



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

Energy Security

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1. IRAQ

- **Sunni Endowment confirms legitimacy of negotiations with government over protests (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Sunni Endowment stressed the legality of negotiating with the government to meet the demands of the demonstrators.

The Iraqia official Sat channel reported "The Sunni Endowment confirmed the legitimacy of launching dialogue with the government to discuss answering the demonstrators' demands."

"The negotiations should be done through the people non-politicized commissions and without previous conditions," the report added.

- **Anbar protestors plan a march on the occasion of Baghdad occupation (NINA)**

07 April 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Coordination Committee of Anbar protest said that it is preparing for a large march on Tuesday, Apr. 9, on the occupation of Baghdad.

Member of the coordination committees, Mohammed al-Dulaimi, told NINA that on the occasion a photographs exhibition about the crimes committed by American occupation forces against Iraqi people and a poetry evening will be held on the occasion.

- **South Oil Company employees start an open sit-in for the next 10 days**

07 April 2013

The protestors at the South Oil Company in Basra in southern Iraq have announced that they will continue with their sit-ins and demonstrations for the next 10 days until their demands are met.

Scores of the company's employees on Saturday [6 April] started an open sit-in in front of the company's building to protest against failure to fulfil their demands, which they had emphasized in previous protests. The protestors argued that their demands include settling the employees' pending profits, increasing the employment of Iraqi labour in oil licensing rounds, and settling the issue of land distribution to employees.

- **Maliki to attend next parliament session, says MP (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -Independent MP Kadhim al-Sayadi, expected the attendance of the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki to the parliament session on next Monday and his revealing for all the corruption files related to the legislative authority.

Sayadi told All Iraq News Agency "Maliki expressed his readiness to attend the parliament's session on next Monday on condition of unveiling all the corruption and terrorism files involved by the legislative authority in addition to discussing all the other problems including the arrest warrants which were not carried out."

"Maliki will call the parliament to vote on the files that will be tackled," he added.

Parliamentary sources have reported earlier that the State of Law Coalition threatened the political blocs which demand to investigate Maliki at the parliament, to disclose their files.

- **PM to Disgrace Rivals under Parliament's Dome (Shafaq News)**

07 April 2013

Shafaq News /The agency obtained information that the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki will disclose the violations of his opponents as attending the hosting parliamentary session expected to be holding on Monday.

According to information "Shafaq News" received "Maliki will reveal all corruption files related to political blocs".

The information stipulated that "al-Maliki expressed his willingness to attend the parliament session on Monday in return for revealing all corruption and terrorism files of political powers , the problems and even the warrants that have not been implemented".

The information showed that "Maliki will demand the parliament to vote on the files that will be revealed.

The Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki did not attend last Monday's parliamentary session supposed to host him in order to discuss the latest security developments in the country.

Argue raised regarding the reasons behind Maliki's not showing up, as his opponents acknowledged he conditioned the meeting to hold exclusively with bloc-heads and not to be aired –a point rejected by majority of lawmakers-, his supporters said that a meeting with Korean firms prevented PM to conference with lawmakers.

The parliament scheduled a host session to be held on last Monday to discuss security developments in the country with PM.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/5730-pm-to-disgrace-rivals-under-parliaments-dome.html>

- **Iraq cabinet unveils sweeping reform of Saddam law (AFP)**

By Prashant Rao | AFP –07 April 2013

Iraq's cabinet unveiled sweeping reforms to a law barring members of Saddam Hussein's Baath party from public life on Sunday as part of moves to placate angry rallies by the country's Sunni Arab minority.

The amendment to the De-Baathification law still needs to be approved by parliament, where it is expected to face stiff opposition, but it is among a raft of concessions to demonstrators who have alleged that the Shiite-led authorities unfairly target the Sunni community.

The protests since December lie at the heart of a political dispute that has pitted Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who is Shiite, against several of his erstwhile national unity government partners with less than two weeks to go before provincial elections, Iraq's first polls since 2010.

"This law (of De-Baathification) has excluded many talented people and prevented the country from (benefiting from) their services," Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlak said in a statement summarising the reforms.

Ministers approved a draft amendment that would allow Baath party branch chiefs, or firqa-level members, to rejoin the civil service, and would provide for pension payments for many members of the Fedayeen Saddam, a paramilitary organisation loyal to the ousted dictator.

It would also put a time limit on the law, ensuring that only names blacklisted by the end of 2013 would be restricted from public life.

In all, the draft law would allow thousands of people to either enter the civil service or receive pensions.

"If you want to create a state, you need reconciliation," said Mahmud Othman, an independent Kurdish MP opposed to the current De-Baathification laws which, he said, were "punishing the people" with links to Saddam's regime.

"Maybe the few people who have committed crimes, you take them to court. The rest, you should open the door to them."

But, Othman said, the law would likely face strong opposition in parliament from Shiite Muslim lawmakers whose constituencies in south Iraq were among those that suffered most under Saddam's rule.

"They (the amendments) could be proposed, but passing them in the form

that they have been proposed will not be easy," he said.

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/iraq-cabinet-unveils-sweeping-reform-saddam-law-135031228.html#UHPmtGy>

- **Barazani calls on the Federal Government to adopt practical steps toward solving Iraq's problems (NINA)**

07 April 2013

Erbil (NINA) – President of Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barazani, stressed the necessity for the Federal Government to adopt practical steps toward solving the problems of Iraq.

In a statement to the press on Sunday, Apr. 7, the Presidency of Kurdistan Region said that Barazani met with a delegation from the US State Department, headed by Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State. He acquainted the delegation with the Region's position toward the crisis Iraq is witnessing and the Region's participation in the political process; stressing the necessity to work in accordance with the principle of partnership, harmony and balancing.

For his part, the Secretary of State's Senior Advisor express his opinion on the situation stressing importance of the principle of partnership, as stipulated in the Constitution and Erbil Agreement.

- **Barzani to discuss message to be sent to INA with Kurdish sides (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, will hold a meeting on next Monday with the Kurdish political sides to discuss the message that will be sent to the Iraqi National Alliance concerning the pending issues with Baghdad government.

The spokesperson of the Kurdistan Alliance, Muayid al-Tayib, told All Iraq News Agency "Barzani will meet with the Kurdish sides in Erbil to evaluate the recent visit of the INA to Kurdistan, also to discuss the message that will be sent to the INA to explain our demands," stressing "our demands are not impossible such as calling to foil the political process or the constitution."

A delegation from the INA has visited Erbil on last Wednesday, where the

delegation's members met with the President of Kurdistan, Barzani, and other senior officials to discuss the pending issues with the central government.

- **Hurra Iraqiya coalition denies intention to join one alliance with White bloc (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Hurra Iraqiya coalition denied any intention to form any bloc or alliance jointly with the White bloc, stressing "what was reported by media outlets on lips of the White bloc's head, Jamal al-Batiekh in this regard is groundless."

A statement by the coalition cited on Sunday "We respect all the political blocs whether we are in harmony with them or not, however the Hurra Iraqiya Coalition does not have desire to join any coalition with the White bloc neither in present nor in future as both sides are totally different."

The Secretary General of the White bloc, Jamal al-Batiekh, announced earlier holding several meetings and talks with the head of the Iraqiya Hurra Slate,

Qutaiba al-Jobouri, to join a new political alliance

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31714

- **Alewi calls on KA to coordinate with INA to reduce gap between them (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Kareem Alewi, of the Iraqi National Alliance called the Kurdistan Alliance to coordinate the efforts with the INA to reduce the gap between them.

He stated to AIN “The Government of Kurdistan Region must intensify the efforts with INA to end the crisis.”

“There are positive initiatives and dialogues going on between the two sides,” he added, stressing “The necessity of speeding up the efforts to settle the disputes as soon as possible.”

“It is possible to solve the pending issues because there is a strategic relation between the two sides,” he concluded.

- **No information on granting Kurdish ministers vacations, MPs (Aswat al-Iraq)**

07 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Two Kurdish MPs denied any knowledge of Premier Nouri al-Maliki advisor's statement of granting the Kurdish ministers a vacation and replacing them with other ministers after one month of their absence of the Cabinet meetings in protest for endorsing the general budget without their consent.

MPs Ashwaq al-Jaf and Mahmoud Othman, in telephone call with Aswat al-Iraq, denied their knowledge of such actions or statements.

Premier's media advisor Ali al-Mussawi stated today, Sunday, to Egyptian Middle East News Agency, that Premier Maliki granted the Kurdish ministers an open vacation after boycotting the Cabinet meetings few weeks ago.

Maliki's stand was after one day of a Kurdish MP Farhad al-Atroushi's statement that "Premier Maliki cannot grant the Kurdish ministers a vacation and replacing them with other ministers".

Barham Saleh, a Kurdish leader, stated, earlier, insinuated that the Kurdish leadership may resort to "public referendum" if all possible means failed to solve pending political differences with Baghdad.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%285xq4xvynshc5yvyzfatt3bjil%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152942&l=1

- **Kurdish ministers to resume their attendance at CoM, says MP (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Diwaniya (AIN) -MP Huda Sajad of the State of Law Coalition headed by the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, revealed the Kurdistan Alliance Ministers' intention to resume their attendance at the Council of Ministers' meetings.

Sajad stated to AIN on Sunday "The delegation which visited Erbil in recent, reached several positive points through the talks with the KA," stressing "the Kurdish ministers' intention to resume their attendance at the CoM, through a phone call she made with those ministers."

- **Hakim releases initiative of "Karbala, Pride of Iraq" project (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Karbala (AIN) -The head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, released an initiative for the project "Karbala, Pride of Iraq"

Hakim said during his speech on occasion of announcing the Citizen Coalition in Karbala province "This project contains several points which are: allocating 1% of the federal budget to Karbala for five years, establishing high council for reconstruction devoted to Karbala, presenting exceptional facilitations for the private sector to encourage the local and foreign capitals to invest in the province, and establishing modern roads network that links Karbala to the neighboring Iraqi provinces."

- **Iraq executes 7 convicts over terror charges (Xinhua)**

BAGHDAD, April 7 (Xinhua) -- The Iraqi Ministry of Justice on Sunday announced that it has executed seven convicted prisoners over terror charges.

"The executions were carried out today by hanging for the seven terrorists in accordance with Article 4 from the anti-terrorism Law," the ministry said in a statement.

The convicts were involved in crimes of killings and bomb attacks against Iraqi citizens, the statement said.

The increasing of executions in Iraq sparked calls by the UN mission in Iraq, the European Union and some international human rights groups to stop Baghdad's use of capital punishment, criticizing the lack of transparency in the proceedings of the country's courts.

Death penalty in Iraq was suspended for over a year after the U. S.-led invasion. Paul Bremer, then U.S. administrator for Iraq, suspended its use on June 10, 2003.

However, the Iraqi government reinstated it on Aug. 8, 2004, saying it would curb the widespread violence in the country. Since then, scores of people have been executed, including the toppled Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-04/07/c_124548711.htm

- **Torture in Iraqi prisons "war crimes against humanity", MP (NINA)**

07 April 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc MP Waleed al-Muhammadi stated today that "practicing torture inside Iraqi prisons is a war crime against humanity", calling to stop them and put the culprits to courts.

He called the security commanders, including Premier Nouri al-Maliki, to present "an explanation for such practices and killing the detainees inside the prisons after one or two days of their arrest".

Muhammadi urged NGOs and human rights organizations to "exert more efforts, inside and outside Iraq, to save the innocent detainees who suffer daily injustices".

- **HR Ministry suggests including [disappeared] citizens within mechanism of Martyrs of former regime (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Director General of the Human Rights Directorate, Ahmed al-

Attar, announced that the Human Rights Ministry, in cooperation with the parliament, intends to include the lost citizens during the former regime within the mechanism of the Martyrs and Victims of the former regime.

Speaking to the reporter of All Iraq News Agency (AIN), Attar said "This suggestion will bring justice to a large number of the families of the lost citizens due to the procedures of the former regime whose corpses are not discovered yet."

He called "The families of the lost citizens to visit the HR Directorate headquarters in Diwaniya province to register the names of the lost members." /End/

- **Nijaifi's coalition considers Maliki's proposal to conduct early parliamentary elections (alliraqnews)**

07 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The electoral "United" Coalition which comprises a number of the Iraqiya Slate leaders including the parliament Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi announced its intention to earnestly consider the proposal of the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki over conducting conditioned early parliamentary elections.

The spokesperson of the Coalition, Dhafir al-Ani, said "We have no objection to bring forward the date of the parliamentary elections in case good will and integrity are there."

"United Coalition is seriously studying Maliki's call to launch early parliament elections," he added noting "We are studying the seriousness of the this proposal or it is just for electoral propaganda."

- **Former US congressman joins Iranian exiles protesting in Sweden (AP)**

By Associated Press, Published: April 6

STOCKHOLM — Hundreds of supporters of an Iranian opposition group have rallied in Stockholm, denouncing the Islamic Republic's regime and urging the U.N. to better protect the group's members in neighboring Iraq.

Former U.S. Congressman Patrick Kennedy was among the speakers Saturday at the demonstration in support of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK.

The crowd waved Iranian flags and chanted “down with Mullahs’ regime” before marching toward the Swedish Parliament.

The MEK fought alongside Saddam Hussein’s forces in the Iran-Iraq war and until recently was listed by the U.S. as a terrorist organization. The group says it renounced violence in 2001.

The U.N. says more than 3,000 MEK members live at a former U.S. military base in Iraq. Iraq still considers MEK a terrorist group and wants it out of the country.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/former-us-congressman-joins-iranian-exiles-protesting-in-sweden/2013/04/06/ba422b08-9ebb-11e2-9219-51eb8387e8f1_story.html

2. IRAN

- **Official: Iran's Foreign Trade Exchanges Hit \$94bln**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The value of Iran's non-oil trade with the outside world reached \$94bln in the last Iranian year (March 20,

2012- March 20, 2013), a senior Iranian official announced on Monday.

Head of Iran's Customs Office Abbas Me'marnejad told FNA that the total value of Iran's trade with other countries hit \$94bln last year.

He noted that Iran imported 53.3bln worth of goods in the said period, adding that the figure shows a 14% decrease compared with a year earlier.

Me'marnejad further announced that Iran exported 41.5bln worth of products last year, 5% lower than previous year.

Senior Iranian officials have underlined Tehran's intention to further reduce its dependence on oil revenues, and said the country is exporting its non-oil products to over 151 world states now.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107158736>

- **Lebanese Prime Minister-Designate Asks for Iran's Support**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam called on Iran to continue its support for the East

Mediterranean country to help it attain its goals.

Speaking at a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Beirut Qazanfar Roknabadi on Sunday, Tammam Salam said his government is seeking to hold elections based on a law agreed by all sides.

"We want the Islamic Republic of Iran's support for Lebanon to fulfill its objectives," he added.

As regards the anti-Israeli resistance movement in Lebanon, Salam said that such resistance has always been supported and emphasized by all the Lebanese.

During the meeting, Roknabadi congratulated Salam for his election, and stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran will stand by Lebanon.

He said national unity and solidarity and maintaining security and stability as well as utilizing all the existing capacities to fully support the anti-Israel resistance are currently among the most important issues.

Tammam Salam on Saturday became Lebanon's premier-designate after receiving 124 votes in the two-day parliamentary consultations as Lebanon's parties began looking ahead to government formation.

Salam was elected to the parliament twice in 1996 and 2009. He served as the culture minister from 2008 to 2009.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107158742>

- **U.S. says door still open on Iran nuclear talks**

TEHRAN, Apr 8(MNA) – U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Sunday world powers would pursue further talks with Iran to resolve a decade-old dispute over its nuclear program, but stressed the process could not go on forever, Reuters reported.

Iran and world powers failed to reach any agreement during two days of talks over Tehran's nuclear program in the Kazakh city of Almaty on Friday and Saturday. No new talks were scheduled between Iran and the six powers.

“This is not an interminable process,” said Kerry after arriving in Istanbul on Sunday on the first leg of a 10-day trip to the Middle East, Europe, and Asia.

He said President Barack Obama was committed to continuing the diplomatic process despite what he called the complicating factor of an Iranian presidential election in June.

“Diplomacy is a painful task... and a task for the patient,” Kerry told a news conference.

Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz urged the powers on Sunday to set a deadline of weeks for military action to persuade Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment activity.

Steinitz, who is close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told Army Radio action should be taken within “a few weeks, a month” if Iran did not curb its nuclear program.

Western powers suspect Iran is trying to develop the means to produce nuclear weapons behind the guise of a declared

civilian atomic energy program. Iran denies the accusation.

“It is important to continue to talk and to try to find common ground,” Kerry said. “So we hope that out of Almaty will come a narrowing of some of the differences. We remain open and hopeful that a diplomatic solution can be found.”

The six powers want the Islamic Republic to suspend its higher-grade uranium enrichment work in return for modest relief from international sanctions, an offer Iran did not accept.

“Obviously there is an election and that complicates the choices with respect to the politics of Iran, and we are aware of that,” Kerry said.

“But we will continue. The president (Obama) is determined to continue to pursue the diplomatic channel... We remain open and hopeful that a diplomatic solution can be found.”

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819661>

- **Option of withdrawing from the NPT on the table**

TEHRAN, Apr 8(MNA) – Alaeddin Boroujerdi said in case of non-adherent of Western powers to subjects such as nuclear arms reduction and recognition of Iran’s right to nuclear energy, withdrawal from the NPT will be among the options on the table for Majlis.

Chairman of the National Security and Foreign policy Commission of Majlis, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, in an interview with Al-Alam network in reaction to possible West’s actions about tightening sanctions and referring Iran nuclear issue to UNSC said: “all options are on the table in Majlis [parliament].”

He said: “it is not acceptable for Iran to respect the NPT and IAEA regulations, but the US and EU to ignore NPT protocols including Article 6 (nuclear arms reduction) and Article 4 (right to nuclear energy), therefore, there is no reason for Iran to be a NPT member, and Majlis could review that.”

Boroujerdi continued: “the red line is the nuclear bomb, which we are against it, and in addition to NPT commitment we

are the only country with great religious fatwa (decree) about it [against nuclear weapons]. So the seriousness of the Islamic Republic of Iran in opposing to nuclear bomb is important aspect of confidence building.”

Chairman of the National Security and Foreign policy Commission of Majlis referring to another West demand of closing ‘Fordow’ [nuclear facilities] and said: “Fordow [nuclear facilities] have been built to safe keep nuclear facilities from the Zionist regime bombing or missile threat and no sane person will purposely expose its wealth for the enemy targets.”

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819677>

- **Iran presidential candidate Velayati pledges most powerful Iranian govt.**

Iran’s presidential candidate Ali Akbar Velayati says his electoral coalition will form the most powerful Iranian government, if he wins the upcoming election.



Velayati, a senior advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is a member of a coalition which also includes senior lawmaker Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel and Mayor of Tehran Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.

Speaking at a press conference on Sunday, Velayati said his group will introduce a powerful team to deal with the economic, social and political issues of the country.

So far, at least 20 Principlist, Reformist and independent candidates have announced their decisions to run for president in Iran's upcoming presidential election.

Iran's Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar announced on December 15, 2012, that the Islamic Republic's eleventh presidential election will be held on June 14, 2013.

He added that the registration of presidential candidates will be conducted from May 7 to May 11.

The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election. Candidates for the presidency must be vetted for qualifications by the Guardian Council.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/08/297175/velayati-pledges-most-powerful-govt/>

- **Enrichment suspension, Iran's red line in talks: Iranian MP**

The spokesman for Iran's Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has described the suspension of enrichment activities as Tehran's red line in talks with the world powers.

Seyyed Hossein Naqavi-Hosseini said on Monday that no one can make Iran halt or suspend its enrichment program, adding, "Negotiations over this issue are one of our red lines, but we are ready to negotiate over the level of enrichment," Fars News Agency reported.

The Iranian lawmaker added that Iran will itself seek to provide any level of enriched uranium needed by the country's nuclear industry.

Considering the country's stance toward talks, Naqavi-Hosseini said, the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21) will be "a very very important" one for our nation with regards to this issue.

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany wrapped up their latest round of negotiations on Saturday in the Kazakh city of Almaty.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said in a press conference on Saturday that the two sides "remain far apart on the substance" of the talks. She added, however, "Indeed, we have talked in much greater detail than ever before, and our efforts will continue in that direction."

"For the first time, I've seen a real back and forward between us, where we were able to discuss details to pose questions and to get answers directly on the sort of issues that we need to discuss in order to be able to move forward. To that extent,

that has been a very important element," the EU foreign policy chief said.

Ashton also said she will be in touch with Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili "very soon in order to see how to go forward."

After the Saturday meeting, Jalili said Tehran has given a comprehensive operational plan to the P5+1 and it is now up to the group to decide on how to respond to the Iranian proposals.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Sunday, "Russia says clearly the recognition of all rights of Iran under [the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,] including the right to enrichment in exchange for the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) control over Iran's nuclear program, is the final model. This can be spread out to any depth."

Tehran and the P5+1 have held several rounds of talks mainly over Iran's nuclear energy program. The two sides had also previously met in Almaty on February 26-27.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/08/297155/enrichment-suspension-irans-red-line/>

- **Russia voices hope for more Iran-5+1 talks**

Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers held comprehensive talks in the Kazakh city of Almaty on April 5, 2013.

Russia has expressed hope for the continuation of talks between Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany).

The Russian foreign ministry, in a statement released on Sunday, hoped negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group would soon be continued on a “step-by-step and equal basis,” the Voice of Russia reported.



Commenting on the latest negotiations between Tehran and the P5+1, the Russian Foreign Ministry said both sides discussed the proposals made by the P5+1 during an earlier round of talks in late February.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Saturday that the recognition of Iran’s rights under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the only solution to the West’s dispute with the Islamic Republic over its nuclear energy program.

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany wrapped up their latest round of negotiations on April 6 in Almaty.

Speaking at a press conference after the talks, Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili said extensive and comprehensive talks were held to address an action plan proposed by Tehran based on the group’s response to proposals made in previous negotiations.

Jalili said representatives from the P5+1 group sought clarification and raised many

questions about the plan and received answers in full detail.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who represents the group of six powers, said in a press conference on Saturday that the two sides of the negotiations “remain far apart on the substance” of the talks.

However, she added, “Indeed, we have talked in much greater detail than ever before, and our efforts will continue in that direction.”

“For the first time, I’ve seen a real back and forward between us, where we were able to discuss details to pose questions and to get answers directly on the sort of issues that we need to discuss in order to be able to move forward. To that extent, that has been a very important element,” the EU foreign policy chief said.

Tehran and the P5+1 have held several rounds of talks mainly over Iran’s nuclear energy program. The previous round of talks took place in Almaty on February 26-27.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/08/297153/russia-wants-iran-p51-to-extend-talks/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• Kerry meets Israeli leaders to push Mideast peace

Following meetings with PA's Abbas, US secretary of state meets with President Peres, PM Netanyahu in hopes of ending Israeli-Palestinian stalemate

US Secretary of State John Kerry is looking to breathe new life into dormant Mideast peace talks in meetings Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior Israeli and Palestinian officials, amid talk of modifying a decade-old Arab plan that's long been greeted with skepticism by the Jewish state.

A day after meeting one-on-one with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas , Kerry spent the morning of Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day at Yad Vashem, laying down a red, white and blue wreath at the nation's official monument for the 6 million Jews murdered during World War II.

He was to meet privately Monday with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Israeli President Shimon Peres , before a dinner with Netanyahu and other Israeli officials.

Kerry is trying to end a 4 1/2-year stalemate between the Israelis and Palestinians during which they've hardly negotiated peace at all. Making his third trip to the region in a period of two weeks, he has yet to outline any new plan but U.S. officials say he is exploring several ideas to try to corral both sides back into direct talks.

Palestinian and Arab officials have pointed to one idea in particular: An attempt to revive, with modifications, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative that offered a comprehensive peace with Israel for a pullout from territories captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

The officials say Kerry is seeking greater Arab-Israeli security commitments and softer language on borders as part of the plan.

But key obstacles remain. Israel has not softened its objections and the Palestinians say they turned down a request from Kerry for the proposed changes.

Kerry and Abbas met for an hour behind closed doors in Ramallah on Sunday evening, where they discussed "the path to peace," according to a senior State Department official. Beforehand, US and Palestinian officials met in a larger format to discuss strategies for economic growth in the Palestinian territories and how to best create a "positive climate for negotiations." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of Kerry's orders not to brief reporters.

US officials refused to comment specifically on the initiative, which was revolutionary when it was introduced by Saudi Arabia's then crown prince, King Abdullah, and later endorsed by the 22-member Arab League at a summit in Beirut. However, it was overshadowed by fierce Israeli-Palestinian fighting at the time and never won Israel's support. The Arab League re-endorsed the offer in 2007 and technically it remains in effect.

In the 1967 war, Israel took control of the West Bank, east Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Sinai and Golan Heights. Israeli returned the Sinai to Egypt in 1982 in the framework of a peace treaty and pulled out of Gaza unilaterally in 2005. Israel annexed the Golan Heights in 1981 and peace talks with Syria over the territory have repeatedly failed.

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have been deadlocked since late 2008, in large part over the issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. The Palestinians refuse to talk while Israel settles its population on the occupied territories where they want to establish their state. They have demanded that Israel accept the 1967 lines as the basis for a future Palestine, but Netanyahu rejects a return to the 1967 lines and calls for talks with no preconditions.

Abbas spokesman, Nabil Abu Rdeneh, said the Palestinian leader called for a solution based on the 1967 lines in his Sunday meeting with Kerry. He did not say whether the Arab peace initiative was discussed but confirmed Abbas was

leaving Monday for talks on the plan at an Arab League meeting in Qatar.

There, a special committee will hold an "urgent meeting" on the subject Monday, said Mohammed Subeih, the Arab League's undersecretary for Palestinian affairs. Qatar's prime minister will chair it and the foreign ministers of key countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Palestinians will participate.

Subeih said the committee would form a delegation led by Arab League chief Nabil El-Araby and the Qatari prime minister to travel to Washington in the coming weeks with the goal of drawing a new roadmap to "end Israeli occupation."

The chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said Kerry has been floating the Arab initiative as a possible way out of the deadlock.

Officials say Kerry has proposed two small changes to make it more palatable to Israel. He wants language saying the 1967 lines can be modified through mutual agreement and providing stronger security guarantees.

But Erekat said the plan could not be changed.

"Kerry asked us to change a few words in the Arab Peace Initiative but we refused," he told the Voice of Palestine radio station on Sunday.

Israeli officials refused to comment on the matter.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4365345,00.html>

- **1942: Ben Gurion's censored demand for Jewish army**

IDF archives reveal David Ben Gurion's demand from Allied Forces of Jewish army to fight Nazis; else, he warns, 'Your hands will be soaked in Jewish blood'; excerpts censored by British now published

"In the name of all Jews, we demand of you, rulers of England, Russia and the United States, our right for a Jewish army," thus David Ben Gurion opened his 1942 speech calling on the allied forces to let Jews form an independent force to fight the Nazis.

The speech was revealed in its entirety by the IDF archives and the Defense Ministry, including the parts rejected by the British censor for hinting at Jewish independence.

The bold text, including the opening phrases, are the parts erased by the censor. The full speech will be made available online by the IDF.

The speech continues: "... Our right to fight the greatest of our enemies as Jews, in a Jewish framework, Jewish organization, Jewish headquarters, Jewish discipline and under a Jewish flag.

The speech, courtesy of the IDF archives and Defense Ministry

"Our needs will not be met by the crumbs allowed us here to protect our homeland and the surrounding countries."

Hitler's regime, Ben Gurion foresaw, would be vanquished, but "we do not know if the victory of democracy, liberty and justice will not find in Europe an immense cemetery strewn with the bones of our people, men and women, old and young."

He continues: "The Jewish people's delegates are called today to challenge from Zion, before the world, the spilling of our Jewish blood"

He does not know how many were already killed and how, Ben Gurion said, but their massacre "is due solely for one sin, that these are Jews. For only Jews have no protector, no warrior."

Courtesy of the IDF archives and Defense Ministry

But Ben Gurion's call for outright independence and criticism of the British was rejected by the censor: "For Jews have no standing, state emblem, no Jewish military, no Jewish independence and no free and safe homeland."

Ben Gurion pled the allied forces' leaders to "prevent the annihilation of a jailed, shackled, defenseless nation," and urged them to allow Jewish children to immigrate to Palestine.

"Reject the disgraceful edicts to the effect that a Jew from an enemy state isn't allowed to return to his homeland. As long

as this shameful decree exists, as long as our land's gates are shut to Yisrael's refugees, your hands will be soaked in Jewish blood, spilled in the Nazi inferno."

In the speech, Ben Gurion demands the British to allow Jews to fight the Nazis as a Jewish army: "Every Jew will carry proudly the yellow star, and if we meet our brother from the Nazi ghettos we'll carry them on our arms with the yellow star. It will be a flag of honor, a mark of martyrs and saints.

"Not the Nazis, but you, civilized nations, are dishonoring us when you deprive our right as a people, an equal nation, of our right to fight Hitler as Jews."

Ben Gurion's demand was not for an auxiliary force, such as the Jewish Brigade Group, but for an independent Jewish army, a demand which was also censored: "We want to fight as a Jewish army. All Jews who aren't duty bound to enlist in some other military, all Jews free to do as they please, we demand their human right, we demand their honorable right to enlist in a Jewish army under a Jewish flag, as an equal partner to the allied forces."

At the speech's climax Ben Gurion calls for Jewish independence in Palestine: "And we demand not only our right to fight as Jews, we demand the right that every nation in world has, be it big or small, for an independent homeland.

"All the unnecessary victims, all the thousand, hundreds of thousands and maybe millions of victims are the product of discrimination of the Jewish nation.

"These are the victims of a nation which has no country and no freedom. We demand of you to correct this wrong: Equal national standing, homeland and independence for the Jewish people."

Ben Gurion concluded: "We'll do what we can to avenge you and we'll give ourselves no quarter until we save you from the Nazis and from the atrophying Diaspora, and we'll bring you, all of you, to us, to our salvaged land."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4365298,00.html>

- **Hamas: PA forces arrest 3 members in Hebron**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Palestinian Authority security forces arrested three Hamas members in the West Bank, the Islamist movement said Monday.

Forces from the Fatah-led PA detained the Hamas affiliates in Hebron, Hamas said in a statement.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=583457>

- **Israeli forces raid villages in northern West Bank**

JENIN (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces raided three villages in the northern West Bank on Monday, locals said.

Three Israeli patrols raided Jalbun village, east of Jenin. Soldiers photographed Roman-era archeological sites in the village, locals told Ma'an.

Soldiers also took photographs in Raba village, south-east of Jenin.

Meanwhile troops set up a checkpoint at the entrance to Khirbet Yarza, east of Tubas, said local official Ahmad al-Asad.

Soldiers patrolled the village and stopped Palestinian cars for inspections, al-Asad told Ma'an.

www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=583446

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egyptian forces find weapons cache near Israel border**

Antitank mines, grenades and other arms found in underground warehouse near Israeli border

Egyptian authorities uncovered a munitions cache, including antitank weapons, buried in the sand of the Sinai Peninsula near the border with Israel, a security official said Monday.

The discovery took place when a large security force raided the town of al-Jora in the northern Sinai on Monday, the Palestinian news agency Ma'an reported.

The weapons were found in an underground storage room about five kilometers from the Israeli border and included 15 antitank mines, grenades and other weapons.

Egyptian security forces have been working to return law and order to the peninsula, which is thought to be home to several terror cells working to smuggle weapons into Gaza.

The find is a the latest in a series of operations against Islamists harboring heavy arms, many of which trickled in from Libya.

In February Egyptian authorities intercepted a truck carrying two tons of explosives that was heading for the border with Gaza, where the contents were apparently to be smuggled into the coastal enclave.

Earlier in the month Egyptian security officials claimed to have foiled five attempts to smuggle weapons from Sinai into Gaza in the previous weeks. In January another truck carrying a ton of explosive was seized as it headed from Cairo to Sinai.

The effort to clean up the peninsula was sparked by an attack on an Egyptian army position in Rafah last year that left 16 border guards dead.

In January, seven Egyptian policemen were injured in an ambush by Islamic terrorists.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/egyptian-forces-find-buried-weapons-cache/>

- **Egypt on edge after deadly sectarian clashes**

Egypt was on edge Monday after a night of violence outside Cairo's Coptic cathedral following the death of six people in clashes between Christians and Muslims, with President Mohammed Mursi promising an immediate investigation.

Calm was restored to the central neighborhood of Abbasiya in which police deployed in force outside St. Mark's cathedral and where several Copts were still gathered on Monday morning.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/04/08/Egypt-on-edge-after-deadly-sectarian-clashes-.html>

- **Algeria struggles to assuage anger in south**

Algeria is making more gestures towards people in the south of the country, but that has yet to succeed in mollifying the anger spreading across the region.

On Thursday (April 4th), Labour Minister Tayeb Louh paid a visit to Tamanrasset. As he entered the city, unemployed young people were waiting for him with banners expressing their demands.

At the end of his trip, along the road leading out of the city, these same young people were waiting for him once again with their banners. Surrounded by security officers, the young people demanded jobs and complained about their exclusion.

Although several members of the local Coordinating Body for the Defence of Unemployed People's Rights (CNDDC) attended the meeting with the minister, the decision to stage a big demonstration in Tamanrasset on April 10th has not been reversed.

"We were contacted by members of the government and the president's office, but we refuse to engage in under-the-table dialogue," said Taher Belabbes, the

national co-ordinator for CNDDC. "We want frank and open dialogue with representatives of unemployed people. We want to be recognised as real representatives."

"Our protest will not end. There will be a demonstration in Tamanrasset, followed by another in Ghardaia on 13 April," Belabbes said.

The labour minister had a met with young people and local elected representatives at the end of the day in the provincial capital. Louh listened to the grievances of the young people of Tamanrasset and conveyed the government's responses.

In addition to demanding public sector jobs, Tamanrasset youths are also seeking a quota for jobs at the In Salah gas complex and the Amesmessa gold mine.

Some furious young people spoke out about their marginalisation: "If young people from In Salah have the right to work here, we demand the right to work in their area, otherwise they should stay where they are." Another young person said: "Why is the government encouraging

people from the north to come here but not offering us jobs?"

The talk is becoming more radical and developing in a way which is troubling local elected representatives, the new governor and even the minister. Young people have railed against the central government and want more from it immediately.

One of the complaints they have levelled at companies is the fact that the latter exclude them by setting impossible requirements, such as knowledge of foreign languages for jobs as drivers, guards or cleaners. They have also hit out at huge pay differentials.

The new governor has already sent a specialist committee to In Salah to review the local job situation. The labour minister has also promised to crack down on companies which break the rules and has said that the Ministry of Trade could remove any company which does not obey the prime minister's instructions with regard to employment in the south.

He also pointed out that only governors have the right to decide to recruit from

outside the province in exceptional cases where no one within the province can be found to fill a vacancy.

"Problems are solved by being open. We have nothing to hide. It's true that there are loopholes and irregularities, but we're going to close the door to those who want to exploit these loopholes," the labour minister said.

Louh also stated that only investment that creates wealth and jobs could solve the problem of unemployment. In this regard, he said that measures to encourage investors should be revised to offer more advantages to those who want to invest in the south than are offered to those who invest in the north.

Although Louh has repeatedly insisted that oil and gas fields and the public sector are not the only sources of jobs, and has pointed out that sectors such as agriculture and construction are in desperate need of labour, young people are keeping up the pressure on the government and demanding jobs immediately.

Local dignitaries have also spoken out. At the end of last month, they held a meeting to express their grievances, which include their rejection of the "exclusion" of the south. They are calling for a quota of jobs within top-level state institutions such as ministries and embassies and want Tamashek to be taught using Tifinagh, the traditional script of the Touareg.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/07/feature-01

- **Algerian governor escapes Al-Qaeda assassination**

Medea wali Brahim Merad on Wednesday (April 3rd) survived an assassination attempt by al-Qaeda terrorists in the Algerian city of Mezghena.

Terrorists opened fire on police officers who were securing the route for the governor's convoy going to an event. One police officer was killed and two others were wounded and were taken to a hospital in Tablat.

There are conflicting reports as to what happened, El Watan noted. One of the newspaper's sources said that terrorists started shooting into a crowd of people

they thought were surrounding the governor.

The other report said that the terrorists started shooting because they grew impatient from waiting for the governor's arrival.

The governor's convoy remained relatively distant from the place where the fire-fight took place and the governor withdrew after the security forces intervened.

The operation was followed by a bomb blast targeting an Algerian army vehicle that rushed to the scene directly after the attack. However, no soldiers were wounded and there were no material losses.

The terrorists seized four civilian vehicles and fled after forcing the owners out of their vehicles. The owners were later found tied up on the road.

Ennahda Movement Secretary-General Fateh Rebai condemned the terrorist attack that targeted Medea governor and his accompanying delegation.

In a statement, the movement called the attack a cowardly criminal act, and that such cowardly attacks could bring Algeria back to blood and fire.

The statement also urged the authorities to deal with all reasons of social and political tensions that some exploit to manipulate young people and throw them into the cycle of violence and terrorism.

"Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) always seeks to target the symbols of state... to show that it still can inflict harm," Mohamed Smiem, an academic specialising in security affairs said.

"Although the terrorist operations have recently dropped, the group is always seeking to carry out attacks... It wants to send a message to national and international public opinion that it still has the ability to launch painful blows," he added.

He noted that the group chose this area for this operation due to the rough terrain there and the mountains surrounding the road that the local official was supposed to take, in order to make the chase difficult.

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

This was not the first time that AQIM targeted senior Algerian officials. In 2007, terrorists targeted the Tizi Ouzou governor, and in 2012, former Illizi governor Mohamed Laid Khelfi was kidnapped by a group affiliated to Abdelhamid Abou Zeid.

The Illizi governor was taken to Libyan soil and was freed after the central authorities in Tripoli intervened.

The operation occurred the same day Algerian authorities released a list of 57 terrorists, they said would likely carry out suicide attacks. Algerian newspaper Ennahar published the list with pictures.

The group includes one woman and two Libyans who have been wanted since the end of 2011. The newspaper added that orders were given to all security authorities to publish the pictures of terrorists, names and aliases to facilitate their identification.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/05/feature-01

• Aoun, Siniora agree to a mixed electoral law, Rai says

Maronite Patriarch Beshara Boutros al-Rai said that Free Patriotic Movement chief Michel Aoun and Future bloc leader Fouad Siniora both want the upcoming elections to be held according to a mixed electoral law.

“Aoun and Siniora have agreed to a mixed law,” Rai said on Monday prior to his travel to France.

He added that all the political parties have come to advocate for the adoption of an electoral law that combines majoritarian voting and proportional representation.

“The mixed law has become everybody’s request,” the Maronite figure noted.

Rai went on to express his wish that a new electoral draft would pass in parliament in order to serve as an alternative to the 1960 law currently on the books, given that “all the [political] forces agreed that the 1960 law will not be [adopted].”

After the sectarian-based Orthodox law was met with severe criticism notably from the Future Movement, the parties that endorsed this draft – including the FPM - were compelled to express their openness to an alternative proposal in a meeting held last week at the seat of the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkirki.

Future lawmakers and Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumbalht had been elaborating a new mixed electoral proposal that will be based on majoritarian voting in 26 districts and proportional voting in 9 other constituencies, according to sources, as an alternative to the Orthodox draft and the current 1960 law.

Meanwhile, The Maronite Patriarch stated that the constitutional deadlines will be extended in order to allow parties more time to agree on a new electoral draft.

The Lebanese parliament is set to hold a session on Tuesday 10:30 a.m. to amend the deadlines regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections, including candidacy applications, withdrawal of candidacies, and the elections date.

However, it is not clear whether this session will abolish or keep the 1960 law in place, after Al-Akhbar daily mentioned earlier on Monday that Speaker Nabih Berri will discuss amending the law in question.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/aoun-siniora-agree-to-a-mixed-electoral-law-rai-says>

Salam: Consensus should underpin new Lebanese government

The new Lebanese prime minister underscored the importance of the national consensus that secured the overwhelming majority of MPs nominations.

Prime Minister-Designate Tammam Salam voiced hope that the consensus that his nomination gathered would permeate to the process of the formation of the new cabinet.

“What is required is for this positive atmosphere to be reflected in the consultations ahead of the formation of the cabinet,” Salam said in remarks published by Al-Jumhuriya newspaper on Monday.

“I count on this consensus and its continuation through to the formation process, especially since I have heard only constructive and positive stances.”

In remarks published by As-Safir, Salam addressed the situation in neighboring Syria where a violent uprising against President Bashar al-Assad has so far killed more than 70,000 people according to United Nations figures.

“I support the right of the Syrian people, not the gunmen, in demanding freedom, democracy and the rotation of power.”

Last week, Tammam Salam became Lebanon’s premier-designate after receiving 124 votes in the two-day parliamentary consultations as Lebanon’s parties began looking ahead to government formation.

Salam is the son of six-time former PM Saeb Salam and has himself served as culture minister in Fouad Siniora’s cabinet between 2008 and 2009.

He won a seat in parliament in 2009 while running as part of March 14’s electoral list in the Beirut III district.

The post of prime minister became vacant after Miqati resigned from his office last month, raising concerns amid the country’s dueling parties over a possible political vacuum.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/salam-consensus-should-underpin-new-lebanese-government>

- **FPM insists on maintaining same portfolios in new government**

The Free Patriotic Movement wants to maintain its presence in the new Lebanese government based on the same ministerial portfolios held currently by the movement.

“The FPM will request the same shares in the next government, especially the Energy and Telecommunications Ministries,” a FPM source told NOW contributor Naji Younes on Monday.

“The March 14 forces are doing their utmost best to remove Energy Minister Gebran Bassil from the government,” the source added.

Bassil “will stay in place whether the upcoming government is political or formed by non-MPs.”

The source also said that Prime Minister-Designate Tammam Salam will “face difficulties” in his efforts to form his new cabinet.

Earlier on Monday, Tammam visited FPM leader MP Michel Aoun at his residence in Rabieh and urged him to protect the consensus that led to his nomination at the head of the new cabinet.

Bassil, a member of the FPM and an opponent of the March 14 opposition coalition, has held the Energy Ministry portfolio since 2009.

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<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/fpm-to-maintain-same-portfolios-in-new-government-source-says>

6. SYRIA

- **Sunday, Coptic mourners had packed the cathedral for prayers to honor four Copts, who had been killed in sectarian clashes in a town north of the Egyptian capital that also left one Muslim dead.**

As the mourners left the cathedral, they came under attack from a crowd who pelted them with stones, sparking violence that killed a Christian, 30-year-old Mahrus Hanna Ibrahim Tadros as well as a second victim who has not yet been identified.

At least 89 people were wounded in the violence, the health ministry said.

Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim inspected the scene on Sunday following the overnight clashes. He was accompanied by a representative of the

Presidency Republic as well as security officials to examine the security situation.

Dozens of residents chanted "leave," and "internal thugs," upon his arrival to the cathedral.

Christians form between six and 10 percent of Egypt's population of nearly 83 million people.

Syria crisis: Damascus car bomb kills at least 10

A car bomb has exploded in the centre of Syria's capital Damascus, killing at least 10 people, state media reports.

The blast happened close to Syria's central bank and a school, reports say.

The blast caused extensive damage and intense gunfire was heard shortly afterwards, news agency AFP reported. Large plumes of smoke rose from the scene of the blast.

At least 70,000 people have died since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began just over two years ago.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said on Monday that an inspection team is in Cyprus waiting for permission to enter Syria and investigate reports of chemical weapon attacks during the conflict.

Speaking in The Hague, he said such reports "should be examined without delay, without conditions and without exceptions" but explained that the UN is still in "technical and legal" negotiations with Mr Assad's government over the team's deployment.

Syrian television reports that the car bomb exploded between Sabaa Bahrat Square and Shahbander street, a busy residential and commercial part of the capital.

Residents said sirens from ambulances and fire engines could be heard as the emergency services rushed to the scene.

Several cars in the area were set ablaze by the blast which blew out windows from surrounding buildings, AFP reported.

Security forces and the army moved in quickly to prevent people from approaching the scene.

State broadcaster al-Ikhbariya said that as the blast took place near a school, children are believed to be among the dead and wounded.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22062326>

- **UN's Ban: Syria chemical weapons inspectors 'ready to deploy'**

A UN inspection team is in Cyprus and ready to deploy to nearby Syria to probe the alleged use of chemical weapons in the conflict there, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said on Monday.

"I can announce today that an advance team is now in Cyprus for the final stage" before the mission heads to Syria, Ban said in The Hague. "We are ready."

Ban said at the opening of the third review of the Chemical Weapons Convention at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that they still needed the Syrian regime's go-ahead.

"The UN is now in the position to deploy in Syria -- in less than 24 hours all logistical arrangements will in place," Ban said after

President Bashar al-Assad called on the UN to probe allegations rebels had used chemical weapons.

"All we are waiting for is the go-ahead of the Syrian government to determine if any chemical weapons have been deployed," Ban said.

"We are still in the process of discussing it with the Syrian government."

We are still in the process of discussing it with the Syrian government.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/uns-ban-syria-chemical-weapons-inspectors-ready-to-deploy>

- **Mistrust mars deal between Syria rebels, Kurds**

In the city of Aleppo, past differences between the rebels and Kurdish fighters are being put aside to fight against the regime, although tensions remains.

In the majority-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsud district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, Arab rebels and Kurd fighters say they are fighting together against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

But on the ground, the reality is rather more complex.

Standing at the entrance to Sheikh Maqsud, rebel commander Abu Ahmad wears an orange, green and red scarf -- the colors of the Kurdish flag.

Nearby, two flags fly together: that of the Kurds, alongside the green, black and white standard of the Syrian revolt.

"I wear the colors of my Kurdish brothers, even if I am an Arab," says Abu Ahmad, proudly.

He says Kurdish militia loyal to the Democratic Union Party (PYD) -- Syria's branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) -- have "given us ammunition, and their fighters are on the front lines of the battle against the regime."

Kurds comprise 10 percent of Syria's total population, with most living in the north of the embattled country.

Since the outbreak of the anti-Assad revolt more than two years ago, most Kurds

have tried to ensure that their areas remained violence-free.

Last summer, Assad's forces withdrew from majority Kurdish areas, and the YPG Kurdish militia became responsible for security there.

Although many Kurds feel hostile to a regime that has oppressed them for decades, they have also tried to keep the rebels out of the areas they control in order to avoid sparking a confrontation with the army.

When Islamists launched a bid to take over the city of Ras al-Ain in the north, firefights pitted Arab rebels against the Kurds.

But in Sheikh Maqsud, where rebels say "Aleppo's biggest battle" is being waged, it appears that past grudges between rebels and Kurds have been set aside, and that the Kurdish militia has joined forces with the insurgents.

Thanks to the Kurds' help, "we have blocked the army's supply and reinforcements route near Al-Kindi hospital and the central prison" in

northern Aleppo, says Abu Abdullah, who commands a mainstream rebel Free Syrian Army battalion in Syria's second city.

"The regime can only use its planes now to bring supplies to its troops," he told AFP.

But the army has bombarded the district since insurgents took up positions there.

On Saturday, an air raid killed 15 people, among them nine children. In revenge, Kurdish fighters attacked an army checkpoint, killing five soldiers.

"There's no difference between us. Together, we fight the same enemy: the regime," says Abu Juan, a Kurdish militiaman.

"It's a matter of conscience. We are fighting oppression by the regime," says another Kurdish fighter.

But under the surface, feelings of mutual suspicion run deep.

Dozens of men wearing the Kurdish YPG militia uniform -- distinct for its yellow star symbol on a red background -- stand at a checkpoint.

They are visibly more disciplined and organized than the Free Syrian Army in Aleppo, most of whose checkpoints are manned by young, shabbily dressed fighters.

A YPG commander says the Kurds' priority is self-defense. "We are here to protect our people and residents of Sheikh Maqsud, where the PYD has been present for years," he says.

"Some FSA rebels are respectable, but others are here just to steal. They break into company premises and loot stuff," adds the Kurdish commander.

Because of this, the fighters are well spread out in Sheikh Maqsud. Arab rebels keep a lookout in residential areas of the district, while the YPG is responsible for the industrial part.

The FSA, meanwhile, fears that Kurdish residents will provide the loyalist army with sensitive information.

"We used to allow a lot of civilians to enter the neighborhood. But the bombing

intensified, and now we are more careful," says Abu Abdullah.

Because of the violence, Sheikh Maqsud is becoming a ghost town.

At the district's northern edges, civilians are leaving en masse, packing belongings including mattresses, carpets and electrical appliances onto pick-up trucks.

"We're fleeing the bombing," calls out one man, as the pick-up he is in drives off.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/mistrust-mars-deal-between-syria-rebels-kurds>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain dismisses reports on Arab mediation with Iran**

Manama: Bahrain has dismissed reports on Gulf and Arab mediations with Iran as "plain lies."

"The reports are fabricated and we do stress that there are no mediation efforts between Bahrain and Iran on any issue," said Sameera Rajab, the state minister for

information affairs and the spokesperson for the government.

"There are sides that benefit from disseminating the blatant lies on the existence of a mediation. Bahrain relies on its own people on domestic matters. This is a purely internal issue and we will solve it through our own ways," she said on Sunday as she gave the first live brief on the cabinet session.

Bahrain has been trying to break a two-year-long political deadlock that resulted from sharp divergences between pro- and anti-government Bahrainis over events that unfolded in the country in February and March 2011. A new round of national dialogue was launched on February 10 to address political issues.

Iran loomed large in the Bahrain stalemate amid accusations by Manama of blatant interference by Tehran in its domestic affairs and relations between the two countries have plummeted to their lowest level in decades.

Reports about a mediation drive to ease the tension between the two capitals have

often emerged, but Bahrain said the reports were false.

Last week, a report claimed that Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, Bahrain's foreign minister, had requested Algeria where he was on an official visit to use its good relations with Iran to launch mediations between Manama and Tehran.

However, Shaikh Khalid rejected the report as "not true and lacking credibility" and insisted that no such request had been made.

"A brother does not mediate between his brother and a foreigner," Shaikh Khalid was quoted as saying when he was asked at a press conference about the tension between Bahrain and Iran and the chances of Manama requesting Algiers to mediate with Tehran.

"All countries can however convey Bahrain's position to Iran so that the facts on the ground are obvious," he said.

In February, Bahrain and fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, rapped a

suggestion by Tehran to include developments in Manama in the nuclear talks between Iran and a six-nation group made up of the US, UK, France, Germany, Russia and China.

The GCC dismissed the call as "further evidence of Iranian interference in the domestic affairs of Arab countries and its attempts to undermine their security."

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-dismisses-reports-on-arab-mediation-with-iran-1.1167880>

- **Bahrain, Saudi Arabia reiterate mutual support**

Manama: Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have reiterated strong support for each other's stability and security as "firm and consistent positions within their policies".

The pledge was renewed during a one-day visit by Bahrain's Prime Minister Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa to Riyadh for a meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz.

"HRH Prince Salman, the Crown Prince, Deputy Premier and Defence Minister reiterated the support of the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia to the Kingdom of Bahrain in all matters that preserve its security, stability and sovereignty,” Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported. “HRH Prince Salman stressed that this support is a robust and steady position within the Saudi policy.”

In a statement, Prince Khalifa said that Bahrain “stresses its firm and strong support to the sister state of Saudi Arabia on all measures it takes to preserve its security and boost its stability as it faces terrorism and endeavours to eradicate its roots”.

According to official reports from both capitals, the meeting addressed bilateral relations and ways to broaden them.

Bahrain is keen on bolstering coordination with Saudi Arabia on all issues, especially broadening bilateral cooperation in all areas and expanding their common views and objectives, Prince Khalifa said, quoted by BNA.

The two sides reiterated their full support for the initiative announced by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz to move the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) from the stage of cooperation to the stage of a union within a single entity, saying that it would consolidate security and stability in the region and bolster political and economic achievements, BNA said.

The call for the Gulf union was issued by the Saudi monarch in December 2011 at the GCC summit hosted by his country.

The proposal was welcomed by Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the six members of the GCC set up in 1981 in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi.

However, while officials in Manama and Riyadh showed the greatest enthusiasm for the move, their counterparts in other GCC capitals requested more time to study the finer details.

The reports added that Prince Khalifa and Prince Salman also reviewed the latest developments in the region and agreed on the need to converge positions and views.

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are linked by the 25-kilometre long King Fahd Causeway inaugurated in November 1986.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-saudi-arabia-reiterate-mutual-support-1.1167612>

- **Saudi authorities round up Shiites in spy row**

Shiite leaders have accused the government of deflecting attention from reform calls

Abu Dhabi: Saudi authorities have called in several influential Shiite Muslim clerics and intellectuals for questioning, as last month's arrest of 16 people on charges of spying for Iran threatens to raise tensions between leaders of the religious minority and the government in the oil-rich kingdom.

Over the past days and weeks, the interior ministry has summoned scores of clerics and intellectuals from the towns of Ihsaa and Qatif in the oil-producing Eastern Province for interrogation, Saudi activists say.

The trigger for the summons was the Shiite community's angry reaction to last month's arrest of 16 Saudi Shiites, who are accused of providing information and

documents to Iran, allegations that Iran denies.

Their arrest had prompted a wave of anti-Shiite rhetoric in the state media. Leading Shiite thinkers had then published statements questioning the timing and motive for their detention. Some suggested the arrests and the accusations of espionage had been designed to distract a population eager for reform.

"The dawn raids on the alleged spies and the summons have created an atmosphere of fear," said one prominent Shiite activist. "Even if the 16 people were spies, the entire community should not be held responsible for them. The statements were meant to defuse tension, but instead, the interior ministry started interrogating those who signed the statements, and ordered them to pledge not to issue similar statements."

Among those summoned was Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, an influential Shiite cleric who led the sect's political movement in exile before returning to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s after reconciliation with the late King Fahd.

He was called to meet interior minister Prince Mohammad Bin Naif in Riyadh after he delivered a sermon accusing the government of playing the sectarian card to deflect focus off demands for reform.

He was kept waiting for a week to meet the minister. Late last week, hundreds rallied in Qatif, denouncing “the disrespectful” treatment of the shaikh. A security official and a member of his family denied the shaikh’s movement was restricted.

Shaikh Al Saffar’s sermon was important, not just because he raised doubts about the spying ring, but also because he struck an inclusive tone, calling on the government to protect the rights of all Saudis to fair trials and fairer distribution of the oil-rich kingdom’s vast wealth.

“Many governments use issues like uncovering espionage network to distract their population away from priorities and to ignite sectarian divide once their people were united on pressing for reform,” he said in the sermon. “The days when the people were silent are over. They won’t accept any more to be kept in the dark with no participation in decision making,

or real representation, fighting corruption, or holding prisoners without trial.”

The Shiites in Saudi Arabia have long complained of marginalisation and prejudice, especially by the official religious establishment which describes them as heretics. The situation improved under King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, who started a national dialogue in 2003. But still there is no Shiite in charge of senior ministerial or military positions. The government denies allegations that it discriminates against Shiites.

Unlike previous rallies, which were fixated on Shiite issues and figures, last Thursday’s protesters in support of Shaikh Al Saffar, also carried pictures of and demanded the release of imprisoned Sunni rights defenders, Mohammad Fahd Al Qah’tani and Abdullah Al Hamed, who were recently sentenced to prison.

“The government wanted to send a message to the shaikh [Al Saffar] that the way he styled his speech was not accepted,” said Waleed Sulais, a Qatif-based rights activist. “People are more aware of their rights because of the Arab spring, They realise that the government

does not accept any different point of view, that it is not only about the Shiites.”

In the wake of the Arab spring, there were small but persistent protests in Qatif demanding more Shiite rights and protesting against sending Saudi troops to Bahrain to help quell an anti-government uprising by the Shiite-led opposition. The protests, which turned deadly sometimes, challenged the image of Saudi Arabia as the bulwark of stability amid regional turmoil.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-authorities-round-up-shiites-in-spy-row-1.1167953>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Afghan Officials: NATO Air Strike Kills 11 Civilians, Mostly Children**

VOA News
April 7, 2013

Afghan officials say a coalition air strike has killed 11 civilians, including 10 children, in the eastern part of the country during a joint Afghan-NATO operation against Taliban militants.

Government officials in Kunar province said Sunday that the air strike targeted a house near Pakistan, killing at least six suspected militants -- including two senior Taliban commanders -- in addition to the civilians.

The U.S.-led coalition confirmed that international forces called in the air strikes after they came under attack from the house Saturday. However, NATO officials have not confirmed the death toll, saying they are still investigating.

The deaths came on the same day that a car bomb killed five Americans, including three U.S. soldiers, a civilian Defense Department employee and a young female foreign service officer. The attack in southern Afghanistan's Zabul province also killed an Afghan doctor.

Their convoy was on the way to deliver books to children at an Afghan school.

Saturday's attacks also came as the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, arrived in the country to meet with American and Afghan officials and assess the number of U.S. troops who should remain in the

country to train Afghan soldiers after next year.

Most NATO combat troops are due to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014, leaving security responsibility to Afghan forces and raising fears of increased militant violence.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **Taliban attack kills two children in eastern Afghanistan, police say**

Press TV

April 7, 2013

Afghan police sources say two children have been killed in an attack carried out by the Taliban militants in eastern Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

Police sources in the eastern province of Kunar said the militants carried out a 'missile attack' in the provincial capital of Asadabad on Saturday night.

The sources said the Taliban militants fired four missiles during the attack.

The Taliban attack was carried out a day after the governor of Afghanistan's

southern province of Zabul escaped an attempt on life when a car bomb targeted his convoy near a hospital in the provincial capital, Qalat.

According to the United Nations, thousands of civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands more displaced in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion of the country in 2001.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan as part of the so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains across the country.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **Suicide attack in Afghan senator house in Samangan province**

By MIRWAIS ADEEL - 07 Apr 2013, 8:17 pm

Khaama Press

According to local authorities in northern Samangan province of Afghanistan, a suicide bomb blast rocked Aibak city on Sunday evening without causing any casualties.

The suicide bomber reportedly detonated his explosives inside the residential house of an Afghan senator.

Provincial governor Khairullah Anoosh confirming the report said the bomber detonated his explosives inside the house of Mohammad Asif Azimi, Afghan senator representing northern Samangan province in Afghan senate house.

Mr. Anoosh further added that Mohammad Asif Azimi was not present in his house when the incident took place and there were no casualties as a result of the incident.

He said the suicide bomber lost his leg following the blast and is under the treatment.

No group has so far claimed responsibility behind the incident.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **Paktia provincial council chief murdered in Kunduz province**

By SAYED JAWAD - 07 Apr 2013, 3:03 pm

Khaama Press

According to local authorities in northern Kunduz province of Afghanistan, unknown gunmen assassinated Mirza Ali, provincial council chief for eastern for eastern Paktia province of Afghanistan.

Provincial governor spokesman for Kunduz, Enayatullah Khaliq confirming the report said the incident took place on Saturday night in this province.

Mr. Khaliq further added that Mirza Ali was living in Haji Shahid village in the second district of northern Kunduz city and was killed while he was on his way towards his home

Mirza Ali was appointed as provincial council chief for Paktia province during the past one year and had close cooperation with the Paktia high council department.

Local security officials are saying that an investigation has been started in connection to Mirza Ali's assassination.

No group has so far claimed responsibility behind the incident.

Kunduz is among the relatively volatile region in northern Afghanistan where militants are actively operating in a number of its districts.

This comes as Afghan parliament house speaker's family members including his father were killed following a suicide bomb blast in this province.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **Afghanistan calls Pak-Afghan strategic pact 'meaningless'**

By SAYED JAWAD - 07 Apr 2013, 9:05 pm

Khaama Press

Afghan foreign ministry officials on Sunday called the strategic pact between Kabul and Islamabad meaningless unless Pakistan does not take practical steps to fight terrorism and assist Afghanistan in peace process with the militant groups.

The officials once again emphasized that Taliban leaders are based in Pakistan and those Taliban figures who were supporting Afghan peace talks were either killed or arrested.

Pakistan, the closest neighbor of Afghanistan has long been accused of violence in Afghanistan.

Afghan foreign ministry spokesman Janan Mosazai on Sunday said that the draft strategic pact agreement between Kabul and Islamabad was handed over to Afghan foreign minister during a summit in London.

Mr. Mosazai further added that Afghanistan wants practical steps by Pakistan to fight terrorism before the two nations sign a long term strategic cooperation agreement.

He said, "If we ignore the priorities which have direct impact on peace process, security and the sovereignty of Afghanistan then signing only a strategic pact on a piece of paper will have no meaning."

Foreign ministry spokesman Janan Mosazai also criticized Pakistan for its negative interference in Afghan peace process once again insisted that the Taliban figures are based in Pakistan.

Mosazai said that those Taliban leaders who were in direct contact with the Afghan government and those who were supporting Afghan peace process are either killed or detained.

Kabul and Islamabad have been engaged in negotiating Afghan peace process during the past three years but Afghanistan recently announced to continue peace talks with the militant groups with the cooperation of Islamabad after the Afghan government failed to achieve satisfactory results.

In the meantime Afghanistan is looking to continue peace talks with the Taliban group through the Taliban liaison office in Qatar, and president Karzai recently visited Qatar to discuss Afghan peace process with the Qatar officials.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.

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This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar. It covers news and*