



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Protestors in Anbar threaten to sever relations with the Government (NINA)**

31 Mar 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Protestors in Anbar threatened the Government that they will sever relations with it unless it shows good intentions.

A statement issued on Sunday evening, Mar. 31, the Protestors said that the Government's negative messages, in the last three days, mainly aerial bombing of Tarmiya area and besieging the prisons suggest that the Government is not serious in discussions with protestors in the Protest Fields.

The statement added that the tyrannical decision of postponing elections in Anbar and Niniveh provinces might result in withdrawing military units from provinces where elections held and send them to these provinces under the pretext of protecting polling centers, while in fact to attack Protest fields.

Earlier Anbar Protest Organizing Committee announced that a negotiating

committee is been formed to negotiate with the Government.

Chairman of the Protest's Political Committee, Sheikh Abdul Razak al-Shimari, pointed out that the Negotiating Committee will carry the protestors' demands in one working paper for all provinces and will not allow any side to talk for the Protestors' demands other than the Negotiating Committee.

- **NA stresses the need for the continuation of dialogue with political partners (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

31 Mar 2013

The National Alliance has condemned the figures who incite violence and call for sectarianism, calling for excluding them, keeping them away from the protests' squares, and subjecting them to just judicial trials.

The National Alliance stressed, during a meeting headed by NA head Ibrahim al-Ja'fari and attended by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and a number of leading NA figures, the need for the continuation of dialogue with political partners in order to reach solutions to all the pending issues and preserve Iraq's unity. The meeting

witnessed discussions over the legitimate protesters' demands which were fulfilled by the ministerial and the fivefold committee. The NA stressed the need to go on with issuing the required procedures and legislations."

- **White National bloc rejects summoning Maliki at parliament (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The leading figure within the White National bloc, MP Aziz Shareef al-Mayahi announced his bloc's refusal for summoning the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki in the parliament's session of next Monday.

Mayahi pointed out that "The demand of investigating Maliki at the parliament is a clear violation for the parliament's bylaw as the article No. 55 of the bylaw stipulates sending a request by the parliament's chairmanship to the Premier and the latter identifies a date for the hosting session."

"Assigning a date for the hosting session by the parliament without considering the Premier's obligations and commitments is unacceptable, so the While bloc rejects

this violation on the parliament's bylaw," he stressed.

- **KA rules out [that] Kurdish MPs, ministers [will soon return to] their federal offices (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Kurdistan Alliance ruled out the return of its MPs and ministers to the parliament and the government.

The spokesperson of the KA, Muayad al-Tayib, told AIN on Sunday "I rule out near return for the Kurdish MPs and ministers to Baghdad to resume their offices as there is no serious step by the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki nor his coalition to settle the pending issues."

"Kurdistan President will hold meeting with the Kurdish MPs and ministers on next Monday to take decision over their resumption for their positions," he added.

- **Iraqi parliament lifts regular session till Monday (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi parliament lifted its regular session of Sunday till tomorrow Monday.

MP Mutashar al-Samarrai, of the Iraqiya Slate told AIN on Sunday "The parliament chairmanship decided to lift the session till next Monday after voting on a number of law drafts and completing the discussions with the Independent High electoral Commission over the decision of postponing the local elections in Anbar and Nineveh provinces."

- **Kurdish MP calls on Maliki to resign (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mohamed Kiani of parliament Change bloc called the Iraqi Premier, Nouri al-Maliki to resign from his post since Iraq needs reliable government to stabilize the security and provide services.

Kiani stated to All Iraq News Agency "The country lacks government as the government means existence of a programme which is not found in Iraq, so the current government is failed."

"Maliki has to quit since he is not able to address the deteriorated security and service situations in the country," he added.

- **Araji calls to put end to Nijaifi's manipulation of power (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Qasim al-Araji, of parliament Badir bloc called the Iraqi political blocs to put an end to the Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi's autocracy in chairing the parliament's sessions.

Araji showed his surprise over "Nijaifi's reviewing for statements of security leaders dated for the last year about the security situation in Nineveh."

He added "Displaying these statements aims to mislead the MPs while summoning the Independent High Electoral Commission at the parliament to discuss the decision of postponing the local elections in Anbar and Nineveh provinces."

The parliament has discussed with the IHEC officials the decision of postponing Anbar and Nineveh's local elections during Sunday regular session.

- **[Persons Possessing Leaflets] Signed by Izzat al-Douri Arrested (Shafaq News)**

31 Mar 2013

Shafaq News / The Interior Ministry announced arresting six gunmen in possession of sectarian leaflets with the signature of the deputy Chairman of the dissolved Revolution Command Council, Izzat al-Duri in Babel province.

The ministry spokesman, Saad Maan said in a statement received by "Shafaq News", that "the security forces in Babel arrest six terrorists in al-Eskandariya town in Babel province, for possessing sectarian leaflets signed by the criminal, Izzat al-Duri".

Maan added that those leaflets "incite murder, terrorism, destroy the interests of the state and its citizens, provoke sectarian strife, press the government and create an angry public opinion against its policies".

Maan explained that the 100 leaflets included an explanatory text concerned conducting assassinations for some officials".

the security forces also seized 10 religious inciting books, that incite murder and provoke the return of Baath, according to the statement.

Duri is one of the most prominent wanted by the Iraqi government on charges of supporting armed groups and igniting violence.

- **Alawi calls for international supervision for next local elections in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Iraqiya Coalition, Ayiad Alawi, warned from disorder that may happen in Iraq if the current dramatic situation continues in the country.

Alawi said in a statement on occasion of the tenth anniversary of the war on Iraq in 2003 "The Iraqis still hope for a better future despite the fears of unrest and civil war which would lead for serious consequences for the region at large."

He stressed that "The upcoming local elections stand for Another chance to put Iraq on the right path," confirming "This

cannot be achieved without free, fair elections."

Alawi called "The neutral international organizations to supervise the elections and bring international observers to oversee the government's actions to ensure fair elections," noting "The current Iraqi government can't supervise fair elections."

- **Barzani and Nujaifi met to discuss security and Election-postponement in Nineveh (Shafaq News)**

31 Mar 2013

Shafaq News / President of Kurdistan Region , Massoud Barzani discussed in Erbil with the governor of Nineveh , Atheel al-Nujaifi, the security development in the country as well as the the postponing of the provincial elections in Nineveh.

A statement issued by KRG and received by "Shafaq News", reads that "Barzani received on Saturday, 03/30/2013 in Salahuddin, Nineveh Governor , Ethel al-Nujaifi," and that "the meeting which was attended by Interior Minister of the region , Karim Sinjari and discussed the security situation in Iraq in general and Nineveh".

The meeting highlighted the issue of postponing Nineveh's provincial elections and the latest related developments.

The statement added that "relations among the political forces in Nineveh province, especially the cooperative relations between Nineveh brotherhood list and Hadbaa have been discussed in the meeting,as well".

The federal government had decided earlier to postpone the local elections scheduled in 20 of April in Nineveh and Anbar due to the security deterioration as a result of continued protests and sit-ins opposed to Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki more than three months ago.

- **IHEC officials arrive to parliament to discuss postponing Anbar, Nineveh's local elections (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Independent High Electoral Commission's officials arrived to the Iraqi parliament building to discuss the decision of postponing the next local elections in Anbar and Nineveh provinces during the parliament's session of Sunday.

MP Mufeed al-Baldawi of the State of Law Coalition told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) on Sunday "40 MPs signed to take part in the discussions over the decision of postponing Anbar and Nineveh's local elections during the regular session devoted for discussing this decision."

- **Parliament to vote on postponing Anbar, Nineveh's local elections on Monday, says MP (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Hussein al-Mansouri of Ahrar bloc stressed that "The parliament legal committee will make a decision over accepting or refusing the government's decision of postponing the local elections of Anbar and Nineveh provinces to be submitted then, for vote at the parliament on next Monday.

Mansouri told All Iraq News Agency on Sunday "The parliament referred this subject to the legal committee in order to mold a decision about it."

"This decision will be displayed for vote during parliament Monday session," he added.

The parliament discussed, during Sunday session, the decision of postponing Anbar and Nineveh's local elections in presence of the Independent High Electoral Commission officials, Anbar Governor, Qasim al-Fahdawi, and representative for Nineveh Governor

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=31267](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31267)

- **Samarrai describes postponing Anbar, Nineveh's local elections as knockdown for political process (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mutashar al-Samarai, member of the parliament legal committee, described the decision of postponing the next local elections of Anbar and Nineveh provinces as "knockdown for the political process of Iraq" as the Provincial Elections Law stipulates that the elections are held across the provinces at a single time.

Samarrai stated to AIN on Sunday "The Independent High Electoral Commission officials were summoned at the parliament's session of Sunday to discuss

with them, the government's decision of postponing the two provinces' local elections," noting "The IHEC stressed its readiness to conduct the elections, but, it pointed out that it's up to the security forces to decide in this respect."

- **Polls body calls on Iraqis for effective participate in elections (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

31 Mar 2013

The Independent Higher Electoral Committee, IHEC, has called on Iraqi citizens to participate effectively in the provincial councils' elections.

The IHEC pointed out that the effective participation in the elections will result in electing competent candidates who will best serve citizens.

- **Elections security committee do not oppose army's protection of electoral centres (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

31 Mar 2013

The security committee of the provincial councils' elections, has said that the political blocs in Al-Anbar did not oppose appointing the Iraqi Army forces to

protect the electoral centres, in case of holding the elections.

Ahmad al-Khafaji, head of the security committee of the provincial councils' elections, told the IMN news centre that the Al-Anbar people do not reject the army's protection of the electoral centres, pointing out that unidentified parties issue statements regarding this issue. Al-Khafaji added that the Al-Anbar witnesses positive relations between the security leaders and the political blocs.

- **Call for government to stop Kuwaiti expansion, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

31 Mar 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Free Iraqiya bloc MP Alia Nsaif called today the Iraqi government to "wake up of its nap and put an end to the Kuwaiti expansion in Iraqi territories".

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, she referred to old historical documents where Kuwaiti borders were outlined by the British as independent emirate, "but, now, Kuwait is penetrating into Iraqi territories by tens of kilometers".

She disclosed that Kuwait paid for 36 donums of land, while the stolen area reached to 76 donums.

"The Iraqi government should wake up of its nap and put an end to Kuwaiti expansion, because coming generations will not forgive our silence and the loss of Iraqi territories", she confirmed.

UN representative to Iraq Martin Kobler announced that border demarcation between the two countries reached to an end by the approval of three Iraqi families to demolish their houses on the Kuwaiti side of the borders and accepting the compensations of the Iraqi government.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28432xbnr14eqwv2455ec5ux55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152882&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28432xbnr14eqwv2455ec5ux55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152882&l=1)

- **Iraqi MoJ denies issuing executions for Iraqi prisoners in Kuwait (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi Ministry of Justice denied issuing executions against Iraqi prisoners in the Kuwaiti jails.

The spokesperson of the Ministry, Wisam al-Freji, said "The Justice Minister, Hassan al-Shimari, phoned the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq, Ali al-Mu'min, and the Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohamed Bahr al-Oloum, to investigate the news which reported issuing executions against Iraqi prisoners in the Kuwaiti jails."

"The Ambassadors of both countries denied this news, stressing lack of Iraqi prisoners sentenced to death in Kuwait," he added.

"Shimari pointed out that both countries seek to conclude an agreement to exchange prisoners when completing the required approvals," Freji added.

News have reported that executions were issued for Iraqi prisoners present at the Kuwaiti prisons.

- **US and Turkey discuss Iraq, Syria over the weekend (Hurriyet Daily News)**

MURAT YETKİN

01 April 2013

The fragile situations in Iraq and Syria were discussed on March 30 during a telephone call between U.S. Secretary of

State John Kerry and Ahmet Davutoğlu, the foreign minister of Turkey, which shares a border with two critical Middle East countries, diplomatic sources told the Hürriyet Daily News.

On Syria, the discussion centered on the measures to be taken regarding a warning by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon regarding the Syrian government's use of Scud missiles against rebel forces in populated areas and the possible use of chemical weapons in President Bashar al-Assad's arsenal. On March 20, both Syrian government forces and rebel forces accused each other of using chemical weapons in the Han Ansal region, some 30 kilometers from the Turkish border.

In addition to the Turkish military's conventional measures along the 910-kilometer-long Syrian border, three NATO-owned Patriot anti-missile batteries operated by American, German and Dutch soldiers were deployed to Turkey earlier this year to endorse the solidarity of the alliance. In answer to HDN questions, sources said there was no mention during the conversation of assigning a dual role to the batteries to create a safe haven for the rebels.

Kerry had voiced his reaction to the weapons support the Syrian government gets from Iran and elsewhere via Iraq, during his visit to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad on March 24. Al-Maliki, himself a Shiite, the official religion of Iran, does not hide his support for al-Assad and was quoted as saying in return that he did not have the sufficient means to control the planes and trucks carrying cargo to Syria through Iraq.

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-and-turkey-discuss-iraq-syria-over-the-weekend.aspx?pageID=238&nid=44003&NewsCatID=409>

- **Border Forces repeal attack, 2 attempts to cross the borders from Syrian side (NINA)**

31 Mar 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Border Forces repealed and armed attack and two attempts to cross the borders from Syria into Iraq.

Statement on Sunday, Mar. 31, by the Ministry of Interior said that Border Forces repealed an attempt by infiltrators to cross from Syrian territories into Iraq in Damlouq area, Anbar province.

The statement added that Border Forces in Anbar province repealed an armed attack on border posts forcing armed persons to flee.

The statement went on saying that Border Forces' paratroopers in Niniveh province, repealed an attempt to perforate the barrier from the Syrian side into Iraq.

- **Dulaim's Amir accuses Iran of organized assassinations and displacement of Iraqi scientists and intellectuals (NINA)**

31 Mar 2013

Ramadi / NINA / Ali Hatem al-Suleiman, Amir of Dulaim's clans accused Iran and what he called, its agents of being behind the targeting Iraqi scientists and thinkers through organized assassinations and displacement campaigns carried out against them.

He demanded in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / to stop, what he called, the organized and programmed killings and displacement of Iraqi intellectuals and scientists in order to save the country.

He criticized the Minister of Higher Education Ali al-Adeeb, accusing him of working to pave the way for the Iranians to invade Iraq religiously and culturally, he says.

He asked: "How does Adeeb allow himself to blur the Arab identity of Iraq and turn it into a Persian identity in order to satisfy Iran, when he demanded their help to change the curriculum in Iraq?".

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research denied that its minister Ali al-Adeeb asked the Arab or any regional country, including Iran, to contribute to modernize educational curricula in Iraq.

- **Many Iranians visit what used to be Iraq-Iran war fronts (Press TV)**

31 Mar 2013

Iraq-Iran war remembered on Nowruz, holidays. Iranians from across the country are visiting places which used to be the scenes of one of the fiercest war of the 20th century. The imposed Iraq-Iran war. "Rahyan Noor"(travelers on the path of light) is a government entity that facilitates travelling to the former front lines of Iraq-Iran. They want the stories

and the lessons the war taught, to be heard from one generation to the next. Hoveize Martyr Camp in Southern Iran is one of around thirty battlefields of yesterday, turned into the tourist attractions of today.

Talayee, another Battlefield where people are stepping today, was a strategic point in the war., Seyyed Baqer Ahmadi, a military expert explains why:

Tourists that come here say they are mostly interested in moral points of the war, virtue of the martyrs and the atmosphere surrounding these areas.

Iraq-Iran war lasted from September 1980 to August 1988 making it the second longest conventional war after the Vietnam War.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/31/295968/iran-iraq-war-fronts-battle-fields-rahyan-noor->

- **Egypt negotiates with Iraq over Egyptian debts payment (alliraqnews)**

31 Mar 2013

(AIN) -The Government of Egypt announced conducting negotiations with

Iraq about the payment of Egypt's financial dues payable on Iraq, amounting to \$ 1300,000,000.

The Egyptian Minister of Planning, Ashraf al-Arabi, said in a statement "We discussed with Iraq, during our last visit to Iraq, the file of the Egyptian debts payable on Iraq which are \$ 1, 3 billion."

"These sums are estimated by the Egyptian government while the Iraqi government has different accounts which are less than what Egypt demands," he added.

"The mutual high commission between both countries will discuss reaching final formula concerning this file," Arabi pointed out.

The Egyptian Planning Minister has conducted four-days visit to Baghdad on 25th, current March.

- **Khafaji describes erecting oil pipeline from Kurdistan Region to Turkey as provocative action (NINA)**

31 Mar 2013

Karbala (NINA) – Lawmaker from State of Law Alliance, Abdul Mehdi al-Khafaji,

described the agreement reached between Kurdistan Region and Turkey to erect a crude oil pipeline, of being an act of provocation.

Khafaji told NINA on Sunday, Mar. 31, that such things could not succeed because they bypass Federal laws.

He added that oil issue is a Federal issue, and all its affairs are under the supervision of the Federal Government.

It is noteworthy that the media circulated reports on an agreement reached between Kurdistan Region and the Turkish Government to erect pipeline to export oil produced in Kurdistan Region to Turkey, without consulting the Federal Government.

- **Turkey's projects continue in all corners of Iraq (Anatolia News Agency)**

ANKARA

31 March 2013

Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Taner Yildiz said that Turkey's projects continued in all corners of Iraq.

In a written statement released on Sunday, the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources said that Minister Yildiz appeared on the private Kanal 7 TV channel and talked on various issues.

Touching on energy cooperation with north of Iraq, Taner Yildiz stressed that Turkey's projects continued in all regions of Iraq.

"We have spent 600 million USD with our partners in the natural gas and oil fields in the south. Our projects in these regions continue," Yildiz said.

"In a previous meeting, the Iraqi Oil Minister Luaibi indicated that they wanted to develop a 'joint' project with Turkey. We expressed our readiness for a pipeline that would extend from Basra to the north and Ceyhan. We will begin the project when our Iraqi brethren are ready," Yildiz also said.

<http://www.aa.com.tr/en/rss/151483--turkeys-projects-continue-in-all-corners-of-iraq>

## 2. IRAN

- **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Calls for Further Trade Interaction with Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior official of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) called on Iran to play a more effective role in trade interactions with SCO member states.

The issue was raised by SCO's Business Council Chairman Marat Sharshekeev in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Bishkek Ali Najafi on Saturday.

Sharshekeev pointed to Iran's active role in several international organizations, and stressed the need for benefiting from Iran's experiences in SCO business council.

Najafi, for his part, urged the Iranian businessmen and entrepreneurs to increase their trade and economic transactions with SCO member states.

In December, Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi said the country is ready to play a constructive role in bolstering the SCO's activities and performance.

"The organization has the capability to act influentially in international equations through the further expansion of its activities, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to play a desirable and remarkable role in this regard," Rahimi said in a meeting with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Zhantoro Satybaldiyev in Bishkek at the time.

The SCO Business Council was established in June 2006.

It is a non-governmental body, which brings together the most influential members of the business communities of the six member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

Boosting economic cooperation in the framework of the SCO, establishing direct links and dialogue among business and financial circles of the SCO member states are some of the main objectives of the SCO Business Council.

Iran along with Afghanistan, India, Mongolia, and Pakistan are observer states of the SCO.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107156606>

- **Iran ready to offer mine clearing expertise to other states: Defense minister**

Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi says the Islamic Republic is prepared to offer its mine sweeping experience to other countries and help in the clearance of mine fields worldwide.

In a message on the occasion of the upcoming International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action on April 4, Vahidi said unexploded mines and ordnance are the negative outcomes of armed conflicts among countries and governments.

He added that mines and cluster munitions, characterized by their failure to distinguish military personnel from civilians, inflict great pain on both troops and civilians during a war, and also negatively affect the environment and human communities after the war.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran is among the countries that has suffered extensive damage as a result of the excessive use of mines and cluster bombs by [executed Iraqi dictator] Saddam’s military forces during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988),” Vahidi pointed out.

The Iranian defense minister went on to say that more than 20 million mines and nearly 20 million unexploded shells and explosives were left over in Iran after the Iran-Iraq war.

He added that Iran began mine sweeping operations in the mine-affected areas after the war, and defused cluster ammunition and explosives that were scattered around.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/01/296015/iran-ready-to-offer-demining-expertise/>

- **Iran urges Armenia to condemn chemical attack in Syria**

Scores of people, mostly civilians, were rushed to hospitals in Aleppo following the terrorist chemical attack on March 19, 2013.

Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has urged Armenia to condemn the latest deadly chemical attack near Syria's northwestern city of Aleppo, which left dozens of people dead.

During a meeting with Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian on Sunday, Iran's Ambassador to Yerevan Mohammad Raeesi conveyed a message from Salehi to his Armenian counterpart.

In his message, Salehi censured the use of chemical weapons near Aleppo, situated about 310 kilometers (193 miles) north of the Syrian capital Damascus, as "inhumane," and held militants in Syria and their foreign sponsors accountable for the criminal act.

The Iranian foreign minister noted that Tehran supports a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria, stressing that regional stability and security can be maintained only through a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

He also called on the Armenian government and humanitarian

organizations to condemn the chemical attack in Syria.

On March 19, at least 25 people were killed and 86 others injured after militants fired missiles containing poisonous gas into Aleppo's Khan al-Assal village. Women and children were among the victims.

The unrest in Syria began in March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of soldiers and security personnel, have been killed in the violence.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/01/296010/iran-urges-armenia-to-slam-cw-attack/>

- **Iran marks Islamic Republic Day**

In a two-day referendum held on March 30-31 after the 1979 victory of the Islamic Revolution, over 98.2 percent of the

Iranians voted “yes” to the establishment of an Islamic Republic.

Iran commemorates the 34th anniversary of the referendum in which Iranians voted for the establishment of the Islamic Republic following the collapse of the US-backed Pahlavi regime.

In a two-day referendum held on March 30-31 after the 1979 victory of the Islamic Revolution, over 98.2 percent of the Iranians voted “yes” to the establishment of an Islamic Republic.

Addressing a Sunday cabinet meeting in Tehran, Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the day, Farvardin 12 in the Iranian calendar, marked the birthday of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“On this day, the blood of thousands of martyrs that prepared the ground for the establishment of the Islamic state bore fruit,” the president said.

The establishment of the system was in line with the popular motto of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that called for the country's "Independence, Freedom and an Islamic Republic" against the regime of

Iran's last monarch Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Since then, the nation annually celebrates Farvardin 12, which falls on April 1 in normal years and March 31 in leap years, as the anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, referred to as the Islamic Republic Day.

With the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Pahlavi regime collapsed, putting an end to 2,500 years of monarchic rule in the country.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/01/295997/iran-marks-islamic-republic-day/>

- **Iran urges Kazakhstan to condemn chemical weapons use in Syria**

Scores of people, mostly civilians, were rushed to hospitals in Aleppo following the terrorist chemical attack on March 19, 2013.

Scores of people, mostly civilians, were rushed to hospitals in Aleppo following the terrorist chemical attack on March 19, 2013.

Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has called on Kazakhstan to condemn the "inhumane" use of chemical weapons by the foreign-backed militants in the northwestern Syrian city of Aleppo.



In a meeting with Kazakhstan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kairat Sarybay, Iran's Ambassador to Astana Qorban Seifi conveyed an oral message from Salehi to his Kazakh counterpart Erlan Idrissov.

In his message, Salehi censured the use of chemical weapons in Aleppo and said as one of the main victims of such weapons, the Islamic Republic calls on Kazakhstan to spare no effort to prevent the repetition of similar incidents in future.

The Iranian minister also urged his Kazakh counterpart to support an impartial probe into the crime and the punishment of its perpetrators.

At least 25 people were killed and 86 others injured after militants fired missiles containing poisonous gas into Aleppo's Khan al-Assal village on March 19. Women and children were among the victims.

The Syrian crisis began in mid-March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of security personnel, have been killed in the violence, and several international human rights organizations say the foreign-sponsored militants have committed war crimes.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/31/295955/iran-urges-kazakhstan-to-slam-cw-use/>

- **Tehran slams anti-Iranian separatist meeting in Azerbaijan**

Iran has strongly condemned the recent forum of the separatist and anti-Iran South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement in Baku.



Director of the Media Section of the Iranian Embassy in Baku Seyyed Mohammad Ayatollahi issued a statement on Sunday in reaction to the provocative move.

“Despite Tehran’s policy of bolstering friendly ties with Baku, respecting Azerbaijan’s sovereignty, and not interfering in the domestic affairs of the country, certain anti-Iran elements have regrettably carried out aggressive and offensive actions in Azerbaijan and have made unfounded territorial allegations against the Islamic Republic of Iran,” the statement read.

The statement added that Tehran would officially complain to Baku over the meeting.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/31/295951/iran-censures-separatists-meeting-in-baku/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **At least 7 Palestinian kids injured from stone-throwing**

Settlers hurled rocks at 2 Palestinian school buses, says PA official; IDF confirms incident, says it’s investigating the details  
By Michal Shmulovich April 1, 2013, 1:57 am 1

At least seven Palestinian children were injured Sunday south of Nablus after settlers threw stones at them, according to Palestinian sources.

Eight Palestinian girls were lightly injured by settlers from Yitzhar who whisked rocks in their direction and then drove away, AFP reported, quoting an unnamed Palestinian Authority official.

Palestinian news agency Ma’an reported that settlers threw rocks that smashed the windshields of two buses, injuring seven kids as they returned from a school trip. They were rushed to Rafedia Hospital in Nablus, Ma’an added, citing Ghassan Daghlis, who monitors settlement activity in the northern West Bank, as well as an unnamed PA official.

The IDF confirmed the occurrence and stated it was investigating the details of the incident.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-kids-reportedly-injured-from-stone-throwing/>

- **Natural gas from Tamar field reaches Israel**

One day after it was first pumped to Israeli shores, valuable resource flows to processing plant for use in energy market  
By Times of Israel staff and AP March 31, 2013, 11:08 pm 1

Natural gas from the offshore Tamar field reached Ashdod on Sunday night after it was pumped to Israeli shores for the first time Saturday, four years after its discovery.



The Tamar deposit, discovered in 2009 some 90 kilometers west of Haifa, holds an estimated 8.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

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On Saturday, hailed a “historic” and an “important day for the Israeli economy” by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, natural gas from the field was pumped to a newly erected facility on the coast of Ashdod, connected to the gas field via pipelines laid out on the ocean floor, 150 kilometers long and 16 inches wide.

On Sunday, the gas finally reached the Ashdod processing plant from which it will start to flow into the Israeli market.

This newly harnessed resource promises to be a major boon to both the country’s public and private energy needs.

The gas from Tamar is expected to help meet Israel’s energy needs for the next 20 years, Channel 2 said, and will save the economy some NIS 13 billion (some \$3.5

billion) per year. Its ahead-of-schedule use will also save Israeli citizens some cash — lowering a planned rise in electricity costs to 6 percent, less than originally planned.

The Tamar deposit, and especially the heftier Leviathan, which was discovered in 2010, are expected to provide Israel with enough natural gas for decades and transform the country, famously empty of natural resources, into an energy exporter.

Leviathan, which boasts an estimated 16 to 18 trillion cubic feet of gas, is expected to go online in 2016, the approximate time when exports are expected to begin.

The discoveries are just a portion of the huge reserves in the Levant Basin, which the United States Geological Survey estimated in 2010 holds some 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/natural-gas-from-tamar-field-reaches-israel/>

- **Abbas clamps down on critics, despite promises to the contrary**

Targets of crackdown include Hamas supporters; ex-adviser says Fatah leaders

fear they have ‘lost their grip on Palestinian society’

By Dalia Nammari and Karin Laub March

HUSSAN, West Bank (AP) — Mahmoud Abbas’ government in the West Bank is getting tougher with critics, interrogating, prosecuting and even jailing several journalists and bloggers in recent months for allegedly “defaming” the Western-backed Palestinian leader.

Rights activists say the legal hassles are meant to silence dissent and that the campaign is intensifying despite promises to the contrary by Abbas. Targets of the crackdown include supporters of Abbas’ political rival — the Islamic militant Hamas — and political independents who have written about alleged nepotism and abuse of power in Abbas’s Palestinian Authority.

Abbas’ aides insist the Palestinian leader opposes any curb on expression. They blame overzealous prosecutors and security officials, but government critics say Abbas could easily halt the clampdown.

“It’s a good cop, bad cop routine. The bad cops are the security services, and the good cop is the benevolent president,” said Diana Buttu, a former Palestinian Authority insider. They want to send a chilling message, she said, “and it works.”

Abbas’ foreign backers, who view him as key to delivering any future peace deal with Israel and maintaining quiet in the West Bank, have said little in public about the issue. Instead, during a visit to the West Bank in late March, US President Barack Obama showered Abbas and his security forces with praise for their efforts to prevent militant attacks on Israel.

The new tactic of taking journalists and bloggers to court has invited speculation about timing and motive.

Some say Abbas and his inner circle are lashing out at critics because they feel increasingly vulnerable politically. Others suggest the 78-year-old Abbas is either an old-school Arab politician not used to criticism or an out-of-touch leader getting bad advice.

“It’s a weak authority and that’s why it’s doing this,” said Shahwan Jabareen, who

heads the human rights group Al-Haq. “They fear the criticism is growing — that they will lose the (Palestinian) authority — and they are trying to keep it by acting like this.”

Such insecurities are rooted in the political split of 2007, when Hamas seized the Gaza Strip from Abbas.

Since then, Hamas has been going after sympathizers of Abbas’ Fatah movement in Gaza, while Abbas’ security forces have tried to dismantle the Hamas infrastructure in the West Bank to prevent a similar takeover there.

Reconciliation efforts have failed, and both sides are entrenched in their respective territories.

The split has prevented new elections, meaning Abbas has already overstayed his term as president by four years, weakening his claim to lead. His troubles are compounded by a cash crisis in his foreign aid-dependent government and lack of progress toward his main objective of negotiating terms of a Palestinian state with Israel.

There have been waves of crackdowns on political rivals, particularly Hamas, since the Palestinian Authority was established two decades ago, as part of interim peace deals with Israel.

However, Palestinian journalists say they are increasingly being targeted.

“I think it is getting worse, although we are getting very rosy promises” from the president’s office, said Nabhan Khraishi, a spokesman for the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate, a union with hundreds of members.

Ahead of Obama’s March 21 meeting with Abbas, 18 Palestinian journalists were told that they would not be allowed to enter the president’s compound to cover the event. Veteran reporters were among those denied accreditation apparently for being perceived as politically hostile to the Palestinian Authority.

Khraishi said that in talks with the journalists’ union, political advisers and security officials blamed each other for banning an unprecedented number of journalists from covering Obama.

Tayeb Abdel Rahim, an Abbas adviser who dealt with the issue, did not return phone messages Sunday.

Two recent court rulings have drawn more attention to the clampdown on free speech.

On Thursday, an appeals court in the West Bank upheld a one-year prison term for Mamdooh Hamamreh for “defaming” Abbas. Hamamreh allegedly posted a photo montage on his Facebook page in September 2010 that showed Abbas next to that of a TV villain. A caption read: “They’re alike in all ways.” The villain in the TV drama collaborated with French colonial rule in Syria.

Hamamreh, a Hamas activist in his college years, denies having posted the photos. He said he spent 53 days in interrogation, missing the birth of his son and was banned from seeing his lawyer for the first 20 days.

After his release on bail, his trial and an appeal dragged on for more than two years. Abbas pardoned him hours after the appeals court decision Thursday, and Hamamreh was released later that day.

In this Saturday, 30 March, 2013 photo, Palestinian journalist Mamdooh Hamamreh adjusts his glasses during an interview with the Associated Press in the West Bank village of Hussan, near Bethlehem. Last week, an appeals court in the West Bank upheld a one-year prison term for Hamamreh for "defaming" Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in a Facebook post. (AP Photo/Nasser Shiyoukhi)

In this Saturday, 30 March, 2013 photo, Palestinian journalist Mamdooh Hamamreh adjusts his glasses during an interview with the Associated Press in the West Bank village of Hussan, near Bethlehem. Last week, an appeals court in the West Bank upheld a one-year prison term for Hamamreh for "defaming" Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in a Facebook post. (AP Photo/Nasser Shiyoukhi)

Nimer Hamad, an Abbas adviser, said the Palestinian leader hadn't pushed for Hamamreh to be prosecuted. "This young man did not deserve such a sentence," Hamad said. "The freedom and right of expression is guaranteed to all people and

the president is keen on protecting freedom of expression."

Hamamreh said he believes the main point was to deter him and others from speaking out, and that he will stay clear of any potential trouble in his work.

"I now censor myself regarding anything I say," the 29-year-old said Saturday, surrounded by well-wishers at his family home in the village of Hussan, near Bethlehem. "It's the one thing they (the authorities) succeeded in doing, which is intimidation."

On the same day as Hamamreh's verdict, another court in the northern town of Salfit sentenced a blogger, Anas Ismail, to six months for "liking" three Facebook posts critical of the Ministry of Telecommunications and the minister himself.

Ismail, 30, said he was jailed for 17 days of interrogation in February and convicted and sentenced Thursday for "insulting a minister." The judge allowed him to appeal immediately, meaning he is staying out of prison for now.

He later posted on his Facebook page: “For a ‘tag,’ you get one year. For a ‘like,’ you get six months, for a ‘share’ you get a suspended sentence. A comment invites the biggest disaster.”



A Palestinian advocacy group, MADA, said it counted 238 violations of the rights of Palestinian journalists last year, including detentions, travel bans and the closing of media outlets. MADA said that of those, 70 percent, or 164, were committed by Israel and the rest in equal measure by the two rival Palestinian governments.

Last year, 12 journalists were detained by Palestinian security forces, up from five in 2011, while 13 were summoned for questioning, the group said. Overall, there was a drop in Palestinian and a rise in Israeli violations, the group said.

Jihad Harb, an independent Palestinian commentator, said dragging journalists to

court for defaming the president and the government is a relatively new tactic.

Harb himself was summoned to the prosecutor’s office in Ramallah in November, three months after writing about he claimed was nepotism in filling senior public service positions. Harb said he is still waiting to hear how the case against him, on possible defamation charges, will proceed.

“The biggest loser is the president, Mahmoud Abbas, and his image in the world,” said Harb.

Another journalist, Yousef Shayeb, said he was jailed for interrogation for eight days, after writing in a Jordanian newspaper last year about alleged abuse of power in the PLO embassy in Paris. He said he faces a civil suit by the Palestinian foreign minister and two top embassy officials who have dismissed Shayeb’s allegations as baseless.

Buttu, a former legal adviser in the Palestinian Authority, said it’s unclear to what extent Abbas is involved in the clampdown or is being pushed by those around him.

“Part of it is that they fear they have lost their grip on Palestinian society,” she said.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-clamps-down-on-critics-despite-promises/>

- **Hamas leadership reelects political chief Mashaal**

Vote by terrorist group’s Shura Council said to have been unanimous, despite Mashaal’s stated wish to retire

Khaled Mashaal was reelected as the political chief of Hamas on Sunday night, according to British and Palestinian media reports on Monday.

The vote, taken in Cairo among the top leadership of the Gaza-based terrorist organization, was unanimous, reported Sky News in Arabic. The BBC in Arabic also cited an unconfirmed report from a senior Hamas source, saying that the vote was over.

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The decision to reelect Mashaal was met with thunderous applause in the Shura Council, the group’s decision-making body, according to sources cited by the Palestinian Ma’an news agency.

Hamas did not officially confirm the reports, and several media outlets in Egypt and the Gaza Strip indicated Monday that the election hadn’t yet taken place.

Unnamed sources told the Turkish news agency Anadolu on Sunday that Mashaal had arrived in Cairo from Qatar, and that Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had arrived from Gaza. Other members of the Shura Council also reportedly arrived in Cairo Saturday from across the Arab world to take part in the vote.

The election of Hamas’s highest political position had been postponed numerous times since last April amid rumors that regional players were pressuring Mashaal to stay on for another term, despite his wish to retire.

The sources told Anadolu that the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian regime, Qatar and Turkey would all like to see Mashaal

remain in office given “the complicated and dangerous situation the movement faces.”

Other candidates included Mashaal’s Cairo-based deputy Moussa Abu-Marzouq, as well as Haniyeh.

Hamas elects its political leadership every four years — from the regional command to the leadership of the political bureau — under a shroud of secrecy. Voters must belong to three regions; Gaza, the West Bank and “the diaspora.”

In January 2012, Hamas shuttered its political headquarters in Damascus. The movement’s leaders have been dispersed throughout the Middle East ever since.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-reelects-political-chief-mashaal-report-says/>

## 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

### • Tunisia salafists threaten Ennahda

By Monia Ghanmi in Tunis for Magharebia– 29/03/2013

In the first direct threat to Tunisia's Islamist-led government, the leader of the country's salafist jihadist movement threatened to topple the prime minister, Tunisienumerique.com reported on Wednesday (March 27th).

"Hold back your sick person from us or else we'll wage a war against him until we topple him and throw him into the dustbin of history," Ansar al-Sharia leader Saif Allah bin Hussein (alias Abou Iyadh) said in a message addressed to Ennahda published on Ansar al-Sharia's Facebook page.

"We won't talk much, you'll see and not just hear the response... if you don't hold him back," the message added.

The threat came just one day after Prime Minister Ali Larayedh blamed Abou Iyadh for the spread of arms in Tunisia and the recent rise of violence.

Abou Iyadh is wanted in connection with the deadly attack on the US embassy in Tunis last September.

In recent months, Tunisian security forces found several weapons caches, detained

many salafist jihadist movement members and clashed with militants on the Algeria border.

While the Abou Iyadh Facebook post was the first direct threat to the government from the radical group, tensions between the two sides have been rising since last December, when embassy attack suspects Bechir Golli and Mohammed Bakhti died in Mornaguia prison after a 50-day hunger strike.

Salafist jihadists blamed the government for their deaths.

"Our relations with Ennahda has been severed in full because that party is not Islamist as they so claim," salafist jihadist leader and Ansar al-Sharia member and spokesperson Mohamed Anis Chaieb told arabstoday.net.

"This is because they embrace the civil state concept, and there is nothing in their programmes indicating that they are adopting the Islamic rule model," he added.

The battle between the two sides erupted when al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri

attacked Ennahda for failing to use Islamic Sharia as a main source of legislation, international relations professor Mohamed Ben Zekri said.

Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi responded strongly to al-Zawahri, describing him as a catastrophe for Islam and Muslims.

"There is an intellectual and doctrinal difference between the salafist jihadists and Ennahda," Ben Zekri told Magharebia. "That difference started to appear a while ago, and each side is trying to use this conflict to win the support of the biggest possible number of Tunisians."

Tunisian citizens, meanwhile, are voicing concerns that the conflict between the salafists and Ennahda threatens the country's political and social stability.

"Has Tunisia become a game for the Islamists and Salafists?" student Faten Marouani wondered. "Will the violence that they want be the factor that gets the country out of the bottleneck and realise the Tunisian people's hopes for security, stability and economic and political prosperity?"



"It seems that the government, especially Ennahda, has tolerated the salafist jihadist movement and will reap what it sowed," commercial representative Abdallah Baldi said.

"What we fear today - after the enmity between the two sides increased – is that it will have serious repercussions on the country," he said.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/03/29/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/03/29/feature-01)

- **Libya security problems persist**

By Essam Mohamed in Tripoli for Magharebia – 29/03/2013

Libyan legislators on Tuesday (March 26th) asked the defence and interior ministries to dispatch security forces to the restive south-eastern city of Kufra.

The General National Congress (GNC) called for stationing units within the city, creating checkpoints and opening safe corridors for citizens.

Ethnic clashes between the Toubou and Zuwayya tribes led to hundreds of deaths

before Prime Minister Ali Zidan brokered peace talks last month.

[AFP/Mahmud Turkia] Joint Libyan forces conduct security operations in Tripoli.

[AFP/Mahmud Turkia] Joint Libyan forces conduct security operations in Tripoli.

Security forces will evict illegal occupants of public and private properties and turn them over to the authorities. The GNC specified that foreign illegal residents would be deported to their countries of origin.

The defence and interior ministries also plan to replace shantytowns with decent housing for citizens. Owners of cleared properties will be compensated.

The government move comes amidst ongoing security problems.

In December, the General National Congress declared the country's southern region to be a restricted military area. "The provinces of Ghadames, Ghat, Obari, Al-Shati, Sebha, Murzuq and Kufra are

considered as closed military zones to be ruled under emergency law," the decree said.

Still, issues persist in the south. In the south-western desert city of Sebha on Tuesday, an estimated 50 inmates escaped from the local prison. A riot over poor detention conditions reportedly preceded the prison break. Some 200 prisoners escaped from the same facility last December.

The city is no stranger to violence. Sebha tribal clashes last year killed 147 from both sides and left 395 wounded.

The violence became so extreme that the Libyan Red Crescent and the United Nations stepped in to address the humanitarian needs of Sebha residents. Libya's third-largest city is more than 600km from Tripoli, but insecurity in Sebha has far-reaching consequences, residents in the north are quick to point out.

"The stability of these cities ensures the stability of the capital," Tripoli resident Laila Abdullah told Magharebia.

Security problems also persist in the north. Earlier this week, five British human rights activists were kidnapped and later released by a gang in Benghazi. The three men and two women were travelling in a convoy for an Istanbul-based Islamic charity, the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH).

The two women "were horribly raped in front of their father ", Deputy Prime Minister Awadh al-Barassi said in a statement posted on his Facebook account. On Thursday, the Deputy Prime Minister visited the women in a Benghazi hospital.

Security forces are hunting for the perpetrators, government official Yusuf Salmi said.

"The government must consider the security situation as its priority," university student Yousef Bin Saleh said.

"It's time for the state to take control," he added.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/03/29/feature-02](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/03/29/feature-02)

- **Al-Qaeda eyes Tunisia front**

By Mawassi Lahcen in Casablanca for

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's recent appeal for recruits is setting off alarm bells around the world. The new message from al-Qaeda urged supporters to fight at home against secularists and liberals.

The plea for aid from like-minded Islamists was met with a warm response by Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, further heightening concerns that the country could become a new battleground for the terror network. Magharebia sat down with Moroccan researcher Abdellah Rami to get a better understanding of al-Qaeda's potential plans to open a new front in Tunisia.

Magharebia: What's new about the latest message from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)?

Maghreb security officials that they may bring the fight back home.

Abdellah Rami: What interests me is the attention paid by the leadership of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to the issue of the departure of the mujahideen from

their countries of origin to battlefields abroad.

In the last paragraph of the message, al-Qaeda warned against leaving governance to secularists and their ilk. They are calling on jihadists to do the job.

In fact, this is not new. Al-Maqdissi in Jordan [ed: Mohamed Maqdissi, the mufti of Al-Qaeda known as the "spiritual father" of global jihad] warned against this. It was a point of disagreement between him and his disciple [Abu Musab] al-Zarqawi in Iraq. Political Islamist groups in Iraq did the same thing when they decided not to leave parliament to the secularists.

Here it should be noted that some Syrian opposition armed groups stopped letting jihadists join the battlefield. I do not know if this decision had any relationship with the new position of AQIM.

Magharebia: In the March 17th communiqué, al-Qaeda called for dawa, not jihad. Is this a new strategy designed to activate sleeper cells in the Maghreb?

Rami: No, the message calls for not leaving the internal front empty, rather than focusing on travel to other fronts.

It seems that al-Qaeda is trying through this message to give a new direction to the jihadists in order to focus on building a solid local nucleus and structured organisations, to expand and spread within the local community instead of focusing on external fronts. The message is not an invitation to carry out operations.

In Tunisia, jihadi salafism became a declared movement active in the daylight. In Morocco, they are publicly expressing in their slogans the loyalty to al-Qaeda, and chanting the name of bin Laden in their demonstrations and protests.

However, things have changed somehow; people affiliated with the ideology of al-Qaeda are not necessarily fighters. This does not mean either that they have abandoned the doctrine of jihad; they still adopt it at the theoretical level, but do not translate this belief in practice, at least locally, though maybe on the battlefield.

At the local level, the main target of jihadists has become penetrating society and permeating it, because circumstances have changed. They are now working publicly and no longer hide their faces. The message is not addressed to sleeper cells, but to a clear movement.

It is true that the situation is different in each Maghreb country, where each jihadist salafist movement has its own agenda. In Tunisia, for example, they are working on everything except fighting locally. They are heavily involved in the media and in politics, advocacy and social and charitable work, and they organise forums, gatherings and conferences openly.

Yet that does not mean they are unwilling to fight. On the contrary, they are storing weapons, and they are known to have training camps, both in Tunisia and on the border with Algeria. They are not hiding or keeping their opinions secret, unlike in Algeria.

Magharebia: The message included an explicit call for support in Mali and on the northern front in Algeria. The letter also specifically addressed Ansar al-Sharia in

Tunisia. Why, in your opinion, were they so specific?

Rami: They know that Tunisia now has a large reservoir of jihadists. It is enough to look at the number of Tunisians who joined jihad in Syria to confirm that Tunisia has already gained a human depth unique to the salafist jihadist movement in the Maghreb.

Magharebia: This latest al-Qaeda appeal came in the wake of major setbacks for the terror network in Mali, including the death of Abdelhamid Abou Zeid. Does that mean the message is a plea for help?

Rami: It is certainly an appeal for help and support, and this is very clear in the message. Thus, this letter is an indication that AQIM has received strong blows, especially after the deaths of several leaders and big losses incurred due to the on-going military operations in Mali. This is an indication that they are being asphyxiated and are under siege.

That is why they turned to Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, which is experiencing an opposite situation, a period of recovery, expansion and strength. Jihadists in

Algeria live under a special status because of the security and military blockade around them. Prior to that, relief was found in the Sahel, Mauritania and southern Algeria.

Today the entry of France and security and international military co-ordination tightened the noose. Thus came this message, and it is hard to say whether they are seeking help or if this is a call for attraction, or to redefine the priorities and redirect the war.

Magharebia: A message to entice Ansar al-Sharia? How so?

Rami: Maybe the goal of the message is to invite Ansar al-Sharia to join al-Qaeda organisationally. That is an invitation for them to join. As of now, we do not know the exact nature of the relationships between al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia.

Ideologically, there is a relationship, but there is ambiguity at the organisational level. Are they part of the organisation; are they just another face of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, or are they an independent ideological extension?

Ideological convergence and dogmatic loyalty are clear, but is there an organisational link and loyalty?

Magharebia: Does the quick response by Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia to al-Qaeda's message indicate any organisational link?

Rami: In the jihadist phenomenon we must distinguish between ideological loyalty imposed by intellectual and ideological harmony, which forces on jihadi elements the duty of helping, and the organisational link which requires an official announcement through a declaration of allegiance.

This is what we've seen previously when the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) announced its allegiance to al-Qaeda.

It is different for volunteers to go to Syria and Mali. They do not go because of an organisational commitment but volunteer based on the duty of helping.

This could explain the invitation contained in the message as a polarising one, intended to urge Ansar al-Sharia to

declare its allegiance and engage organisationally in al-Qaeda.

Magharebia: Yet it seems that Ansar al-Sharia in Libya is more powerful and has more weapons. So why is al-Qaeda so interested in Tunisia?

Rami: Unlike Tunisia, the situation in Libya is unclear. The state there is completely disjointed, with major security breakdowns. The features of the social and political equation are not known. In Libya, armed militias prevail. Some belong to people or tribes, some are Islamists and some are linked to regional powers.

Ansar al-Sharia appeared in Libya as an extension of the new jihadist movement which rebounded after the killing of Bin Laden in the context of the Arab Spring. They operated openly before being trapped after the killing of the US ambassador. Currently the parameters of this movement are unclear, but it exists.

There are also ancient jihadists in Libya. They have been involved in the government. There were also attempts to contain this extremist movement in Libya after the revolution. However, I think that

these attempts failed, and the proof is the killing the US ambassador. So Ansar al-Sharia in Libya is currently living in the shadows.

Magharebia: What about the situation in Morocco?

Rami: The Salafiya Jihadia movement in Morocco gives priority now to preaching, ideological activity and human rights issues, struggling to defend its detainees and to demand their release.

Organisationally, they have co-ordination, as evidenced by their participated in the protests of the February 20 Movement. Socially, they have limited presence in some neighbourhoods, mainly in Fez, Tangier, Tetouan and Casablanca, but they have not permeated society as in Tunisia. They have not produced clear leaders either.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a-wi/reportage/2013/03/29/reportage-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/reportage/2013/03/29/reportage-01)

- **President Morsi refers Islamic bonds law to Egypt's Al-Azhar**

Proposed legislation regulating Islamic bonds – passed earlier this month by

parliament's upper house – is referred by President Morsi to Egypt's Al-Azhar for approval

President Mohamed Morsi on Sunday referred a controversial draft law on Islamic bonds – or sukuk – to Al-Azhar's Senior Scholars Authority, according to Egyptian state television.

In late February, Al-Azhar, Egypt's leading Islamic religious authority, said its clerics must be consulted on the proposed law, which would allow the government to issue Islamic bonds.

Al-Azhar's statement set it at odds with the Muslim Brotherhood, which drove the legislation through the Shura Council (the upper house of Egypt's parliament, currently endowed with legislative powers) on 19 March.

The law would let Egypt issue bonds compliant with Islamic principles regarding debt interest, allowing the state to tap into new areas of finance as the administration of President Morsi grapples with a widening budget deficit.

The proposed sukuk law has been a source of friction between the Brotherhood, whose Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) represents a majority in the Shura Council, and more hard-line Islamist groups who say the draft legislation must first be approved by Al-Azhar scholars.

Morsi hails from the Muslim Brotherhood and was the head of the FJP before assuming the presidency.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/68170/Business/Economy/President-Morsi-refers-Islamic-bonds-law-to-Egypt.aspx>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Arslan to consult Jumblatt before nominating premier**

Lebanese Democratic Party leader MP Talal Arslan announced that he would consult with fellow Druze chief Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt before he decides on who to nominate for the premiership.

"I will nominate someone for the premiership after I hold consultations with Jumblatt on the matter. We hope to reach

an understanding on the issue of the government," the National News Agency quoted him as saying Sunday.

Arslan warned that the process to form a new government might be a long one.

His comments come amid President Michel Suleiman's legally binding call for Lebanon's parliamentary bloc to meet with the president on April 5 and 6 to discuss a nominee for the premiership that Najib Miqati stepped down from last week.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonews/arslan-to-consult-jumblatt-before-nominating-premier>

- **Jordan king, Abbas ink deal to "defend" Jerusalem**

Jordan's King Abdullah II and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas signed on Sunday an agreement confirming their "common goal to defending" Jerusalem and its sacred sites against attempts to Judaize the Holy City.

A statement by the palace said the deal confirms Jordan's historic role as custodian of Muslim holy sites in

Jerusalem, particularly the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, and outlines coordination between the two sides.

"In this historic agreement, Abbas reiterated that the king is the custodian of holy sites in Jerusalem and that he has the right to exert all legal efforts to preserve them, especially Al-Aqsa mosque," the statement said.

"It is also emphasizing the historical principles agreed by Jordan and Palestine to exert joint efforts to protect the city and holy sites from Israeli judaisation attempts."

"It also reaffirms the historic principles upon which Jordan and Palestine are in agreement as regards Jerusalem and their common goal of defending Jerusalem together, especially at such critical time, when the city is facing dramatic challenges and daily illegal changes to its authenticity and original identity."

Al-Aqsa compound, known to Muslims as Al-Haram Al-Sharif, is Islam's third holiest site after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, and houses the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosques.

But it is also Judaism's most sacred place of worship, venerated by Jews as Temple Mount, the site where King Herod's temple stood before it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

It is one of the most sensitive sites in Jerusalem, and clashes frequently break out between Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

"Jerusalem is currently facing major challenges and attempts to change its Arab, Muslim and Christian identity," the palace said.

Israel captured the eastern half of the city during the 1967 Six Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized internationally, but the Palestinians want east Jerusalem as capital of their future state.

Jordan, which has a 1994 peace treaty with Israeli, administers the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem through its ministry of Awqaf and religious affairs.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/jordan-king-abbas-ink-deal-to-defend-jerusalem>

- **Hezbollah official slams March 14**

Hezbollah official Nabil Qawouk on Sunday launched a broadside against the pro-Western March 14 alliance, accusing it of maneuvering to keep the 1960 electoral law on the books.

“[March 14] engaged in a policy of procrastination to [force] the Lebanese elections to be held under the 1960 law... in a deliberate act to [stop] a law that would not give it a majority,” the National News Agency quoted him as saying.

Meanwhile, the leader of Hezbollah’s parliamentary bloc, MP Mohammad Raad, called for the next Lebanese cabinet to uphold the formula of the unity of the Lebanese people, army and Resistance.

Concerns over a political vacuum in Lebanon emerged following Prime Minister Najib Miqati’s stepping down from his office last week.

This resignation comes as Lebanon’s political parties remain deadlocked over which electoral law to adopt for the parliamentary elections scheduled for June.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanon/news/hezbollah-official-slams-march-14>

## 6. SYRIA

- **Syria rebels, regime trade accusations of 'massacre'**

Syrian rebel fighters accuse the Al-Assad troops of executing 11 people, including eight women, during a raid by regime forces in the south of the conflict-ridden country

Russia to fight opposition move to take Syria's UN seat

The Syrian regime and rebel opposition forces on Sunday traded accusations of blame for a "massacre" of at least 10 people in the town of Tal Kalakh in the south of the conflict-ridden country.

"Last night, terrorists committed a new massacre against peaceful citizens in the city of Tal Kalakh in the Homs countryside, storming the Burj neighbourhood and

killing a number of citizens, including women and children," state news agency SANA reported.

The agency said "terrorists," the term by which the Damascus regime and official media refer to rebel forces, had also looted homes and shops.

"An official source said that the terrorist group stormed the Burj neighbourhood and killed 10 people, most of them children and women, before one of the units from our armed forces intervened," the agency added.

Activists pointed the finger of blame at government forces.

"The bodies of 11 people, including eight women, were recovered after they were executed during a raid by regime forces in the Burj neighbourhood of Tal Kalakh today, according to activists in the area," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights watchdog said.

Tal Kalakh, near Syria's border with Lebanon, was among the first Syrian towns to rise up against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in 2011, and

regime forces have laid siege to it several times.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/68139/World/Region/Syria-rebels,-regime-trade-accusations-of-massacre.aspx>

- **Syria says rebels set fire to three eastern oil wells**

Rebels torch three wells in eastern Syria causing massive losses of both oil and gas, petroleum ministry official is quoted as saying on Sunday

Syrian rebels have set three oil wells in the east of the country ablaze, causing a daily loss of nearly 5,000 barrels of oil and 52,000 cubic meters of gas, state media quoted an oil ministry official as saying on Sunday.

SANA news agency said the damage to the oil wells in Deir al-Zor province, much of which is in rebel hands, followed disputes among the fighters over "sharing out the stolen oil" from fields in areas they control.

It said Syria's Furat Petroleum Corporation was working to extinguish the three fires.

A total of nine wells had been set on fire by the rebels, the agency added, without saying when the other six had been set ablaze.

Furat was not immediately able to comment on the report.

European Union sanctions imposed on Syria two years ago over President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on protests - which have since developed into armed conflict - effectively halted Syria's modest oil exports.

Assad's government has also struggled to meet domestic energy requirements after losing control of large parts of the east of the country, where most of the oil wells are located.

But despite the fighting residents say oil production has continued in some fields, with rebels trading with local authorities and allowing oil to be shipped to government-controlled areas.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/68163/World/Region/Syria-says-rebels-set-fire-to-three-eastern-oil-we.aspx>

## ● **Somber Easter for Syria's Christians**

Syrian Christians marked a somber Easter on Sunday, many having to observe the holy day in areas devastated by Syria's conflict, including in the northern hamlet of Ghassaniyeh.

The Christian town on the edge of Idlib province was once home to some 10,000 residents, all of them Catholics except six Muslim families.

Now Ghassaniyeh is a ghost town, with no more than 15 of its residents left.

"We weren't able to celebrate either the Passion or the Crucifixion, we didn't dare to leave our homes," 88-year-old Giorgio told AFP, referring to religious ceremonies on Good Friday.

But Giorgio, one of the last residents left in the town, decided to make it to church for the Easter Sunday service.

Dressed in a blue trousers, a beige jacket and traditional white headscarf, he marked the occasion with eight other residents, four nuns and two priests.

"We are people of peace, not of war. We want peace for the whole world," added Giorgio, whose children fled town when their homes were destroyed in shelling.

At the entrance to the town, a large statue of Saint George slaying the dragon has been half destroyed by a rocket, and an altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary bears the marks of fighting.

The roof of one of the three churches in the area, belonging to the Evangelical community, has been pierced by a rocket and the floors of buildings in the town have been reduced to rubble by successive air raids.

In the capital Damascus, where fighting between rebels and regime forces has engulfed districts on the outskirts of the city, the atmosphere was similarly somber.

"This year, we aren't celebrating with the family," said 32-year-old Naji, whose brother was killed in violence three months ago.

"I'm ashamed to utter the word 'celebration' while my country is

bleeding," added 53-year-old Fadia, a translator living in northern Damascus.

"It's sadness that unites the families on this day... there are so many relatives and friends who have left the country," she added.

"While in the past the churches were full of believers, today it was desperately quiet. People are afraid to leave their homes."

State television showed footage of Easter services in the capital, some of them sparsely attended. The Orthodox Christians of Syria celebrate Easter in May.

At its peak, Syria's Christians numbered around 1.8 million, approximately five percent of the population. They have remained largely out of the armed revolt which erupted after a crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011.

The violence has killed 70,000 people since then, according to UN figures, and prompted a call on Sunday from Pope Francis for a "political solution."

Speaking in front of some 250,000 people from around the world in the Vatican, Francis prayed for "dear Syria, for its people torn by conflict and for the many refugees who await help and comfort.

"How much blood has been shed! And how much suffering must there still be before a political solution to the crisis will be found?" he asked.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/somber-easter-for-syrias-christians>

- **Syria conflict dents Damascus loyalties of Golan Druze**

The Golan's native Druze have remained fiercely loyal to Damascus through 46 years of Israeli occupation but as the Syrian civil war draws ever closer, it is dividing the tight-knit community.

With the sound of fighting between Damascus troops and rebels booming from just across the armistice line that separates them from their compatriots, some among the Golan's 20,000 Druze are beginning to question their longstanding devotion to the Syrian regime.

In the territory's main town Majdal Shams, most residents, at least publicly, profess the same staunch Syrian nationalism that has seen nearly all of them spurn Israel's offer of passports since it unilaterally annexed the strategic plateau in 1981.

But the rebel sympathies of a minority, evidenced by a Syrian opposition flag planted atop an Israeli army communications mast just outside town, are stoking sometimes acrimonious splits, even within families.

"Imagine someone refusing to speak to his own brother because of a difference of opinion over Syria," said 20-year-old Noor, an engineering student from Majdal Shams.

"A standard question is who are you with? Many people are not friends anymore because of this.

"A father slapped his son in front of everybody" in the town during an argument about Syria, she said.

The sensitivity of the rift within the community over the devastating war between President Bashar al-Assad's

troops and the rebels fighting to overthrow him means that most Druze speak only on condition of anonymity.

"I'm pro the Syrian people, and therefore pro-Assad," said shopkeeper Abu Zayd -- not his real name.

"There's no such thing as the Free Syrian Army (the main rebel force)," the 30-year-old said. "It's a Pakistani, Afghan, American army... which wants to wage jihad."

Umm Zahir, again not her real name, expressed fears shared by many Druze about the many Sunni Islamists in rebel ranks, including fighters of the jihadist Al-Nusra Front who are active just over the armistice line and for whom their breakaway faith is heretical.

"I'm scared that if the rebels win, Al-Nusra and Al-Qaeda will come here, and they believe anyone who's not from their religion is infidel and should be killed," she said.

"I support Assad, and I'm for elections. If there are elections, the people will choose Bashar," the 40-year-old shoe-seller said.

One elderly farmer said he still remembered the years before the 1967 Middle East war, when the whole Golan right down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee was still under Syrian control.

"Our president is Bashar al-Assad and our army is the Syrian Arab Army," he said proudly.

The uprising against him launched in March 2011 "is a conspiracy... in which 130 countries are participating," he added, alluding to the international diplomatic recognition extended to the armed opposition.

But as the reality of the bloodshed draws ever closer with wounded Syrians seeking treatment on the Israeli side of the armistice line, some Majdal Shams residents are ready to voice public support for the rebels.

"We're against Assad," said Fawzi Mahmud, 42. "Assad showed himself to be worse than a dictator, killing everyone without regard. He doesn't care."

Mahmud said that the spread of sympathy for the Syrian opposition had been helped by the gradual erosion of the distinct Golan Druze identity and its attachment to Damascus.

"We don't feel we have any particular identity, Druze or other. We've been under Israeli occupation for 40 years," he said.

In the past, Syria's Druze minority has played a leading role in some of the major events of the country's history.

A monument that adorns a roundabout in Majdal Shams recalls the part played by the community in the nationwide revolt against French colonial rule that erupted in Druze areas in 1925.

Nearly 90 years on, their country's future is being decided on the other side of the Israeli-patrolled barbed wire and they can only watch on as divided spectators.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-conflict-dents-damascus-loyalties-of-golan-druze>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Kuwait hangs three in first executions since 2007**

Authorities in Kuwait on Monday hanged three convicted murderers in the first executions in the Gulf state since May 2007, the ministry of justice said.

The men, a Pakistani, a Saudi and a stateless Arab, were hanged at the central jail, west of the capital Kuwait City, in front of judicial and security officials, the ministry said.

The Pakistani was convicted of killing a Kuwaiti couple and the Saudi of murdering a compatriot.

The stateless Arab was hanged for killing his wife and five children after claiming he was a long-awaited imam.

Shiite Muslims revere Islam's twelfth imam, Mohammad Al-Mahdi, who disappeared from the earth in the tenth century and is said to be due to return to save mankind.

Kuwait had six years ago stopped executing convicts sentenced to death without providing an explanation.

The local Al-Sabab daily reported Monday that at least another 44 people are on death row.

They include two members of the Al-Sabah ruling family convicted over drugs trafficking and murder, and a woman who set a wedding tent ablaze in 2009 killing 57 people.

Kuwait has executed a total of 69 men and three foreign women since it introduced the death penalty in mid-1960. Most of those condemned have been convicted murderers or drug traffickers.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-hangs-three-in-first-executions-since-2007>

- **Kuwait bourse suspends 17 firms for not posting results**

The Kuwait Stock Exchange on Monday suspended trading in the shares of 17 listed firms for failing to report their annual financial results on time, a statement said.

The companies, 10 of them investment firms, violated a rule that requires them to post their results of the previous year within three months, a statement posted on KSE website said.

A number of the companies had already been banned from trading for previous periods for the same reason.

KSE, the third largest Arab bourse in market value after Saudi Arabia and Qatar, lists around 204 Kuwaiti and Gulf companies and has a capitalization of \$102 billion.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-bourse-suspends-17-firms-for-not-posting-results>

- **Finland minister holds hostage talks in Yemen**

Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja held talks in Sanaa on Sunday on the fate of a couple from Finland held hostage in Yemen together with an Austrian since December.

State media said he met President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, who did not rule

out the use of force to secure their release.

"The hostages must be released using all means possible, including the use of force, but with caution to make sure they remain safe," said Hadi, quoted on the defense ministry's website.

The three Europeans were abducted in the Yemeni capital on December 21 as they prepared to travel to the southern port of Aden.

In early January, Yemeni security officials said the Europeans were being held by Al Qaeda-linked tribesmen in Marib province of eastern Yemen.

Yemeni forces in January suspended an offensive aimed at freeing the hostages that cost more than 65 lives, and tribal mediators were allowed to attempt a negotiation with the kidnapers.

Most kidnappings of foreigners are carried out by members of Yemen's powerful tribes who use them as bargaining chips in disputes with the central government.

Hundreds of people have been abducted in Yemen over the past 15 years. Almost all have been freed unharmed.

Al-Qaeda militants, active in the south and east of Yemen, rarely carry out kidnappings, but a Saudi diplomat, Abdullah al-Khalidi, has remained in the hands of the jihadist network since his abduction in Aden on March 28, 2012.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/f inland-minister-holds-hostage-talks-in-yemen>

- **Kuwaiti opposition tweeter jailed for emir insult**

Kuwait's lower court on Sunday sentenced opposition tweeter Hamed al-Khaledi to two years in jail on charges of insulting the Gulf state's ruler, a rights activist said.

"Khaledi has been sentenced to two years in jail with immediate effect," the director of the Kuwait Society for Human Rights, Mohammad al-Humaidi, said on his Twitter account.

Khaledi was charged with writing remarks on his Twitter account deemed offensive to Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah.

The verdict is not final, but his jailing was immediate pending the appeals process.

His lawyer Jasser al-Jadaei said he will file an appeal later on Sunday against the verdict and seek an early hearing.

Khaledi is one of dozens of opposition activists and former MPs who have either been sentenced to various jail terms or are on trial on similar charges.

Last week, the appeals court toughened the jail term of opposition tweeter Bader al-Rasheedi to five years for calling for a coup and insulting the emir.

Rasheedi has been in jail since November 28 after the lower court gave him a two-year term on charges that also included spreading false news about the emirate and insulting the ruler.

More than a dozen youth activists and former MPs have so far been handed down jail terms following a clampdown on opposition social network users and activists.

Criticising the emir is illegal in Kuwait and is considered to be an offence against state security.

The Kuwaiti opposition has staged regular demonstrations in protest against an amendment last year of the electoral law and subsequent December elections. It has also demanded the dissolution of parliament and new elections.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwaiti-opposition-tweeter-jailed-for-emir-insult>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • **Karzai in Qatar for Possible Afghan Taliban Office**

VOA News  
March 31, 2013

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is in Qatar to discuss the possibility of having the Taliban open a political office there to help move Afghanistan's peace process forward.

Karzai arrived in the Gulf nation on Saturday for a two-day state visit, alongside his foreign minister Zalmai

Rassoul and the chairman of Afghanistan's High Peace Council Salahuddin Rabbani. Since then, he has met with several Qatari officials, including the emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani.

Karzai has long insisted that any peace process with the Taliban be an Afghan-led one, and previously, he was opposed to the militant group having a meeting place outside Afghanistan.

The United Nations this week welcomed President Karzai's planned trip to Qatar and issued another call for the Taliban to come to the negotiating table.

Karzai has stressed that he would only start talks with the Taliban if they broke all links with al-Qaida and gave up violence. But the Taliban has repeatedly refused to talk with the Karzai administration, calling it a "puppet regime" of the U.S.-led coalition.

Speaking to the French news agency, a Taliban spokesman said the group's opening of any office in Qatar would not be related to the Afghan president, but rather, it would be a matter between the Taliban and the Qatari government. The

spokesman also said that any Taliban representatives already in Qatar would not see or talk to Karzai.

The international coalition fighting in Afghanistan is in the middle of handing security control of the country to the Afghan national forces as nearly all coalition combat troops mobilize to leave the country by the end of next year.

Some information for this report was provided by AP and AFP.

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

- **Afghan forces uncovered major bomb plot on water dam**

Press TV

March 31, 2013

Afghan officials say its security forces have foiled a major explosion plot on a water dam located in the western province of Herat.

Provincial governor spokesman, Mohiuddin Noori said on Sunday that Afghan intelligence - the National Directorate of Security - along with the Afghan National Army have seized nearly

1,500 kilograms of explosives from Chesht and Pashtun Zarghoon districts intended to be used to destroy the Salma water dam.

Noori said the explosives, which were among the most dangerous and destructive in its kind, had been imported from abroad. He went on to say that investigations have begun in this regard.

Salma dam is located in the Chest district and was due to be completed within three years by an Indian construction firm; however the project has been delayed because of the growing instability in the Herat province.

Afghan energy and water minister, Esteemed Alhaj Muhammad Ismail, has criticized international community for not fulfilling their commitments in regard to construction projects in Afghanistan.

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

- **Afghan foreign minister discuss railway construction with Tajikistan**

By SAJAD - 31 Mar 2013, 1:44 pm

Khaama Press

Afghan foreign minister Zalmai Rasoul on Friday discussed the construction of railway link connecting Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan as well as implementation of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA 1000) with Tajik president Emomali Rahmon.

According to the Tajik president's official website, the sides also discussed cooperation between relevant bodies of the two countries for implementation of ambitious regional projects.

Dr. Rassoul underlined Afghanistan's commitment to the core values and principles of the only continent-wide process of its kind to promote cooperation across Asia.

"Afghanistan particularly, fully and wholeheartedly endorses and aligns itself with the concept of ACD enhanced regional connectivity to promote trade, investment, transit, people-to-people contacts. This is a concept that lies at the heart of our own vision for a life of peaceful and mutually beneficial co-existence and cooperation with our

neighbours and the broader region around us,” Dr. Rassoul said.

Dr. Rassoul added that Afghanistan’s unique place as an “Asian Roundabout” offered tremendous opportunities in all the above areas among three of Asia’s major sub-regions, namely South Asia, Central Asia/Eurasia and the Middle East/Western Asia.

“To illustrate this uniqueness, consider the fact that Afghanistan is less than a single day’s drive to two of the world’s largest economies, both of which are growing at a monumental rate,” Dr. Rassoul said. “Consider also that Afghanistan is the only dark spot in our continent’s and especially in the Heart of Asia region’s vast railway networks. Removing this dark spot by implementing existing plans to connect the railway networks of Pakistan, Iran and all Central Asian states with one another and with other sub-regions in the Asian continent and beyond will dramatically increase trade, investments and people-to-people contacts. Similarly, Afghanistan is the one missing link in connecting energy-rich Central Asia with energy-deficient South Asia through power grids and energy pipelines.”

Dr. Rassoul added that the Afghan people and government’s ongoing successful efforts to improve security, build lasting peace, strengthen state institutions and further consolidate our national sovereignty leading up to and beyond 2014 will also increasingly allow Afghanistan to contribute to regional peace, security and economic development, as well as to the ACD’s vision and goals.

Among other things, participants at this meeting agreed to the establishment of a provisional secretariat for the ACD in Kuwait until the next summit in Thailand in 2015.

They also expressed hope that a trilateral trade and transit pact that would be signed between Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan would pave the way for further expansion of trade and economic cooperation between the nations.

President Rahmon noted that Tajikistan was ready to provide assistance to Afghanistan with training of personnel for its railway and other sectors.

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

- **Pakistani Ulema chief once again urge Afghanistan to apologize**

By MEENA HASEEB - 31 Mar 2013, 12:04 pm

Khaama Press

Pakistani Ulema Council Chief once again emphasized that the Afghan government must apologize for accusing him of endorsing suicide bombing in Afghanistan.

While speaking during an exclusive joint debate hosted by Radio Free Europe and Radio Mashaal, Maulana Tahir Ashrafi denied endorsing suicide bombing in Afghanistan.

He said, "I have not mentioned about suicide attack. It is a propaganda against me and against my country. I will not sit-in for peace conference unless the Afghan government does not apologize from me."

This comes as Maulana Tahir Ashrafi quoted by media agencies earlier in March said that suicide bombing is allowed in Afghanistan as long as foreign troops are present in this country.

However Maulana Tahir Ashrafi denied the reports but the allegations sparked widespread objections by the Afghan people and president Hamid Karzai.

While speaking during a joint press conference with the NATO secretary general president Karzai said, "Apparently those who are encouraging and supporting terrorism and kill ordinary Afghan people including men and children should be added to the blacklist. This a violation of the human dignity to kill women and children."

Afghan officials have long been accusing Pakistan for supporting militants in Afghanistan but Islamabad has repeatedly denied the allegations.

The conference of Afghan and Pakistani Ulemas was agreed during a joint triateral summit between Afghan, Pakistani and British leaders back in February.

However Pakistan Ulemas boycotted the conference calling it a one side attack against the Taliban militants group without having any specific agenda.

In the meantime Qazi Mohammad Waqad a member of the Afghan high peace council who participated in the debate denied the allegations and said that the conference had a clear agenda but was boycotted by Maulana Tahir Ashrafi.

He said, “Maulana Tahir Ashrafi following a Fatwa endorsed the holy war by Taliban in Afghanistan and denied to participate in the conference due to the presence of foreign troops in the country.”

Mr. Waqad also insisted that the government of Afghanistan does not need to apology from anyone and only the misunderstandings should be cleared.

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

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