



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

29 APRIL 2013

NO: 1591

1. IRAQ.....	3
• Tribes Committee calls on Iraq's tribes to avert sedition.....	3
• US Embassy encourage Kurdish delegation's visit to Baghdad	3
• Kuwait expects Iraq's exit from Chapter VII in 2014	4
• Peshmarga announces filling the gaps in four Iraqi provinces.....	4
• Awakening gives protestors 24 hours deadline	6
• Can the peace process cut the high security budget?.....	7
2. IRAN	10
• Islamic Awakening Conference Kicks Off in Tehran	10
• Senior MP: US, Allies Experiencing "Humiliating Defeat" in Syria.....	12
• Iranian Deputy FM: US Seeking to Impose No Fly Zone over Syria	13
• Presidential Hopeful: West Should Accept Iran's Independence.....	14
• Syrian army kills many militants near Damascus	15
• 'Gas reservoir explored in S Iran'	17
• Iran reacts to US gas propaganda.....	18
• Iran to unveil new ballistic, cruise missiles	19
• Zakani vows to fight inflation, corruption if he wins presidency	19
• Iran, Egypt discuss ways to help end Syrian crisis	20
• Iran offers to host meeting of contact group on Syria	21
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	22
• Ashkenazi: Israel can handle outcomes of Iran strike	22
• International Conference Adopts Campaign to Free Prisoners.....	23
• No Family Visitation for Gaza Prisoners, says Red Cross.....	24
• "Arabs key to Israel's economic growth"	25
• Freedom of Palestinians is Urgent, says European Parliament.....	26
• Newspapers Review: Dailies Highlight Israeli Arson of Palestinian Property.....	27
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	28
• Egypt presidency, judiciary draw closer on proposed legislation	28
• Egypt opposition demand public debate on state budget	30
• Mauritians protest violence against women.....	32
• National Conscience Front slams Judge Zend for 'foreign interference' calls.....	35
• Oman reassures Libya Gathafi family not to meddle in politics.....	36
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	37
• Constitutional Council to address PSP challenge	37
• Bogdanov meets Nasrallah, concludes Lebanon visit	38
• Lebanon dragged in as Hizbollah joins Syria war	39
6. SYRIA.....	43
• Ahmadinejad: War, Bloodshed No Good Way to Establish Security in Syria	43
• Syrian rebels, troops clash at three air bases.....	45



• Absence of secular rebels in Syria creates problem for U.S.....	47
• Syria: we must not rush to judge on chemical arms	49
• Syrian premier escapes bomb attack	52
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	54
• Green bank among agreements to be signed during Khalifa visit	54
• Al Azhar’s support to Islamic, Arab issues hailed	54
• UAE disappointed by US human rights report	56
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	57
• US-led soldiers kill three civilians in eastern Afghanistan: Officials.....	57
• UN-backed Afghan vaccination drive to reach 8 million children	58

1. IRAQ

- **Tribes Committee calls on Iraq's tribes to avert sedition**

Baghdad (AIN) -The parliament Tribes Committee condemned the killing of five soldiers in Anbar province, calling Anbar tribes to confront the sedition and fight its agitators.

A statement by the Committee reported "The parliament Tribes Committee condemns the heinous crime committed against five soldiers in Anbar on last Saturday," arguing "We call on all the Iraqi tribes to stand against every corrupter and whoever wants to hit the country's unity and stability."

The statement continued addressing Anbar tribes by saying "Oh dear brothers, the tribes in particular, we call on you to increase your known keenness on the national unity to protect your brothers within the security forces and to stand side by side with them in combating Iraq's enemies and foiling the dubious plans being set for the country."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33014:tribes-committee-calls-on-iraqs-tribes-to-avert-sedition-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **US Embassy encourage Kurdish delegation's visit to Baghdad**

Baghdad (AIN) -The US announced its support for the visit of a delegation from the Kurdistan Region to Baghdad scheduled on tomorrow, Monday, to discuss pending issues.

A statement from the US Embassy in Baghdad, received by All Iraq News Agency (AIN) cited that "The United States welcome the visit of the Kurdish delegation to Baghdad tomorrow and the meeting to be held between the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Nijervan Barzani."

"The American officials have repeatedly tried to open channels of close communication with political leaders who represent all factions in Iraq in order to encourage positive steps designed to ease the current crisis."

The statement added that "The US Embassy urge all parties to look at tomorrow's meeting as an opportunity to take positive action towards achieving national reconciliation, which would enable Iraq to overcome the threat of terrorism, and strengthen democratic institutions in the country and achieve prosperity for all Iraqis."

A delegation from Kurdistan Region chaired by Barzani is scheduled to visit Baghdad to discuss the article [140], the budget of the Peshmerga, the issue of oil and gas law and the rest of the outstanding issues

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33022:us-embassy-encourage-kurdish-delegations-visit-to-baghdad-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Kuwait expects Iraq's exit from Chapter VII in 2014**

Shafaq News / A senior official in the Kuwaiti government expected on Monday, that Iraq would exit from Chapter VII early next year, stressing that Kuwait has sought since 2003 to improve its image to the Iraqi people.

“We expect Iraq to exit from the sanctions threat imposed on it in accordance with Chapter VII starting from next year,” Minister of State for Kuwait’s Cabinet Affairs, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak said in remarks briefed by “Shafaq News”.

“Kuwait’s the leadership, government and people, have good intentions and wishes towards Iraq and we hope prosperity and

stability to it; because it will reflect on Kuwait,” he added.

It is noteworthy that Iraq is subjected since 1990 to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which was imposed on it after the invasion of the former President Saddam Hussein’s regime to Kuwait in August of the same year, and this item allows the use of force against Iraq as a threat to international security, large amounts of its assets were frozen also in the financial global banks to pay compensation to those affected by the invasion.

The Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations have recently made progress in relations to resolve some of the outstanding problems, as the parties agreed to settle many of the files, including the demarcation of the border and the debt of Iraqi Airways to Kuwait.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/5942-kuwait-expects-iraqs-exit-from-chapter-vii-in-2014.html>

- **Peshmarga announces filling the gaps in four Iraqi provinces**



Shafaq News / Ministry of Peshmarga in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced, on Saturday that it filled the gaps left by the Iraqi army in the disputed areas in Kirkuk , Diyala and Salahuddin provinces , fearing that armed elements might sneak to these areas, stressing that the goal is to protect all national and religious components in it.

“The Iraqi army left most of the military bases and the headquarters of the military units affiliated to brigades 5 in Diyala , 4 in Salahuddin and 12 in Kirkuk, especially at night for fear of attacks carried out by armed group,” A statement of the Secretary-General of the Ministry , Jabbar al-Yawar reported for “Shafaq News”.

“The unfortunate events in Hawija city and the confusion state in general situation and security in most areas of Diyala, Salahuddin, Kirkuk and Nineveh provinces led to create a state of panic and fear among the citizens in those provinces in general and citizens in Kurdish areas outside the region in particular”.

“In order to protect the lives of citizens in all their national, social, religious and sectarian components and after consultation with the governor of Kirkuk, it was decided that Kurdistan’s Peshmarga forces would fill those gaps in general and the area around Kirkuk, in particular”.

The statement noted that “the intelligence information of the ministry refers to the intention of these groups to carry out major terrorist operations, especially within Kirkuk city “, pointing out that “Peshmarga forces believe that its duty is to protect the lives and property of citizens and fill the vacancy”.

The statement stressed that “our troops have no intention to enter Kirkuk and other cities and do not have any political goals behind these plans”.

Peshmarga forces refer to armed Kurdish fighters.

It is worth mentioning that the Iraqi army forces stormed the Sit-in square, of Hawija protesters in Kirkuk province raised the anger of demonstrators and protesters in nearby provinces and that made them target the army , police and the Awakening forces

affiliated to the government, which resulted in many casualties on both sides.

The Sunni minority complains from marginalization since the fall of the former regime in 2003 and accuses Maliki's government of using unfairly anti-terrorism and de-Baathification laws against them, but al-Maliki stresses that he applies the laws and the Constitution.

It is worth mentioning that sectarian tensions in Iraq in 2006 and 2007 claimed tens of thousands of lives and almost turned into a civil war.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/5931-peshmarga-announces-filling-the-gaps-in-four-iraqi-provinces.html>

- **Awakening gives protestors 24 hours deadline**

Shafaq News / Protesters in Anbar have been given 24 hours as a deadline to hand over the killers of the Iraqi army's elements, the leader of the Iraqi armed tribal factions (Awakening) loyal to the Iraqi government said on Saturday.

Awakening forces says that thousands of its elements were killed and others were wounded in the struggle to combat the influence of radical Islamist groups linked to al-Qaeda.

Those factions were formed by US forces in 2006, in Anbar province.

"We give the protesters 24 hours only to hand over the killers of the Iraqi army's elements to the judiciary," The leader of the Awakening forces in Iraq, Wesam al-Hardan said in a statement received by "Shafaq News".

Five members of the intelligence of the Iraqi army were killed in an attack by unidentified gunmen in Anbar.

Al-Hardan said, addressing the attackers "We will not stand still till the return 2006 days".

Violence has intensified with the swell of Sunni opposition to Maliki, whose power-sharing government has been all but paralyzed since US troops withdrew in December 2011.

Anbar (110 km west of Baghdad) is a Western Region of Iraq. The largest province in Iraq by area, it shares borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Anbar is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim Arab.
Its capital is Ramadi.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/5930-breaking-news--awakening-gives-protestors-24-hours-deadline-.html>

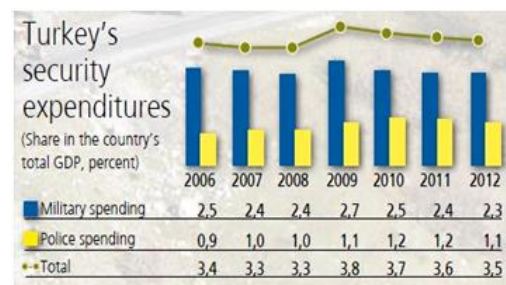
- **Can the peace process cut the high security budget?**

The recent resolution process provides a potential for a decrease in soldier and police spending, which reached a total of 50 billion Turkish Liras (\$27 billion) last year. DHA photo Turkey's military spending constitutes 4 percent of the country's GDP. It might even reach 5 percent if confidential spending is added to that. If we retrench by 20 percent (one percentage point) it would be about 15 billion Turkish Liras (\$8.3 billion). It is not a small amount, but it is not as much as to sweep us off," says Professor Seyfettin Gürsel, an academic at Bahçeşehir University and an economy writer, in his column in daily Radikal on March 28.

Professor Asaf Savaş Akat, an academic at Bilgi University, also wrote about military spending in his column in daily Vatan on March 21. "It is even said that the 30-year cost of a war is

\$400 billion. Official annual military spending is 4 percent of the national income. It would reach 5 percent with the additions of confidential ones. To illustrate, a two-point austerity corresponds to 30 billion liras (\$16.6 billion) annually. It is a considerable source. Remember that the total public investment in 2012 was 50 billion liras (\$27.8 billion). If it is invested in infrastructure, for instance, there would be a 60 percent increase [in total public investment]," Akat says.

Is it really so? Is it really true that military spending constitutes 5 percent of national income? Secondly, will the [resolution] process decrease the military (and domestic safety) spending? The real extent of military spending always remains a "secret." The claims written above are not based on any scientific research. The only entity conducting such studies is the Public Expenditures Monitoring Platform. A study led by Professor Nurhan Yentürk tries to shed light on the real aspects of public, military and domestic safety expenditures.



Yentürk, who conducts monitoring work at Bilgi University on military and domestic safety spending under the title of “nongovernmental organization activities,” states that only a certain part of the military spending could be fully monitored, while some portion of it could be relatively observed, and the rest could only be based on bare presumptions. From the database of the Finance Ministry’s General Directorate of Public Accounts, the spending of the Defense Ministry, gendarmerie, Defense Fund and Coast Guard Security could be monitored.

The total spending of these institutions is estimated about 27 billion liras (\$15 billion) for 2012. Moreover, the secret service expenses that could be only limitedly monitored, the expenses of village guards, funds allocated to the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) and the Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKEK), the aid sent to North Cyprus and foreign military debt discharges correspond to 10 percent of the overall monitored spending, thus total military spending in 2012 reached nearly 30 billion liras.

When the spending of armed force foundations and pensions of retired military officers are added to this, the total spending reaches 34 billion liras (\$18 billion) for 2012. This amount, which nearly constitutes 2.4 percent of national income, is almost half of the claimed rate of 5 percent.

The “Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defense” issued on February 19, 2009 indicated that Turkey’s military spending for 2008 is \$13.3 billion, while it has a 2 percent share in overall military expenditures of NATO. Turkey’s military spending for 2012 corresponds to \$18.4 billion with the average exchange rate of the dollar. Doubtlessly, the lira’s excessive value gain has affected these results. Still, it would be good to remind that the claim saying that “the Turkish army is one of the strongest armies of NATO” is an exaggerated review.

Domestic safety expenditures should be also added to military spending, which constitutes about 2.5 percent of Turkey’s national income. The findings of Professor Nurhan Yentürk with regard to domestic safety showed that while police spending was below 1 percent of national income in 2006, it exceeded 1.1 percent in 2012, reaching approximately \$9 billion. In other words, domestic safety

expenditures cost at least half of the military spending, which is estimated to have cost \$18.2 billion in 2012. And the total of these two is equal to 3.4 percent of Turkey's national income.

What can be done?

The recent resolution process has provided a potential for a decrease in soldier and police spending, which reached a total of 50 billion liras (\$27 billion) according to 2012 prices. The most reasonable act is to decrease expenses from 3.5 percent of the national income to 1.5 percent, just like in most European countries. This would create at least \$17 billion of resources. Anything can be done with these resources, including the things that could enrich the concept of the peace process, or an effectual land reform in southeast Turkey. Why not?

Especially in the southeastern provinces of Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa, there is an unjust distribution of land, and landowners still dominate there. Where will Kurdish youth be employed when they leave the thier places? Is it possible to create a prosperous and peaceful future with the lands distributed to them and their families and the irrigation investments fulfilled with the resources provided by a

retrench from military spending? I think it is possible.

However, the real question is "Could what is 'possible' be also 'probable'?" In case of a cease-fire with the Kurdish movement, is a radical decline in military and domestic safety budget possible in the face of current and possible tensions with neighboring countries including Syria, Iran and Iraq? Unfortunately not. Even if peace can be achieved inside the country, the situation in the Middle East, especially relations with neighbors, decreases the possibility of cutting the military and domestic security spending of Turkey.

Turkey ranks 15 in military spending

According to the data released by Swedish nongovernmental organization SIPRI on military expenditures in 2012, among the total military expenses in the world, which is \$1.75 trillion, 39 percent belongs to the U.S., while China ranks second with 9.5 percent and Russia follows it with 5.2 percent.

Despite rapidly increasing their military expenditures after 2003, China and Russia still fall behind the U.S. Allocating 4.4 percent of its national income to military spending, the U.S. seems to have decreased its expenditures

by 6 percent last year with the effect of the global crisis. With an \$18.2-billion budget allocated to the military, Turkey ranks in the 15th place in the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. However, SIPRI indicates that the United Arab Emirates, for which data was not available, would possibly be in 15th position in place of Turkey.

Military spending in 2012 and its share within GDP

(%)	
GDP (Billion Turkish Lira (TL) , Current price)	1,416
Total military expense (Billion TL)	33,6
Rate of military expenses in GDP (%)	2,37
A: Observable military expenses (share in total %)	80,5
National Defense Ministry	54
Gendarmerie General Commandership	15
Defense Industry Support Fund	10,5
Coast Guard Security Commandership	0,9
Defense Industry Undersecretary	0,1
B: Limitedly observable military expenses %	5,2
Confidential service expenditures	2,1
Village guard salaries	1,3
TUBITAK, defense research and development (R&D)	0,9
Military aid to Northern Cyprus	0,5
Foreign loan repayments	0,3
Budget transfer to Machinery and Chemical Corporation (MKEK)	0,1
C. Estimated military expenses %	14,3
Army pensioner payments	14,1
Estimated expenses of Turkish Armed Forces Foundation Military Projects	0,2

Source:TÜİK, General Directorate of Public Accounts, works of Nurhan Yentürk

http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=4427

2. IRAN

• Islamic Awakening Conference Kicks Off in Tehran

TEHRAN (FNA)- The 'Muslim Ulema (religious scholars) and Islamic Awakening' conference started work in Iran on Monday in the presence of the Supreme

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

The two-day conference is attended by over 500 Iranian and 200 foreign scholars.

Ayatollah Khamenei addressed the audience at the beginning of the conference.

The Islamic awakening in Muslim countries and the role of Muslim Ulema is among the topics to be discussed by participants in the conference.

The participants in the conference in Iran are also likely to set up a contact group on Syria, Secretary of the conference Hojjatoleslam Ali Karimian announced Tuesday, saying that the Syrian crisis is one of the main topics of discussions at the gathering.

"One of the issues always discussed in the previous meetings was the Syrian problem about which the pros and cons presented their ideas," Karimian said in a press conference in Tehran.

"The Syrian issue will be studied in the upcoming conference in which different

spectra and tastes are present," he added, and continued, "Thus, a contact group will be formed on Syria if the participants, of course, decide so."

Since the beginning of 2011, the Muslim world has been the scene of Islamic awakening. The Muslim world witnessed popular uprisings and revolutions similar to what happened in Iran in 1979.

Tunisia saw the overthrow of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in a popular revolution in January, which was soon followed by a revolution which toppled Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in February.

Libya was the third country touched by the Islamic Awakening. Libyans also embraced victory after months of bloody campaign against the country's dictator, Muammar al-Qaddafi.

Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have since been the scene of protests against their totalitarian rulers, who have resorted to brutal crackdown on demonstrations to silence their critics.

Unlike the popular protests in other Arab countries of the region Syria has been

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

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

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

In October 2011, calm was almost restored in the Arab state after President Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but Israel, the US and its Arab allies sought hard to bring the country into chaos through any possible means. Tel Aviv, Washington and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots to topple President Bashar al-Assad, who is well known in the world for his anti-Israeli stances.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107165502>

- **Senior MP: US, Allies Experiencing "Humiliating Defeat" in Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi underlined that the US and its allies have experienced a bad defeat in Syria despite mobilizing all their efforts to bring the Muslim country to its knees.

Boroujerdi's remarks came after US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said earlier this month that "Washington is sending 200 troops to Jordan to help contain violence in Syria", fueling speculations that the US is setting the stage for an intervention in the Arab country.

"After two years, Syria has become the scene of a very humiliating defeat for the US and its allies in the region," Boroujerdi said.

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

The US and its western and regional allies have long sought to topple Assad and his ruling system. Media reports said that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

The US daily, Washington Post, reported in May that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups battling the President Bashar al-Assad's government have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

The newspaper, quoting opposition activists and US and foreign officials, reported that Obama administration officials emphasized the administration has expanded contacts with opposition military forces to provide the Persian Gulf nations with assessments of rebel credibility and command-and-control infrastructure.

Opposition activists who several months ago said the rebels were running out of ammunition said in May that the flow of

weapons - most bought on the black market in neighboring countries or from elements of the Syrian military in the past - has significantly increased after a decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107165332>

- **Iranian Deputy FM: US Seeking to Impose No Fly Zone over Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The US and its allies have hatched different plots to undermine the Syrian government, including the imposition of a no fly zone over the country, in a bid to help the terrorist groups, an Iranian deputy foreign minister said.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian confirmed reports that chemical weapons have been used in Syria, but stressed that evidence shows that "irresponsible armed groups" fighting against the Syrian government have used the banned weapons in a bid to project

the blame on the Syrian government to pave the way for foreign intervention in the Muslim country.

"Chemical weapons have been used by the al-Nusra Front and a number of irresponsible armed groups," Abdollahian told Arab Language Al-Alam TV network last evening, adding that the US and Qatar have extended most aid and support to these armed groups.

He said some regional and trans-regional states which have caused and helped terrorist attacks and al-Qaeda's presence in Syria now aim to push Syria into a new war in a bid to pave the ground for foreign intervention in Syria.

"We have precise information that some foreign parties have supplied terrorists with their needed possibilities in a bid to help them use chemical arms against the Syrian people and the army to spark hue and cry and pave the ground for foreign intervention in Syria," the Iranian deputy foreign minister cautioned.

He said in the second part of this plot the US would try to accuse the Damascus government of using chemical attacks to

impose a no fly zone over Syria to limit the Syrian government and provide immunity for "irresponsible armed and terrorist groups".

The Iranian diplomat further warned that a no fly zone will further complicate situation in Syria.

Meantime, Syria's Permanent Representative to the UN Bashar Jaafari said that the UN Security Council is the only authority vested with the power to impose a no-fly zone over any given world state, and stressed that the UN body may not ratify a no-fly zone over Syria.

In an interview with the Lebanese NBN TV channel, Jaafari, said that western countries are raising the issue of chemical weapons use in Syria to exert pressure on Syria in order to get concessions from the Muslim state.

Responding to the recent statements made by US Secretary of State John Kerry that if Damascus use of chemical weapons is proved, a no-fly zone can be imposed on Syria or the opposition will be equipped with better and more arms, he said that a no-fly zone can only be implemented via

the Security Council, which is impossible to happen on the case of Syria.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107165500>

- **Presidential Hopeful: West Should Accept Iran's Independence**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Presidential hopeful Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel underscored Tehran's insistence on the materialization of its nuclear rights, and said the US and other western states should accept Iran's independence.

"Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei) believes that the US and the western states should accept that Iran does not obey them, and that they are not the one who decides for Iran's use of the nuclear energy," Haddad Adel said, addressing a large number of university students in Tehran on Sunday.

Haddad, a former parliament speaker who is now a member of the Iranian legislature, underlined Iran's firm stance on materializing its nuclear rights, and said any withdrawal on this path will not be

the last retreat since raising allegations against Iran's nuclear program by the West is merely a pretext to put more pressures on the country and they would seek other excuses under such conditions.

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=9107165382>

- **Syrian army kills many militants near Damascus**

The foreign-sponsored militant groups in Syria have suffered major losses as the Syrian army continues its operations on the outskirts of the capital, Damascus.



On Sunday, intense clashes erupted between the Syrian troops and militants in the district of Qudssaya, located about 10 kilometers (six miles) northwest of Damascus. The Syrian army killed a number of militants many of whom were foreign nationals, Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

Terrorist hideouts were also raided by Syrian forces in the towns of Jobar, al-Shifoniyeh, al-Rihan, Harmala, Harasta and Barzeh al-Balad.

Moreover, the Syrian troops engaged militants in Jobar area, located about two kilometers (1.2 miles) northeast of the capital. The militant commander of terrorist Hamza and al-Abbas Battalion, Abu Hamza al-Maidani, was among the gunmen slain during the heavy clashes, SANA stated.

In addition, Syrian troops stormed a terrorist hideout in the town of Zamalka, about four kilometers (2.5 miles) east of Damascus. A large amount of weapons and munitions was destroyed after the fierce gun battle.

Similar operations were carried out by the Syrian army in the towns of Daraya, al-Hejjeira and al-Dhiyabiyeh.

In Daraya, which is eight kilometers (5 miles) southwest of Damascus, Syrian troops killed Abu Mus'ab, who was the leader of the so-called Asoud al-Furqan militant group, during clashes.

The Syrian army has fully purged the town of Kimam in the strategic region of al-Qusayr near the border with Lebanon.

Unrest has gripped Syria for over two years and the Syrian government says the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country.

The United States recently made an unfounded allegation that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons on a small scale in its fight against terrorists. Syria has strongly rejected the false claim.

Several international human rights organizations have said the militants are committing war crimes in Syria.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/29/300838/syria-inflicts-major-loss-on-militants/>

- **‘Gas reservoir explored in S Iran’**

National Iranian Oil Company's exploration director, Hormuz Ghalavand says the country has explored an underground natural gas reservoir in the southern Iran Fars province.

“It is predicted that the vast natural gas reservoir starts from Borazjan (the capital of Dashtestan county, Bushehr province) and stretches into Minab fault line and Persian Gulf coastline,” the senior official said on Sunday.

He also noted that the natural gas reservoir was explored and identified by drilling a 3,300-meter-deep well, adding that rich hydrocarbon reserves, especially those of natural gas and light crude, were found for the first time in the hydrocarbon layer Zekin, the lower layer of the Paleozoic.

Ghalavand stated that studies have begun for the purpose of achieving the

technology for extracting and processing conventional gas reserves, and the preliminary studies indicate that the Sea of Oman and the Caspian Sea contain non-conventional gas reserves such as shale gas and gas hydrates.

According to the last official report by Iran’s Ministry of Petroleum, the volume of recoverable natural gas reserves has increased to more than 33 trillion cubic meters (tcm).

Iran, which sits on the world's second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia, has been trying to enhance its gas production by increasing foreign and domestic investments, especially in South Pars gas field.

The South Pars gas field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are located in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, i.e. the North Dome, is located in Qatar's territorial waters.

The Iranian gas field contains 14 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, about eight percent of the world's reserves.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/28/300788/gas-reservoir-explored-in-s-iran/>

- **Iran reacts to US gas propaganda**

TEHRAN, Apr. 29 (MNA) – In response to the US companies gas propaganda launched against gas-producing countries, Iran says it has discovered new oil and gas reserves.

The newly discovered oil and gas reserves are the first underground hydrocarbon reserves located in Paleozoic layers, and it has extended from Borazjan to the Persian Gulf coasts.

The US has 9.1trillion cubic meter of gas reserves, which has made it one of gas-rich countries in the world. Since two years ago, with the extraction technology developed, and gas production from unconventional reserves (such as shale layers) the US has stopped importing gas from others, and itself has become an exporter of LNG.

The US gas companies have launched attempts media propaganda against countries with conventional gas reserves,

and embarked on unconventional gas extraction in Asia and Europe. They have signed extraction contracts in China, India and EU countries like Poland to minimize their dependence to imported gas from Russia and Iran.

Gas experts believe that extraction of unconventional reserves would be economically justified only when the oil price is set in \$ 100 or 110 per barrel, otherwise, the benefits rising from such projects soon would fade away.

In reaction to such deafening propaganda by the US companies in Europe and Asia, Iran has turned its additional trump card that would be a revolution in gas markets in the world. According to last estimations b the Oil Ministry, recoverable gas reserves of Iran is 33 trillions of cubic meters of gas, and with the current pace of extraction (150 million cubic meters) it would have gas for 100 years to export, without any new discovers.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820881>

- **Iran to unveil new ballistic, cruise missiles**

TEHRAN, Apr. 28 (MNA) – Iran will unveil new ballistic and cruise missiles in the first six months of the current Iranian calendar year, which started on March 21, Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi told.

Vahidi also said that the new cruise missile will have a longer range compared with previous domestically manufactured cruise missiles.

In addition, he said that new bombs would be unveiled, a new submarine and a new missile-launching flying boat would be launched, and new helicopters, aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles would be delivered to the country's armed forces in the first six months of the calendar year.

On April 17, an Iranian Defense Ministry official announced that Iran would unveil an upgraded surface-to-surface cruise missile in the near future.

“The missile is an upgraded version of previous missiles, and it will increase our defense capabilities in sea battles,” Brigadier General Mehdi Farahi said in an interview with the Fars News Agency.

He also said that compared with its predecessor, the new missile was more powerful and had a longer range.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820823>

- **Zakani vows to fight inflation, corruption if he wins presidency**

TEHRAN – Presidential hopeful Alireza Zakani vows to curb inflation, stabilize prices, bring down prices to real levels, and launch a balanced development across the country if he succeeds to win the June election.

During a press conference in Tehran on Sunday, Zakani also said fighting financial corruption is among his top priorities.

He also vowed to pay special attention to the production sector.

The principlist lawmaker added that along with creating wealth in the society the government should seriously consider ways to distribute wealth among different folks.

The presidential contender said his team has drawn up plans to alleviate poverty in the country.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Zakani said that in case he wins the June election, he will hold a meeting with his rivals.

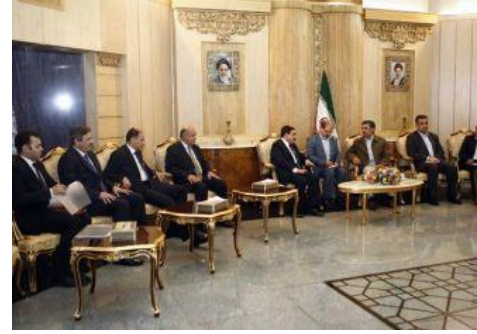
He also said competition should not violate ethical standards.

He also criticized Mahmoud Ahmadinejad' government for failing to fulfill its promises, saying today the government is engaged in pursuing electoral activities instead of tackling economic problems

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107218-zakani-vows-to-fight-inflation-corruption-if-he-wins-presidency>

- **Iran, Egypt discuss ways to help end Syrian crisis**

TEHRAN – Egypt has sent a high ranking delegation to Tehran to discuss the provisions of an Egyptian-drafted quartet initiative to find a solution to the Syrian crisis.



The Egyptian delegation included advisor to the president on foreign affairs Essam El-Haddad and presidential chief of staff Refaa al-Tahtawi among others.

The delegation held meetings with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili, and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi.

During the meetings on Sunday the sides discussed issues of common concern including the bilateral relations.

The Iranian and Egyptian officials agreed to help implement Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's proposal to end violence in Syria through national reconciliation.

During an emergency Islamic summit in Mecca on August 14 and 15, 2012, Morsi put forward a proposal for the

establishment of a contact group to defuse the Syrian crisis.

The first meeting of the group was held in Cairo on September 17, 2012.

The meeting in Cairo was described as the quartet meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, but neither Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal nor any other Saudi Arabian official attended the meeting.

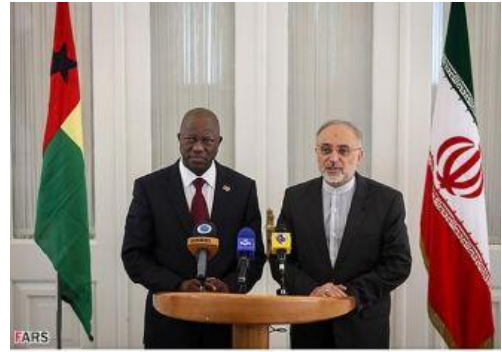
Their second meeting was held in New York on September 29, 2012, again in Faisal's absence.

The three ministers also met for the third time in Islamabad on November 21, a day before the summit of the D-8 group of developing countries in the Pakistani capital.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107-217-iran-egypt-discuss-ways-to-help-end-syrian-crisis->

- **Iran offers to host meeting of contact group on Syria**

TEHRAN – Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has said that Iran is ready to host a meeting of a contact group on Syria comprising Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.



Salehi made the remarks during a joint press conference with Guinea-Bissau's Foreign Minister Faustino Imbali in Tehran on Sunday.

“We have announced readiness to host (a meeting of) the contact group on Syria,” Salehi said, adding that Iran would also agree to a decision to hold the talks in another country, like Saudi Arabia.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on April 21 that negotiations of the contact group would resume soon.

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi had put forward the proposal for the

establishment of the contact group to help defuse the Syrian crisis during an emergency Islamic summit held in Mecca on August 14 and 15, 2012.

Commenting on bilateral relations, Salehi said that Iran was ready to share its experiences with Guinea-Bissau in all areas.

He also thanked Guinea-Bissau for the stance it has adopted toward Iran in the international arena, particularly in regard to Iran's nuclear program.

Imbali for his part said that Guinea-Bissau was keen to expand cooperation with the Islamic Republic in various spheres.

He also said that Tehran had already given his country a \$20 million credit line.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107216-iran-offers-to-host-meeting-of-contact-group-on-syria->

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Ashkenazi: Israel can handle outcomes of Iran strike**

In New York, former IDF chief says Israel worked 'long and hard' to prepare for consequences of military operation in Iran. Yadlin: Israel doesn't need US for strike

WASHINGTON – Former IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi said Sunday that Israel can handle the outcomes of a military strike on Iran. "We've worked long and hard to prepare ourselves," he said at a Jerusalem Post conference in New York.

Former Military Intelligence chief Amos Yadlin, who also spoke at the conference, echoed Ashkenazi's statements saying that Israel can mount an attack on its own, without US assistance and can handle the consequences.

If all other options fail, Israel will have to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, Yadlin said. Once a top Air Force commander Yadlin explained that an attack on Iran is preferable to an Iranian nuclear weapon.

Earlier on Sunday, Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert addressed the conference saying that Iran has yet to cross the "red line" as defined by Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu when speaking in front of the UN.

According to Olmert, the Iranian nuclear program has not been making progress in years, and the extent of the threat has been exaggerated.

Olmert further predicted that Syrian President Bashar Assad might suffer a fall, saying it was a matter of time before he would be toppled.

The conference also hosted former Mossad chief Meir Dagan who claimed that Assad was not the one who ordered the use of chemical weapons. He added that Russia will continue to support the Syrian regime as it holds a crucial naval base in Syria.

Dagan backed Olmert's statements saying he had not changed his mind about an Israeli strike on Iran.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4373532,00.html>

- **International Conference Adopts Campaign to Free Prisoners**

RAMALLAH, April 28, 2013 (WAFA) – The “Freedom and Dignity” International conference Sunday adopted the launch of an international campaign to free Fatah leader and lawmaker Marwan Barghouti and all prisoners in Israeli jails, said a press release on Sunday.

The Free Barghouti campaign said that Member of the African National Congress (ANC), Ahmed Kathrada recommended the launch of this campaign which is similar to a previous campaign to free President of South Africa Nelson Mandela.

The participants in the conference suggested on the current and former presidents of the Palestine committees’ in the parliaments of their countries to form a Parliamentary network that adopts the prisoners’ freedom as a priority.

Presidents and former Presidents of the Palestine committees in the European Parliament, France, Argentina, Britain, Sweden and Chile signed the recommendations.

The recommendations of the conference also included agreeing with the International Federation for Human Rights

and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) to launch a legal campaign to defend the rights of prisoners and to compel Israel to international laws and conventions.

The participants, according to the press release, affirmed the importance to work on all official, parliamentarian, legal and solidarity movements' levels to increase pressure on Israel to abide by the international law.

They said that the Palestinian people and prisoners' dignity and freedom is a basic condition to achieve peace in the region.

The two-day Freedom and Dignity conference was held in Ramallah to mark 11 years since the arrest of Barghouti and was attended by a large number of international figures.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22238>

- **No Family Visitation for Gaza Prisoners, says Red Cross**

GAZA, April 29, 2013 (Wafa) – The Israeli authorities have cancelled visit by Gaza families to their sons in Israeli prisons that was scheduled for Monday, said the Red Cross.

Red Cross spokesman Nasser Nijim said Israel informed them that there will be no family visitation this Monday because Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing will be closed.

Israel has recently allowed family visitation to Gaza's 470 prisoners, which takes place only on Monday of every week.

Israel closed all crossing with Gaza as a punishment following the firing of a missile from Gaza into Israel on Saturday.

Raed Fattouh, who coordinates entry of goods into Gaza, said Israel has informed the committee that Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing on the Israeli-Egyptian border with Gaza will be closed on Monday and no goods will be allowed in.

He said this vital crossing, where all goods and fuel enters Gaza through it, is now closed for three days in a row for various

reasons. Its closure normally leaves serious shortage of goods and fuel in the Gaza Strip.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22241>

- **"Arabs key to Israel's economic growth"**

Shfaram Mayor Nahed Khazem: Without the Arab and haredi communities, the economy will not flourish as expected.

Last week, the Israel Building Center held a conference in Shfaram for investors interested in Arab Israeli towns and ventures. "The potential of the Arab sector is huge and untapped," said Shfaram Mayor Nahed Khazem, "The time has come for the government to relate to this, partly because of the potential for increasing GDP."

Khazem added, "It should be realized that without the Arab and haredi (ultra-orthodox) communities, the economy will not flourish as expected. I hope that Minister of Finance Yair Lapid, who has spoken about the middle class, will also give his attention the poor, and the Arab

sector in particular. Until now, I have not heard him mention the Arab sector. The country's development also depends on the development of the Arab sector, and this sector's huge potential is untapped now."

"Globes": Where is Shfaram's untapped potential, for example?

Khazem: "Today, there is no industrial zone in any Arab town. Only last year, after years of bureaucracy and exhausting work, was Shfaram's business area declared a regional industrial zone, thanks to the Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sectors at the Prime Minister's Office. For this purpose, we allocated 800 dunam (200 acres) of Israel Land Administration and privately owned land, and we are now drawing up an outline plan for the whole area to exploit its huge potential. Shfaram is located on two key arteries - Road 70 and Road 79 - and will soon be connected to Road 6, which gives it huge untapped potential.

"I have several times proposed to the government, 'Come once and invest smartly in the Arab sector. I want my town

to be financially sound.' So long as 80% of the arnona (local property tax) I collect comes from households, of which almost 50% receive discounts, how can I develop? Instead of continuing to receive equalization grants of NIS 25-30 million every year, the government should decide to make a one-time NIS 150 million long-term investment to build a Shfaram industrial zone, so we will no longer need government support. Private developers we've met immediately identified the great potential and large purchasing power, but they also saw the many bureaucratic obstacles. If the government will see this, within three years, we could have an industrial zone that is the equal of the Tefen Industrial Park."

<http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=1000839802>

- **Freedom of Palestinians is Urgent, says European Parliament**

RAMALLAH, April 28, 2013 (Wafa) - Vice President of the European Parliament (EP) Isabelle Durant Sunday said that the freedom of the Palestinian people is urgent and they must be given support in order to achieve it.

Durant told Wafa in an interview that she has been following up on the Palestinian cause for over 20 years and this is the first time for her to visit Palestine.

She said that the Palestinians' suffering that she witnessed firsthand, indicates that it is of utmost importance to help them gain their freedom using nonviolent methods.

Durant, who came to attend the "Freedom and Dignity" conference held in Ramallah to discuss issues related to the Palestinian prisoners and their conditions in Israeli jails, said that this conference was different in that it had a highly innovative, interactive and representative format with the participation, inter alia, of civil society.

On behalf of the EP president, Martin Schulz, Durant attended the conference wishing it to be the beginning of something bigger that could help the Palestinians gain their freedom.

She called for an increasing support to Palestinians within the EP and affirmed that she will be brief its members on all

that she heard and saw in order to help the Palestinians gain their freedom and independence.

Durant emphasized that the EP is doing its best to free and protect the prisoners' dignity "especially when they are being imprisoned without charge or trial."

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22236>

- **Newspapers Review: Dailies Highlight Israeli Arson of Palestinian Property**

RAMALLAH, April 29, 2013 (WAFA) – The three Palestinian Arabic dailies highlighted on their Monday front page fanatic Israelis setting fire to Palestinian and international property in Jerusalem during celebrations of a Jewish holiday.

They said the settlers celebrated the bon fire Lag Ba'omer holiday by torching several United Nations vehicles in Jabal al-Mukaber and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhoods of occupied East Jerusalem and attacking Palestinian homes and residents in the area.

The paper reported as well on threats by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against the Gaza Strip warning that he will not remain quiet to firing of missiles from Gaza into Israel.

However, Al-Quds said in a report that the developments in Syria and Iran and the improvement in relations with Turkey prevent Israel from carrying out a military operation against the Gaza Strip.

Al-Ayyam said a delegation of Arab foreign ministers is scheduled to meet on Monday with United States Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington during which they will stress to him the importance of ending the deadlock in the peace process and not just to be satisfied with managing the conflict.

Al-Hayat al-Jadida as well as the two other papers reported on the current visit for President Mahmoud Abbas to Italy during which he received an honorary peace award in Napoli.

Al-Quds said in a story that plans are underway to end the daily traffic congestion at Qalandia checkpoint by finding alternative routes. The project is

under study by the Ministry of Housing and Works and US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Al-Ayyam published an analysis by its Jerusalem correspondent on the formation of a unity government. It expected that Fatah-Hamas talks on forming the new government are going to face many hurdles particularly since Hamas wants all issues related to the division to be handled and resolved simultaneously.

The paper had a story about the 13-year-old Palestinian boy from Arroub refugee camp near Hebron whose arrest by Israeli soldiers and his plea with the soldiers, which went unheeded, to come and take him the next day after he sits for his school exam was documented on Israeli TV. The report said that after 18 days in detention, an Israeli military court fined Ahmad Jawabreh more than \$1000 and sentenced him to home arrest in the camp for one year during which he will not be allowed to leave his home to even attend school in the camp.

The reports said the Ministry of Education was thinking of providing home schooling

to Jawabreh so that he will not miss getting education.

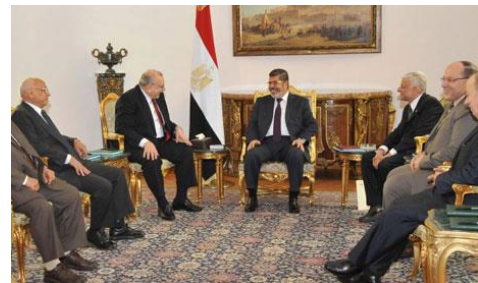
The three papers reported on Christian followers of the Orthodox Church and others as well celebrating Palm Sunday with the annual march in the Old City of Jerusalem and mass at the Holy Sepulcher ushering in the Easter Holy Week.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22244>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt presidency, judiciary draw closer on proposed legislation**

After Sunday meeting between presidency and heads of judicial agencies, President Morsi promises to adopt judges's proposal for new judicial authority law



Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi has told Egypt's top judges that he would

personally adopt their proposals for a new judicial authority law in hopes of containing mounting tension between Egypt's Islamist forces and the judiciary.

"All obstacles to achieving justice will be discussed at an upcoming conference, including the formulation of new judicial authority laws," presidential spokesman Ehab Fahmi said following a Sunday meeting between President Morsi and the heads of Egyptian judicial agencies.

"The president will personally adopt all recommendations to come out of the planned conference, including draft laws, which he will present to the relevant legislative bodies," Fahmi added. "The president has praised judges' proposals for a 'justice conference' and has asked judges who attended the Sunday meeting to convene on Tuesday to prepare for the conference."

The Sunday meeting was seen as an attempt to clear the air amid an ongoing standoff between the presidency and Islamist parties on one hand, and the judiciary on the other.

The Muslim Brotherhood, from which President Morsi hails, along with other

Islamist forces, have been calling on the Shura Council (the upper house of Egypt's parliament, currently endowed with legislative powers) to pass a new judicial authority law.

The new law would see the retirement age for judges lowered from 70 to 60, an outcome opposed by many judges and political forces.

In a separate announcement, Supreme Judicial Council head Mohamed Montaz Metwally – who attended Sunday's meeting – confirmed the presidency's assertions.

"The president has expressed his full appreciation for Egypt's judicial authority and has commended the idea of convening a 'justice conference'," Metwally announced following the meeting.

Neither of the two statements, however, provided details as to the fate of the proposed judicial authority law. However, Mamdouh Ramzi, a member of the Shura Council's legislative committee, said that Sunday's meeting meant that the current draft law – proposed earlier this month by

the moderate-Islamist Wasat Party – would likely not be considered.

"If President Morsi... said he would receive a draft law from the judges and propose it himself to the Shura Council, then we can say goodbye to the draft law tabled by the Wasat Party," Ramzi told Al-Ahram's Arabic-language news website on Sunday.

The months-long standoff between Egypt's presidency and judiciary began in earnest last November, when Morsi issued a decree sacking Mubarak-era prosecutor-general Abdel-Meguid Mahmoud and replacing him with Judge Talaat Abdullah.

The move prompted uproar among much of the judiciary, with a number of judges accusing Morsi of infringing on judicial independence. According to Egyptian law, they argued, the Supreme Judicial Council is the only entity with the right to appoint a new prosecutor-general.

On 19 April, the Muslim Brotherhood organised a Friday rally to demand a "purge" of Egypt's judiciary, in a move that some analysts feared would further

damage the group's relationship with the nation's judges.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70326/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-presidency,-judiciary-draw-closer-on-propose.aspx>

- **Egypt opposition demand public debate on state budget**

The people have the right to know where their money is going, say opposition political party representatives



At a press conference held Saturday at the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) in Cairo, several of Egypt's opposition parties demanded that the state budget be made public and discussed.

The Strong Egypt Party, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, the Egyptian Social

Democratic Party, the Egyptian Current Party as well as the Federation of Independent Trade Unions were all represented, urging the government to publish the details of the state budget. The Constitution Party although not represented on Saturday, was included as one of the parties calling for the press conference.

Rights lawyer Malek Adly of ECESR explained that a lawsuit was filed demanding the budget is made public after the government ignored a request made to publicly discuss it. The lawsuit was filed before the State Council on behalf of several parties and NGOs.

Adly added that it is unconstitutional for the Shura Council, the upper house of Egypt's parliament, to be discussing the budget when it is the task of the lower house (the House of Representative) to do so.

The Shura Council is currently Egypt's sole legislative body as the last House of Representatives was dissolved following a court ruling that the electoral law used in polling for the body was unconstitutional.

Representative of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party Ali Soliman stated that the parties demanded the budget be published in a national newspaper.

"They [the government] wants to run Egypt like they run the Muslim Brotherhood ... the Brotherhood are used to secrecy and following orders," he said slamming the government appointed by President Morsi — who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood — for lack of transparency.

Egyptian Social Democratic Party member Maha Abdel-Nasser insisted Egyptians should know how much is spent on their education, healthcare and how much is spent on policing or by government officials.

"We cannot see economic development without social justice, and we cannot accomplish social justice without transparency," he added.

Head of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions Kamal Abu-Eita underlined that workers should have a say in the state's budget plan.

"We [the workers] have been kept ignorant for years, kept away from any form of participation in our economic fate ... We are the essence of production in this country and we deserve to know where our money goes," he said.

Abu-Eita further slammed the government for pursuing loans from other countries instead of focusing on boosting production.

"The government is pursuing policies that make the country submissive to foreign countries. We do not want to be a nation of beggars; we want to be a productive nation," Abu-Eita said.

Egypt's government continues to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) a \$4.8 billion loan. The conditions of the loan remain private, although critics say it will require economic reforms that would include lifting state subsidies and devaluing the local currency.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Imam of the Strong Egypt Party insisted that access to the details of the state budget is a basic right of every citizen.

"We [the people] need to know how much is allocated to the police, military, servicing of debts, subsidies ... We have information that the police budget will increase 300 percent. which means more tear gas and benefits for corrupt officers" Imam said.

Egypt's Ministry of Finance submitted unofficially to the Shura Council the 2013/14 draft budget in late March. However, the ministry, according to sources, recently withdrew the draft to make adjustments to comply with the updated economic plan it recently submitted to the IMF. The adjustments could include cuts to subsidies and public sector salaries.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70221/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-opposition-demand-public-debate-on-state-bud.aspx>

- **Mauritanians protest violence against women**

Mauritania on April 21st named Irabiha Mint Abdel Weddoud as the first female

head of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH).

The move was due in part to the outcry from civil society organisations regarding increased violence against women.

Little more than a fortnight before the new CHDH chief's appointment, thousands of people marched in Nouakchott to demand justice for 20-year-old Penda Sogué.

The young woman had been raped and mutilated before she was murdered.

Women at the April 3rd protest were heard chanting, "Kill the rapists!" Soghé's mother later delivered a letter to interior ministry officials on behalf of the demonstrators.

The brutal killing of the young woman on March 28th stirred outrage from Mauritanian citizens.

"We've all been moved by it," Association of Female Family Heads (AFCF) chair Aminetou Mint El Moktar said. "This is the first time our country has seen a rape

followed by such an outbreak of savage behaviour."

"We can't let it pass without marking it in some way: we're all here to say this must never happen again in this country. Justice must be passed fairly and the punishment must be an example to all," she added.

The young woman's "barbaric killing" was a wake-up call, Le Calame reporter Mariem Mint Derwich said.

Women in Mauritania and elsewhere are the "first to fall victim to insecurity, the first victims in society, the first victims of violence", she said.

"This savage murder must remind us of certain things... violence against women is a sordid, daily reality," Mint Derwich added.

AFCF reported that 4,732 women were raped in 2012, she noted, asking, "How many more have been hushed up and hidden away?"

"Our societies have always preferred the hypocrisy of false morals and the preservation of social, family and/or tribal

order over speaking out," Mint Derwich told Magahrebia.

"Authorities have helped this by causing confusion between Sharia law and the status of women, happily blurring the distinctions between tradition and religion, and shamelessly sanctioning abominable behaviour without any scruples," she added. The Personal Status Code was one example, the journalist noted.

"Mauritanian law bans the marriage of women under the age of 18, but by sleight of hand it allows the marriage of an underage girl at her guardian's discretion," she said.

The "Adama" NGO is speaking out about the increase in sex crimes, particularly the rape of children.

The NGO is also calling for a ban on pornographic films, which the organisation says encourages young people to take a step from fiction to reality.

"The whole of Mauritania must wake up and put a stop to violence in all its forms,

particularly our sisters, cousins, wives, daughters and mothers," Nouakchott resident Amadou Kide said.

"Our Islamic religion protects women, irrespective of race or ethnicity," Kide added.

Women's associations on March 8th handed Mauritanian authorities a draft bill aimed at preventing gender-based violence.

The proposal is still on the table, but NGOs said the Penda Sogué case could encourage authorities to put it into action.

Meanwhile, the government launched a large-scale police campaign to crack down on crime.

In accordance with the security plan from the High Council for Defence, the national gendarmerie deployed extra units around Nouakchott.

A curfew has also been put in place in the high-risk neighbourhoods of Toujinine, Arafat and Dar-Naim.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/28/feature-01

- **National Conscience Front slams Judge Zend for 'foreign interference' calls**

The Islamist-dominated National Conscience Front has called for the head of the Judges Club to be held accountable for statements seen as calling for US intervention in Egyptian affairs

Egypt's National Conscience Front lambasted Saturday veteran judge Ahmed El-Zend for "demanding foreign interference" in domestic affairs, in the latest development in the judiciary-presidency conflict saga.

El-Zend, head of the unofficial judicial union the Judges Club, has been spearheading counterattacks on Islamist forces who have been calling for a "purge of the judiciary" while pushing forward controversial amendments to the judicial authority law.

In recent press conferences, El-Zend sounded disgruntlement with protests against the judicial system, expressing

astonishment over the fact that the US "did not do anything concerning the flagrant encroachments of Egypt's judiciary." His statements drew fierce criticism against him, with many considering it as a call for the US to intervene in a domestic dispute.

After El-Zend underlined last week that he did not mean to invite foreign interference, the Conscience Front demanded that he should be held "legally and politically" accountable for his statements, which the front described during a Saturday press conference as "ignorance of the meaning of patriotism and international law."

El-Zend along with hundreds of judges have been protesting the new proposed judicial authority law, which would see a reduction of the age of retirement from 70 to 60. El-Zend and colleagues have said the purpose behind that law is to introduce new Brotherhood-loyal judges, replacing around 3,500 judges that would be force retired should the law be ratified.

The Shura Council's Legislative and Constitutional Affairs Committee on Wednesday gave its assent for the

potential amendments to the judicial authority law. The amendments should be referred back to the Shura Council for further discussion. In case approved by the council, the amendments will be referred back to the committee to discuss the amendments one by one.

While reading the National Conscience Front's statement, Mohamed El-Beltagy — a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party, and also one of the front's leading figures — said that the Shura Council is under attack, so as to ensure it cannot "fulfill its duties to ratify legislation," which would "turn the new constitution into mere ink on paper."

The Shura Council, the upper house of parliament, currently holds legislative authority until a new lower chamber of parliament — the House of Representatives — is elected.

El-Zend reiterated that only the House of Representatives is entitled to pass and amend laws, not the Shura Council. He also threatened that legal action would be taken against critics, should they keep on attacking the judicial system.

The National Conscience Front includes several political figures, mainly from the Islamist current, including former Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Mohamed Mahsoub, legal expert Ramadan Bateekh, former Islamist presidential candidate Mohamed Selim El-Awa, Ghad Al-Thawra Party leader Ayman Nour, and ex-parliamentarian Mohamed Mohieddin.

The front has been subject to fierce criticism since its launch, with detractors accusing it of being a "contrived" opposition that aims to take pressure off the presidency. Its critics have been quick to point out that the front contains a number of prominent Islamist figures under its umbrella. Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi hails from the Muslim Brotherhood.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70240/Egypt/Politics-/National-Conscience-Front-slams-Judge-Zend-for-for.aspx>

- **Oman reassures Libya Gathafi family not to meddle in politics**

MUSCAT - Oman has reassured Libya that members of killed dictator Moamer Gathafi's family who are staying in the sultanate will not interfere in Libyan politics, Foreign Minister Mohammed Abdelaziz said on Sunday.

"The Sultanate of Oman has accepted to treat them as political refugees and this is its right. What we are concerned about is that they carry out no political activities against the February 17 revolt" that ended with Gathafi's killing in 2011, Abdelaziz said.

"We have received reassurances on several occasions from the Omanis that this (concern) will be respected."

Abdelaziz said Gathafi's daughter Aisha, her sons, husband, and brother Mohammed as well as other relatives who had fled to Algeria during the uprising have been granted refuge in Oman.

In addition to Aisha and Mohammed, Gathafi's wife Safia and their son Hannibal sought refuge in Algeria after the fall of Tripoli in August 2011 to rebels battling the dictator's forces. Gathafi's another

son, Saadi, fled to Niger in September 2011.

Mutassim, Seif al-Arab and Khamis, three other sons of Gathafi, were killed during the conflict in separate incidents.

The dictator's most prominent son Seif al-Islam, who was once touted as a potential successor, was arrested in November 2011 and is awaiting trial.

Gathafi himself was killed in his hometown of Sirte in October 2011.

Arab monarchies of the Gulf are known to offer political asylum as long as the refugee does not indulge in politics from their soil.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58406>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Constitutional Council to address PSP challenge**

BEIRUT: The Constitutional Council is set to meet Monday to look into a challenge put forward by MP Walid Jumblatt's

National Struggle Front bloc over the suspension of electoral deadlines set under the 1960 law, a judicial source told The Daily Star.

In remarks to An-Nahar newspaper published Monday, the council's head said that the body is set to appoint a rapporteur to draft a report concerning the challenge put forward by Jumblatt's bloc.

"We will appoint a rapporteur [today] from one of the council's members to submit a report [over the challenge] in no more than 10 days," said Issam Sleiman.

Sleiman said the council would meet in the next couple of days to discuss the challenge submitted by Jumblatt's bloc, adding that the deadline for issuing a decision on the matter is May 26.

Earlier this month President Michel Sleiman signed a draft law approved by Parliament suspending the deadline for submitting candidatures for the parliamentary polls until May 19. Lawmakers from Jumblatt's PSP had boycotted the Parliament session.

The challenge to the suspension of candidacies was submitted Friday by the eight-member National Struggle Front, Deputy Speaker Farid Makari and MPs Ahmad Karami and Marwan Hamade.

The PSP argues that the suspension of the deadlines would annul the controversial "1960 law" without an alternative to replace it.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-29/215427-constitutional-council-to-address-bsp-challenge.ashx#axzz2RqOxvjkd>

- **Bogdanov meets Nasrallah, concludes Lebanon visit**

BEIRUT: Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov met with Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah over the weekend for talks on the political developments in the region before concluding his visit to Lebanon, the National News Agency reported Sunday.

The meeting that was held on Saturday addressed the developments in Lebanon as well as Syria and was attended by

Russian Ambassador to Lebanon Alexander Zaspikin.

Bogdanov concluded his three-day visit to Lebanon early Sunday and headed to the Jordanian capital as part of his tour in the region.

The Russian envoy voiced satisfaction over his talks with Lebanese officials and said prior to his departure that they focused on the latest local and regional developments.

“Our visit helped us develop a vision regarding the future of Lebanese-Russian ties,” Bogdanov told reporters speaking at Rafik Hariri International Airport in Beirut.

During his visit, the Russian envoy held talks with President Michel Sleiman, caretaker Premier Najib Mikati, Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam and other political leaders.

Bogdanov said over the weekend that Russia opposes attempts at pressuring neighboring countries to Syria to interfere in the conflict, and was worried that any if the crisis drags on it risks widening divisions in between Lebanon and Syria.

He also said the consensus over the naming of Salam would help accelerate the formation of a Cabinet.

Salam was appointed on April 6 by a sweeping majority during parliamentary consultations to replace Mikati, who resigned in March over rifts within his Cabinet.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-28/215320-bogdanov-meets-nasrallah-concludes-lebanon-visit.ashx#axzz2RqOxvjkd>

- **Lebanon dragged in as Hizbollah joins Syria war**

BAALBEK, Lebanon — Along north Lebanon’s highways, the portraits of Hizbollah fighters who have died in skirmishes with Israel are fading. But there are glistening photos of those killed in Hizbollah’s new fight.

These men died in Syria, battling alongside the army of Hizbollah’s close ally President Bashar Assad against rebel units in a conflict which has killed more than 70,000

people and risks reigniting Lebanon's 15-year sectarian civil war.

The Shiite Muslim group, designated a terrorist organisation by the United States, is the most effective military body in Lebanon and its growing involvement in Syria's quagmire has angered Lebanese Sunni rebel sympathisers.

The Hizbollah stronghold of Baalbek, famed for its colossal Roman ruins, now feels like a garrison town. Hizbollah men in military fatigues and police outfits are everywhere. As are Jeeps and Chevrolets with blacked-out windows — the group's vehicles of choice.

On Wednesday afternoon, machinegun fire rang out through Baalbek's narrow streets, signalling the arrival of another dead Hizbollah fighter from Syria, 12 km to the east.

Around 30 of his comrades quickly aligned in the street and straightened their green berets, readying themselves to carry the corpse on their shoulders.

"We have one or two of these funerals every day in Baalbek," said a young

electronics shopkeeper, who asked to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the issue.

A Hizbollah policeman in a polyester blue shirt told Reuters not to film the public funeral. "There are five or six Hizbollah martyrs every day from northern Lebanon," he said quietly, ushering the car away.

An open secret

Lebanon endured a military presence by its historically dominant neighbour for 29 years until 2005 and has tried to maintain a policy of "dissociation" from Syria's once-peaceful uprising against four decades of family rule that turned violent after Assad's men killed and arrested thousands.

But insulating Lebanon's four million people from Syria proved impossible; refugees flooded in, Sunni villagers along the border began giving shelter, food and medical care to Syrian rebels and rebel supporters in Lebanon sent guns and fighters across the border to fight Assad's troops.

With no command structure, how many is hard to establish, but 12 Lebanese gunmen were killed by the Syrian army near Homs in November and residents in the Lebanese coastal town of Tripoli, where Sunnis sporadically clash with Alawites, say some local Sunnis fight in Syria, too.

Assad has told Lebanon, where power is distributed between Sunni Muslims, Maronite Christians and Shiite Muslims, it must help him fight what he calls “foreign-backed terrorist groups”.

His men have regularly fired mortars into Lebanon and occasionally entered in pursuit of fleeing Syrian rebels.

Hizbollah, which was formed as a resistance group to the Israeli occupation during Lebanon’s own civil war between 1975 and 1990, has been called in to help.

It maintains that it is keeping its weapons and huge missile caches to defend the country, but fighting a foreign war has stretched the definition of the group’s mandate, angering those Lebanese who want to distance the country from Syria.

Officially, Hizbollah denies fighting in Syria. Asked about the latest escalation in the border area, Ibrahim Mussawi, Hizbollah’s media relations officer, said: “For two years it has been our official policy not to comment.”

But the secret is an open one. Michael Young, an opinion writer for the Beirut-based Daily Star, said in a column on Thursday that the pressure is likely coming from Shiite Iran, Hizbollah’s main financier and supporter of Assad, who is himself an Alawite, an offshoot of Shiism.

“Hizbollah’s becoming cannon fodder for the Syrian regime, at Iran’s request, is not something the party must relish,” he wrote. “There is a price to pay for Hizbollah’s pushing the boundaries of Lebanon’s sectarian system to its limits. And this price may be the party’s gradual destruction, or worse, a Lebanese sectarian civil war.”

Late on Wednesday, prominent Syrian opposition figure Moaz Alkhatib issued a direct appeal to Hizbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah to withdraw fighters from Syria to prevent sectarian war engulfing the Middle East.

“The blood of your sons in Lebanon should not be spilled fighting our oppressed sons in Syria,” Alkhatib said in a video message, following days of heavy fighting in Syria’s Homs border province where rebels say Hizbollah is most active.

“Hizbollah’s intervention in Syria has complicated matters greatly,” he said.

Alkhatib, a Sunni former preacher in Damascus, said Sunni and Shiite Muslims had to overcome “a thousand years of strife” between their communities, or risk an explosion of sectarian conflict reaching from Syria and Lebanon to Turkey and Iran.

But already there have been calls to arms by influential Sunni Muslim preachers in Lebanon against Hizbollah, the “Party of God”, risking a return to Lebanese bloodshed.

One of the most outspoken, Ahmad Al Assir, urged his supporters to fight Hizbollah inside Syria to help rebel groups, many of whom are hardline Islamist.

And on Saturday, Syria’s Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra front broadcast a statement on the opposition Orient Television, saying rebel brigades would “move the battle into Lebanon” if the Hizbollah-backed offensive in Homs continued.

The statement said rebels would use tanks and missiles to hit Baalbek and move fighters into Lebanese territory to attack Hizbollah there.

Syrian rebel hatred

Over the past two weeks, eight Grad rockets have landed in Shiite Hermel, a sprawling agricultural town of around 100,000 next to the Orontes River on Lebanon’s border with Syria and about 45km north of Baalbek.

One empty building was hit along Hermel’s main thoroughfare, leaving a metre-wide hole. Another hit a house next to an orphanage further into the town and shrapnel pock-marked a nearby house. None have caused injuries, yet.

The mayor of Hermel, Hajj Saqr, said the missiles were fired by Syrian rebels, or as he calls them: “terrorists”.

“If [the rebels] want change, then why do they fire into Lebanon?” he asked, saying Hermel has taken in 4,000 Syrian refugee families and helped the wounded.

“If the terrorists continue to attack and enter Lebanon, then we will protect ourselves,” he said.

Saqr denied that men from his pro-Hizbollah town are making the 10km trip north to fight in Syria.

He said only that Lebanese citizens living just within Syria have set up their own civilian militia to protect themselves. Hizbollah also says its members in Lebanese-populated villages in Syria are “defending themselves”.

But further up the road to Syria, lined with pictures of Assad and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, there is an evident military buildup. Hizbollah fighters are everywhere, some carrying big bags and walking north.

The group’s private ambulance service runs back and forth across the Orontes. And as frogs croak by the river, a Syrian air

force jet briefly enters Lebanese airspace before banking sharply and releasing two bombs on a town over the border.

<http://jordantimes.com/lebanon-dragged-in-as-hizbollah-joins-syria-war>

6. SYRIA

- **Ahmadinejad: War, Bloodshed No Good Way to Establish Security in Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reiterated the necessity for the settlement of the Syrian crisis through talks, and said security cannot be established in the Muslim country by a group which seeks to grasp power through war and bloodshed.



"Empowerment of any group through war and conflict in Syria means continued war and insecurity for a long time," Ahmadinejad said in a meeting with

Egyptian President's Senior Advisor in Foreign Relations Essam el-Haddad in Tehran on Sunday.

Noting that Iran and Egypt share common views on Syria, he said, "We should accelerate our measures to settle the problems in Syria based on understanding and talks and I hope that we can use all our power in this path and I believe that victory belongs to nations with God's assistance."

Haddad, who is visiting Tehran as the Egyptian president's special envoy, stressed the necessity for ending violence and bloodshed in Syria, and said, "We believe that God has entrusted Iran and Egypt with the responsibility to settle the crisis in Syria and we should prevent the interference of foreign states in Syria by taking the initiative in our hands."

Earlier in February, presidents of Iran, Egypt and Turkey in a meeting in Cairo underscored the necessity for an immediate stop in the bloodshed, violence and crisis in Syria.

In their trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the OIC Summit, Ahmadinejad, Mursi

and Gul proposed several initiatives and discussed various issues related to solving the Syrian crisis, but they were all agreed on the point that the massacres and bloodshed there needed to end immediately.

The three political leaders at the meeting commissioned the three countries foreign ministers to have a series of meetings to sum up the discussed issues and present them to the concerned parties and officials in Syria so that the crisis and bloodshed there would hopefully come to an end.

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

Thousands of people have been killed since terrorist and armed groups turned protest rallies into armed clashes.

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

In October 2011, calm was almost restored in most parts of the Arab state after President Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but Israel, the US and its Arab allies brought the country into chaos through every possible means. Tel Aviv, Washington and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots in the hope of increasing unrests in Syria.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107165388>

- **Syrian rebels, troops clash at three air bases**

BEIRUT — Syrian rebels seeking to topple President Bashar Assad fought intense battles with his troops on Sunday to try to seize control of three military air bases in the country's north and curtail the regime's use of its punishing air power, activists said.

Rebels, who have been trying to capture the air fields for months, broke into the sprawling Abu Zuhour air base in north-western Idlib province and Kweiras base in the Aleppo province on Saturday. Fighting raged inside the two facilities Sunday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least seven fighters were killed in the fighting in Abu Zuhour, in addition to an unknown number of soldiers. The group, which relies on a network of activists on the ground, said the Syrian air force conducted an air strike on Abu Zuhour village during the fighting to ease pressure on government troops inside the base.

Rebels control much of Idlib and Aleppo provinces, which border Turkey, although government troops still hold some areas including the provincial capital of Idlib province and parts of the city of Aleppo, Syria's largest urban centre.

The Aleppo Media Centre said rebels also seized 60 per cent of the Mannagh helicopter base near the border with Turkey. Rebels from the Islamist Al Burraq Brigades announced that fighters from multiple factions in northern Aleppo have launched a large-scale offensive to seize full control of the facility.

Government troops regularly shell nearby areas from the Mannagh base, including a rocket attack overnight on the town of Tal

Rifaat near the border with Turkey that killed at least four people, including two women and a child.

Syria's conflict started with largely peaceful anti-government protests in March 2011 but eventually turned into a civil war. More than 70,000 people have been killed, according to the United Nations.

The Obama administration said Thursday that intelligence indicates that government forces likely used chemical agents against rebels in two attacks.

Washington's declaration was its strongest on the topic so far, although the administration said it was still working to pin down definitive proof of the use of chemical weapons. It held back from saying Damascus had crossed what President Barack Obama has said would be a "red line" prompting tougher action in Syria.

Both sides of the civil war accuse each other of using the chemical weapons.

The deadliest such alleged attack was in the Khan Al Assal village in the Aleppo

province in March. The Syrian government called for the United Nations to investigate alleged chemical weapons use by rebels in the attack that killed 31 people.

Syria, however, has not allowed a team of experts into the country because it wants the investigation limited to the single Khan Al Assal incident, while UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has urged "immediate and unfettered access" for an expanded investigation.

The state-run Al Thawra newspaper on Sunday accused the UN secretary general of being a "tool" for the United States and accused him of "bowing to American and European pressures".

In neighbouring Lebanon, Hizbollah's Al Manar TV reported that Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov met Saturday night with the pro-Syrian militant group's leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. No details emerged of the late night meeting.

The Shiite Muslim group has been drawn into the fighting in Syria and is known to be backing regime fighters in Shiite

villages near the Lebanon border. The Syrian opposition accuses fighters from the group of taking part in the Syrian military crackdown inside the country.

At a Sunday morning at a news conference in Beirut, Bogdanov called for a diplomatic solution to Syria's civil war based on the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The communiqué is a broad but ambiguous proposal endorsed by Western powers and Russia to provide a basis for negotiations.

<http://jordantimes.com/syrian-rebels-troops-clash-at-three-air-bases>

- **Absence of secular rebels in Syria creates problem for U.S.**

CAIRO — In Syria's largest city, Aleppo, rebels who are aligned with al-Qaeda control the power plant, run the bakeries and head a court that applies Islamic law. Elsewhere, they have seized government oil fields, put employees back to work and now profit from the crude they produce.

Across Syria, rebel-held areas are dotted with Islamic courts staffed by lawyers and clerics, and by fighting brigades led by

extremists. Even the Supreme Military Council, the umbrella rebel organization whose formation the West had hoped would sideline radical groups, is stocked with commanders who want to infuse Islamic law into a future Syrian government.

Nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of.

This is the landscape President Barack Obama confronts as he considers how to respond to growing evidence that Syrian officials have used chemical weapons, crossing a red line he had set. More than two years of violence has radicalized the armed opposition fighting the government of President Bashar Assad, leaving few groups with both a political vision the United States shares and the military might to push it forward.

Among the most extreme is the notorious Al Nusra Front, the al-Qaeda-aligned force declared a terrorist organization by the U.S., but other groups also share aspects of its Islamist ideology in varying degrees.

"Some of the more extremist opposition is very scary from an American perspective,

and that presents us with all sorts of problems," said Ari Ratner, a fellow at the Truman National Security Project and former Middle East adviser for the Obama administration. "We have no illusions about the prospect of engaging with the Assad regime — it must still go — but we are also very reticent to support the more hard-line rebels."

Syrian officials recognize that the United States is worried that it has few natural allies in the armed opposition and have tried to exploit that with a public campaign to persuade, or frighten, Washington into staying out of the fight. At every turn, they promote the notion that the alternative to Assad is an extremist Islamic state.

The Islamist character of the opposition reflects the main constituency of the rebellion, which has been led since its start by Syria's Sunni Muslim majority, mostly in conservative, marginalized areas. The descent into brutal civil war has hardened sectarian differences and the failure of more mainstream rebel groups to secure regular arms supplies has allowed Islamists to fill the void and win supporters.

The religious agenda of the combatants sets them apart from many civilian activists, protesters and aid workers who hoped the uprising would create a civil, democratic Syria.

When the armed rebellion began, defectors from the government's staunchly secular army formed the vanguard. The rebel movement has since grown to include fighters with a wide range of views, including al-Qaeda-aligned jihadis seeking to establish an Islamic emirate, political Islamists inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and others who want an Islamic-influenced legal code like that found in many Arab states.

"My sense is that there are no seculars," said Elizabeth O'Bagy, of the Institute for the Study of War, who has made several trips to Syria in recent months to interview rebel commanders.

Of most concern to the United States is the Nusra Front, whose leader recently confirmed that the group cooperated with al-Qaeda in Iraq and pledged fealty to al-Qaeda's top leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's longtime deputy.

In the oil-rich provinces of Deir al-Zour and Hasaka, Nusra fighters have seized government oil fields, putting some under the control of tribal militias and running others themselves.

"They are the strongest military force in the area," said the commander of a Hasaka rebel brigade reached via Skype. "We can't deny it."

But most of its fighters joined the group for the weapons, he said, not the ideology, and that some left after discovering the al-Qaeda connection.

"Most of the youth who joined them did so to topple the regime, not because they wanted to join al-Qaeda," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

http://www.denverpost.com/nationworld/ci_23122877/absence-secular-rebels-syria-creates-problem-u-s

- **Syria: we must not rush to judge on chemical arms**

What is most important now is the integrity and transparency of any investigation into the use of agents such as sarin

War is a terrible thing. Weapons systems are designed to kill and maim in horrible ways with different levels of discrimination.

The laws of war, while setting limits for behaviour, not least prohibiting the intentional targeting of civilians and proportionality, barely mitigate the awfulness of conflict.

Some weapons, however, have come to be regarded as more terrible than others. The use of nuclear and chemical weapons is seen as far beyond the pale. Despite the fact that an estimated 70,000 people have lost their lives in the Syrian war so far, the overwhelming majority to conventional weapons, the alleged limited use of chemical agents, including the nerve agent sarin, has come to be seen as a defining moment for the international community.

Few would argue that the widespread use of chemical and biological agents against civilians in Syria by the regime, or, indeed,

by the opposition forces, would not change attitudes towards intervention in the conflict. The crucial question is: have we reached that point?

The reality is that the considerations are complex. The bar for proof should be set very high. What is known at this juncture is that samples that appear to have tested positive for sarin have been provided to at least three western intelligence agencies. Although it was at first suggested that these samples were gathered by national intelligence agencies, French officials have said that they have "no national evidence", while sources in the US have told media outlets that blood samples seen there were provided by opposition sources. The UK has not made clear the source of its samples.

That sourcing, as Michael Luhan, a spokesman for the Hague-based Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, has made clear, is problematic. It is evidence that it would not be regarded as sufficient for the UN's own investigating team. The White House too, in its letter to senators confirming suspicions of chemical weapons "exposure", has made clear that it has

similar doubts, suggesting both differences of opinion in US intelligence over what has been found thus far and a split at policy level between "intelligence assessments" and "corroborated facts".

While the tests for sarin on physiological samples are more straightforward, environmental samples can be a more complicated issue, with known examples of false positives from contamination by agricultural chemicals.

Evidence of exposure is one thing, but proving that it was regime forces that fired chemical weapons requires a far more complex casework, requiring not simply identifying traces of toxins, but establishing by whom, when and where the weapons were deployed. That would involve ruling out both the possibility that the agents were released accidentally – for example in a fire – or inadvertently by forces unaware a shell was chemical. There are precedents for both.

Another crucial issue is intention. While much reporting of the intelligence claims has focused on the samples as proof that the "Assad regime" used chemical weapons as opposed to regime forces – a

crucial distinction – that is far from clear. Even if it can be established that a certain unit fired a chemical munition on a certain day at a specified target, the very limited use of chemical weapons means that does not amount to proof of a policy of use.

Indeed, as several high-profile cases involving senior officials involved in the wars in the Balkans have demonstrated, proving chain-of-command responsibility can be extremely difficult. In this case, it would be necessary to establish with a high level of probability that Assad or members of his inner circle ordered chemical weapons use or had permitted individual commanders to make that decision. And unlike Saddam's use of chemical weapons to kill 5,000 Kurds at Halabja, in Syria, there is as yet no clear pattern of use from which it might be surmised that targeting with chemical weapons has become regime policy.

Indeed, even if it were established that chemical weapons have been used on a very limited scale by regime forces – the most likely explanation for the samples – it remains unclear to many what benefit such a discrete use of a weapon of last resort might confer on the regime.

That is not to say there does not exist a possible explanation for such a limited use, argued most clearly by Jon Lee Anderson in a column for the New Yorker last week. In it, he points to Assad's history during the Syrian war of "gradualist escalation" – seeing what he can get away with at each stage through the initially limited use of paramilitaries, helicopters and jets to target the opposition, expanding the use of each when he has realised he can get away with it. The limited use of sarin – to test the reaction of the international community – would fit this logic.

The problem of determining how the exposure took place is overshadowed by an issue that has never gone away during the course of the conflict in Syria: what options are open to the international community if it determined that a threshold has been reached?

The failure of the interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, the first launched on concocted intelligence, has left an understandable reluctance, not least in Washington, to be dragged into foreign adventures lacking clear outcomes.

All options are fraught with difficulties, not least arming an opposition in which al-Qaida-allied jihadists are prominently represented. While it would be possible to enforce a no-fly zone – as happened in Libya – the experience in that conflict, which has left behind a deeply fragile state lacking central authority, has raised fears over what a post-Assad Syria might look like if the regime were suddenly to collapse.

If there is one glimmer of hope on the horizon, it is in the evidence that on the issue of chemical weapons at least, the US and Russia are in agreement, with Moscow having warned Damascus in private in terms similar to President Barack Obama's public warnings.

Although in the past Russia has hardly been an honest broker in the conflict, in this case its concerns seem genuine, opening an avenue of pressure on the regime to allow UN inspectors to visit sites of suspected use.

What is most important now is the integrity and transparency of any investigation that requires governments

that claim they have evidence of use to explain precisely what they know as a fact and the limits of their knowledge.

At this critical juncture, anything less than a frank and honest assessment would be as shameful as trying to sweep the claims under the carpet.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/28/observer-editorial-syria-chemical-weapons>

- **Syrian premier escapes bomb attack**

Syria's prime minister escaped an assassination attempt on Monday when a bomb went off near his convoy in the capital, Damascus, state media reported. Prime Minister Wael Al Halqi was unhurt in the attack in Damascus' western neighborhood of Mazzeh, state TV said. The TV showed footage of heavily damaged cars and debris in the area of the blast as firefighters fought to extinguish a large blaze caused by the explosion.

A Syrian government official told The Associated Press that an improvised explosive device was placed under a car

that was parked in the area and was detonated as Al Halqi's car drove by. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

The government-run Al Ikhbariya station said Al Halqi went into a meeting with an economic committee straight after the bombing.

The attack was not the first targeting a high official in the Syrian capital over the past year.

On July 18, a blast at the Syrian national security building in Damascus during a meeting of Cabinet ministers killed the defence minister and his deputy, who was President Bashar Assad's brother-in-law. That attack also wounded the interior minister.

In December, a car bomb targeted the Interior Ministry in Damascus, killing several people and wounding more than 20, including Interior Minister Mohammed Al Shaar. Initially, Syrian state media said Al Shaar was not hurt in the Dec. 12 blast. News of his injuries emerged a week later, after he was brought to neighboring

Lebanon for treatment of a serious back injury.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Monday's attack.

Massive bombings like the one that struck the prime minister's convoy have been a trademark of Islamic radicals fighting alongside the Syrian rebels, raising concerns about the extremists' role in Syria's civil war.

Al-Halqi, a senior member of Assad's ruling Baath party, took office last year after his predecessor, Riad Hijab, defected to Jordan. Al Halqi was Syria's health minister before taking the post. He is a member of Assad's ruling Baath party and hails from the southern city of Daraa, the birthplace of the Syrian uprising.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2013/April/middleeast_April341.xml§ion=middleeast

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Green bank among agreements to be signed during Khalifa visit**

The UAE and the UK are expected to sign three agreements, including one on setting up a green bank for environment-friendly projects during the President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan's visit to the country which begins today.

The UAE economic delegation is headed by Shaikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, CEO and Chairman of The Emirates Group and Chairman of Dubai World, Shaikha Lubna Al Qasimi, Minister for Development and International Cooperation, Dr. Anwar Mohammed Gargah, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Federal National Council Affairs, and Dr Sultan bin Ahmed Sultan Al Jaber, Minister of State, who is also CEO and Managing Director of Masdar.

' UAE-UK relations are improving, and three agreements will be signed between the two countries,' said Dr. Anwar Gargash. The green bank is one of them and there is also an agreement on

specifications and metrology, he said. Bilateral ties are looking good and the agreements will go a long way in cementing the relationship, the minister said.

Dr Sultan Al Jaber shed light on the proposed Green Investment Bank, which will finance green energy projects in Britain. It will grants suitable financing facilities for sustainable energy projects like the London Array Offshore Wind Farm project, the biggest wind-generating energy project in the world which is 30pc owned by Masdar.

The \$2.4 billion mega development will be launched in July this year and is now in its pilot phase.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/nationgeneral/2013/April/nationgeneral_April564.xml§ion=nationgeneral

- **Al Azhar's support to Islamic, Arab issues hailed**

General Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and

Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces met the Grand Imam of Egypt's Al Azhar Al Sharif, Dr Sheikh Ahmed Al Tayyeb, who is currently on a visit to the UAE.

General Shaikh Mohammed congratulated Dr Sheikh Al Tayyeb for being named the Cultural Personality of the Year in the seventh edition of the Shaikh Zayed Book Award.



General Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed receives Dr Sheikh Ahmed Al Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. — Wam

At the meeting, held at Emirates Palace, Gen Shaikh Mohammed hailed the intellectual and cultural role of Al Azhar Al Sharif and its support to the Islamic and Arab issues. These positions, he noted, stem from the prestigious status attained by the institution centuries ago as a scientific and religious beacon.

General Shaikh Mohammed commended the outspoken and clearly-stated positions taken by Al Azhar to firmly counter all attacks on the essence and the creed of Islam.

He also hailed the institution's role in preserving the ideological fabric of Islam, which is rich in diversity of visions and thoughts that comply with the foundations of Shariah and the spirit of Islam.

General Shaikh Mohammed emphasised the UAE's interest in bolstering its cooperation with, and support to Al Azhar Al Sharif in the service to Islam and Muslims in scientific, religious, educational and other spheres.

General Shaikh Mohammed and the Grand Imam discussed issues facing the Muslim World and emphasised the need for coordination among all parties concerned in the Arab region and Muslim World in order to achieve solidarity and face challenges.

The Grand Imam praised the wise leadership of the President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and his

role in backing the causes of Islam and Muslims in continuation of the approach adopted by the late founding father, Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

He also hailed the UAE's humanitarian and charitable aid that had given the UAE a good international reputation.

He also praised the UAE's support for religious and scientific institutions involved in spreading the culture and teachings of Islam.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/todayevent/2013/April/todayevent_April37.xml§ion=todayevent

- **UAE disappointed by US human rights report**

Report provides an unbalanced picture of the human rights situation in the UAE and fails to give adequate recognition to the significant progress

Abu Dhabi: The UAE was disappointed by the US State Department's 2012 Report on

Human Rights Practices in the UAE, published on April 19. The report provides an unbalanced picture of the human rights situation in the UAE and fails to give adequate recognition to the significant progress that has been made to promote and protect human rights in the country.

The UAE is rated by the UN as having a very high level of human development; it is a tolerant, multicultural society in which people with many different nationalities worship freely in churches, temples and mosques; UN indicators show that it has a high level of gender equality; and it provides citizens and residents with access to education and healthcare.

By focusing on specific instances of alleged violations of human rights and what the State Department considers to be the remaining human rights challenges facing the UAE, the report fails to adequately reflect this overall progressive context.

In addition, the report does not mention some of the important steps that the UAE took in 2012 to further the protection of human rights. For example, when discussing torture, the report makes no mention of the fact that the UAE acceded

to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in July 2012.

Article continues below

When discussing discrimination against women, it makes no mention of the fact that in December 2012 the UAE's Cabinet made it compulsory for corporations and government agencies to include women on their boards of directors, or of the prominent role of women in UAE politics, including four female Ministers in the Federal Cabinet.

The UAE faces many challenges on human rights issues, like other countries, and is highly committed to an ongoing process of improvement in this regard. The UAE government takes concerns of any possible violation of human rights very seriously and is constantly working on strengthening its capacity to respond to these. It will continue to take this proactive approach, in a way that is consistent with its constitution, laws and traditions.

The UAE has also shown itself to be very open to engaging in constructive dialogue with other countries on human rights

issues. In January 2013, the UAE participated actively and in an open and transparent fashion in its Universal Periodic Review by the United Nations Human Rights Council and will soon respond officially to the recommendations made by 88 countries.

The UAE notes its preference for conducting dialogue on important human rights issues through this kind of legitimate, transparent, multilateral forum, as well as the ongoing discussions that take place between governments.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/gene ral/uae-disappointed-by-us-human-rights-report-1.1176441>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• US-led soldiers kill three civilians in eastern Afghanistan: Officials

US-led troops have killed at least three Afghan civilians in the country's eastern province of Nangarhar, local officials say, Press TV reports.

The incident took place on Sunday in province's Chaparhar district after US-led soldiers opened fire on people working on

a farmland, said Director of Provincial Development Council Malak Mohkam Khan.

Khan added that the US-led troops shot and killed the civilians including two children after they came under fire by unknown people.

US-led foreign forces killed seventeen civilians in the eastern province of Kunar last month.

On January 31, at least three Afghan farmers were wounded after US-led forces opened fire on them in the northeastern province of Kunar.

Civilian casualties have long been a source of friction between the Afghan government and US-led foreign forces and have dramatically increased anti-US sentiments in Afghanistan.

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

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

Meanwhile, a great number of Afghan civilians are killed in US-led drone strikes. Washington claims that its airstrikes target militants, but local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

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

- **UN-backed Afghan vaccination drive to reach 8 million children**

28 April 2013 – During a United Nations-backed global campaign to vaccinate children this week, Afghan Government officials are aiming to administer anti-measles and anti-polio vaccines along with additional doses of Vitamin A to about eight million children below five across the country.

Globally, the World Vaccination Week is marked between 24 and 30 April with the

theme ‘Stop Measles Now’ this year. In Afghanistan, a national anti-polio vaccination campaign was launched on 21 April with thousands of health workers and volunteers fanning out across the country’s 34 provinces in the first three days to administer anti-polio drops to children below five, according to the UN World Health Organization (WHO), which supports government efforts to eradicate polio and measles.

The anti-polio campaign is significantly important in Afghanistan because, as the WHO said, 160,000 to 180,000 Afghan children below five missed their routine vaccination, including for measles, in 2012.

One of the priorities of WHO and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Afghanistan is to eradicate polio – a challenge given that many Afghans see vaccination as a taboo, leaving the country as one of only three countries in the world, along with Pakistan and Nigeria, where polio is endemic.

Afghan Minister for Public Health, Dr. Suraya Dalil, said last week that two new cases of polio have been reported in Afghanistan this year – one each in

eastern Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. The number was 36 last year.

Dr. Dalil said that during the three-day campaign – focused on anti-polio vaccination – aimed to vaccinate around eight million children under five, which constitute about 90 per cent of Afghan children of that age group. Besides anti-polio drops, the children are also given Vitamin A capsules, which are necessary for children’s normal health and growth.

“Around 57,000 health workers and volunteers are taking part in the national drive throughout the country,” said Ms. Dalil, adding that the three-day anti-polio campaign would cost about US\$3 million.

According to WHO, the global Vaccination Week is focusing on measles elimination in Eastern Mediterranean Region because all the countries of the region have set 2015 as the target for measles elimination. The Week highlights the importance of protecting individuals from vaccine-preventable diseases and celebrates the achievements of immunization programmes in promoting health communities.

In Afghanistan, the immunization coverage has ways to reach the goal of at least 80 per cent coverage in every district and 90 per cent nationally.

“It is for more people and their communities to be protected from vaccine-preventable diseases,” said Dr. Ahmed F. Shadoul, the Representative of World Health Organization (WHO) in Afghanistan. “We all must work together to convince people that immunization saves lives of their lovely children, mobilize action to increase vaccination coverage and reinforce support for achieving national, regional and global immunization goals.”

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his message on the World Malaria Day, urged the global health community, including political leaders in endemic countries, to maintain their commitment to provide universal access to malaria interventions and end needless suffering from this preventable and treatable disease.

Since 2000, malaria mortality rates have fallen by more than 25 per cent globally. However, 50 of the 99 countries with ongoing transmission are now on track to

meet the 2015 World Health Assembly target of reducing incidence rates by more than 75 per cent. Malaria still kills an estimated 660,000 people worldwide, mainly children under five years of age in sub-Saharan Africa. Every year, more than 200 million cases occur; most of these cases are never tested or registered.

According to a WHO report published in 2011, Afghanistan is the third country in Eastern Mediterranean Region with endemic malaria. Despite 19 per cent decrease in the number of malaria cases as compared to the last year and 98 per cent decrease in the cases since 2002, still 391,365 cases of malaria were reported during last year.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.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.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM araştırma asistanı **Miray Başar** tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadođu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*