



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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1. IRAQ

- **The International Envoy calls for immediate stop to executions (NINA)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (NINA) - , The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Martin Kobler, expressed deep concern toward the continuation of carrying out executions in Iraq, when other death sentences carried out on Monday, Apr. 1.

Once again, the International envoy called on the Iraqi Government to put immediately a stop to the remaining death sentences and to abolish death sentence for good.

- **Iraq: UN officials condemn wave of attacks against media professionals (UN News Centre)**

2 April 2013 – United Nations officials in Iraq today strongly condemned a wave of attacks across Baghdad that targeted journalists and media facilities, while urging Iraqi authorities to bolster protections for media professionals across the country.

“Assaults against media organizations or journalists are unacceptable under any circumstances,” declared Martin Kobler, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in a press release.

On 1 April, gunmen reportedly forced their way into the Baghdad offices of four independent newspapers attacking and beating employees, in what is the latest episode of targeted violence in the Iraqi capital. According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the country remains one of the most dangerous for journalists.

In his statement, Mr. Kobler called on the Iraqi Government “to ensure that media professionals are protected against all forms of intimidation and violence because of their opinions or thoughts.”

Adding her voice in condemning the violence against journalists, UNESCO’s Director in Iraq, Louise Haxthausen, expressed her “deep concern” over what she said was “the dangerous impact of such incidents on press freedom and freedom of expression.”

“Freedom of expression is a crucial element for establishing true democracy and building sustainable peace in Iraq,” Ms. Haxthausen stated.

In addition, the UNESCO official called on Iraqi authorities to bring justice and prosecute those involved in the attacks.

Turning to the issue of Iraq’s democratic institutions, Mr. Kobler also reiterated the UN’s support for the country’s electoral body, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), ahead of the upcoming Governorate Council elections.

“I encourage the IHEC to maintain its independence, transparency and credibility, in order to secure the trust of the voters,” he said in a news release, following a meeting with IHEC members.

Last month, reports suggested that the elections were plagued by security concerns prompting possible delays in the Anbar and Ninewa provinces. At today’s meeting, however, the IHEC assured the UN envoy that it was ready to conduct the elections in all 14 provinces on 20 April, according to Mr. Kobler’s office.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44541&Cr=journalist&Cr1=#.UVs-wOpNV6I>

- **Kobler, Election Commission discuss Anbar and Ninewa elections (Aswat al-Iraq)**

02 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: UN representative to Iraq Martin Kobler discussed today with the Election Commission questions related to the postponement of elections in Ninewa and Anbar provinces.

In a statement by the commission, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, both sides discussed necessity to perform the elections at the earliest after 20 April date.

It pointed out readiness of the elections commission to perform its duties in regard to technical and logistic aspects.

- **Kobler arrives in Kirkuk, meets with its Governor (NINA)**

02 April 2013

Kirkuk (NINA) - The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Martin Kobler, arrived on Tuesday afternoon, Apr. 2, in Kirkuk province.

Informed official source in Kirkuk said that Kobler held a meeting behind closed door with Governor Najmuldeen, Omer Kareem, discussing local elections and Iraq's political crisis.

The source pointed out that during his visit, Kobler will visit Husseiniya "al-Rassou al-Adham" that was subjected of being exploded, few days ago, to show solidarity with the victim's families and holds a press conference there.

- **Kobler stresses importance to hold elections throughout Iraq at one time (NINA)**

02 April 2013

Kirkuk (NINA) – Head of the UN mission in Iraq, Martin Kobler, stressed the importance to hold election in Niniveh and Anbar provinces at the same time along with other provinces.

Answering a question during a press conference held on Tuesday evening, Apr. 2, at the building of Kirkuk Governorate,

Kobler said that the UN in Iraq supports holding elections in Anbar and Niniveh provinces at the same time with other provinces, it is on the Iraqi Government to provide suitable environments to hold them through protecting the candidates and elections.

Earlier in the day, in a joint meeting with the Cabinet, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and Security Committee charged with Provincial Councils' Election have recommended holding the elections in Anbar and Niniveh provinces on Saturday, 18 of May.

- **UN urges Iraqi forces to sit, talk (KUNA)**

IRBIL, April 2 (KUNA) -- UN Secretary General's representative in Iraq Martin Kobler Tuesday called on all Iraqi parties to sit on table of dialogue and think seriously of the suffering of the Iraqi people.

"The UN urges all politicians to sit on table of dialogue and to seriously think of the suffering of the Iraqi people who are in dire need of dialogue and overcoming of political disputes," Kobler told a news

conference held in a mourning house, or Hussainiya, that was bombed last week.

Kobler rejected the attacks against mosques and mourning houses all over the country.

He said the UN favored holding of elections in all provinces at the same time, and that the Iraqi government should protect the candidates and create safe environment for elections.

The Iraqi government announced last month postponement of elections in the Nineveh and Anbar provinces for six months at the behest of the two districts. Three people were killed and 83 others injured, including Shiite cleric Ali Sistani's representative in Kirkuk Mohsen Battat in a bomb attack last month.

- **UN condemns attacking Iraqi media, stressing it is unacceptable (NINA)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – The UN strongly condemned Monday's attacks against a number of newspapers in Baghdad.

In a statement to the press on Tuesday, Apr. 2, the Special Representative of the

United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Martin Kobler, said that attacks against the media are unacceptable, under any circumstances, urging the Iraqi Government to provide protection to media people from all kinds of intimidation and violence because of their ideas.

For her part, Head of the UNESCO in Iraq expressed deep concern of the dangerous effect of such incidents against freedom of the press and expression; she called for bringing those implicated in the attacks before justice to be tried.

She added that freedom of expression in an important factor to establish real democracy and building sustainable peace in Iraq.

- **Disease stalks Iraqi camps for Syrians: UNHCR (AFP)**

AFP, Geneva - 02 April 2013

Crowding in Iraqi camps for Syrians who have fled their war-ravaged homeland is raising the risk of disease, the U.N. refugee agency warned Tuesday.

“Pressure to accommodate refugees is growing,” said Adrian Edwards,

spokesman for the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

“The crowding is in turn having an impact on sanitation, which is already below humanitarian standards. Congestion and warmer temperatures are increasing vulnerability to outbreaks of diseases as well as to tension between camp residents,” he told reporters in Geneva.

As of the end of March, a total of 121,320 Syrian refugees were registered in Iraq, Edwards said, with 90 percent of them hosted in the country’s Kurdistan region.

The situation at a camp at Domiz, in northwestern Iraq, is particularly worrying, he noted.

“The Domiz camp is currently housing around 35,000 Syrian refugees and is critically overcrowded. Thousands of families are sharing tents with newly arrived refugees as almost 3,500 families do not have their own shelters,” he said.

Overall, refugees are arriving in Kurdistan at a rate of 800 to 900 per day -- double that seen just three months ago, Edwards noted.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/04/02/Disease-stalks-Iraqi-camps-for-Syrians-UNHCR-.html>

- **Iraqiya MP calls on government to negotiate directly with the demonstrators (NINA)**

02 April 2013

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Kamel al-Dulaimi demanded the government to form an empowered ministerial committee, and sent to the arenas of the sit-ins to negotiate directly with the demonstrators.

He said in a press conference held at the parliament building today 2, April: "The demonstrators spent more than 100 days in the sit-in yards, to claim their rights," called on the government to open a direct dialogue with them and keep away all political, denying the existence of foreign agendas for the demonstrators.

He explained: "the politician represents the citizen in parliament, so he has to implement the demands of the demonstrators in the House of Representatives and through to attendance and vote on the laws."

- **"Radical voices" in Al-Anbar protests reportedly "fade away" (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

The Al-Anbar demonstrations' coordination committees have said that the voices promoting radicalism and violence started to disappear from the place of the protests and demonstrations after the uncovering of their goals and intentions which have nothing to do with the protesters' legitimate demands.

In a statement to the IMN news centre, Sheikh Ghassan al-Isawi, member of the demonstrations' coordination committees, said that the radical voices started to fade away in light of the determination to keep these protests peaceful by avoiding any clashes with the security apparatuses, unlike what some political and media sides seek to achieve.

- **Kurdish region continues boycotting Cabinet and Parliament (Aswat al-Iraq)**

02 April 2013

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish region presidency decided to continue boycotting the meetings of Baghdad Cabinet and

Parliament till the Shiite Alliance surrenders the demands wanted.

The wanted demands are national partnership, political coalitions and representation balance in political decisions.

In a short statement by the third meeting held by President Masoud Barzani, the boycotting was in protest for the stands of Premier Nouri al-Maliki and his bloc, State of Law, as well as the Shiite Alliance from the present political crisis.

It was decided to send a message to the Shiite Alliance, expressing keenness to protect the constitution, values of partnership and national coalition balance.

- **Iraqi Cabinet approves Federal Budget implementation instructions (alliraqnews)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi Council of Ministers approved on Tuesday the instructions of implementing the federal budget for 2013.

A statement by the Council of Ministers reported on Tuesday "The Cabinet held its regular session on Tuesday chaired by the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki where an approval was issued to ratify the instructions of implementing the federal budget for 2013."

The Acting Finance Minister, Ali Shukri, has announced on last Saturday releasing the payment of the federal budget's financial allocations for the ministries and governorates.

- **Hakim Backs Saddam's Opponents (Shafaq News)**

02 April 2013

Shafaq News / The head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, Ammar al-Hakim acknowledged the need to form a body to take care of orphans and families of the combatants opposed the toppling regime in the marshlands southern Iraq.

Ammar al-Hakim, a Shiite leader and ISCI's Head said in a speech during the annual conference of Mujahideen of marshlands movement held today in Basra and attended by "Shafaq News", that "it is important to form a private institution for Mujahideen to take care of them and their

families as well as their orphans after all the sacrifices they have made for Iraq".

"Act 91 must be modified to include all Mujahideen of the marshlands with a priority to those with academic certificates," Hakim added

The opposed to Saddam Hussein's regime parties and organizations, particularly Shiite, used to conduct armed operations from the Iranian territory in the marshlands during his era.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/community/5683-hakim-backs-saddams-opponents-.html>

- **Sistani's Aide [Warns against] Sectarianism in Basra (Shafaq News)**

02 April 2013

Shafaq News / A representative of Iraq's highest religious authority in Basra warned against sectarian strife to be erupted in Zubair district due to the recent bombings there.

Sheikh Mohammed Falak al-Maliki, a deputy of Ali al-Sistani in Basra told "Shafaq News" that "the bombing of

Zubair district two days ago was intended to create a chaos among Zubair's citizens".

A roadside bomb went off on Sunday in Haj Taiwina Mosque, the first Shiite mosque built in the district, resulted in the death of one person and the injury of 25 others, according to the statement of the Deputy Head of Basra provincial council.

"Immediately after the incident clerics of our Sunni brothers denounced this coward act and call on the people of the city to preserve the national unity and to not to be driven by those trying to stoke sectarian strife," he added.

Zubair's provincial security committee revealed earlier arresting a Kirkuk local involved in the implementation of Haj Taiwina mosque bombing.

Zubair, southwestern Basra inhabited by both Sunni and Shiite people.

- **Call to investigate not raising Iraqi flag on Parliament building, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

02 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: State of Law MP Abdul Salam al-Maliki called to form an

investigation committee to "know the reasons for not raising the Iraqi flag on the Parliament building".

In a statement by his media office, he questioned the reasons for not raising the flag, charging Speaker Usama Nujaifi as "not recognizing the parliament as part of the Iraqi state's sovereignty or not accepting the new flag".

He added to question whether this act is "intentional or out of negligence".

- **Al-Hayis hails [formation of] a committee for special pardons [with the aim] of releasing detainees (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

Sheikh Hamid al-Hayis, chairman of the Al-Anbar Salvation Council, has said that the announcement of the formation of a committee to receive the applications for special pardon with the aim of releasing detainees is a step in the right direction and an effort to end the demonstrations.

In a statement to the Iraqi Media Network [IMN] news centre, Al-Hayis said that this committee needs support to be able to perform its duties, adding that the families of the victims should relinquish their

rights so that the prime minister could send a special pardon accordingly. Al-Hayis said that this process might be time-consuming and might be hindered by some obstacles in a number of areas.

- **Fatlawi criticizes objection of some MPs to carrying out death sentences in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Hanan al-Fatlawi, of the State of Law Coalition headed by the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, criticized the objection of some MPs from conducting the death sentences in Iraq.

She stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The MPs who object conducting the death sentences in Iraq to the criminals of al-Qaeda Terrorist Organization must state to the Iraqis that they are supporting al-Qaeda to make them know who support them and who are not."

"The parliament must support the families of the victims rather than the terrorists," she concluded.

It is worth mentioning that the Justice Ministry executed some sentenced to death prisoners on Monday who

confessed of conducting terrorist attacks against the governmental institutions and the citizens.

- **MoJ: Executions against terrorists implemented as per constitution (alliraqnews)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi Justice Minister, Hassan al-Shimmari, stressed that "The executions of the terrorist convicts were done according to the constitution's provisions and as per the judicial resolutions issues by the Iraqi Presidency Office."

Shimmari said "The sides which defend the terrorists and accuse the Justice Ministry of implementing the executions according to the confidential informants just try to defame the Ministry's performance where their statements are not based on reliable information."

"The demands to cancel the death sentence represent belittlement to the victims of the terrorism and violation for the constitution," he added.

Shimmari confirmed that "The execution sentences issued against the murderers

and the terrorists are submit to appeal for more than five times."

- **18 May next date for Anbar and Ninewa elections (Aswat al-Iraq)**

02 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: The Elections Commission, in coordination with the security commission, proposed 18 May, 2013 as the new date for the elections in Anbar and Ninewa provinces.

In breaking news by semi-official Iraqiya TV, the Commission proposed the Iraqi Cabinet the new date.

Earlier, it was announced that the postponement shall be for one month, not six months as stated before.

- **One-month elections postponement in Anbar and Ninewa (Aswat al-Iraq)**

02 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Elections Commission announced today that the postponement of the elections in Anbar and Ninewa provinces will be for one month, not six months.

Security committee chairman General Ahmed al-Khafaji, in a press conference, said that the discussions with the security commanders in both provinces reached this decision.

Earlier, Iraqi Cabinet announced the postponement for a maximum period of six months, which resulted in negative reactions.

- **KDP, PUK discuss participation in the elections, security situation (NINA)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) politboruea Joint High Committee met on Tuesday, Apr. 2, discussing participation in the upcoming elections and security issues.

A statement issued by the PUK said that in the meeting discussion stressed developing the strategic agreement because of unusual developments on both Iraqi and Kurdistan arenas, as well as the area, pointing out that the meeting discussed means to participate in the upcoming elections.

It added that the meeting discussed also security situation in Kurdistan Region and means to provide more secure environments, as well as consolidate joint work for the political process and joint coexistence, as well as consolidate social peace.

- **Dahlaki describes holding of special voting for security elements on April 13th as “Big chance to forge it” (alliraqnews)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Raad al-Dahlaki, of the Iraqiya Slate described the decision of the Independent High Electoral Commission for holding the elections of the Provincial Councils for the security elements on the 13th of April as “A big chance to forge it.”

Speaking to All Iraq News Agency (AIN), he said “The security elements will perform their vote seven days prior to the elections date where their printed fingers will lose their colors and this gives them a chance to vote again,” calling the “IHEC to be neutral in this issue.”

It is worth mentioning that the PCs elections will be held in the 20th of April where the IHEC decided to make the

security elements conduct their votes in the 13th of April 2013.

- **IHEC rules out having forgery in voting of security elements (alliraqnews)**

02 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Independent High Electoral Commission ruled out having a forgery in the voting process of the security elements.

The head of the Electoral Department within the IHEC, Muqdad al-Shirifi, stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) “The IHEC prepared a special record for the voters to vote in the 13th of April”

“Any security element tries to vote one more time, he will not find his name because it will be omitted and the ink will be for one day only,” he concluded.

Earlier, MP, Raad al-Dahlaki, of the Iraqiya Slate described the decision of the Independent High Electoral Commission for holding the elections of the Provincial Councils for the security elements in the 13th of April as “A big chance to forge it.”

- **MKO must be expelled from Iraq:
Iran's Moslehi (Press TV)**

02 April 2013

Iranian Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi has called for the immediate expulsion of Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorists from Iraq.

“Based on the arrangements made the MKO must leave Iraqi soil as quickly as possible,” Moslehi was quoted as saying on Tuesday.

MKO terrorists, blamed for the assassination of many Iranian people and officials after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, fled to Iraq in the 1980s where they enjoyed the support of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, who allowed them to set up a military base near the Iranian border.

MKO members currently live at Camp Liberty, a former US military camp near Baghdad Airport, after their relocation from their former Camp Ashraf under growing pressure from the Iraqi government and people for the terrorist group to leave the country.

Moslehi said a decision must be made about the MKO soon and the terrorist group has only committed seditious acts against Iraqis and other regional nations.

The Iranian intelligence minister hailed Iraqi forces for their effective handling of security in the country and pledged Iran will transfer its security expertise and experience it has gained battling terrorism over the past three decades to the Iraqi government.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/02/296216/mko-must-be-expelled-from-iraq/>

2. IRAN

- **Iran, Turkey resume gold trade for natural gas**

TEHRAN, Apr 2 (MNA) – Iran and Turkey have resumed their trade of gold for natural gas and made a USD-120-million deal in February, circumventing tough US sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear energy program.

Turkey exported almost USD 120 million worth of gold to Iran in February after it announced a moratorium in January, Reuters reported.

Data from the Turkish Statistics Institute (TUIK) showed that Ankara sold no gold to Tehran in January as banks and dealers implemented the February 6 US sanctions targeting Iranian oil revenues.

The US and its European allies have imposed illegal unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

On February 6, 2013, the US Treasury Department announced new sanctions targeting Iranian oil revenues. The sanctions prevent Iran from gaining access to earnings garnered from its crude exports.

One Istanbul gold trader asking not to be named, said, "Due to the sanctions, nobody wants to attract attention. That may be the reason why exports stopped to Iran in January."

"However, trade with Iran continues; there will always be transfers," the Turkish gold trader added.

On January 4, 2013, Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan slammed European Union pressures on Ankara to stop gold-for-gas trade with Iran, saying the EU demand would fall on "deaf ears."

On December 26, 2012, Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said Ankara would keep buying natural gas from Iran regardless of Western sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819396>

- **Senior Iranian, Kyrgyz Officials Discuss Easing Visa Restrictions**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Senior Iranian and Kyrgyz diplomats discussed the measures which are needed to be taken by the states to ease visa restrictions for the two countries' nationals.

The issue was raised during a meeting between Tehran's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Ali Najafi and two Kyrgyz parliamentarians, Asil Boyok Zhinibikov and Nazar Ali Arefov, in Bishkek.

During the meeting, Najafi briefed the two Kyrgyz lawmakers on his plans to help

further promote mutual cooperation between Tehran and Bishkek during his mission to the Central Asian country.

Zhinibikov, for his part, said that removal of visa restrictions for nationals of the two countries will result in attracting more tourists and consequently help to further progress and prosperity of the Central Asian country.

The other Kyrgyz legislator, Arefov, also supported the easing of visa restrictions between Iran and Kyrgyzstan.

Iran has recently enhanced efforts to boost political, economic, security and cultural ties and cooperation with the regional and neighboring countries, specially the Central Asian states.

Iran and Kyrgyzstan have expanded their bilateral ties and mutual cooperation in different fields.

Last month, Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev in a meeting with Iranian ambassador to Bishkek stressed his country's enthusiasm for further increase in mutual cooperation with Tehran.

"We can enhance ties to a higher level through joint efforts," Atambaev said during the meeting.

He underlined the necessity for bolstering economic cooperation between the two countries, and said, conditions are ripe in Kyrgyzstan and the country's door is open for cooperation with Iran.

During the meeting, Najafi emphasized the necessity for effective efforts to further develop cooperation between the two countries.

In December 2012, Iranian Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi called on Iran and Kyrgyzstan to utilize their potentials for the further development of trade ties, adding that Tehran is interested in launching investment programs in Bishkek's economy.

Iran is ready to take "effective steps" to boost bilateral trade ties with Kyrgyzstan, Rahimi said in a meeting with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Zhantoro Satybaldiyev in Kyrgyz capital city of Bishkek at the time.

Rahimi added that Iran is willing to make investment in Kyrgyzstan to help the country's economic development.

Satybaldiyev, for his part, called for the further expansion of economic ties between Iran and Kyrgyzstan, and thanked Iran for its \$1mln financial aid to Bishkek for building a sports complex in the Southern Osh City.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107157132>

- **Iran condemns UN's Arms Trade Treaty as 'politically motivated'**

A senior Iranian UN envoy has condemned the new Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) passed by the UN General Assembly as politicized and discriminatory.



Addressing the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday, Iran's Deputy

Permanent Representative at the UN Gholam-Hossein Dehqani emphasized that while the major objective of the ATT was to regulate global arms trade, the final draft still provides for the transfer of weapons to armed forces deployed outside their own countries.

The Iranian envoy underlined that the transfer of arms to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region has gravely affected the security and welfare of the people of this region and led to many lost lives in recent years.

He went on to say that the new treaty grants every right to major arms exporters while ignoring the right of arms purchasing by countries in need of weapons for defending their territorial sovereignty.

The Iranian envoy emphasized that despite the Islamic Republic's efforts to resolve various legal flaws in the draft treaty within the framework of constructive negotiations, its preparation was 'politically motivated.'

This treaty, Dehghani added, has merely been drafted to satisfy the desires of the US and its Israeli ally.

The Iranian envoy also pointed to the treaty's indifference towards the demand of many nations to prohibit the transfer of arms to countries engaged in military aggression against other nations.

Iran, Syria and North Korea voted against the ATT on Tuesday, while major arms exporters Russia and China, which had earlier raised major concerns about the final draft of the treaty, abstained from voting, along with over 20 other nations.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/03/296282/iran-slams-un-arms-pact-as-biased/>

- **Iran calls for expansion of relations with Armenia**

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast has urged the promotion of trade ties and tourism cooperation with Armenia.



In a meeting with Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Shavarsh Kocharyan in Yerevan on Tuesday, Mehmanparast said Iran favors good relations with regional states, particularly its neighbors, and believes cooperation can help regional states' development.

He noted that Tehran and Yerevan's diplomatic relations are currently at their best level, and called for further trade, economic, cultural, and tourism ties between the two countries.

Mehmanparast highlighted that Iran and Armenia's support for each other at international level clearly attest to the fact that both states enjoy excellent relations.

Kocharyan, for his part, said that Armenia seeks peace and tranquility and thinks the Islamic Republic of Iran plays a significant role in the establishment of regional stability.

He also stressed the need for promotion of Yerevan-Tehran economic ties.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/03/296236/iran-urges-expansion-of-ties-with-armenia/>

- **Iran develops indigenous fuel to run its nuclear reactors: Envoy**

An Iranian diplomat says the Islamic Republic has managed to produce indigenous fuel needed for its reactors, and advance its nuclear energy program despite pressures and embargos against it.

“Despite growing international pressure and sanctions against Iran to develop its nuclear program, the Islamic country has come up with its own indigenous fuel in response to the opposition and unavailability of uranium to run its nuclear reactors,” Iranian Consul General in the Indian city of Hyderabad, Hassan Nourian, said on Tuesday at a lecture entitled “Iran’s Islamic revolution: Ideals and Achievements” at the Center for Indian Ocean Studies at Osmania University in Hyderabad, IRNA reported.

He added that young Iranian scientists have successfully produced fuel for the country’s nuclear reactors even though international sanctions made it initially difficult for Iran to acquire nuclear fuel.

Nourian also pointed to the fatwa issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, forbidding the creation and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction.

“Nuclear bomb has been declared as religiously forbidden, and we won’t use our nuclear power for anything other than peace,” the Iranian diplomat noted.

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

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

capacity to challenge the nuclear-backed powers.

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

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

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/02/296227/iran-develops-fuel-for-own-reactors/>

- **Iran's intelligence minister meets Iraqi parliament speaker**

Iran's Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi has met with speaker of the Iraqi parliament, emphasizing the need for

ridding the nation of foreign intervention and maintaining national unity among its diverse ethnic groups.

In a Tuesday meeting with Iraq's Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi in the capital city of Baghdad, Moslehi further emphasized the significance of maintaining the nation's sovereignty and independence, adding that while the issue is critical for Iraq's security, it also satisfies the Islamic Republic's security requirements.

Referring to the existing complaints and difficulties in Iraq, the Iranian intelligence minister also underlined the need to prevent foreign intervention in the Arab country's developments.

Moslehi further pointed to the significance of collaborations between all Iraqi ethnic groups, whether Shia, Sunni or Kurd to resolve the domestic crises in the country.

During the meeting, al-Nujaifi welcomed Moslehi's remarks and described foreign intervention as the cause of Iraq's current difficulties.

The Iraqi parliament speaker also pointed to the political differences within the Iraqi nation, adding that officials are making great efforts to bring together differing views of all groups involved.

The Iranian intelligence minister is due to meet with Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki later on Tuesday.

Moslehi arrived in Baghdad on Monday heading a delegation and was welcomed by Faleh Fayyaz, the National Security advisor of the Iraqi government.

The Iranian minister said his visit to Iraq was aimed at exploring avenues for enhancing Tehran-Baghdad relations, particularly in the fields of security.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/02/296177/irans-moslehi-meets-top-iraqi-mp/>

- **Iran intelligence minister arrives in Iraq for talks**

Iran's Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi has arrived in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, for talks with the country's senior officials on ways of improving bilateral relations.



Moslehi arrived in Baghdad on Monday heading a delegation and was welcomed by Faleh Fayyaz, the National Security advisor of the Iraqi government.

The Iranian minister said his visit to Iraq was aimed at exploring avenues for enhancing Tehran-Baghdad relations, particularly in the fields of security.

During his stay in Baghdad, Moslehi is scheduled to hold talks with top Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq Ammar Hakim.

Fayyaz, for his part, assessed as "very important" the expansion of Tehran-Baghdad ties and said Iran is among the few countries in the region that transfers its positive experiences to Iraq.

Iran has always made efforts to help the Iraqi people over recent years, the Iraqi official added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/01/296083/iran-intel-minister-arrives-in-iraq/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **2 rockets fired from Gaza explode in southern Israel**

Projectiles hit near Sderot after overnight IAF strikes; defense minister in Jerusalem warns Israel won't tolerate renewed missile fire

Two rockets fired from the Gaza Strip struck southern Israel Wednesday morning, hours after Israeli planes bombed targets in the Hamas-controlled territory for the first time since November's ceasefire took effect.

No damage or injuries were reported in either incident.

One of the rockets exploded in an open area in the Eshkol border region and Israel Police sappers defused the remaining explosive charge. The police had not yet tracked down the second projectile.

Red alert warning sirens sounded across Sderot and the surrounding area in advance of the attacks.

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon tweeted earlier Wednesday morning that Israel considers Hamas responsible for any rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, and that "we will under no circumstances allow a situation of sporadic fire at our citizens and troops."

Ya'alon, a former IDF chief of staff who took the reins of the Defense Ministry last month, added that Israel also refuses to tolerate cross-border fire on the northern frontier with Syria, and that it would respond in kind to any such incidents in the Golan Heights.

Israeli planes carried out bombing sorties over the Gaza Strip late Tuesday night, responding to rocket attacks out of the Palestinian enclave earlier in the day.

The bombings were the first Israeli attack on Gaza since an informal ceasefire between Jerusalem and Hamas went into effect last November, following Operation Pillar of Defense, the eight-day campaign to stem Gazan rocket fire which also saw

hundreds of missiles launched into Israeli territory.

Hamas charged in a tweet from its official account that Israel broke the ceasefire by carrying out Tuesday night's airstrikes, which followed rocket fire from Gaza earlier Tuesday.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/rockets-fired-from-gaza-explode-near-sderot/>

- **Thousands of Palestinian detainees go on hunger strike**

Thousands of Palestinian security detainees refused their breakfast Wednesday morning in protest of the death of a Palestinian prisoner in an Israeli jail the day before.

Some 4,600 Palestinian security prisoners refused their meals the morning after Maysara Abuhamdia's death from cancer, and prison authorities speculate that the impromptu hunger strike may continue for up to three days.



Abuhamdia, 64, was serving a life sentence for attempted murder in a plot to carry out a suicide attack in Jerusalem in 2002. Abuhamdia was found guilty of sending a suicide-bomber to a cafe in the capital; the terrorist failed to detonate the bomb he was wearing during the attack.

The Palestinian Authority on Wednesday filed a complaint with the United Nations, charging that Israel was responsible for the death of Abuhamdia. In missives to the presidents of the UN Security Council and General Assembly, Palestinian UN delegate Riyadh Mansour wrote that Israel didn't provide the prisoner with proper medical treatment and allowed the cancer to overwhelm Abuhamdia's body. Israel said Abuhamdia was given all necessary medical treatment.

Mansour called for international observation of Israeli prisons holding

Palestinian detainees, and the release of Palestinian hunger-striker Samer Issawi.

Palestinian medical officials will participate in the autopsy of Abuhamdia's body, scheduled for Wednesday at the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute, according to Palestinian Minister of Prisoners Issa Qaraqe. Following analysis at the Israeli lab, Abuhamdia's remains will be transferred to the Palestinians, and then examined at a Palestinian forensics institute in Abu Dis, Israel Radio reported. Abuhamdia is expected to finally be buried on Thursday.

IDF troops were placed on alert across the West Bank on Wednesday morning, anticipating a possible reignition of violence following the death of a Palestinian detainee in an Israeli prison the day before.

Earlier, prisoners banged on cell doors and hurled objects in several prisons on Tuesday, and Arabs in East Jerusalem protested outside the Damascus Gate.

Israel Radio reported that reinforcements had been stationed in and around Hebron,

Abuhamdia's hometown, and at road junctions in the West Bank.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/troops-on-alert-for-new-west-bank-riots/>

- **Survey: Palestinians pessimistic on peace after Obama visit**

RAMALLAH (AFP) -- A majority of Palestinians believe the US will fail to revive the Middle East peace process, according to a survey after Barack Obama's visit to the region, seen by AFP on Tuesday.

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research's report, conducted March 28-30, surveyed 1,270 people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

"Fifty-five percent believe that the US administration will not succeed in reviving the peace process and bringing the two sides to the negotiating table," it concluded.

"Moreover, 70 percent believe that the American administration will not succeed in pressuring Israel to freeze settlement construction," it added, in a reference to Palestinian demands for a cessation of

Jewish settlement building before any talks can be held.

On his first visit to Israel and Palestine as president in March, Obama met leaders of both sides, and follow-up meetings with Secretary of State John Kerry signaled clear intentions to reboot the stalled peace process.

But Israel's newly-installed government includes a number of ministers likely to strongly oppose any settlement freeze in territories occupied by Israel after the 1967 Israeli-Arab war, and President Mahmoud Abbas made it clear to Obama there would be no talks without a new building moratorium.

"Fifty-six percent believe that the two-state solution is no longer practical due to settlement expansion," the report said.

Meanwhile, 71 percent of Palestinians were pessimistic about Washington's move to unblock \$500 million in aid to Abbas's Palestinian Authority, saying it was not enough to address its current financial woes.

And the report also found a dramatic drop in the number of people optimistic that Gaza's Hamas rulers could reconcile their differences with Abbas's rival Fatah movement.

"Percentage of optimism about the chances for reunification of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip drops sharply from 39 percent three months ago to 18 percent in this poll," it said.

Fatah and Hamas have been at odds since the Islamist movement won a landslide general election victory in 2006, and relations took a major turn for the worse after they ousted Fatah forces from Gaza a year later.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=581764>

- **Israeli forces detain 20 Palestinians in West Bank raids**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces detained 20 Palestinians in pre-dawn raids across the West Bank on Wednesday, the army said.

An Israeli military spokeswoman said 20 Palestinians were "taken for security questioning."

In the northern West Bank, Israeli soldiers detained seven Palestinians in Tayasir, three in Tulkaren, one in Burqin and another in Beit Furik, she told Ma'an.

One Palestinian was detained in Qaryut in the central West Bank, and further south Israeli forces detained two people in Bethlehem, one in Beit Ummar, one in Hebron and three in Bani Naim, the army official said.

Locals said soldiers raided several homes in Bani Naim before detaining Thabet Zyadat, Hamzeh Manasreh and Ibrahim Sawalha.

Nour Sarsour was detained in Hebron, a Ma'an reporter said.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=581715>

- **Israel bombs Gaza Strip**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) --Israeli warplanes bombed the Gaza Strip early Wednesday,

causing damage but no injuries, in the first airstrike on the enclave since a November ceasefire.

Two airstrikes hit a tile factory in the Shujaiyeh neighborhood, east of Gaza City, and farm land in Beit Lahiya in the north, locals said.

The raids were the first since Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire on Nov. 21 to end an 8-day war on the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said the two attacks were in response to rocket fire from the enclave.

"In response to several rocket fire incidents directed at Israel, an Israel Air Force aircraft targeted overnight two extensive terror sites in the Northern Gaza Strip," it said in a statement.

"Accurate hits were identified."

On Tuesday Gaza militants fired a rocket into southern Israel after the death in custody of a Palestinian who suffered from cancer, Israeli police said.

"There was a rocket that was fired," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told AFP. "It landed in an open area," he said, adding there were no immediate reports of casualties or property damage.

Earlier in the day Palestinian witnesses told AFP militants in Gaza City had fired three mortar rounds on Israel.

The Israeli army initially said one projectile had landed in Israel, without causing any casualties, but later said none had.

A spokeswoman said military systems detected launches within Gaza but that they had fallen short and landed within the strip.

A coalition of Salafist groups later claimed that its militants fired two rockets at Israel on Tuesday afternoon.

The Mujahedeen Shura Council said in a statement received by AFP that its action was "part of our answer to the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh".

Abu Hamdiyeh, a 63-year-old prisoner from the West Bank city of Hebron, had been suffering from throat cancer. His

death on Tuesday morning sparked Palestinian anger, with officials blaming Israel for allegedly delaying his treatment and refusing to release him early on compassionate grounds.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told AFP the faction was watching the developments with "the greatest concern" and that Israel would "regret its continuing crimes".

It was the third instance of rocket fire since the end of the November fighting, which ended with an Egyptian-brokered truce that has been almost completely respected.

The previous time rocket fire hit Israel was on March 21 during a visit by US President Barack Obama, when two rockets also claimed by the Salafists caused some damage but no injuries.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=581689>

- **Abbas to meet Kerry Sunday in Jordan, Palestinian source says**

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas is to meet on Sunday in Amman with US

Secretary of State John Kerry, who is pushing for a renewal of peace talks, a Palestinian official said.

"US Secretary of State John Kerry will meet with president Abbas next Sunday in Amman," he told AFP on Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

After meeting Kerry, Abbas would on Monday travel to Qatar for a meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative committee for talks likely to focus on US efforts to revive the stalled peace process, the official said.

Israeli press reports said Kerry would arrive in Israel on Saturday night for talks with the leadership, but there was no confirmation from the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose spokesman refused to comment on the issue.

Kerry, who took up his post on February 1, made his first visit to the region alongside US President Barack Obama last month, holding one-on-one talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership in Jerusalem and Amman on March 24.

"I think the stage has been set for the possibilities that the parties can hopefully find a way to negotiations," Kerry said in Baghdad a day later, describing the meetings as "a good beginning."

Direct peace talks broke down just weeks after they were started in September 2010 in a bitter row over Israel's settlement building.

Since then, the Palestinians say they will not return to the table without a settlement freeze, while Israel has agreed to resume talks only if there are no such pre-conditions.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/abbas-to-meet-kerry-sunday-in-jordan-palestinian-source-says>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Economic pain prompts Morocco protest**

Thousands of Moroccans marched through Rabat on Sunday (March 31st) to protest the Islamist-led government's failure to stem unemployment and the high cost of living, AFP reported.

Chanting "Morocco is witnessing social regression", up to 10,000 protesters marched through the streets of the capital before rallying in front of Parliament.

The national march against government "indifference" was organised by the Democratic Workers' Confederation (CDT) and the Democratic Workers' Federation (FDT). The protesters waved placards bearing slogans criticising the "government's disinterest in addressing society's aspirations".

Opposition party figures, human rights activists and members of the youth-led February 20 Movement also participated in the protest, MAP reported.

The government must address the public's demands in order to improve people's living standards and enable them to enjoy their rights fully, according to CDT Vice President Abdelkader Zair.

That position was shared by FDT Secretary-General Abderrahmane Azzouzi, who has called on the government to fulfil unrealised pledges.

The government has a big challenge on its hands. Morocco's economic indicators are in the red. According to Central Bank Governor Abdellatif Jouahri, the budget deficit grew by 7.6 per cent last year, due in part to an increase in the cost of subsidies, which hit 54 billion dirhams (4.8 billion euros) at the end of 2012.

Foreign investment decreased and will continue to decrease due to the fall in production, according to the governor. Foreign currency reserves are only sufficient to cover four months of exports.

Measures to correct the slide in the budget must be taken, he said during a press briefing held on March 27th in Rabat. If the situation is not rectified, there is a risk that international institutions, including rating agencies, will penalise Morocco, Jouahri warned. Efforts therefore must be made to prevent the country from reliving the experience of the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) of the 1980s.



Moroccans have two main fears: that prices will rise and that employment will be adversely affected.

On the prices front, the government is expected to introduce reforms to the Compensation Fund. The government has already underlined that the reform would be accompanied by gradual rises in the prices of subsidised goods, though not immediately.

But ministers have been reluctant to comment on the issue. The coalition government met twice last week to discuss the economic situation.

Only Istiqlal Party Secretary-General Hamid Chabat made a press statement. He said that he opposed any price rise despite the current economic picture.

Although unemployment has stabilised at 9%, according to the governor of the central bank, "the level of job creation is falling". Figures from the High Commission for Planning show that in 2012, 127,000 paid jobs were created but 126,000 unpaid jobs, including 111,000 in rural areas, were lost. Unemployment in urban areas stood at 13.4%.

Young people aged between 25 and 34 are the worst affected. Unemployment within this age bracket is between 17.9% and 18.6%. Graduate unemployment is between 16.7% and 16.4%.

These figures are alarming, economist Mehdi Sebbane said. If the current economic indicators are not rectified, unemployment will rise further, especially in urban areas, according to Sebbane. The government, he said, must take measures to prelaunch the economy and increase growth.

"If growth does not increase, Morocco cannot create jobs. The outlook for the agricultural season is promising. It could boost growth. But this will not be enough," the economist said. "Structural deficits must be prevented from

worsening, otherwise the situation could deteriorate."

Moroccans are hoping that the situation will improve. Mehdi Rafiki, 32, has been unemployed for six years. He said that the job situation was already unfavourable for young graduates.

"We are hoping that things will get better and that the employment sector will expand rather than deteriorate," he said.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/02/feature-01

- **Tensions rise in southern Algeria**

Activists in Ghardaia launched a hunger strike on Monday (April 1st), the latest in a series of actions aimed at calling attention to conditions in southern Algeria.

"Our members have participated in this peaceful action in the defence of just causes and rights of citizens," Liberté quoted the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH) as saying.

LADDH also called for a march on April 9th to support the "release of detainees" and to "express support for local children to young Algerians seeking warmer future".

The hunger strike follows clashes last Tuesday in Ghardaia, where protestors tried to stop a traditional carpet festival from taking place. The demonstrators used the occasion to urge local authorities to address the problems of the young and unemployed.

The demonstration led to violent confrontations between law enforcement officials and protestors, resulting in the arrest of 17 people and 14 injured officers.

The atmosphere was still tense a day after the confrontations. The 17 arrested demonstrators appeared in court on Wednesday. A big crowd gathered early that morning to demand that those arrested be released.

"What took place in El-Oued and Ghardaia are acts of provocation aimed at undermining the peaceful demonstrations of those unemployed in the south," said Tahar Belabbès, a spokesperson for the

National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC).

"We are going back down on the street for sure," Belabbès said while expressing his disapproval over the use of force against demonstrators. "We are going to get things moving and we are going to respond to this crackdown."

The CNDDC called upon activists to show up in Ghardaia to demand the release of all the imprisoned activists.

A day after the clashes, Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kabila, Agriculture Minister Rachid Benaissa and Water Resources Minister Necib Hocine travelled to the southern Algerian town to discuss employment with local representatives.

On Thursday, Labour and Social Security Minister Tayeb Louh announced that the government was working on the introduction of new tax incentives to encourage companies to invest in the south, AFP reported.

Former Labour Minister Maâmar Benguerba last week said he was not

surprised by the re-emergence of protests in the south.

But the proposed measures for the southern population are insufficient and superficial, he told El Watan on March 27th. The real problem in Algeria is that there is a "lack of involvement and a lack of ambition", he said.

For the former minister, the southern region is key to Algeria's stability.

"If in the near future, insecurity develops in the south, it's over," Benguerba said.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/02/feature-03

- **Egypt presidency denies filing complaint against Bassem Youssef**

Office of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi says it supports freedom of expression but warns critics to abide by the law

The Egyptian presidency has denied filing legal complaints against TV satirist Bassem Youssef or any other person.

In comments posted on Facebook on Tuesday, the presidency said it was committed to freedom of expression but advised critics to "abide by the law."

Bassem Youssef was released on LE15,000 bail on Sunday after being questioned about allegations he insulted the president and Islam on his satirical TV show, El-Bernameg.

"The presidency would like to point out that Egypt after the January 25 Revolution is a state of law ... hence the summoning of any Egyptian, regardless of his status or popularity, is a decision for the prosecutor-general who works independently and without interference from the presidency," read a statement on President Mohamed Morsi's official Facebook page.

The statement comes after the US said investigations into Youssef and other government critics were a "disturbing trend."

In response, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party issued a statement accusing the US of "flagrant interference" in Egyptian affairs.

Youssef's El-Bernameg show, which is inspired in part by Jon Stewart's Daily Show, often lampoons President Morsi and conservative Islamist clerics.

The questioning of Youssef came after arrest warrants were issued for five prominent anti-government activists for "inciting violence."

Egypt's prosecutor-general, meanwhile, has denied the recent arrest warrants were political in nature, asserting they simply represented the application of the law.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/68331/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-presidency-denies-filing-complaint-against-B.aspx>

- **Egypt's Islamist-led Shura Council amends law on political rights**

Upper house of Egypt's parliament, currently endowed with legislative powers, green-lights revised law on political rights to allow use of religious campaign slogans

Deputies of the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies in the Islamist-led Shura Council (the upper house of Egypt's parliament, currently endowed with legislative powers) teamed up on Monday and Tuesday to approve amendments to a 1956 law on the exercise of political rights.

The amendments were introduced by the government after Egypt's Administrative Court ruled last month that the current version of the law – approved by the Shura Council on 21 February – was constitutionally and legally flawed. The law was referred back to the High Constitutional Court (HCC), which is not expected to issue a ruling on it in the short term.

According to Sobhi Saleh, deputy chairman of the Shura Council's legislative and constitutional affairs committee and a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), "the two laws regulating parliamentary elections – on the exercise of political rights and the performance of the House of Representatives [the lower house of Egypt's parliament] – were entirely amended by the government."

He added: "This was seen as the best option, rather than waiting for the law to be ruled constitutional or unconstitutional [by the HCC]."

The Shura Council had also been expected to convene a plenary session on Wednesday to discuss amendments to the law regulating elections of the House of Representatives). The meeting, however, was postponed to next Sunday after Saleh told Shura Council Chairman Ahmed Fahmi on Tuesday that the constitutional affairs committee needed more time to issue a report on proposed amendments.

"The new law [on the House of Representatives] requires careful study because it includes several controversial articles, particularly those concerning the re-drawing of electoral districts," said Saleh.

In response, Fahmi said: "The House law will be discussed by the Shura Council at a plenary meeting next Sunday to give the committee enough time to review it and issue a report on it."

Political rights & parliamentary polls

The 69-article political rights law, meanwhile, states that "every male and female Egyptian of 18 years or more [instead of the proposed 16 years] shall have the right to vote in all general elections and referendums." The same article also states that military and police officers will not have the right to vote during their period of service.

The above article, however, was amended by the Shura Council to add "members of the Egyptian intelligence apparatus and Administrative Control Authority" to the list of those ineligible to vote in elections.

Article 2 of the law strips several sectors of society of the right to cast ballots, including "convicted felons, unless rehabilitated; those sentenced to jail terms for crimes of theft; hiding stolen objects; swindling; issuing bad checks; breaches of trust; perfidy; bribery; criminal bankruptcy; forgery; using forged papers; perjury; rape; corrupting the youth; vagrancy; and committing a crime to get out of military or national service."

The same article also states that "civil servants of the state or public sector workers who were dismissed from service

because of a breach of honour will be stripped of their political rights unless five years have passed since the date of dismissal or a judicial order annulling their dismissal." In addition, Article 3 states that the political rights of citizens suffering from mental disorders or who have gone bankrupt will be suspended.

Article 4 states that upcoming parliamentary elections will be conducted under the supervision of a Supreme Electoral Commission (SEC). This will be chaired by the head of Cairo's Appeals Court and will include senior deputy heads of the Court of Cassation; senior deputy heads of Egypt's State Council; and senior heads of Egypt's courts of appeal.

The SEC's powers and responsibilities, according to Article 10, will include "setting up main voting centres and polling and vote-counting stations; preparing and reviewing electoral lists (based on national identity cards); and supervising the registration process."

The SEC will also be charged with allocating "electoral symbols" for party-based and independent candidates. The SEC will also be mandated with regulating

the activities of the media during elections and the participation of civil society organisations in monitoring elections.

Religious campaign slogans

Articles 10 and 61 stirred controversy when Islamist MPs decided not to impose a ban on the use of religious slogans during electoral campaigns.

The FJP's Saleh pointed out that Article 6 of Egypt's new constitution did not ban religious electoral slogans. FJP members rallied behind Saleh's argument, calling for the amendment of paragraph six of Article 10 to state that "electoral campaigning cannot be conducted based on gender or religious discrimination."

This contrasts with the existing text, which states that "rules regulating electoral campaigning must impose a ban on the use of slogans, symbols or campaigning activities of a religious nature."

Saleh also stirred controversy when he insisted that "slogans like 'Islam is the Solution' – used by the Muslim Brotherhood during parliamentary elections since the 1980s – are

constitutional." He added: "Administrative courts have stated 86 times that 'Islam is the Solution' does not violate the constitution."

The FJP and ultra-conservative Salafist MPs mobilised behind the article allowing the use of religious electoral slogans.

"If we decided to impose a ban on religious slogans, then we should prevent the use of liberal and atheist slogans," Saleh said. "The newly-approved constitution emphasises the Islamic character of Egypt. Therefore, there should not be a ban on religious slogans during electoral campaigning."

Saleh's argument was rejected by the government, however, with Deputy Justice Minister Omar El-Sherif saying "it is better to keep the government's text [banning religious slogans] in place and leave the matter to the courts to decide what slogans are religious or not during campaigning."

Salafist MPs, for their part, asserted: "Islamist slogans cannot be banned in a country that is 90 percent Muslim." Liberal MPs, meanwhile, warned that the

amendment would serve to "inflame religious tensions."

Saleh's argument was vehemently rejected by secular political activists.

"This dramatic amendment provides fresh proof that the law is being tailored to serve the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood and help inflame sectarian tensions in Egypt," said Lawyers Syndicate Chairman Sameh Ashour, a member of the opposition National Salvation Front (NSF).

Ashour disagreed with Saleh, saying that Article 6 of the constitution clearly stated that "political parties, not electoral campaigns, cannot be based on discrimination in terms of gender or religion." Ashour expects that, if the law on political rights is referred to the HCC in this form, "it will be ruled unconstitutional."

Margrette Azer, a Coptic member of the liberal Wafd Party, asked: "If 'Islam is the Solution' is constitutionally valid, does this mean that Copts will also be allowed to use the slogan 'Christianity is the Solution' during parliamentary campaigning?"

Azer told Ahram Online that "the Muslim Brotherhood's long-term strategy is to Islamise Egypt and discriminate among citizens based on religious and sectarian lines."

Expatriate voting & red ink

Meanwhile, the Shura Council held a lengthy discussion of Article 15, which was amended to put overseas voting under full judicial supervision in compliance with HCC rulings.



"The amendment doesn't mean that the government will send judges to countries all over the world to supervise the Egyptian expatriate vote," said El-Sherif. Instead, the deputy justice minister noted, expatriates' ballots would be sent by express mail to Egypt to be counted under judges' supervision.

The text of Article 15 now states that "procedures for expatriate voting and vote-counting will be conducted ahead of elections at home and under complete judicial oversight in accordance with rules laid down by the SEC."

By an overwhelming majority, the Shura Council rejected a government proposal to relieve voters of the necessity of staining their fingers with red ink before voting.

"This article requires the government to spend LE5 million a year to import red ink," said El-Sherif. "It's sufficient that voters simply show their national identity cards or valid passports."

The proposal was rejected with MPs insisting that Article 38 state that "all voters must stain their fingers with 24-hour indelible red ink after voting, and that they must sign their names in the book of registered voters."

On Tuesday, the Shura Council approved articles 30 to 69 of the elections law. The most important of these was Article 37, which states that "the voting process begins at 9am and ends at 9pm over two

days; judges can extend voting hours to allow all voters to exercise their rights."

Article 40 strictly prohibits citizens from voting twice, while Article 50 states that "any citizen who abstains from voting without an acceptable reason can be fined as much as LE500." Article 51, meanwhile, makes voters found guilty of using force against supervising judges liable to imprisonment for up to five years.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/68305/Egypt/Politics-/Egypst-Islamistled-Shura-Council-amends-law-on-pol.aspx>

- **Egypt "fully respects" press freedom, Morsi says**

President Mohamed Morsi on Wednesday stressed Egypt's commitment to freedom of expression, insisting his office was not behind a probe against a popular satirist that has raised international concerns.

"The presidency reiterates the importance of freedom of expression and fully respects press freedom," Morsi's office said in a statement.

It denied having filed any complaint against satirist Bassem Youssef, whose wildly popular show Albernemeg offers a biting critique of Egyptian politics and public figures.

Youssef is out on bail facing accusations of insulting Morsi and Islam, and he now faces a new investigation for "threatening public security."

"The presidency has not filed any complaint against stand-up comedian Bassem Youssef," Morsi's office said, stressing that "the current well-publicized claims were initiated by citizens rather than the presidency."

Under Egypt's legal system, complaints are filed to the public prosecutor, who decides whether there is enough evidence to refer the case to trial. Suspects can be detained during this stage of investigation.

The soaring number of legal complaints against journalists has cast doubt on Morsi's commitment to freedom of expression -- a key demand of the popular uprising that toppled his predecessor Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

Youssef's high profile case prompted the United States to express "real concerns" about the direction being taken by the Egyptian government.

It denied having filed any complaint against satirist Bassem Youssef, whose wildly popular show Albernemeg offers a biting critique of Egyptian politics and public figures.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/egypt-fully-respects-press-freedom-morsi-says>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Aoun: Miqati served own interests through premiership

Change and Reform bloc leader MP Michel Aoun slammed caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati, criticizing his tenure as premier.

"Miqati wanted to play with the laws and use them for his own interest, including the extension of the term in office of Internal Security Forces chief Ashraf Rifi," Aoun said in an interview with OTV television on Tuesday evening.

“Had we [allowed him to extend Rifi’s term] he would have resigned for other reasons anyway.”

Aoun went on to criticize Rifi, saying that his term was “unstable” and that the ISF chief “did not uncover any of the major 11 crimes that took place” during his term in office.

The FPM leader also warned that the period ahead might be difficult to handle by Miqati if he was chosen again to head a new government.

“If we were to choose between Rifi and the government, [we would chose to] get rid of the government. There are upcoming circumstances that Miqati wouldn’t want to deal with.”

The extension of the term in office of the top security officials was one of the sticking point during the last meeting of the Miqati cabinet.

Following the failure to agree on the issue, as well as on the formation of a supervisory electoral body to oversee the upcoming parliamentary elections, Miqati

announced last month the resignation of his government.

Talks have since then emerged on the nature of the new cabinet meant to replace the recently resigned government, as well as the premier that will head it.

Aoun, in his interview, remarked that he did not have “pre-conditions for the next government,” adding that he wanted its formation to be conducted in a “fair” manner.

He added that his party hasn’t yet agreed on a candidate for the premiership nominations.

The FPM leader also lashed out at Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt after the latter had criticized Aoun’s Movement for clinging on to the Energy and Telecommunications Ministries portfolios.

“Jumblatt is not a normal person. He wants to discipline the Christians for their proposal of the Orthodox law.”

“Jumblatt and those who secretly back him consider the Energy Ministry a

ministry for diverting money. They want this and the Telecommunications Ministry as well.”

Asked about his view on the mandate of President Michel Suleiman, Aoun said that the latter had been ineffective in his role as head of state.

“We have been living in a state of vacuum of power since [Suleiman] became president.”

He also slammed the president’s opposition to the Orthodox law.

The electoral law issue has gripped the Lebanese political scene for several months and resulted in the approval of the Orthodox law –fiercely backed by the FPM, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines, by the parliament’s joint commissions. Its implementation is pending the approval of the parliament plenary session.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/aoun-miqati-served-own-interests-through-premiership>

- **Future, PSP in Riyadh discussions on new premiership**

As Lebanon's dueling political parties move forward on selecting a new premier, sources spoke Tuesday to NOW on the recent visits of Future Movement and Progressive Socialist Party officials to Saudi Arabia.

Sources in the PSP told NOW that Caretaker Social Affairs Minister Wael Abu Faour --who is a member of the Druze party--discussed with a Saudi official during his visit on how to deal with the coming political situation in the country.

"The views between the two were largely identical," the sources added, but would not reveal the name of the Saudi official.

However, they said that the discussions between the two did not result in the proposal for any candidate as premier.

They also said that Abu Faour returned to Lebanon with a determination to avoid a ministerial crisis that would affect the rest of the country’s constitutional institutions, notably the parliament.

Abu Faour also met with Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri, after which they agreed on choosing a candidate for the new premiership that all parties would agree to, according to the same sources.

They added, however, that no specific name was discussed between the PSP delegate and the Future chief.

Meanwhile, Future bloc leader MP Fouad Siniora led a party delegation to Riyadh to meet their party leader MP Saad Hariri, during which they agreed that the next government must be neutral, not political, sources told NOW.

The sources also said that the Future delegation and Hariri did not select a candidate for the premiership.

Abu Faour returned to Beirut from Riyadh on Monday, while Siniora traveled to the Saudi capital over the weekend.

Lebanon's political scene has recently witnessed discussions on the nature of the new cabinet meant to replace the recently resigned government, as well as the premier that will head it.

Prime Minister Najib Miqati resigned from his office on Friday, March 22, after the cabinet failed to approve the formation of a supervisory electoral body and did not vote on the extension of the tenure of Internal Security Forces chief Ashraf Rifi.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonews/future-ppp-in-riyadh-discussions-on-new-premiership1>

- **Gemayel discussing new premiership with Future, PSP**

Kataeb Party leader Amin Gemayel said that his bloc is coordinating with the Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party in order to choose a candidate for heading the new cabinet.

"We are [cooperating] with [PSP leader MP Walid] Jumblatt and the Future Movement," Gemayel told NBN television on Tuesday.

The Kataeb leader added that he is in constant contact with his allies in the March 14 coalition, as well as the independent Christian MPs.

However, he noted that they have not yet reached a decision regarding the parliamentary consultations.

President Michel Suleiman had announced last Thursday that parliamentary consultations aiming to name a new premier will take place on April 5 and 6, but a Free Patriotic Movement politician said on Tuesday that his party might boycott these meetings.

Gemayel went on to reiterate his party's calls for a national salvation government that would have the Baabda Declaration – which stipulates keeping Lebanon away from regional and international conflicts - as its ministerial statement.

Lebanon's political parties were faced with the decision of forming a new government after Prime Minister Najib Miqati resigned from his office on Friday, March 22; a move that Gemayel described as "very courageous."

The Kataeb leader went on to tackle the issue of the electoral law, confirming that his party will not present its candidacy requests if the upcoming parliamentary

elections are held according to the current 1960 electoral law.

"The electoral law is the hardest law for the parliament to look into because the fate of every party and sect [rests on it]"

The Kataeb Party along with its ally the Lebanese Forces have advocated for the adoption of the sectarian-based Orthodox law as an alternative to the 1960 law. The proposal was later approved by the joint parliamentary commissions in February.

However, other March 14 parties, notably the Future Movement, as well as the PSP have severely criticized this draft on the basis that it would lead to sectarian divisions within the country.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/gemayel-discussing-new-premiership-with-future-bsp>

- **Kataeb reiterates call for national salvation cabinet**

The Kataeb Party said it advocates the formation of a national salvation government that would respect the disassociation policy in the wake of the resignation of Premier Najib Miqati.

“We should be prepared to [face] an extremely dangerous era [following Miqati’s resignation] by forming a national salvation government,” The party’s political bureau said in a statement released on Tuesday.

It added that the cabinet the party is calling for must have the Baabda Declaration, which states keeping Lebanon away from regional and international conflicts, as its ministerial statement.

The Kataeb Party said that this government would be capable of “elaborating an electoral law that provides parity and national unity.”

It further backed this proposal, claiming that the national salvation cabinet would also positively affect the country’s economic situation by “stopping government waste, controlling corruption and restoring [foreign countries’] trust in Lebanon.”

Meanwhile, the Kataeb Party noted that the March 14 coalition has not yet agreed

on a final candidate for the new premiership.

Lebanon’s government fell on Friday, March 22, following Miqati’s stepping down from his office after the cabinet failed to approve the formation of a supervisory electoral body and did not vote on the extension of the tenure of Internal Security Forces chief Ashraf Rifi.

Talks have since focused on the nature of the new cabinet as well as the prime minister that will head this government.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanone/ws/kataeb-reiterates-call-for-national-salvation-cabinet>

6. SYRIA

• U.S., Jordan boost training of Syria opposition fighters: report

American and Jordanian efforts to train Syrian opposition fighters have stepped up, the Washington Post reported on Wednesday, following reports that the training has been focused on anti-tank weaponry.

The report on Wednesday, citing U.S. and Jordanian officials, stated that training – which reportedly began last year - could also be used to establish a buffer zone along Syria’s southern border.

“Jordanian security officials said a previous timetable to complete training of about 3,000 Free Syrian Army officers by the end of June has been moved up to the end of this month in light of the border victories,” the Post reported.

A buffer zone would essentially aim to “aim to convert areas now in rebel hands into permanent havens for thousands of army defectors and displaced civilians in the area and allow easy access for humanitarian aid,” the report added.

“Buffer zones on the Syrian side of the border is the only way to keep the conflict away from Jordan,” Mahmoud Irdaisat, head of the Amman-based Center for Strategic Studies at the King Abdullah II Defense Studies Academy, told the Post.

Last month, German newspaper Der Spiegel quoted what it said were participants and organizers in the training, adding that there were doubts over

whether the Americans worked for private firms or were from the army, although some reportedly wore uniforms.

Spiegel said the training focused on use of anti-tank weaponry.

Jordanian intelligence services are involved in the program, which aims to build around a dozen units totaling some 10,000 fighters to the exclusion of radical Islamists, Spiegel reported.

“The Jordanian intelligence services want to prevent Salafis (radical Islamists) crossing from their own country into Syria and then returning later to stir up trouble in Jordan itself,” one of the organizers told the paper.

A spokesman for the U.S. Defense Department declined immediate comment on the Spiegel report. The French foreign ministry and Britain’s foreign and defense ministries also had no comment.

Britain’s Guardian newspaper also reported in recent weeks that U.S. trainers were assisting Syrian rebels in Jordan. British and French instructors were also participating in the U.S.-led effort, the

Guardian said on Saturday, citing Jordanian security sources.

More than 70,000 people have been killed and 1 million refugees have fled the Syrian conflict.

It started as pro-democracy protests but has turned into a sectarian war between rebels mainly from Syria's Sunni Muslim majority and state forces defending President Bashar al-Assad, who follows the Alawite faith derived from Shiite Islam.

The United States has said it would provide medical supplies and food directly to opposition fighters but has ruled out sending arms for fear they may find their way to Islamist hardliners who might then use them against Western targets.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/04/03/U-S-Jordan-boost-training-of-Syria-opposition-fighters-report.html>

- **Assad: 'No word of truth' from Turkey PM**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad accused Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip

Erdogan of not having said "a single word of truth" about Syria's conflict, in an interview with Turkish media posted on the web.

"Erdogan has not said a single word of truth since the beginning of the crisis in Syria," Assad told journalists working for Turkish television Ulusal and Aydinlik newspaper.

Turkey is a key backer of the Syrian revolt that broke out in March 2011.

Damascus has regularly accused Ankara of financing, training and arming rebels fighting troops loyal to Assad. The UN says Turkey currently hosts more than 260,000 Syrian refugees.

The interview with Assad was conducted on Tuesday and is to run on Friday, according to the president's YouTube channel.

In another extract from the interview, Assad condemned the killing on March 21 of prominent pro-regime Sunni cleric Mohammed Saeed al-Bouti as part of a plan to sow "sectarian strife" in Syria.

"There is no doubt that the role of clerics, including Dr Bouti, was key to ensuring the failure of a covert plan to create sectarian strife. That's why they assassinated Dr Bouti," Assad said.

The UN says more than 70,000 people have been killed in a spiraling war that broke out after the army unleashed a crackdown on a peaceful revolt which morphed into an armed revolt.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/assad-no-word-of-truth-from-turkey-pm>

- **SANA: Syria offers kidnappers amnesty deal**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad offered an amnesty deal to kidnappers in the war-torn country Tuesday, giving them 15 days to hand over victims or face a life of hard labor, state news agency SANA said.

Kidnappers who do not release victims within the 15 days will be sentenced to "a life of hard labor", or executed if their victims have been killed or sexually abused, SANA said.

"Anyone who has kidnapped a person for a ransom and deprived him of his liberty for political, financial or sectarian reasons will be sentenced to a life of hard labor," said the decree, according to SANA.

Kidnappers will be "executed if the crime led to the [victim's] death or permanent disability, as well as in case of sexual assault", the decree added.

It promises amnesty to "anyone who has kidnapped a person and sets him free or hands him over to the competent authorities within 15 days of the decree's entry into force", SANA said.

Kidnapping is rife in Syria, where a two-year conflict has left more than 70,000 people dead, according to the United Nations.

Monitors say money is a key motive for kidnapping, but sectarian attacks are on the rise in a country where the majority of rebels, like the population, are Sunnis, while Assad and several of his close associates belong to the Alawite community.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/sana-syria-offers-kidnappers-amnesty-deal>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Oman rescues crew of partly submerged Turkish ship**

Omani rescue teams evacuated on Tuesday the crew of a Turkish ship loaded with iron that listed and became partly submerged in the Arabian Sea after its engine room caught fire, the transport ministry said.

Units from the armed forces of the Gulf sultanate were working on securing the Atlantik Confidence while waiting for teams specialized in rescuing ships to arrive to stabilize it, said a statement carried by ONA state news agency.

The crew of 21 members was evacuated to a commercial ship nearby.

The Atlantik Confidence, located 144 nautical miles southeast of Masirah island, tilted 20 degrees to port and became partly submerged after the fire erupted, the ministry said.

It is carrying iron frames to be used in a new terminal at the Muscat airport, ONA said.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/oman-rescues-crew-of-partly-submerged-turkish-ship>

- **Kuwait MPs pass anti-money laundering, terror funding law**

Kuwait's parliament on Tuesday overwhelmingly passed a bill to combat money laundering and funding of terror groups, stipulating jail terms of up to 20 years for violators.

Forty-five members, including all cabinet ministers present, voted for the bill while five MPs abstained. The law becomes effective after it is signed by the ruler of the oil-rich Gulf state.

The bill stipulates a jail term not exceeding 15 years for individuals convicted of funding terror organizations in addition to a fine of up to twice the sums used.

It also sets an imprisonment of up to 20 years for money laundering crimes if the violators are organized criminal or groups

deemed terrorist and non-governmental organizations.

The legislation, which replaces an anti-money laundering law issued 12 years ago and described as ineffective, also dictates the confiscation of all funds involved in such crimes.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-mps-pass-anti-money-laundering-terror-funding-law>

- **Ex-Yemeni president in Saudi for treatment**

Former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has been accused of meddling in his country's fragile political transition, was in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday for treatment, a Yemeni diplomat said.

Saleh arrived for medical tests and treatment in the Saudi capital on Monday, his party, General People's Congress (GPC), said. He spent time recovering in a Riyadh hospital in June 2011 after an attack on his compound left him seriously wounded.

A Yemeni diplomat confirmed to AFP that Saleh was in Riyadh and sources in the

GPC said that Saudi Arabia chartered a plane to take him to the kingdom.

Saleh was admitted to hospital, the head of the GPC parliamentary bloc, Sultan al-Barakani, told AFP. He did not elaborate on the nature of the treatment.

After 33 years as Yemen's head of state, Saleh left power in February 2012 as part of an agreement for the transition of power in the country, which also gave him and his family immunity from prosecution.

He last visited Saudi Arabia in November 2011, when he travelled to Riyadh to sign the transitional agreement in the presence of Saudi King Abdullah, one of the plan's main sponsors.

Saleh's latest trip to Saudi Arabia comes just two weeks after the start of a national dialogue in Sanaa aimed at preparing a new constitution and general elections for February 2014, when the two-year transitional period will end.

Although weakened, the ex-president, whose supporters still wield much influence in Yemen, has seemed reluctant to retire from political life.

His opponents suspect him of trying to hamper the transition, which has come to an impasse over the refusal of southern separatists to take part in national dialogue.

On February 15 the United Nations once again threatened sanctions against anyone who interfered in the delicate transition process, naming Saleh explicitly.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/ex-yemeni-president-in-saudi-for-treatment>

- **Saudi deports Yemenis as it cuts foreign labor, official says**

Thousands of Yemeni workers have been expelled from Saudi Arabia after it imposed new labor constraints affecting millions of expatriates in the oil-rich kingdom, an official said on Tuesday.

The new regulations introduced by the Saudi labor ministry aim to reduce the number of foreign workers to create jobs for millions of unemployed Saudis.

"Thousands of Yemenis had to leave Saudi Arabia. They were victims of an arbitrary

application of the new regulations," a Yemeni government official told AFP.

He said workers saw their residency permits torn into pieces by Saudi government representatives.

Under the new rules, foreigners are allowed to work only for their legal sponsors in the kingdom while their spouses cannot take up jobs.

Many foreigners enter Saudi Arabia on the sponsorship of a Saudi national but end up working for others, or set up their own businesses.

Around one million Yemenis live in neighboring Saudi Arabia, transferring around \$4 billion annually to their impoverished nation, according to non-official estimates.

Their return from Saudi Arabia "could harm stability in Yemen" warned Yemeni Nobel laureate Tawakkol Karman in a written statement to AFP.

She urged Saudi Arabia to open up again to Yemenis by removing restrictions on movement between the two countries

imposed in 1990 as a punishment to Yemen which sides with Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait.

Sanaa formed a ministerial commission last week tasked with working with Saudi authorities to soften the impact of the new rules, the official said.

Yemen already faces an economic crisis exacerbated by political instability and poor security.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/saudi-deports-yemenis-as-it-cuts-foreign-labor-official-says>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Karzai Says Mullah Omar Can Run For President**

April 2, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has told a German newspaper that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar can run for president in the election scheduled for next year.

In an interview published on April 2 by the German daily newspaper "Sueddeutsche Zeitung," Karzai said Omar "can give Afghans the opportunity to vote for or against him."

Karzai, whose term as president expires next year, added that the Afghan Constitution is valid for all Afghans and "the Taliban also should benefit from it."

But he reiterated that the militant group needed to first break its ties with Al-Qaeda and renounce violence in order to join the political process.

Karzai's comments come after he visited Qatar over the weekend to discuss the formal opening of a political office there for the Taliban.

Based on reporting by AP and sueddeutsche.de

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

- **Pakistan rejects Afghanistan's claim over border constructions**

ISLAMABAD, April 2 (Xinhua) -- Pakistan on Tuesday rejected Afghan government's claim that Pakistani military has started

unilateral construction and is engaged in physical reinforcement activities along the border in the eastern Ningarhar province.

Afghan Foreign Ministry said on Monday that it has conveyed grave concern about the development to the Pakistani ambassador in Kabul, Muhammad Sadiq and demanded halt to all activities.

Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister, Jawed Ludin, told Ambassador Sadiq that these activities are against all accepted international norms, provocative and unacceptable to the Afghan government, and that the government of Pakistan must halt them immediately, an Afghan Foreign Ministry statement said.

Responding to the assertions by the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister, the Pakistan Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said that Pakistan has an old post called Gursal well inside Pakistani territory bordering Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan, which is under routine renovation.

He said that both sides are supposed to inform any new construction closer to

border areas under the recently signed Tripartite Border SOP.

"Despite being a renovation work, Pakistan shared this information with the Afghan side as a gesture of goodwill. The same was also shared with the Afghan visiting delegation to Mohmand Agency on 24 January 2013," the Pakistani spokesman said.

He said the renovation of the post is primarily meant to interdict terrorists and criminals as well as better management of the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Jawed Ludin's recent concerns about construction and physical reinforcement along the Afghan border are therefore not in keeping with the spirit of the understanding on good border management and the recently signed Tripartite Border SOP".

He said Better managements of the border through strengthening border posts located in each other's territory are in the interest of the two countries to have an effective check over terrorists and

criminals. Pakistan suggests to the Afghan Government to take similar measures on their side of the border posts.

The Spokesperson added that Pakistan remains committed to extending all possible support and facilitation for peace, reconciliation and stability in Afghanistan.

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

- **Afghan spy chief recovers from injuries, returns to Afghanistan**

By MEENA HASEEB - 02 Apr 2013, 2:16 pm

Khaama Press

Afghan spy chief, head of the national directorate for security (NDS) Asadullah Khalid returned back to Afghanistan on Tuesday.

Asadullah Khalid was injured following a suicide bomb blast in capital Kabul after a suicide bomber who introduced himself as the Taliban peace envoy detonated his explosives while meeting him in one of his guesthouses on December 6 last year.

He was taken to intelligence hospital in capital Kabul after the attack and was

later transferred to coalition forces hospital in Bagram airfield.

He was later admitted to a US hospital for further treatment. The attacker was purportedly carrying a peace message on behalf of the Taliban when he detonated himself.

Attack on NDS chief Asadullah Khalid was reminiscent of the September 2011 assassination of former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, at the time the head of a body created by Mr. Karzai to open peace talks with the Taliban.

Mr. Rabbani was killed in his Kabul home by a purported peace emissary who carried a bomb concealed in his headgear. At the time, though, the Taliban didn't claim responsibility for the killing.

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

- **Airstrike kills 8 Taliban fighters in W. Afghanistan**

FARAH, Afghanistan, April 2 (Xinhua) -- Eight Taliban militants were killed as aircraft targeted a Taliban hideout in Farah province 695 km west of Kabul

Monday night, provincial police chief Aqa Noor Kintoz said Tuesday.

"Acting upon intelligence report, the aircraft pounded a Taliban hideout in Pushtrod district last night killing eight Taliban rebels including a local commander Mullah Mansoor and two would-be suicide bombers last night," Kintoz told Xinhua.

Taliban militants fighting the government are yet to make comment.

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

- **US officials confirm Afghan teenager stabbed American soldier**

Press TV
April 2, 2013

US officials have confirmed that an Afghan teenager stabbed a 26-year-old American soldier to death in eastern Afghanistan.

The officials said on Monday that the assailant stabbed Sgt. Michael Cable in the neck on Wednesday in the province of Nangarhar.

The officials, who requested not to be named as they were not authorized to speak to the media, said the attacker was thought to be about 16 years old.

Cable's brother Raymond Johnston said his brother was "prepared before he left for anything that happened" in Afghanistan.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said the boy, identified as Khalid, had taken refuge with the Taliban.

He added that Khalid was acting independently when he stabbed the US soldier.

The high number of military casualties in Afghanistan has intensified opposition in the United States and other NATO member states to the protracted war in the country.

At least 14 US service members have died in March in Afghanistan, occupied by the US-led forces since 2001.

According to the United Nations, thousands of Afghan civilians have died and hundreds of thousands more

displaced during a more than 11-year long war.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban regime from power, but insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan, despite the presence of about over 100,000 US-led troops.

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

- **Afghanistan issues 100bn new Afghani bank notes**

By SAYED JAWAD - 02 Apr 2013, 3:54 pm

Khaama Press

The Central Bank of Afghanistan — Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) officials on Tuesday announced that fresh banknotes amounting to one hundred billion Afghanis have recently been printed.

DAB officials also informed that the latest specifications have been placed in the new banknotes in a bid to make it easier to differentiate from the fake notes.

The officials also added that the Central Bank of Afghanistan remains committed to meet the needs and issues of th Afghan market.

The new bank notes are due to be distributed in accordance with the market demands, DAB officials said adding that the new banknotes have been printing considering the needs of the market for the next five years.

A British firm was contracted to print the new Afghan bank notes and the contract was reportedly given to the firm against \$20 million.

According to reports the Afghan government has also ordered to print another one hundred million Afghanis and the new bank notes will be printed as per the demands of the Afghan market.

In the meantime deputy governor for the Central Bank of Afghanistan Khan Afzal Hadawal said the new specifications of the bank notes will remain confidential with the bank while some of the specifications will be made public in the near future.

This comes as the residents of Kabul city and other provinces of Afghanistan including the business owners complained of facing issues with the fake bank notes in the market.

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

- **Top US General in Afghanistan Visits Pakistan**

Ayaz Gul
VOA News
April 1, 2013

ISLAMABAD — The commander of NATO-led international forces in Afghanistan has made his first official visit to neighboring Pakistan, after assuming command earlier this year. His visit comes amid continuing recriminations between Afghan and Pakistani officials, undermining hopes that a recent thaw in ties could help bring Taliban insurgents to the negotiating table.

General Joseph Dunford, commander of the NATO-led international forces in Afghanistan, met Monday with military chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani in Rawalpindi, where the Pakistan army is headquartered.

A joint statement released after the meeting said the two leaders discussed ways to strengthen military cooperation and “pressuring militants who threaten security along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.”

Officials in Pakistan allege that fugitive militants taking refuge in Afghanistan cross the border with the help of Afghan insurgents to attack Pakistani civilian and military targets. They also are critical of the Afghan National Army for not stopping the violence.

Former Pakistan military spokesman retired General Athar Abbas says such infiltrations and insurgent violence inside Afghanistan are likely to intensify if international forces withdraw from the country by the end of next year without having an effective peace plan in place. He cites the long, porous border.

"If it does not happen and the area is left without coming up with a formula, which basically puts a political dispensation, which is agreeable, approved or acceptable to main stakeholders in Afghanistan, I think then the turbulence or

instability in Afghanistan is likely to spill over to Pakistan, and that is our main worry," said Abbas.

But Afghan officials have alleged that efforts aimed at political reconciliation with the Taliban are not progressing because Pakistan is not living up to its commitment to facilitate the peace process.

Golalai Noor Safi, a female Afghan lawmaker and member of the High Peace Council tasked with negotiating peace with the Taliban, also blames Pakistan for the recent tensions.

"We think that the Pakistani side is not honest in their relations and every day they change their mind about the [peace] process, about Afghanistan, about the situation," said Safi.

Hours after Monday's meeting between NATO and Pakistani top commanders, Afghanistan again accused Pakistan of continuing cross-border rocket and artillery attacks on Kunar, one of its eastern border provinces.

Last month, Afghanistan canceled a military trip to Pakistan over alleged cross-border shelling by Pakistani troops. Pakistan criticized the decision as an "overreaction."

Pakistan's traditional links with some influential insurgent Afghan groups, including the Taliban, are seen as vital in international-backed efforts to try to bring an end to the violence in Afghanistan, to ensure an orderly withdrawal of foreign forces from the country.

Kabul alleges that Islamabad is not interested in promoting the Afghan peace process, a charge Islamabad denies.

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanriverdi 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*

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