would lead to Tehran's crushing response, which will wipe the Zionist regime off the map.



"The Zionist regime should stop thinking about possible adventurism against Iran because this fake regime will definitely be wiped off the map once it errs," Vice-Chairman of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mansour Haqiqatpour told the parliament's news website on Saturday.

"Certainly, any possible Israeli attack (on Iran) will have horrible consequences for the regime," he added.

In relevant remarks on Thursday, Commander of the Iranian Army Major General Ataollah Salehi dismissed Israel's growing war rhetoric against Iran as insignificant, but meantime reiterated that Iran is fully prepared to repel enemy threats and attacks.

The Zionist regime is incapable of attacking Iran and is too little to threaten Iran, Salehi said.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony to mark the National Army Day, he said that the army is fully prepared to counter any adventure by the enemies by an overwhelming counterattack.

The Zionist regime's threats should not be taken seriously, he said, noting that dogs are not expected to do anything but barking.

Israel and its close ally the United States accuse Iran of seeking a nuclear weapon, while they have never presented any corroborative document to substantiate their allegations. Both Washington and Tel Aviv possess advanced weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear warheads.

Iran vehemently denies the charges, insisting that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

The Zionist regime has recently intensified its war rhetoric against Tehran, warning that it plans to hit Iranian nuclear facilities.

Iran has, in return, warned that it would target Israel and its worldwide interests in case it comes under attack by the Tel Aviv.

The United States has also always stressed that military action is a main option for the White House to deter Iran's progress in the field of nuclear technology.

In response, Iran has warned it would hit the US, Israel and their worldwide interests and close the strategic Strait of Hormuz if it became the target of a military attack over its nuclear program.

Strait of Hormuz, the entrance to the strategic Persian Gulf waterway, is a major oil shipping route.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107162584>

- **'US MKO support shows double-standard policy'**



Hossein Naqavi Hosseini, the spokesman for the Majlis (parliament) Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy

The MKO has carried out numerous acts of violence against Iranian civilians and government officials.

An Iranian lawmaker says the United States support for anti-Iranian Mujahedine Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group shows the country's double-standard policy against terrorism.

Hossein Naqavi Hosseini, the spokesman for the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy, made the remarks in an interview with the Islamic Consultative Assembly News Agency (ICANA) on Sunday.

"MKO's terrorist background is known to everyone, and almost all international, legal, and political organizations...are

familiar with this issue,” Naqavi Hosseini stated.

The Iranian MP said the US permission to MKO to open an office in Washington proves its role in backing terrorism, adding, “Americans establish terrorist groups and support them to take actions favored by them [US].”

In early April, the MKO opened an office near the White House in Washington for the first time in 11 years.

In September 2012, the MKO was taken off the US State Department’s blacklist.

The MKO has carried out numerous acts of violence against Iranian civilians and government officials.

Out of the 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist attacks since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, some 12,000 of them have fallen victim to the acts of terror carried out by the MKO.

The MKO fled to Iraq in 1986, where it received the support of Iraq's executed dictator Saddam Hussein, and set up its camp near the Iranian border.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/21/299564/us-mko-support-shows-doublestandard-policy/>

- **Iran would not give up enrichment right**

An Iranian negotiating team member says Islamic Republic deems peaceful nuclear activity, including enrichment ‘it’s right.’

In the briefing session about the recent talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan held for foreign ambassadors and consulates in Tehran, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Asia and Oceania Affairs Deputy of the Foreign Ministry and its representative in nuclear negotiations, pointed to the most important developments culminated in Almaty 2nd round of talks.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran proposed its practical and viable steps to P5+1 in Almaty, that if accepted, would accelerate the pace for reaching the desired outcomes and trust-building, in a gradual basis, on Iran’s peaceful nuclear program,” he said.

He also asserted that the Iranian negotiating team had been prepared to continue talks to reach a final agreement, but the P5+1 had not had the necessary preparations and authority to continue, and needed the consent of their capital cities. “The Islamic Republic of Iran deems peaceful nuclear program including enrichment as its right in NPT framework and will not give up this right,” Araghchi said.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820436>

- **Sanctions Intended to Foster Unrest: Clapper**

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee today and reiterated the same assessment regarding Iran.

Clapper said that Iran has not yet decided to make a nuclear weapon and that “that the intent of sanctions is to spark dissent and unrest in the Iranian population.”

A number of independent reports had it that cancer treatment medications have been rare in Iran due to US and western sanctions on Iranian finance. Anti War website wrote that “the exact same statements – verbatim – were included in Clapper’s unclassified report, that “Iran is developing nuclear capabilities to enhance its security, prestige, and regional influence and give it the ability to develop nuclear weapons, should a decision be made to do so.” The Islamic Republic of Iran officials have frequently announced that Iran did not seek nuclear weapons, and it wants nuclear program for peaceful objectives.

Clapper added that “We do not know if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons,” and that “Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity to eventually produce nuclear weapons.”

Anti War report also wrote that “Again, undermining the bogus claims that Iran is an irrational and reckless actor, Clapper maintained the judgment that “Iran’s nuclear decision-making is guided by a cost-benefit approach,” balancing its own domestic interests with “the international political and security environment.”

Responding to a question about the impact sanctions have on the Iranian government, Clapper admitted that it was aimed at fostering unrest among the public.

On March 2013, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, in his address to the speaker and members of the Assembly of Experts, had said that “sanctions purportedly address nuclear program, but its main objective is long-term, which the Westerners have long sought.” The Leader believed that creating divide between the system and people as sanctions’ main purpose. “West was hoping that pressure on people would deploy them against the system, but what happened in Bahman 22nd, was against their intentions,” the Leader added.

Anti War report added that “Not mentioned in the session, of course, are the decades of repeated affirmations by senior Iranian officials that Iran rejects nuclear weapons on strategic, moral and religious grounds.”

“Furthermore, reports that Iran has continued converting its stockpiled

19.75% enriched uranium into fuel plates for its cancer-treating medical research reactor gained absolutely no traction within the Committee or Clapper’s comments,” Anti War report added.

“In response to questions, Clapper stated that the relationship between the American and Israeli intelligence communities has “never been closer or more pervasive,” the report said.

While each state continues to maintain its own unique sources for intelligence gathering, Clapper said, “generally speaking,” the United States and Israel are “on the same page” when it comes to Iran.

Meanwhile the New York Times reported yesterday that a \$ 10b US weapons agreement in the Middle East has been finalized, saying that the objective being improving defensive capabilities of US allies including the Zionist regime, Saudi Arabia, and UAE against what they call ‘an Iranian threat.’

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820427>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Jews, gentiles not equals in Israel**



The Israeli military's chief rabbi, Brigadier General Rafi Peretz

Head rabbi of the Israeli military Brigadier General Rafi Peretz believes non-Jews should not have equal rights with the Jews in Israel.

The rabbi said the idea of giving non-Jews equal rights in Israel goes against the principles of the Torah and government representatives have no authority to go against the Torah's teachings.

This is while many researchers believe that the current Torah has been distorted and does not contain the original teachings of the Prophet Moses.

Peretz's racist ruling has been published in a book titled "Laws of the Mezuzah"

published by the Israeli military's Rabbinate.

The book, which has been recently distributed in Israeli military bases, has been authored by rabbis, Capt. Alexander Rones, Capt. Dov Berkovich and Capt. Hananiah Shafran.

The book advocates installing mezuzahs, which are fixed to doorposts by Jews as a sign of faith, in army bases and says the presence of non-Jews in Israeli army bases cannot be used as a reason for not affixing mezuzahs there.

It also says even if government property is like a cooperative, since the public in general is Jewish, as long as non-Jews have not purchased a part of the assets, they have no right to government property.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/21/299489/jews-gentiles-not-equals-in-israel/>

Knesset to reconvene after month break

19th Knesset to return to session for first time since Passover break; new members in session only six weeks before break.



The eighteenth Knesset suspended itself for the election on October 15. The nineteenth was sworn in nearly four months later on February 5.

The new Knesset was in session for less than six weeks, but the MKs' work was limited during that time, because committees had not been formed and an opposition leader had not formally been appointed.

Now after a holiday break for Passover and Independence Day that lasted more than a month, the Knesset will be at full force starting Monday.

Monday will be devoted to ceremonies at Knesset committees in which new chairpersons take over from their predecessors. The Knesset will be asked to approve the appointment of Ronen Plot as its new director-general. Plot, who

replaces Dan Landau, was the director-general of the Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Ministry and the Immigrant Absorption Ministry when they were headed by new Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein.

There will also be seven no-confidence motions presented by the eight opposition factions. The only motion presented by two factions together is from Shas and United Torah Judaism. While all the motions presented by individual parties propose that their party leader become prime minister, the Shas-UTJ proposal recommends UTJ leader Ya'acov Litzman, not an MK from Shas, which is led by a triumvirate of leaders who do not get along.

Most of the no-co-confidence motions are on economic issues. The motions presented by the Arab factions protest more generally that the new government is "dangerous."

Edelstein vowed to crack down on gimmicks by MKs that harm the Knesset's image. He said he would have no tolerance for MKs who disturb Knesset proceedings.

The Knesset will disperse for another break in August for summer vacation and the fall Jewish holidays.

<http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Knesset-to-reconvene-after-month-break-310585>

- **Fatah-Hamas animosity trumps calls for unity**



RAMALLAH (AFP) -- After Palestinian Authority prime minister Salam Fayyad resigned, politicians immediately called for elections and a national unity government to reconcile bitter rivals Fatah and Hamas.

But entrenched animosity between the two sides, stretching beyond disagreement over Fayyad, suggested that any thaw in relations between Fatah and

Hamas, which control the West Bank and the Gaza Strip respectively, would be slow.

In Fayyad's first weekly radio address after resigning, the now caretaker premier called for "a general election as the only way to rebuild our political system and achieve our national goals," namely statehood, which would first require intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

"Just as there is no state without Jerusalem as its eternal capital, there is no state without the Gaza Strip, a part that cannot be partitioned from it," Fayyad said.

Hamas leaders met Friday in Doha, the base of the Islamist movement's exiled leader Khalid Mashaal, saying they would discuss "Palestinian reconciliation and developments in the Palestinian arena following Fayyad's resignation."

A senior member of president Mahmud Abbas's secular Fatah party, meanwhile, called on his leader to "hold consultations with Palestinian movements to form a national unity government and set a date for elections."

Azzam al-Ahmed said Fayyad's resignation a week ago, after an announcement by the elections commission that it was ready to carry out elections should they be called, was "favorable to... forming a national unity government."

But Abbas's Thursday pledge to launch talks "in the near future" on forming a new cabinet, despite what officials say is a two-week deadline to do so, avoided giving an exact date as the president prepared for a tour to Turkey and Europe.

In Turkey for two days from Saturday, Abbas will meet Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who is set to visit the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in May.

Fatah has openly criticized the Erdogan trip as fostering intra-Palestinian divisions.

"Any official, Arab, Muslim or foreign, who visits Gaza without reference to the legitimate Palestinian leadership is blessing and consolidating the division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip," Ahmed said in a separate interview with official Voice of Palestine radio on Monday.

And in a march in Gaza to mark Palestinian Prisoners' Day on Wednesday, a speech by a Fatah-affiliated politician and an animated retort by a Hamas member underlined the root of the division between the movements.

Palestinian People's Party member Talaat al-Safadi called for Hamas's Gaza premier Ismail Haniyeh to step down also, prompting Hamas member Ashraf Abu Zeida to seize Safadi's microphone and shout "Fayyad was an impostor, Haniyeh was chosen by the people!

After Hamas won a landslide victory in a January 2006 Palestinian general election, the West mounted a boycott of the movement.

Bickering with Fatah culminated in the formation of a unity government in 2007 but that collapsed in bloody street fighting in Gaza just months later.

Hamas never recognized Fayyad's authority as Palestinian premier, continuing instead to recognize Haniyeh.

The two movements signed a reconciliation deal in Cairo in 2011,

pledging to set up an interim consensus government of independents that would pave the way for legislative and presidential elections within 12 months.

But implementation of the accord stalled over the make-up of the interim government, and a February 2012 deal signed by Abbas and Mashaal in Doha intended to overcome outstanding differences was opposed by Hamas members in Gaza.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=587669>

- **Israel military court to hold 'urgent' hearing for Issawi**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- Israel's Ofer military court will hold an "urgent" hearing for Samer Issawi on Monday after he decided to stop taking vitamin supplements, his lawyer said Sunday.



Palestinian Prisoner Society lawyer Jawad Boulos told Ma'an that Issawi stopped taking supplements on Thursday to protest dissatisfaction with ongoing negotiations with Israel about his release.

There has been no positive progress in talks with Israel so far, Boulos added.

PA minister of prisoners Issa Qaraqe on Sunday condemned Israel for its "immoral attempts to blackmail and pressure Issawi," saying negotiations carried out by Israel were a waste of time.

Issawi's heartbeat has slowed down and he now weighs only 45 kg, Boulos added.

Israeli negotiators have been visiting Issawi at Kaplan Medical Center and pressuring him to accept proposals to end his hunger strike, Boulos said last week.

Issawi has been on hunger strike for over 265 days and has so far refused all offers by Israel to be exiled, insisting on being released to his home in Jerusalem.

Issawi, 33, was first arrested in 2002 and sentenced to 26 years for military

activities on behalf of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

He was released by Israel under a prisoner swap deal in October 2011, but rearrested last July for violating the terms of the agreement by traveling to the West Bank from east Jerusalem

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=587941>

- **Hamas bloc to participate in Nablus student elections**

NABLUS (Ma'an) -- A Hamas-affiliated bloc will participate in student union elections at An-Najah university on Tuesday, for the first time in six years, a statement from the Islamist group said Saturday.

"We have decided to resume student work and stand for elections after a six-year boycott, during which Hamas suffered from crackdowns and arrests by security services," a Hamas statement received by Ma'an said.

An official in Hamas' student bloc said the decision to run in elections would help

shake up the "state of laziness" of the Islamist group's student movement.

The party competing in student elections will be called "Muslim Palestine Bloc."

On Thursday, Fatah's Shabibeh (Youth) Students Bloc won Hebron University's student senate elections.

The list won 23 seats while the Hamas bloc won 17, and a bloc representing the leftist parties won one seat. The Palestine Belongs To All bloc won no seats.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=587511>

- **Israel Arrests 10 in West Bank, Summons 6 Others**

– Israeli forces Monday arrested 10 Palestinians from the West Bank cities of Jenin and Bethlehem and summoned six others for interrogation, according to local and security sources.

They told Wafa that forces arrested three brothers from Jenin refugee camp aged 26, 28 and 30 years after raiding their homes and forcing residents to stand outside in the cold weather for several

hours during which they searched the homes.

Forces also arrested another 45-year-old resident of the city of Jenin and confiscated his personal computer.

They also handed three other people from the village of Raba, east of Jenin, including two brothers, notices to appear before the Israeli security services at Salem military camp.

Meanwhile, forces arrested six Palestinians, including five in their early 20's, from the northern area of Bethlehem after raiding and searching several homes and summoned three brothers to the military office at Gush Etzion settlement bloc for interrogation

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22187>

- **Ya'alon on Iran threat: Israel prefers diplomatic solution**

In joint press conference with American counterpart, defense minister says diplomacy is preferable route to stopping

Iran's nuclear program. Hagel: US provides Israel with air supremacy in Middle East

In a joint press conference with Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon in Tel Aviv, Hagel said that it has been agreed that the US will provide Israel with a line of military means including missiles, advanced radar systems, tanker jets and V-22 Osprey jets, which Israel will be the first to receive.

The secretary of defense explained that this would guarantee Israeli air supremacy in the region and will provide the Air Force with long term options.

Ya'alon discussed the threat Iran poses to the region and the world and stated that while Israel prefers a diplomatic solution to the crisis with the Islamic Republic, it maintains the right to self defense.

Asked about his past statements against a military operation in Iran, Hagel said he has always maintained that every option should be on the table. He added that he supports President Barack Obama's stance on Iran which is not to allow it to obtain nuclear weapons.

Hagel and Ya'alon appeared to get along well during the press conference and the former thanked the Israeli minister for his "professional leadership."

Hagel landed in Israel on Sunday and said that the United States and Israel see "exactly the same" threat from Iran, but differ on when it may reach the point of requiring US or Israeli military action.

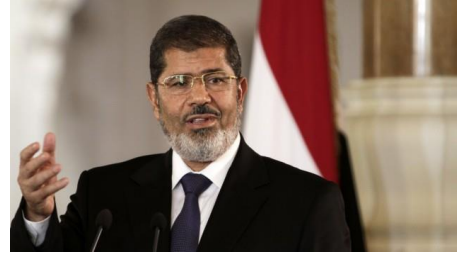
Hagel held out hope for a nonmilitary way to ending the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, but he also emphasized Washington's willingness to let Israel decide whether and when it might strike Tehran in self-defense.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4370829,00.html>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Morsi says he won't visit or warm ties with Israel**

Egyptian leader dismisses talk of increased cooperation with Jerusalem, noting, 'Even enemy states coordinate on security matters'



Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi said he wouldn't visit Israel, nor would he host an Israeli leader in Egypt, before peace is achieved between Israel and the Palestinians.

In a lengthy two-hour interview with the Qatari news channel Al-Jazeera on Saturday, Morsi stressed Egypt's commitment to the peace accords signed with Israel in 1979 as an expression of "the free will of the Egyptians," but added that true peace couldn't exist as long as Palestinians were denied their rights.

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"The peace treaty [with Israel] clearly states: 'just and comprehensive peace for the nations of the region.' I refer to the Palestinian people. Where is just and

comprehensive peace for the Palestinian people?”

Relations between Israel and Egypt sharply deteriorated in the wake of the popular Egyptian uprising of January 2011. Egyptian demonstrators stormed and ransacked the Israeli embassy in Cairo in September 2011, and the embassy has yet to be reopened. The appointment of a new Egyptian ambassador to Israel last October unleashed a flurry of condemnation against Morsi’s administration.

Asked about the prospect of normalization with Israel, Morsi said he could not foresee such a possibility materializing in the future.

“We must always talk about reality, not imagine future things which are impossible as we observe reality,” he said. “There are attempts [by Israel] to change the landscape, aggression, marginalization, and decades-long expansion. This must stop by international pressure, and Egypt will be at the heart of this [effort]. Can anyone imagine peace or stability in the Middle East without Egypt?”

Morsi dismissed recent comments by Israeli Chief of Staff Benny Gantz to the effect that security coordination with Egypt was much better today than it was in the past. He added, however, that if such improvement did indeed exist it was the result of a more self-confident Egypt.

“The security coordination has been going on for 30 years, it’s not new. Even enemy states coordinate on security matters to achieve stability along the border,” he said. “However, why do they claim that relations are better than in the past? Because there is a balance in decision-making. No one imposes their will on us.”

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/morsi-not-ready-to-normalize-ties-with-israel/>

- **'At least 82 hurt' as Islamists, rivals clash in Cairo**

CAIRO (AFP) -- At least 82 people were hurt in clashes after opposition activists marched on thousands of Islamists rallying outside a central Cairo court demanding judicial reform, an official said.

The fighting erupted near the iconic Tahrir Square, roughly 0.5 kilometers from where the Islamists had staged their rally, with each side throwing stones at the other.

A few activists on the opposition side fired homemade guns loaded with birdshot at the Islamists, who had taken over a main bridge that crosses the Nile River.

Five Islamist protesters wounded with birdshot were carried away by comrades, an AFP correspondent reported. The head of the Egyptian emergency services, Mohammed Sultan, told television at least 82 people had been hospitalized.

Riot police on foot and in armored vehicles had by nightfall succeeded in creating a cordon between the two sides, but ended up clashing with the opposition activists.

A riot police vehicle on a side street came under fire from birdshot rifles as Islamists ducked for cover behind the armored vehicle.

A police officer fired back what appeared to be birdshot from a rifle as Islamist

protesters cheered, but an interior ministry official later insisted to AFP that police had been armed with only tear gas and blanks.

"The people demand the toppling of the regime," the opposition protesters chanted -- the signature slogan of the early 2011 uprising that ousted president Hosni Mubarak and eventually brought Islamists into power.

"Morsi! Morsi!" the Islamists chanted back, referring to President Mohamed Mursi, a former Muslim Brotherhood leader.

An interior ministry statement said police had arrested 19 suspects in Cairo's clashes, including three young men suspected of torching a bus that had transported the Islamists to their rally.

Islamists and their opponents also clashed in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, where four people were wounded, the health ministry said in a statement.

The statement added that one protester had been injured in smaller clashes in the Nile Delta province of Dakahaliya.

Prime Minister Hisham Qandil issued a statement warning that "demonstrations accompanied by violence completely harm the security and economy of the country and hamper plans for reform."

Mursi's presidency has been plagued by deadly clashes between protesters and police, a revolt in Suez Canal cities, sectarian violence and a devastating economic crisis, which many fear is bringing Egypt to the brink of chaos.

Since Mursi's election in June, the Islamist leader has sought to face down an increasingly vocal opposition that accuses him of betraying the goals of the 2011 uprising. He has even had to confront unprecedented strikes by the police.

In Friday's clashes, police had initially withdrawn after their first attempt to separate the protesters. They thought the Islamists would use them as shields, the police lieutenant colonel who ordered his conscripts to retreat told AFP.

They later massed again when the Islamist protesters agreed to hang back.

The Islamists rallying on Friday were demanding an overhaul of the judiciary, which they believe is hostile to Mursi.

Last month, a court overturned a controversial decree by Morsi to sack state prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmud, appointed by Mubarak, and replace him with Talaat Abdallah.

The court believed Morsi had overstepped his powers in sacking Mahmud, who has been blamed for bungling the trials of former regime officials, including Mubarak himself, after the 2011 uprising.

The Islamist-controlled Senate is currently preparing to debate legislation that would lower the retirement age for judges from 70 to 60. Many judges see this as a maneuver to get rid of suspected anti-Mursi figures.

A court had also overturned Mursi's calling of parliamentary polls for this month, ruling that he had ratified a new electoral law without consulting the constitutional court.

Friday's violence came days after a negotiating team from the International

Monetary Fund left Egypt after talks over a key \$4.8 billion loan that Mursi's government hopes will revive the badly hit economy.

But any IMF loan would require considerable reforms, and progress in the talks has been hampered in part by the inability of the government to build a political consensus around the program.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=587564>

- **BREAKING: Court accepts prosecutor's request to keep Mubarak locked up**



Prosecutor-general challenges recent decision ordering Hosni Mubarak's release from jail pending further investigation into graft charges and judge keeps the ousted president behind bars

Authority denies Mubarak's health incident in prison

Egypt court approves Mubarak appeal for release pending corruption trial

Mubarak returns to Egypt's Tora Prison
A Cairo criminal court has accepted an appeal submitted by Egypt's prosecution against an earlier release order granted to former President Hosni Mubarak in his trial over graft charges.

Mubarak will remain detained for at least a 15-day period pending further investigation into the case.

The 84-year old ousted president had arrived at the Police Academy in the morning.

Based on the defence argument that a procedural hearing should not be held in public, the presiding judge ordered all attendees and journalists to leave the court room.

On Saturday, a court had ordered Mubarak's release while investigations continue into the graft charges. Nevertheless, he remained in Tora Prison

pending a verdict in a separate financial corruption case.

Earlier last week, a judge ordered Mubarak's release without bail pending a retrial over charges of complicity in the killing of protesters during the January 25 Revolution. He remained in jail due to the graft charges.

Last June, Mubarak received a life sentence for failing to prevent the killing of unarmed protesters during the revolution. In January, he was granted a retrial in the murder case due to procedural failings in the initial trial.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/69843/Egypt/Politics-/BREAKING-Court-accepts-prosecutors-request-to-keep.aspx>

- **Egypt proposes negotiations between Syrian regime, opposition**

Egypt proposed Saturday to conduct negotiations between the Syrian regime and opposition in Damascus — a change in Egypt's stance toward Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's rule.

The proposal was submitted during a ministerial meeting for the main countries supporting the Syrian opposition.

According to the proposal the Egyptian Interior Ministry posted on Facebook, negotiations would include the Syrian National Coalition and regime representatives who weren't involved in the bloodshed.

A statement added that Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr called for the meeting due to the "necessity of reaching a political solution for the Syrian crisis that guarantees preserving unity among the Syrian people."

President Mohamed Morsy had frequently expressed a more direct approach, particularly in his 5 September speech at an Arab League meeting in Cairo, in which he called on the Syrian leader to step down.

Morsy addressed the Syrian leadership saying, "Don't listen to voices that persuade you to stay. Your presence will not remain for a long time."

He also added that the moment was the time for change.

The change comes one day after Morsy made statements at a news conference in Russia, during which he declared that Egypt's and Russia's stances toward the Syrian conflict are similar.

Following the meeting with Russian officials, Morsy also called for a loan and an increase in Russian grain exports to Egypt in return for providing maritime services to the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. Morsy also proposed the development of a peaceful nuclear project for constructing nuclear plants for electricity and oil and gas excavation.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-proposes-negotiations-between-syrian-regime-opposition>

- **Islamist party power erodes across Maghreb**

Almost two years after the Arab Spring carried Islamist parties to power, despair has replaced optimism.

The murder of Tunisian secular opposition figure Chokri Belaid in February may have been a turning point for the region. His assassination plunged Tunisia into its worst political crisis since the revolution, sparked nationwide protests and forced the Islamist government to concede some of the control won in the country's first elections.

Despite the Ennahda Movement's effort to appease the population, concern over the extremist threat has only grown since the killing of the secular politician. Students were attacked for performing internet dance craze "Harlem Shake" and on April 10th, salafists tried to kill a Nabeul headmaster for refusing entry to a student in niqab.

With a moderate Islamist party in power, salafists been accused of using the opportunity to push their agenda.

Salafists are an extremist current who aim "to destroy all the gains that the country has made in terms of public and private freedoms", according to journalist Hamadi Maamri.

"It's true that Tunisians may have chosen an Islamist movement to run the country's affairs, but they will never accept Salafists as a political actor in the country to decide their fate," Maamri adds.

More than 70 per cent of Tunisians are worried about the upswing in religious extremism, a survey by Al Maghreb/Sigma found.

"This is a danger to the state, social peace, tourism and investments," Tunis school teacher Mohsen Dlisi tells Magharebia. "We're under continuous pressures and restrictions because they [salafists] want to push the country to apply sharia."

Meanwhile, Islamist-backed President Moncef Marzouki may face a no-confidence vote after he warned that "secular extremists" could spark a bloody revolution in which they would be "hanged", AFP reported on Tuesday (April 16th).

Insecurity continues to rattle neighbouring Libya, where Ansar al-Sharia and scores of small groups of radical Islamists emerged jockeying for power.

In the latest bout of militia score-settling, the leader of Libya's Ansar al-Sharia branch in Derna escaped an assassination attempt last week-end. Sofian Ben Qumu is suspected of involvement in the September 2012 killing of US Ambassador Christopher Stevens and other Americans in Benghazi.

While the world's gaze is on Tunisia and Libya, Mauritania may offer a distinct experience in faith and politics.

The country's Islamists boast strong organisational capacities and regional ties, which they showcased during the last congress of the Tawassoul party.

Twenty delegations of Islamist politicians, ulema and sheikhs from across the Arab world convened in Nouakchott for the event four months ago.

"Islamist movements must understand well that moving from the sphere of preaching to the sphere of state needs competency and expertise," Algeria's Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) chairman Bouguerra Sultana said at the conference.

Ennahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi and the General Supervisor of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, Bashir Kabti, also attended the gathering.

Yet while Tawassoul was able to bring together key international Islamist leaders, its domestic influence may be far from solid.

The situation in Morocco and Tunisia is very different from Mauritania's, according to Mohamed Salem Ould Dah, the director of the African-Arab Centre for Information and Development.

"Those countries lived through a stage of spiritual and moral vacuum that made their peoples interact with parties with an Islamic reference," he tells Magharebia.

Mauritanian society has a religious background by nature, Ould Dah adds.

"This is perhaps why the Islamic movement in Mauritania has been unable to present anything new, unlike their counterparts in the Arab world", he says.

Mauritanians "reject the introduction of Islam in politics", says analyst Zain Al-Abidine Ould Mohamed.

"This is due to the bad reputation of the word 'politics', which most Mauritanians consider as another face of lies, deceits and hypocrisy," he explains.

"This might be why Mauritanian Islamists' calls for revolution didn't resonate with the vast majority of citizens," the analyst adds.

Still, Islamists maintain a strong presence in Mauritania, according to writer Cheikh Omar Enjai.

"They are visible in media through the success of their newspapers and websites, and they also have a presence in the February 25 Youth Co-ordination group, which has troubled the current regime for the last two years," he says.

But Tunisia's experience serves as a cautionary tale for potential supporters in Mauritania.

"Ennahda hasn't realised much for the Tunisian people," Ould Mohamed says.

"What we're seeing is an inclination towards unilateralism and conflict with democracy in most political Islamist groups, both before and after the Arab Spring," Mauritanian thinker Abul Abbas Ould Borham says.

Islamists are the most organised political opposition force in the region and Mauritania is no exception, according to researcher in communication science Hajj Ould Ibrahim.

Islamists have branches among student associations and unions as well as the influential media, he adds. They were also active within the Co-ordination of Democratic Opposition (COD), which staged a number of anti-government rallies.

But despite multiple levers of influence, their reach remains limited, the analyst says.

"Their popularity is mainly among students and graduates of mahdharas, traders and some followers of Sufi orders," Ould Ibrahim says.

"The Islamist movement in Mauritania is still far from introducing a political change whether this means that they come to power or win the majority of seats in parliament," he concludes.

While Islamists' discourse may be attractive for many disenfranchised youths, Mauritania lacks the ingredients for a major Islamist-driven change.

"People who accept a minimum level of services don't usually respond to calls of revolution," says rights activist Mohamed Yahya Ould Abderrehman.

"The tensions that can give rise to a revolution are not available at the same level as in the Arab Spring countries," he adds.

Moreover, to partake in a positive social change, Islamists would need to collaborate with their secular partners, says Mohamed Abdou, a leader of the 25 February Movement.

"I don't think that any ideological faction can make the desired revolutionary change alone."

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/reportage/2013/04/19/reportage-01

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **LF warns boycott of vote law committee**

BEIRUT: Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea has threatened to boycott the parliamentary subcommittee discussing a new elections law, criticizing some participants for their political “maneuvering.”

“We cannot continue to attend or participate in subcommittee meetings if things continue as there are some who are not providing a clear position and there is [political] maneuvering by others while the election law has been [exhausted],” Geagea told the local daily Al-Akhbar in remarks published Monday.

A source close to Geagea told The Daily Star Monday that the LF would make a decision at Tuesday's subcommittee meeting.

"If there is no serious discussion we will boycott the meeting," the high-ranking LF source told The Daily Star.

A senior March 8 source told The Daily Star Sunday that the picture regarding a new electoral law was still “sketchy.”

“Tuesday's meeting of the parliamentary subcommittee will not be decisive with regard to agreeing on a new electoral law,” the source said.

On the formation of a new government, Geagea reiterated his support for Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam.

He called on Salam not to succumb to pressures and to “fully cooperate” with President Michel Sleiman over the Cabinet lineup.

Future Movement MP Jamal Jarrah also sounded downbeat ahead of Tuesday's meeting.

"Hezbollah's negative stance and hiding behind Christian consensus as well as not participating in the debate on a hybrid law are all signs that Hezbollah does not want [participants] to produce an electoral law for the upcoming elections," Jarrah told the Kataeb-run Voice of Lebanon radio station Monday.

Hezbollah has said on several occasions that it will back any electoral law that wins the support of Christian political parties.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-22/214614-lf-warns-could-pull-out-of-vote-law-committee.ashx#axzz2RC7Gdb00>

- **Hezbollah: Nonpolitical government unrealistic**



BEIRUT: Efforts to form a new government marked time Friday as Hezbollah reiterated that a nonpolitical government is unrealistic, adding that an all-inclusive Cabinet should be formed to handle the huge tasks ahead.

“A nonpolitical government is unrealistic. There is no one who is not politicized in the country, even the Prime Minister-

designate [Tammam Salam] has a political vision,” Sheikh Naim Qassem said during a ceremony in Beirut’s southern suburbs.

“Therefore, we must think objectively about forming a political government. We call for a national, all-inclusive government.”

The Hezbollah official said the new Cabinet should manage the country’s affairs and supervise elections in a timely way under an electoral law that has the agreement of political parties.

“These are huge tasks the government must shoulder, whether it’s in office for one, two or three months or one, two or three years,” Qassem said.

Salam, who was nominated by the March 8 and March 14 coalitions earlier this month, insists that his government should be nonpolitical and have as its main objective the supervision of a parliamentary election round scheduled to take place in June. The March 14 camp supports Salam’s stance.

“To those who say that the government will handle one task only for a specific

period of time, we say: What is the role of the government in other issues? Who manages the country?" Qassem said.

Qassem lashed out at U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Maura Connelly, saying the country could manage without the dictates of foreign countries.

"We say to Connelly: We know how to manage the affairs of our country in cooperation with all the country's factions; we do not want your advice," Qassem said.

A source close to Salam told The Daily Star that while the chief mission of Salam's government was to hold parliamentary elections, it would also address the economic situation and the challenges that have resulted from the presence of several hundred thousand Syrian refugees.

The source said Salam was still tackling the broad outlines of the Cabinet formation, adding that he insists on having a government whose ministers are not running for elections.

"Certainly, these ministers will be close to various political groups, as there is no one in the country who isn't politicized," the source said.

Earlier, Salam discussed the economic situation with a delegation from the Lebanese Industrialists Association.

Meanwhile, Batroun MP Butros Harb said he would propose a novel electoral law that he hoped would break the deadlock.

"I am preparing a one-man-one-vote proposal, which will be ready [Saturday]," he told The Daily Star.

The National Bloc, led by Carlos Edde, has long advocated single-member districts.

"There are technical complications in terms of redistricting, but I think that it would be much easier than dividing the country into sectarian pockets," added Harb, a staunch critic of the Orthodox Gathering proposal, which would require each sect to vote for its own MPs.

Caretaker Health Minister Ali Hasan Khalil, speaking during a ceremony in Beirut, said he hoped the near-unanimous nomination

of Salam for the premiership would help in forming a government that represents all parties and whose members agree on a plan of action for “facilitating the passing of an electoral law, holding elections and addressing the socioeconomic situation.”

Separately, caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati issued a circular urging caretaker ministers to limit their activities to routine administrative work in line with Article 64 of the Constitution. It said that any other extraordinary measures that have a significant impact on the economic or political situation in the country require the approval of Mikati and President Michel Sleiman.

A source close to Mikati said the move came in light of comments by MPs, who complained that several caretaker ministers were exceeding their prerogatives. – With additional reporting by Hasan Lakk

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-20/214443-hezbollah-nonpolitical-government-unrealistic.ashx#axzz2RC7Gdb00>

- **Jumblatt: PSP ‘moderation’ to boost electoral law agreement**

Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt said that his party was prepared to express “the required moderation” in order to facilitate the agreement on a new electoral law.

“With the positive signs surrounding the increased acceptance of the mixed electoral law that joins proportionality and majority rule, we renew the readiness of the PSP to show the required moderation and to make further positive steps,” Jumblatt wrote in remarks published by Al-Anbaa newspaper’s website on Monday.

“The party is prepared to renew dialogue in that context with all parties in order to reach [agreement on a new electoral law] and to get rid of the law of partition, aka the Orthodox law.”

The PSP leader also called for facilitating the mission of Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam to form a new government following the resignation last month of Prime Minister Najib Miqati.

In recent months, Lebanon has been gripped by a crisis that has centered around the development of a new electoral law which will lay the groundwork for this year's upcoming parliamentary elections.

In mid-April, the government officially changed the election date to June 16 from June 9 by way of an official decree. The parliament also approved an extension of all election-law-related deadlines to May 19.

Jumblatt – a Druze political leader - has repeatedly voiced his rejection of the Orthodox law – backed by the main Christian parties – as well as proposals for laws based on proportional representation.

Earlier in April, Lebanon's parliamentarians held talks with Salam ahead of the formation of the new government after which he said that "the central task of the government is to prepare for the parliamentary elections and it cannot be a national unity government or a political one."

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/jumblatt-ppp-moderation-to-boost-electoral-law-agreement>

6. SYRIA

- **Syrian army forces destroy large arms convoy in Idlib**



Syrian soldiers shout slogans in support of President Bashar al-Assad near the town of Jisr al-Shughour.

Syrian forces in the northwestern province of Idlib have attacked and destroyed a large convoy of munitions originating from Turkey and destined for the militant groups in Syria, Press TV reports.

On Monday, Syrian troops targeted a car laden with a large amount of weapons and explosive devices on the outskirts of Idlib city, located roughly 295 kilometers (183 miles) north of the capital, Damascus.

The incident came a day after Syrian soldiers killed a large number of foreign-backed militants in the same province.

On Sunday, the army said it had killed and wounded dozens of terrorists in several areas of Idlib Province including Jisr al-Shughour, al-Janoudia, al-Hamama, and al-Yaqoupiya, and seized their weapons.

Syrian troops also ambushed militants in al-Mahamil valley in Ein al-Sheb area and killed many armed men affiliated with al-Tawhid Brigade.

The Syrian army continues operations against the militants across the country.

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad said on Sunday that the situation in the country was improving as the army enjoys people's support in the fight against terrorism.

On the same day, the Syrian forces thwarted an attack by a group of gunmen against the Daba'a military airbase near the town of al-Qusayr, which is situated about 35 kilometers (22 miles) south of the western city of Homs.

The Syrian government has repeatedly stated that the chaos, which has gripped the country for more than two years, is being orchestrated from outside, and that the West and its regional allies including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are supporting the militant groups in Syria.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/22/299614/syrian-army-destroys-large-arms-convoy/>

- **Assad: Army enjoys people's support**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad meets with members of Lebanese delegation in Damascus on Sunday

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad says situation in the country is improving as army enjoys people's support in the fight against terrorism.



Assad made the remarks on Sunday in Damascus while receiving a Lebanese delegation representing national parties and forces.

The Syrian president pledged to make Syria free from terrorism in all its forms.

He underlined that the government will make no reconciliation with terrorist groups and will sternly confront with them.

Meanwhile, the army inflicted more losses on foreign-backed militants on Sunday across the country.

State media reports said an operation in Damascus suburb destroyed weapons and ammunition and left unknown number of terrorists killed and wounded.

The Syrian Army units have conducted similar successful operations in Hama and Homs governorates over the past few days.

The Syrian troops have also seized four cars carrying a cache of weapons in the northwestern governorate of Idlib. Several militants were killed in clashes there.

The troops dismantled five Turkish-made anti-armor mines and captured thirteen explosive devices planted on the road between Khan Shekhun and Ma'art al-Nouman in Idlib governorate.

Government forces also inflicted heavy losses on armed groups near the shrine of Sayyida Zainab in the south of the capital Damascus.

Syria has been gripped by a deadly unrest since March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of government forces, have been killed in the violence.

Damascus says the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

The Syrian government says the West and its regional allies including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are supporting the militants.

Several international human rights organizations have accused militants

operating in Syria of committing war crimes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/21/299551/assad-army-enjoys-peoples-support/>

Syrian opposition warns Hezbollah to stay out
Iranian official says US-led battle to topple Bashar Assad has failed

The Syrian opposition called on Hezbollah to withdraw its fighters from the country immediately, as activists said regime troops supported by pro-government gunmen linked to the Lebanese Shiite militant group battled rebels Sunday for control of a string of villages near the Lebanon-Syria border.

The Syrian National Coalition — the main Western-backed opposition group — warned that Hezbollah involvement in Syria's civil war could lead to greater risks in the area, and urged the Lebanese government to “adopt the necessary measures to stop the aggression of Hezbollah” and to control the border to “prevent further risks and to protect civilians in the area.”

The statement, posted on the Coalition's Facebook page, coincides with a surge in fighting around the contested town of Qusair in Syria's Homs province near the frontier with Lebanon. Over the past two weeks, the Syrian military, supported by pro-regime militia backed by Hezbollah, has pushed to regain control of the border area — a strategic region because it links Damascus with the Mediterranean coastal enclave that is the heartland of President Bashar Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

It also points to the sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict, which pits a government dominated by the president's Alawite minority against a primarily Sunni Muslim rebellion, as well as fears that the civil war could drag in neighboring states.

The pro-regime gunmen are members of the Popular Committees, which were set up last year in Syria with Hezbollah's backing to protect Syrian villages inhabited by Lebanese Shiites, although rebels accuse the fighters of attacking opposition villages in the area and fighting alongside government forces.

While Hezbollah confirms backing the Popular Committees, it denies taking part in Syria's civil war.

The fighting along the border region has flared in recent weeks, and on Saturday government forces captured the villages of Radwaniyeh and Tel al-Nabi Mando. On Sunday, regime forces shelled the villages of Abu Hourri, Saqarigh, Nahriyeh and Ein al-Tanour in the Qusair region, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights activist group. It said at least four rebels were killed in the fighting.

Syrian state television said the army was trying to "uproot all the terrorists from the area." The government, which denies it is facing a popular uprising, describes the revolt as a foreign-backed plot and calls those trying to topple it "terrorists."

Lebanon's state-run news agency reported two shells fired from Syria landed Sunday in the town of Hermel near the frontier with Syria, causing material damage but no casualties. A day earlier, two mortar rounds landed in the town for the first time, marking an escalation in violence along the already tense border.

Syria's two-year-long conflict has repeatedly spilled over into neighboring states, while the violence at home has forced more than 1 million Syrians to escape their homeland to seek safety abroad. Most of the refugees have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, where they have put an immense burden on already cash-strapped governments to cope with huge influx.

In Jordan, police arrested eight Syrians on suspicion of inciting riots at the sprawling Zaatari refugee camp, according to a Jordanian security official who requested anonymity in line with regulations.

About 100 Syrian refugees threw stones at Jordanian police on Friday for preventing some of them from sneaking out of their desert camp. Ten police officers were injured, including two who remain in critical condition.

The security official said a military prosecutor was set to question the eight suspects later Sunday. If convicted, they face up to three years in jail.

The Zaatari camp houses 150,000 Syrian refugees, while another 350,000 Syrians have found shelter in Jordanian communities. Conditions in the overcrowded camp have worsened since it opened last July, and there have been several riots.

In Damascus, a senior Iranian lawmaker on Sunday expressed support for Assad, and said that what he called the US-led battle to oust the Syrian leader had failed.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the head of Iran's parliamentary committee on national interest and foreign policy, said Tehran is "happy that the US, with its abilities and regional allies, has failed despite its efforts" to topple Assad.

"Today, they are the losers in the game, no doubt," Boroujerdi told Iranian state TV ahead of talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem.

Iran is Syria's chief regional ally.

Al-Moallem repeated the government line that Syria is the victim of a foreign conspiracy hatched by the United States in cooperation with Syria's neighbors.

Damascus has previously rebuked Saudi Arabia and Qatar for financing arms purchases to the rebels, and Turkey and Jordan for allowing arms shipments.

The US has long called for Assad to leave power, but for months did not play an active role in backing the rebellion. Recently, however, Washington has grown more assertive, helping cobble together the Syrian National Coalition late last year in the hopes that it could unite the deeply divided opposition and provide a conduit for aid to the rebels.

At an international conference on Saturday in Istanbul that brought together the opposition leadership and its chief international supporters, US Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the Obama administration would double its non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition with an additional \$123 million in supplies. That could include for the first time armored vehicles, body armor, night vision goggles and other defensive military supplies, officials said.

The additional aid brings total non-lethal US assistance to the opposition to \$250 million since the fighting began more than

two years ago. Washington has refused so far to provide weapons to Syria's rebels out of fears they could fall in the hands of extremists.

The US pledge was the only tangible, public offer of new international support at the meeting of the foreign ministers of the 11 main countries supporting the opposition and fell well short of what the opposition has been appealing for: weapons and direct military intervention to stop the violence that has killed more than 70,000 people.

The Syrian National Coalition is seeking drone strikes on sites from which the regime has fired missiles, the imposition of no-fly zones and protected humanitarian corridors to ensure the safety of civilians.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/syrian-opposition-warns-hezbollah-to-stay-out/>

- **Syria activists report massacre near Damascus**

More than 80 bodies found in Damascus district after days of fighting as opposition leader again offers his resignation.

least 80 people, including women and children, have been killed in Damascus, according to Syrian activists.

Many were reportedly executed by government forces at a makeshift hospital in the town of Jdeydet al-Fadel, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the UK-based network, said on Sunday.

Al Jazeera has been unable to independently verify the report, but has been sent video images of the bodies.

The report came as the leader of the main Syrian opposition group offered his resignation from the post yet again.

Moaz al-Khatib, president of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), submitted his resignation, a statement on the organisation's Facebook page announced on Sunday.

The SNC said it would take up the matter at its next meeting, without providing a date.

Khatib, a respected Muslim preacher seen as a uniting figure and moderate, tried to quit his post in March, citing frustration

over what he called a lack of international support and constraints imposed on the body itself.

The coalition rejected his resignation then, and he agreed to stay on until his six-month terms ends in May.

Bodies found

Claiming that scores of bodies were found in Jdeydet al-Fadel, in the suburbs of Damascus, the SOHR said it was able to document the names of 80 victims and that the death toll might be much higher.

Opposition fighters pulled out of the town on Saturday because they ran out of ammunition, the SOHR said.

By Sunday morning, government forces had taken full control of the area.

The killings reportedly took place during four days of fighting between government forces and anti-regime fighters.

Spotlight

In-depth coverage of escalating violence across Syria

Many were killed during shelling and in summary executions, according to the SOHR.

Violence has also raged in Sunni Muslim areas of the nearby Christian-majority town of Jdeydet Artuz, and in the rebel stronghold of Daraya, the scene of fierce fighting for several months.

The SNC accused the army of staging a "fierce attack" in areas south and west of Damascus.

Jdeydet al-Fadel and other flashpoints are "subjected to a siege and they are deprived of all basic needs for human life", the SNC said on Saturday.

Since last year, government forces have tried to root out rebels positioned southwest and east of Damascus in an effort to secure the Syrian capital.

In another development, the SNC called on Hezbollah to withdraw its fighters from the country, as activists said regime troops supported by the mainly Shia Muslim Lebanese group battled rebels on Sunday for control of a string of villages near the Lebanon-Syria border.

The SNC cautioned that Hezbollah's involvement in Syria's civil war could lead to greater risks in the area, and urged the Lebanese government to "adopt the necessary measures to stop the aggression of Hezbollah" and to control the border to "protect civilians in the area".

Contested town

The SNC statement coincided with a surge in fighting around the contested town of Qusair in Syria's Homs province, near the frontier with Lebanon.

Over the past two weeks, the Syrian military, supported by a Hezbollah-backed group, has pushed to regain control of the border area.

The region is strategic because it links Damascus with the Mediterranean coastal enclave that is the heartland of President Bashar Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shia Islam.

The pro-regime fighters are members of the Popular Committees, which were set up last year in Syria with Hezbollah's

backing to protect Syrian villages inhabited by Lebanese Shias, although rebels accuse the fighters of attacking opposition villages in the area and fighting alongside government forces.

The fighting along the border region has flared in recent weeks, and on Saturday government forces captured the villages of Radwaniyeh and Tel al-Nabi Mando.

Regime forces shelled the villages of Abu Hour, Saqarigh, Nahriyeh and Ein al-Tanour in the Qusair region on Sunday, according to the SOHR.

It said at least four rebels were killed in the fighting.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013421152010175448.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Saudi Arabia invites Hezbollah officials to Riyadh**

Saudi ambassador to Beirut says Riyadh is open for official meeting with Hezbollah if they want.

Mehr News quoted Lebanese daily Elnashra reporting that , Ali Saeed Asiri, Saudi ambassador in Beirut, who is holding many meeting and activities with Lebanese officials and extensive consultations in the country to form a new government, said that “If Hezbollah officials want [travel to Saudi], Saudi Arabian doors are open for an official meeting.”

The appointment of Tamam Salam as the official to form Lebanese cabinet was planned and carried out in partnership with the Saudis, who are actively trying to take the role of interventionist in the Lebanese cabinet organizational structure.

But Riyadh has concluded that in this context, it cannot get any result without Hezbollah as one of the most important political players in the country.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820477>

- **Saudi sends more tanks, arms to Bahrain**



Saudi Arabian troops heading towards Bahrain to crush anti-regime protesters

‘Bahraini regime seeks to fix ugly image’

‘World must act against Bahrain crimes’

Bahrain uprising threatens US hegemony

Saudi Arabia has sent more tanks and weapons for its troops in Bahrain during the Formula One Grand Prix auto race in Manama.

Bhrani activists said on Sunday that the tanks were sent by heavy military transport vehicles, which crossed the main bridge that links the two neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, Saudi-backed Bahraini security forces clashed with pro-democracy protesters, who held demonstrations on Sunday across the country against the Grand Prix race.

The violence erupted when police attacked protesters blocking roads in Manama. The protesters also burnt tires on roads in villages outside Manama, according to witnesses.

Protests have increased in Bahrain as the Manama regime prepares to host the controversial sporting event.

Bahrain's public security chief, Major General Tariq Hassan said in a statement, "Police are out in force to beef up security measures at the Bahrain International Circuit."

On Saturday, police fired tear gas at anti-regime demonstrators calling for the cancelation of the sporting event over the regime's crackdown on peaceful protests.

Similar demonstrations were held on Friday, when tens of thousands of Bahrainis rallied along the Budaiya highway west of Manama to demand the cancelation of the race.

The Bahraini revolution began on February 14, 2011, when the people, inspired by the popular revolutions that toppled the

dictators of Tunisia and Egypt, started holding massive demonstrations.

On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates invaded the country, upon Manama's request, to help the Bahraini regime quash the uprising.

The protesters initially said they wanted political reform and a constitutional monarchy. However, following the regime's brutal crackdown on the popular protests, the Bahraini people began demanding that the ruling Al Khalifa family step down.

Scores of people have been killed and hundreds of others arrested in the crackdown, but the protesters are undaunted and have refused to back down on their demands.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/21/299553/saudi-sends-more-tanks-arms-to-bahrain/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **U.S. special envoy, Pakistan army chief discuss Afghan reconciliation**

ISLAMABAD, April 21 (Xinhua) -- Senior U.S. diplomats and defense officials met Pakistan army chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, in the garrison city of Rawalpindi and discussed matters of mutual interest with particular focus on Afghanistan reconciliation process, the military said on Sunday.

The army statement said that both sides discussed "matters of mutual interest" but did not give any more details about the talks.

The U.S. delegation comprised Ambassador David Pearce, Acting Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Dagulas Lute, Special Assistant to the President on Afghanistan and Pakistan Peter Lavoy, Principal Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs and Ambassador Richard Olson.

The visit comes at a time when relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are tense over the cross-border tension.

Two top U.S. generals also visited Pakistan this month and discussed mainly about Afghanistan.

Sources said that the talks are also aimed at removing differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan and finding ways to work for the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

The U.S. State Department said ahead of the visit that in Islamabad, Pearce will hold meetings with senior Pakistan officials to discuss ways in which the United States and Pakistan can continue to work together to advance "our bilateral goals and affirm how both our countries can contribute to a secure, stable, and prosperous future for the region."

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

- **Afghans protest US-led civilian killings**

Hundreds of Afghans have taken to the streets to protest the killing of two civilians by the US-led foreign forces during a night raid in Afghanistan's eastern province of Kapisa, Press TV reports.

The demonstration in the eastern town of Tagab came on the heels of an overnight

attack by foreign soldiers that killed two Afghans.

The protesters on Saturday carried the bodies of the slain civilians and chanted slogans against the US-led forces.

Over the past few months, night raids by the US-led forces have resulted in many civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The raids have increased tensions between Washington and Kabul.

Afghans have expressed outrage at the attacks by holding demonstrations throughout the country.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The invasion removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains high across the country.

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM research assistant **Miray Başar**. 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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