



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

**Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Al-Sajari: Al-Nujaifi leads a regional project to divide Iraq**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The Secretary-General of People Trend, MP Ali al-Sajari accused House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi that he is leading a regional project to divide Iraq and he tried to exploit and turn the demands of protesters into calls for dividing the country and trading in the protesters' blood.

He said in a statement today 14, May that "al-Nujaifi is standing an obstacle to implement the demands of the demonstrators, where the goal was not to achieve the demands of the demonstrators but to implement the Turkish agenda."

He continued: "We have information confirming that the leaders of Motahedoon received tips from Turkey to return because the time is not right to implement their agenda and the recent resignations of their ministers are cards presented to cheat protestors because when we asked the government about the resignations, the government confirmed that any resignation of any minister have not submitted and this is a proof of lie and deceive of the leaders of

Motahedoon and it was media bubbles fired from the Yards of the sit-ins.

He made it clear that "the positions of the leaders of Motahedoon are contradictory, as they provoke the demonstrators by using slogans and speeches suggest that they are tough men but, secretly they are begging and kissing hands to return to the government," noting that "this contradiction will not affect our stand to adopted the demands of the demonstrators and we will achieve them in our own way, which is dialogue and mutual respect, and we will not abandon them.

He called on demonstrators to "be aware of the seriousness of these politicians" advising Motahedoon coalition "to abandon the failed leadership and hand the leadership over to Ayad al-Samurai because of his wisdom and statesmanship.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GHLFEJ](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHLFEJ)

- **Qartani considers withdrawal of PKK into Iraq a violation of national sovereignty**

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from Iraqiya slate, Hamzeh al-Qartani, said that the

withdrawal of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) from Turkey toward Iraqi territories of being a violation of national sovereignty.

In a statement to NINA on Saturday, May 11, Qartani said that Turkey must respect international agreements and the UN Charter, as well as agreements with Turkey that stipulate not to violate Iraq's national integrity. He called on the PKK to withdraw from Iraqi territories, because staying in Iraq violate Iraqi Constitution.

Qartani added that all sides, foreign and domestic, are threatening Iraq's sovereignty and lives of the Iraqis; he warned Turkey and Iran from interfering in Iraq's domestic affairs, in particular, and the area's affairs, in general.

It is worth mentioning that, over a month ago, Turkish Government has reached an agreement with PKK Leader, Abdullah Öcalan, ending armed struggle with the Turkish Government against PKK elements withdraw from Turkish territories toward Qandeel Mountain area inside Iraq.

Leader of Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party in Turkey, Salaheddin Temirtash, said that PKK elements have started withdrawing from

Turkey toward Qandeel Mountain in Kurdistan Region.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GHKKLH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHKKLH)

- **MP: Iraq has the right to arrest PKK fighters**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The MP, of the state of law coalition, Kamal al-Saadi confirmed the right of the Iraqi government to arrest the Turkish PKK fighters for entering the country without legal basis and as an armed terrorist faction.

Saadi said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "Any party has no right, constitutionally, to enter Iraqi territory without the consent of the government, and if this faction is a military force, that will be dangerous."

He added: "The agreement between Turkey and the Workers' Party is directed against Iraq, to transfer the conflict into our territory," ... Asking, "How Barzani allowed these fighters to exist in Iraqi territory, especially when PKK stated that it does care for the Iraqi government's stand."

The Turkish government has reached an agreement with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan to end to the armed conflict with the Turkish government, and to withdraw from Turkish territories to Mount Qandil in northern Iraq.

The first batch of the PKK fighters has arrived to the Kurdistan region on Tuesday morning May 14

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GHLFIG](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHLFIG)

- **Turkey frees Talabani's Advisor**

Shafaq News / Turkish news reports said on Sunday, that the Turkish authorities released the Kurdish political activist Khadija as she was arrested recently after returning to Turkey after 33 years on an escape charge for belonging to Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

“The Turkish court in Istanbul freed the Kurdish political activist Khadija, known as (companion Khjo), as she was arrested by Turkish authorities in Ankara Airport during her return to Turkey after 33 years on her escape from a criminal charge ,” sources said briefed by “Shafaq News”.

“Khjo exploited the peace atmosphere that pervades Turkey these days, due to the success of the first stages of the peace process between the Turkish state and PKK,” asserting that “she left her exile, returning to Turkey via Ankara airport and arrived last Wednesday”.

“The authorities there arrested her and took her to the prison before turning yesterday to Istanbul court that ordered to release her because of the invalidity of the charge assigned to her, due to the pass of the legal period of 20 years on the charge”.

“The laws of Turkey state the invalidity of lawsuits against the defendants, if authorities can't arrest him in 20 years,” the source added.

“Khjo had been transferred in 1980 to the Turkish court on charges of presiding a political organization named (the freedom banner), and released a magazine by the same name as she managed to escape from Turkey and join the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan”.

“She met there many the leaders of the Kurdish movement, and accompanied the march of 33-years , prompting Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, after he was elected as

president of the Republic of Iraq, to assign her as the political adviser to him”.

The source added “Khjo’s name was on the list of top leaders of the PKK and sympathizers of political figures accused of terrorism, including the head of the current Workers' Party Murat Kara Whelan, head of the Kurdish Popular conference abroad, Zubair Idar, brother of party leader, Osman Ocalan, the official of European relations, Ramzi KARTAL and the party's two leading figures, Jameel Pike and Duran Kikan “.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6069-turkey-frees-talabanis-advisor.html>

- **Iraq may send officials to London to investigate the toy deal**

Shafaq News / Parliamentary Integrity Committee announced on Sunday, that senior Iraqi officials are involved in the explosives detection devices deal.

“We have discussed today with the head of the Integrity Commission and Vice President of the Council of investigation affairs and the General Inspector of the Ministry of the Interior two important issues for the Iraqi people first the explosives detectors or the

“toy” and the history of the first contract and its approvals,” The Chairman of the Committee, Bahaa al-Araji said in a news conference, attended by “Shafaq News”.

“We wrote to the Presidency of the parliament to agree to send some members of the Integrity Commission to Britain and take basic approvals to meet this British criminal who was sentenced recently to inquire him about information about, officials and traders and companies in Iraq, who have contributed and facilitated the entry of this toy to the country and disrespected the Iraqi blood”.

He stressed “the need to have an investigative committee for the whole file that there are misleading as the device was imported to the Interior Ministry, and this is wrong, but it was imported to the Ministry of Defense and the Office of the Commander in Chief, Trade and Industry ministers and some provinces “.

It is worth mentioning that Iraq has imported in 2007 explosives detectors (ID-651) from (ITCS) British Company, despite its ineffective to the Iraqi public, but the Iraqi government insisted on its use and caused the death and injury of thousands of Iraqis, observers have pointed out then, that implementers of the deal gained millions of dollars because of the

declared price difference and the real price of the devices.

British judiciary sentenced days ago the company's owner and supplier of the device to Iraq for ten years imprisonment.

The Iraqi judiciary has issued last February an order to arrest the general manager of combating explosives, Major General , Jihad al-Jabri and prevented him from traveling on charges of corruption in importing explosives detectors' deals .

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6073-iraq-may-send-officials-to-london-to-investigate-the-toy-deal.html>

- **Barham Salih the only alternative to Talabani**

Shafaq News / An informed Kurdish source said that arrangements are underway to resolve choosing an alternative candidate for President , Jalal Talabani ,while pointing out that the Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Barham Salih is the only candidate for the position.

“Even if President Talabani returned to Kurdistan in good health, he will not be able to

return to his post as president of the country,” The source said in a statement for “Al-Sharq al-Awsat “newspaper briefed by “Shafaq News”.

“Things have become ready today to fill his position, which is by the way of the Kurdish component share specifically for Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by President Jalal Talabani”.

“Barham Salih is the most prominent candidate to fill the position, but now he is the only candidate”.

On the Iranian position from nominating, Barham Salih to the post of president of the republic, the source said that “Saleh is currently in Iran, after the visit of President Talabani’s wife Mrs. Hero Ibrahim Ahmed to Tehran, where she held talks for the first time with the top leaders of the Iranian state, led by President Ahmadinejad”.

“The Iranian leadership tried to persuade her on the need to fill this position by the PUK, first due to the strategic relationship between Iran and PUK as it is in her interest to keep the presidency in its ally hands, and secondly because of internal conflicts that need someone to manage things in order to

preserve the political process and to ensure their safety,” the source added.

“Ms. Hiro Iranian was actually convinced in this point of view, especially as she has announced that she does not aspire to fill this position instead of her husband, thus didn’t oppose the nomination of Salih for the position,” he said.

The Iraqi Presidency of prosecution had asked in a statement yesterday by the Parliament Speaker to initiate legal procedures to fill Talabani’s position due to his absence for long time, through the implementation of Article 72 of the Iraqi Constitution, which identified certain period of absence from the position, and that this demand is based on the text Article I of the Public Prosecution Law No. 159 of 1979, as amended.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6091-barham-salih-the-only-alternative-to-talabani.html>

- **KDP gains an ally to submit Kurdistan constitution and a Competitor to Barzani**

Shafaq News / Kurdistan Socialist Party called on Monday to submit the constitution to a

referendum as Kurdistan Democratic Party’s demand (KDP), led by the region’s president, Massoud Barzani, while the party’s leader, Mohammed Haj Mahmoud said that it is likely to nominate himself as a candidate for the president of the regions’ position as another competitor to Barzani.

Mohammed al-Haj Mahmoud, Secretary General of Kurdistan Socialist Party that has (two MPs in the parliament and a Minister in Kurdistan region government), in a statement for “al-Sharq al-Awsat “newspaper briefed by “Shafaq News”, that “Our party supported the position of KDPs’ proposal to submit a draft constitution to a referendum and not to return it to the Parliament”.

“If the draft would be returned to the Parliament and the change of the current political system to a parliamentary system, then Kurdistan will continue for the coming fifty years under the mercy of the current ruling parties because they enjoy widespread parliamentary majority and they decide to elect the President of the region, thus the chances of democratic competition will be zero “.

“In the previous presidential elections that took place in direct vote of people manner,

there was a chance to compete, and a number of competitors in various areas of Kurdistan appeared in Kefri, Koysanjaq and Erbil, each taking their share of voting”.

“This is the real democracy that gives equal opportunities to all citizens without exception, and we are in favor of this democracy formula, because the presidency is not preserved on a party or a particular party alliance, it is a position that interest all members of the public," he added.

The region's president, Massoud Barzani had decided earlier last month, the 21 of next September to be the date of the parliamentary elections and president election of the region in coordination and agreement with the Independent Higher Electoral Commission in Iraq.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6088-kdp-gains-an-ally-to-submit-kurdistan-constitution-and-a-competitor-to-barzani.html>

- **Second group of PKK arrives to Kurdistan tomorrow**

Arbil / NINA / A Kurdish source said the second group of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) will arrive in the Kurdistan region on Wednesday.

The source did not mention the number of members of this group and the place in which it will stabilize.

It is mentioned that the first batch of the Turkish PKK fighters has arrived to Kurdistan region on Tuesday morning 14, May.

A source told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today that "The first group of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) arrived in the Kurdistan region at six o'clock, local time, noting "it includes 15 people."

He pointed out that "this batch arrived to the province through Qandil Mount and entered Hror zone in Mateen Mount in the province of Dohuk."

The spokesman of the party's leadership, Ahmed Deniz made it clear, in a press statement that "elements of the party are located within the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan since 1984, and the Iraqi government's stand does not matter, and we will continue until the success of the peace process in Turkey."

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GHLFKG](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHLFKG)

- **Attack on Iraq-Turkey oil pipeline halts flow**



Unknown militants have bombed a section of a pipeline carrying Iraqi crude oil from the northern city of Kirkuk to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.

Monday's attack, which was second in a week, stopped the flow of oil, Reuters quoted Iraqi oil officials as saying.

"More than one bomb was used to attack the pipeline at around 1:30 local time Monday. The pipeline was severely damaged," an oil ministry official said.

On May 6, militants bombed the same pipeline, and halted the flow of oil until May 12.

Ties have soured between the Iraqi government and the Turkish government over the energy relations between Ankara and the Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

In November, Baghdad prevented Turkish national energy firm TPAO from bidding for an oil exploration contract.

And in December, the Iraqi government prevented a plane carrying Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz from landing in Arbil as he was reportedly on his way to ink the energy agreements with the KRG.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/13/303350/iraqturkey-oil-pipeline-bombed/>

## 2. IRAN

- **All Heavyweight Politicians Register in Iran's Presidential Race**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Several prominent politicians, including former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Supreme Leader's top aide Ali

Akbar Velayati, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and President Ahmadinejad's Aide Esfandyar Rahim Mashayee, registered their candidacy for the June 14 presidential elections as registration closed on Saturday.

First Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi, Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, President Ahmadinejad's Adviser Ali Akbar Javanfekr, president's elder brother Davoud Ahmadinejad, Agricultural Jihad Minister Sadeq Khalilian, three former ministers of Ahmadinejad's cabinet Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, Manouchehr Mottaki and Parviz Kazzemi, former Commerce Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast and former Central Bank chief Tahmasb Mazaheri are among the hundreds who had joined the race ahead of the Saturday registration deadline. Pro-reform activists Ebrahim Asqarzadeh and Javad Eta'at also signed up.

Several other prominent candidacies who registered on Friday are reformist former vice-president Mohammad Reza Aref, former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Chief Mohsen Rezaei, lawmaker Ali Reza Zakani, senior lawmaker and advisor to Supreme Leader Gholam Ali Haddad Adel and former Education Minister Alireza Ali-Ahmadi.

Also, former Iranian Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian and former Telecommunication Minister Mohammad Qarazi signed up for the upcoming presidential race at the election headquarters of Iran's Interior Ministry in Tehran on Thursday.

Over 500 candidates have registered so far, including moderate cleric Hassan Rohani, a former nuclear negotiator under reformist president Mohammad Khatami and several other reformists, including former member of the parliament Mostafa Kavakebian and MP Massoud Pezeshkian.

Two other Principlists, Vice-Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard and former health minister Kamran Baqeri Lankarani, are also running.

The 11th presidential election will take place on June 14, 2013. Registration of candidates started on May 7 and will finish at 6pm this afternoon.

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169074>

- **Iran to Hold June Presidential Election in 120 Countries**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's next presidential election will be held in 120 foreign countries concurrent with Iran, a senior official announced on Monday.

The remarks were made by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Expatriates' Affairs Hassan Qashqavi in Tehran today.

"The Iranian presidential election abroad will be held at 280 ballot stations in 120 countries on five continents concurrent with Iran," said Qashqavi, who also heads the Supervisory Body Overseeing Iran's Presidential Election Abroad.

The Iranian diplomat noted that the voting in every country will begin at 8:00 a.m. local time on June 14.

Qashqavi noted that Iranian expatriates can vote in the next election with valid Iranian passports.

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<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169758>

- **Leader Reiterates Unique Features of Islamic Revolution**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei underlined the unique features of Iran's 1979 revolution compared with other major revolutions in the world.

"Compared with the other great revolutions in the world, the Islamic Revolution is deeper, stronger and more efficient," Ayatollah Khamenei said, addressing officials in charge of the literature of the Islamic Revolution here in Tehran on Monday.

The Leader at the same time noted that unlike the other great revolutions of the world, the Iranian revolution has not been properly studied by elites and writers.

He stressed the necessity for conducting a contrastive analysis between the Iranian and other world revolutions.

The Iranian Revolution (Also known as the Islamic Revolution, Liberty Revolution or 1979 Freedom Revolution) refers to events involving the overthrow of Iran's monarchy (Pahlavi dynasty) under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and its replacement with an Islamic republic under Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution. It has been called an event that made Islamic principlism (or as westerners like to label Islamic fundamentalism) a political force ... from Morocco to Malaysia.

The first major demonstrations against the Shah began in January 1978. Between August and December 1978 strikes and demonstrations paralyzed the country. The Shah left Iran for exile in mid-January 1979, and two weeks later Imam Khomeini returned to Tehran to a greeting by several million Iranians. The royal regime collapsed shortly after on February 11 when guerrillas and

revolutionary people overwhelmed troops loyal to the Shah in armed street fighting. Iran voted by national referendum to become an Islamic Republic on April 1, 1979, and to approve a new Islamic Constitution whereby Imam Khomeini officially became Supreme Leader of the country, in December 1979, although he had already been known as the Leader and Founder of the Islamic Republic.

The revolution was unusual for the surprise it created throughout the world: it lacked many of the customary causes of revolution (defeat at war, a financial crisis, peasant rebellion, or disgruntled military); produced profound change at great speed; was massively popular; overthrew a regime heavily protected by a lavishly financed army and security services; and replaced a modernizing monarchy with a republic based on Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists (or Velayat-e Faqih). Its outcome - an Islamic Republic "under the guidance of an 80-year-old exiled religious scholar from Qom" - was, as one scholar put it, "clearly an occurrence that had to be explained".

For Iranians, it was an era of heroism and sacrifice that brought forth nothing less than the nucleus of a world Islamic state - "a perfect model of splendid, humane, and divine life... for all the peoples of the world".

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169746>

- **Enemies Spreading Iranophobia to Stop Other Countries from Following Iran's Footsteps**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior official of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said that Iran has now become a role model for the Muslim nations and the West and Israel are trying to spread Iranophobia to undermine Iran's growing influence and prevent other countries from following the same path.

"The massive propaganda and psychological campaign by the western and alien media against Iran is part of a macro-scale strategy by the world arrogance and Zionism to spread Iranophobia and phobia against the (Islamic) Revolution because they (enemies) are witnessing that the Islamic Revolution is known as a successful role model among the oppressed nations of the world, all of whom are following (Iran's) suit," Deputy Head of the Supreme Leader's Representative at the IRGC for Cultural and Publicity Affairs General Mohammad Ali Assoudi said on Monday.

He further said that the West and Israel are trying to block this trend by ignoring and misrepresenting the Islamic Republic of Iran's achievements.

Yet, the commander stressed that Americans and Israelis are wrong in their strategy since these measures will be counterproductive and boost Iran's standing among the world nations.

The US and its western allies have been making growingly hostile moves against Iran under the pretext of Iran's nuclear technology. Iran is under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment, saying the demand is politically tainted and illogical.

Yet, analysts believe that the US is at loggerheads with Iran due mainly to the independent and home-grown nature of Tehran's nuclear technology, which gives the Islamic Republic the potential to turn into a world power and a role model for the other third-world countries. Washington has laid much pressure on Iran to make it give up the most sensitive and advanced part of the technology, which is uranium enrichment, a

process used for producing nuclear fuel for power plants.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169666>

- **Iran Urges Turkey to Show Tolerance on Syrian Crisis**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran underlined the necessity for the peaceful settlement of the crisis in Syria, and called on Turkey, one of the main actors in the Syrian issue, to show tolerance.

"We hope that the Syrian crisis will be solved as soon as possible so that the flames of crisis won't spread to the other places," Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said on Monday before leaving Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he attended a ministerial meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the crisis in Mali.

He elaborated on his meeting with Turkish top diplomat Ahmet Davutoglu on the sidelines of the OIC meeting, and said, "I had talks with Mr. Davutoglu in details to this end (on the Syrian crisis) and we hope that our dear friends in Turkey behave tolerantly towards the issue."

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

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169918>

- **Iran hopes P5+1 will give positive response to proposals: Araçchi**

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman says the Islamic Republic hopes that the P5+1 group of powers will give a constructive response to Tehran's proposals about its nuclear energy program.



Speaking in a press conference on Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry's newly-appointed Spokesman Abbas Araçchi said, "Iran's proposals during the second round of the talks in Almaty were very constructive, balanced, and proportionate; and we expect the other side to react positively and favorably."

He further said that Iran is now expecting a response from EU Foreign Policy chief Catherine Ashton - who represents the P5+1 - and is hoping for a constructive approach toward the proposals of the Islamic Republic.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili is due to hold

bilateral talks with Ashton on May 15 in the Turkish city of Istanbul. The meeting will be a follow-up to the last round of negotiations held in Almaty.

During the meeting in the Kazakh city of Almaty on April 5-6, Iran presented the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the US plus Germany) with the details of its proposals.

Undersecretary of the SNSC Ali Baqeri said on April 5 that Tehran had offered the group "clear proposals to launch a new round of cooperation" between the two sides.

Araçchi added that any progress in the negotiations requires taking "mutual, balanced, simultaneous and congruent steps."

US-UK remarks about pressuring Iran

Commenting on the recent remarks by US President Barack Obama and UK Premier David Cameron, Araçchi said, "Such remarks about continuing pressure on Iran are discouraging and indicate the lack of a realistic view and the right understanding of reality by those who advocate these pressures."

During their joint press conference in Washington on Monday, Obama said the two

sides had “discussed Iran, where we agreed to keep up the pressure on Tehran for its continued failure to abide by its nuclear obligations.”

Araqchi said the policy of pressure had never been effective, adding that purposeful negotiations made with goodwill were the only way to achieve a solution to the Western standoff over Tehran’s nuclear energy program.

The US, the Israeli regime and some of their allies falsely claim that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program, with the US and the European Union using the unfounded claim as a pretext for illegal sanctions on Iran.

Tehran strongly rejects the allegation over its nuclear energy activities, maintaining that as a committed signatory to the 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.

Egypt’s proposal on Syria

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman further welcomed Egypt’s proposal on forming

a quartet on Syria and voiced the Islamic Republic’s readiness to help resolve the crisis in the Arab country.

During a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Mecca in August 2012, Egypt’s President Mohamed Morsi presented an initiative to establish a contact group on Syria comprising Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

A high-level meeting of the quartet group was held on September 17, 2012 about a week after preparatory talks in Cairo by lower-ranking officials from the four countries.

Araqchi expressed satisfaction with the fact that different countries have turned to negotiations as the way to settle the Syrian conflict.

“Currently, the inclination toward resolving [Syria’s] crisis through political means and nationwide dialogue between the oppositionists, the Syrian government and influential countries is on the rise,” he said.

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

government says that the chaos in the country is being orchestrated from outside.

kilometers away from the quake-stricken region, remained intact.

Cooperation with the IAEA on Bushehr NPP

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/14/303442/iran-expects-positive-p51-response/>

Commenting on the recent request by the IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano to dispatch a team of experts to Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), Araçchi said Iran will cooperate with the IAEA “within the framework of agreements.”

Some of Iranian presidential hopefuls have offered their viewpoints regarding different plans they will implement if elected Press TV reports.

On Saturday, Amano was quoted as telling the Bahrain News Agency in Manama that “it is better to send experts to check on the safety of Iran's Bushehr reactor,” following an earthquake that struck an area near the NPP.

- **Iran election hopefuls make comments about various topics**

On Monday, several presidential hopefuls held Q-and-A sessions and speeches explaining their policies about different subjects.

On April 9, a 6.1-magnitude quake hit the town of Kaki near Iran's southern city of Bushehr, killing over 35 people and leaving more than 850 injured.

Expediency Council Secretary Mohsen Rezaei made remarks about the country's economic situation, saying, “I believe the country needs to be rebuilt economically and culturally.

Officials at Russia's Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation say the power plant has been constructed to withstand an earthquake with a magnitude of nine Richters.

There is a big gap among universities, industry, agriculture, trade, and the lives of people. And so long as we do not bridge this gap, and stay away from popular economy, we will fail to bring about big change in the current economic conditions of the country.”

The Bushehr NPP, which is located 18 kilometers south of Bushehr and about 160

Presidential hopeful Ramin Mehmanparast stated that he was taking part in the election

as an independent hopeful and only because of the sensitive situation in the country.

“The Zionist regime and its allies are trying to inflict damage on the Iranian nation because they consider our country influential in the region and the world. The enemies want to take advantage of the election in order to create tension in the country. Therefore, all of us should work together, and strongly defend our rights,” the former foreign ministry spokesman said.

Meanwhile, principlist presidential hopeful Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, who is a member of the Coalition of Three, suggested that the group may support Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili for the election.

However, Hossein Mozaffar, the head of the election headquarters of the coalition, denied any decisions by the hopefuls to quit the race.

Reformist hopeful Hassan Rohani also said that he consulted with former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and they decided that one of the two should be on the list for the election.

The registration of hopefuls for Iran’s June 14 election began on Tuesday March 7 at Iran’s Interior Ministry and ended on Saturday March 11.

A total of 686 individuals signed up for the 11th presidential election.

The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election, and the Guardian Council vets the candidates to determine if they have the qualifications to serve as president.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/14/303361/iran-election-hopefuls-express-views/>

- **Ex-advisor to Iran's president withdraws from presidential election**

Former advisor to the Iranian president Ali Akbar Javanfekr has withdrawn his bid for presidency in favor of the president’s former chief of staff.

In a statement on Monday, Javanfekr, who is the former top media aide to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the former CEO of IRNA, announced that he made the decision after consultations with the incumbent

president and in respect to his opinion.

He is appealing to the electorate to vote for hopeful Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei in the 11th presidential election on June 14.

Javanfekr said that Rahim Mashaei can follow the path of the current administration to lead Iran towards prosperity and progress.

The former advisor registered to participate in Iran's presidential election before the registration deadline ended on Saturday.

Earlier in the day, Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi, another pro-Ahmadinejad hopeful, also withdrew from the 11th presidential election due to "heavy executive responsibilities."

"...My participation [in the presidential race] is likely to slow down or bring to a halt some of the heavy executive responsibilities.

Therefore, I decided to pull out," Rahimi said.

The registration of hopefuls for Iran's 11th presidential election began on Tuesday March 7 at Iran's Interior Ministry and ended on Saturday March 11.

A total of 686 individuals signed up for the race.

The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election, and the Guardian Council vets the candidates to determine if they have the qualifications to serve as president.

The Iranian Constitution stipulates that presidential candidates must be religious or political figures, be Iranian in origin, have Iranian citizenship, possess resourcefulness and managerial skills, have no criminal record, be trustworthy and pious, and have firm belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the country's official religion.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/13/303348/javanfekr-pulls-out-of-presidential-race/>

- **Middle East now conscious, not obedient**

TEHRAN, May 14 (MNA) – Iran's Parliament speaker has said now the Middle East is conscious and not obedient, and that 'Islamic Awakening' will disillusion region's reactionary regimes.

Ali Larijani, who was speaking in an open session in Parliament, said that “despotic and reactionary rulers in the region would disappoint to see that their chimerical assumptions about provide an opportunity for the Zionist regime in this troubled situation.”

“during recent days, many US and European leaders have been frequenting international arena to discuss situation in Syria, and they finally confirmed the political solution for Syrian crisis only after two years of civil war and death of tens of thousands of people, and after they had known that they had no operational competence,” said the speaker.

“Now the question is, had not the Islamic Republic of Iran announced that a political solution would be preferable over bloodshed? Who are responsible for wanton killings of Syrian citizens in Syria using Western weapons?” asked Larijani rhetorically.

“Low-profile countries of the region, who have been playing as West’s brokers through political lust, now what would they concoct as response for killing of Muslims? Behind the West’s and reactionary regimes’ idiotic adventurism, one thing became obvious that the Middle East is conscious and not

obedient,” asserted Larijani, adding that “this is the path Imam Khomeini (RA) opened for Muslims, and God willing, thanks to conscious Muslims’ attempts, hands of the arrogant powers will be cut from the region, and a free Middle East will emerge through Muslims’ hard working, a thing that is ultimate goal.”

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1821787>

- **MPs seek legal action against Ahmadinejad for accompanying advisor to election registration**

TEHRAN – A number of Iranian MPs have written a letter to the Judiciary calling for legal action against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for accompanying his advisor, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, when he registered for the presidential election, saying it was a violation of the electoral law.

The letter, which was signed by more than 150 MPs, stated that according to the electoral law, individuals with an official position are not allowed to take a stance for or against a candidate.

On Saturday, Ahmadinejad accompanied Rahim Mashaei when he put his name forward

at the election headquarters of the Interior Ministry.

Guardian Council spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei said on Sunday that the move violated the electoral law, adding that the facts would be reported to the Judiciary.

However, the Presidential Office issued a statement on Monday dismissing the criticism and saying that the fact that Ahmadinejad accompanied Rahim Mashaei to the Interior Ministry was within his “freedom of opinion and personal attitude.”

The statement also said that the law actually prohibits electoral officials from supporting a candidate during the official election campaign, after candidates are confirmed by the Guardian Council. And since the president himself is not an electoral official, his move did not constitute a violation of the law, the statement added.

According to the Constitution, the Guardian Council, a 12-member body consisting of six law experts and six religious jurists, is tasked with vetting candidates and supervising elections.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107669-mps-seek-legal-action-against-ahmadinejad-for-accompanying-advisor-to-election-registration>

#### • Iran to test two new cruise missiles

TEHRAN – Two new domestically manufactured cruise missiles will be tested during the Velayat-92 naval drill, the commander of the Iranian Navy told the Tasnim News Agency on Monday.

Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari also said that the Navy was making preparations to stage the Velayat-92 war games, adding that it was more than likely that the maneuvers would be held in the second half of the current Iranian calendar year, which started on March 21.

An Iranian Defense Ministry official said on April 17 that Iran would unveil an upgraded surface-to-surface cruise missile in the near future.

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

In addition, the general said that Iran would introduce new domestically manufactured ballistic, cruise, and anti-tank missiles in the current Iranian calendar year.

On February 24, Iran test-fired a short-range anti-vessel radar-guided Zafar (Victory) cruise missile in the Persian Gulf. The missile successfully hit the designated target.

The production line of the Zafar cruise missile was officially launched in February 2012.

The domestically designed coast-to-sea Qader cruise missile was also test-fired in January during the Velayat-91 naval drill.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107667-iran-to-test-two-new-cruise-missiles>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Netanyahu discusses ME stabilization efforts with Putin**



PM doesn't touch on missile deal to Syria in opening remarks.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu arrived Tuesday afternoon for talks in Sochi with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and said at the outset of meetings he is glad to be able to discuss with Putin ways to stabilize the region.

"The region around us is tumultuous, rough, unstable and volatile, therefore I am pleased with the opportunity to consider together way to stabilize the region and bring about security and stability," Netanyahu said.

He made no reference in his opening remarks to the Russian intention – opposed by Israel and the US – to sell state-of-the-art S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Syria.

Putin, according to a statement put out by Netanyahu's office, thanked Netanyahu for accepting his invitation to visit Russia, and mentioned the warm welcome he received in Israel when he visited there in June 2012. This is the two leaders' first meeting since then, though they have spoken on the phone on numerous occasions, most recently last Monday when Netanyahu was in China.

On Monday, US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron called on Russia to join international efforts to end the Syrian civil war. The US and Russia announced last week their intention of holding an international conference aimed at ending the Syrian civil war.

Cameron, who met Putin Friday in Sochi, said at a press conference with Obama, “I think the Russian president, the American president and myself, we can all see that the current trajectory of how things are going is not in anybody’s interest.”

<http://www.ipost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Netanyahu-discusses-ME-stabilization-efforts-with-Putin-313140>

- **Netanyahu decides on more moderate defense**

Security cabinet decides to only cut NIS 3b. from IDF budget, taking the remaining NIS 1b. from Treasury reserve.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on Monday decided to reduce proposed defense cuts from NIS 4 billion to NIS 3b. clearing the way for the government to approve Finance

Minister Yair Lapid’s 2013- 2014 budget proposal.

“Yesterday, we sat until very late on the defense budget and I decided to bring before the security cabinet and the full cabinet a decision that moderates the proposed cut to the defense budget by NIS 1b., which will not be at the public's expense,” the prime minister said at the start of Monday’s cabinet meeting.

Netanyahu plans to spend an extra billion shekels without otherwise affecting the budget by dipping into the reserves, discretionary funds set aside by law in each budget to allow the government flexibility for unforeseen circumstances.

“I would like to make it clear that the IDF – including its commanders, soldiers and weapons – is vital, in both defense and offense, to Israelis' security,” Netanyahu said, adding that he believed he had reached the right balance between security and economic needs.

“The offensive front is clear. The defensive front is expanding to include the entire home front, the entire State of Israel. And therefore, we need the IDF to continue becoming more

efficient, but we also need additional Iron Dome [anti-missile] batteries.”

Defense officials will now have to decide which military programs will be cut. With the budget for defense in 2014 set at NIS 51b., it appears likely that some training programs will be reduced. Earlier fears that long-term purchases of military platforms could be delayed, however, seem less acute.

Opposition leader Shelly Yacimovich (Labor) came out against the reductions in cuts, saying it was strange that the government suddenly found a billion shekels in reserves to prevent defense budget cuts, while they could not be found to prevent increasing VAT or cuts to the Education or Welfare ministries.

“The finance minister must immediately reveal what other ‘reserves’ the government has and explain his order of priorities in how he uses them,” Yacimovich said.

Lapid’s original budget proposal had set aside NIS 8.7b. in reserves for 2013 and NIS 9.6b. reserves for 2014.

“Experience shows that time and again, in practice, the Defense Ministry gets its budget back – not only what is cut, but more than

that, without any in-depth discussion,” the Labor chairwoman said.

“Here too, any pretense of new politics melted away, after Lapid led his voters astray,” she said.

MK Isaac Herzog (Labor) also pointed out that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu promised the extra billion shekels would come from reserve funds.

“In the last year, we were told that the economic situation is excellent and the deficit will only be NIS 18b., and the prime minister said the deficit will not have a significant effect on Israeli citizens.

After the election, it turned out that the numbers they sold us were wrong and the deficit is more than double – NIS 39b! Where is the truth, Mr. Prime Minister?” Herzog asked at a Labor faction meeting.

Meretz chairwoman Zehava Gal-On said cabinet members wasted a day and a half on the defense budget, deciding in the end to cut far less than is necessary.

“It’s bizarre that it took a day and a half to give in to the Defense Ministry yet again, but

it's mostly unfortunate that the ministers are wasting their time on a cut that won't happen. Anyway, the connection between the approved defense budget in the beginning of the year and the real expenses of the security monster is weak," she said.

NIS 10b. more than the defense budget is spent on security in the average year, Gal-On said, and the expenses are wasteful and lack transparency.

She accused the Defense Ministry of "blackmailing the public with threats to empty the public's pockets," and said if it does not stop, it won't have a country to protect anymore.

Commenting on the day's developments, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said Israel faced a complex economic situation, and "we in the defense community are committed to carrying the burden and taking part in the effort to end the large deficit that was created. We're not a desert island."

He added that during negotiations, representatives of the defense community insisted that the IDF would work according to a multi-year plan, beginning in 2014 and ending in 2018.

"Undoubtedly, changes are needed in military force buildup, in light of the regional shake-up, and technological changes. The defense industries provide us with tremendous capabilities. We'll try not to hurt the process aimed at strengthening the army... through spreading out payments for projects over a longer period."

President Shimon Peres, who was supportive of the unpopular measures that Lapid wants to carry out to stabilize the economy, told Israel Radio, when asked whether the defense budget should be cut, that cuts can be made in every government ministry, but the government must assess its priorities, and the most important of these is the defense of the country.

Peres, a former defense minister, said he sees soldiers risking their lives every day to keep the country safe, and they should not have to suffer deprivation.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Netanyahu-decides-on-more-moderate-defense-cuts-312983>

- **‘Conference for refugees held in Gaza’**

A conference for Palestine refugees has been held in Gaza to mark the 65th anniversary of the historic Nakba Day, Press TV reports.

Leaders of Palestinian factions and representatives from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt attended the conference, entitled “United for Return.”

Following the establishment of the Israeli regime in 1948, some 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homeland because of the threat of being massacred. Palestinians commemorated the dispossession as Nakba.

Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said Palestinian refugees around the world “assert their adherence to the right of return” on Nakba Day.

“The children and the grandchildren of the refugees will never give up the land of their ancestors, we will never give up an inch of Palestine not even a grain of sand from the land of Palestine,” he added.

The conference highlighted the right of return for thousands of Palestinian refugees who live in the Middle East and around the world.

It also emphasized the rejection of the Israeli regime’s resettlement or compensation as a substitute for the Palestinian refugee’s right of return.

Maram al-Madhoun, the conference spokeswoman, said the conference was organized to send a message to the world that the Palestinians have the right for return to their own villages and towns.

Organizers also said that the conference aimed to form a coalition of media and law organizations which are interested in refugees affairs and Palestinians right of return to their homeland.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/14/303396/conference-for-refugees-held-in-gaza/>

- **Israel tanks, bulldozers invade northeast Gaza Strip**

Israeli tanks and bulldozers have carried out an incursion into northeastern areas of the Gaza Strip, local sources say.

A number of Israeli tanks and bulldozers infiltrated into Palestinian-owned lands in the town of Beit Hanoun on Monday.

The Israeli forces also entered Beit Hanoun last week, razing Palestinian farmlands and forcing the farmers to leave the area.

Israel has carried out a number of incursions into Gaza in the past weeks, including three airstrikes on the southern town of Khan Younis and near the town of Rafah in southern Gaza in late April.

The attacks are in violation of a ceasefire which brought an end to Israel's eight-day war against Palestinians last November.

According to Israeli Walla website, the Israeli army is preparing to launch Operation Pillar of Defense II against the Gaza Strip in a bid to eliminate Hamas resistance movement.

The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine has also warned against an imminent Israeli attack against the besieged coastal enclave.

The group's military wing, Al-Quds Brigades, has been holding military exercises in order to prepare its members for a possible Israeli aggression, the movement said.

Israel launched the so-called Operation Pillar of Defense I against Gaza in November 2012.

Over 160 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed and about 1,200 others were injured and more than 1,500 targets were hit across the Palestinian enclave during the eight-day war.

In retaliation, Palestinian resistance fighters fired rockets and missiles into Israeli cities, killing at least five Israelis. The offensive ended after Egypt brokered a truce between Hamas and Israel.

According to a Hamas spokesman, Israel's eight-day aggression against the Gaza Strip caused more than USD 1.2 billion in direct and indirect damages.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/13/303300/israel-tanks-bulldozers-invade-ne-gaza/>

- **Israel opens new office in unidentified Persian Gulf state: Report**

Israel has reportedly set up a new office in an unidentified country in the Persian Gulf region following the closure of its missions in Arab states over the past years.



According to Israeli Foreign Ministry's economic plan for 2013-2014, Tel Aviv has set up 11 new diplomatic missions in different countries since 2010 including an office in a Persian Gulf state, the website of Ha'aretz reported.

Israel's diplomatic mission in Oman was closed after the Second Intifada in 2000 and Qatar shut down Tel Aviv's office, which had been opened in 1996, after Israel carried out the Molten Lead operation against the besieged Gaza Strip in 2009.

However, documents published by the website, the Wikileaks, in 2010 indicate that Israeli diplomats have been in contact with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

According to one of the cables dated August 2005, then Bahrain Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa told the deputy American Ambassador in Manama that he had met "Israel's roving ambassador, Bruce Kashdan" and Bahrain has had "quiet,

businesslike contacts with Israel for some time."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/12/303081/israel-opens-new-office-in-pg-state/>

- **Palestinians mark Nakba day in West Bank**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Millions of Palestinians on Tuesday will join rallies and activities in the West Bank and abroad to commemorate the eve of Nakba day, an organizing committee said.

The higher committee for commemorating Nakba Day, along with the Higher National Committee for defending the Right of Return, said that a program of events will take place throughout the day in the West Bank.

Rallies will take place in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Birzeit, Hebron, Qalqiliya, Tubas, Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarem.

Talks, films, art shows, and theater performances commemorating the Nakba will take place across the West Bank, and scout groups will perform in several cities.

Activities also include planting trees and naming them after displaced Palestinian villages.

On May 15, Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, or catastrophe, of Israel's founding in 1948, when over 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from or fled their homes.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=595337>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Algerian army kills seven terrorists**

Algerian troops killed seven terrorists in two separate operations in the restive Kabylie region, the defence ministry announced on Wednesday (May 8th).

In the first operation, four terrorists were taken out in Tizi Ouzou on Tuesday evening, where authorities recovered three Kalashnikovs during an ambush in the Aghrib region.

The second operation took place in the area of Bouhmidane on the border between Boumerdes and Bouira and resulted in the killing of three terrorists

and the confiscation of three machine guns and a significant amount of ammunition, as well as other items

The statement of the National People's Army (ANP) stressed that these operations highlighted the "firm and irrevocable commitment" of its units to "continue unabated the fight against terrorism across the country to destroy any action threatening country's security and tranquillity of the citizens".

The operations come on the heels of others targeting al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb strongholds in Kabylie.

According to security reports, army special forces and security units eliminated 200 insurgents active within various battalions of al-Qaeda during 2012. The list includes emirs and senior leaders. Another 120 elements active in support and logistic networks of the terror network were also killed.

Security forces have also killed 31 terrorists in Kabylie so far this year, including two top emirs.

Meanwhile ANP troops are also stepping up their operations along the Tunisian

border in light of the al-Qaeda violence in Jebel Chaambi.

Algerian Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablia has confirmed security co-ordination and intelligence exchanges between Algeria and Tunisia to face the al-Qaeda gunmen holed up in a mountainous area near the border with Algeria. Ould Kablia stressed however that his country "does not interfere in the affairs of Tunisia".

The Tunisian Interior Minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou announced Wednesday that his country would ask Algeria for assistance to disarm mines planted by militants linked to al-Qaeda in Jebel Chaambi in the province of Kasserine bordering Algeria.

"The terrorist group that was trapped inside the Tunisian territory near the border with Algeria entered via Mali in confirmation to what Tunisian authorities have said," Ould Kablia explained.

He pointed out that Algeria was "keeping an eye on what is going on there and has strengthened the security of its eastern border while tightening control over all suspicious movements in the region."

"Our job is to secure our borders," the interior minister said. Algerian daily El Khabar reported that the defence and interior ministries issued strict instructions to seven governors of eastern provinces to mobilise all security forces to control the border. These measures are in anticipation of the infiltration of terrorists from Tunisia or Libya into Algeria, or departing Algeria for these countries.

The newspaper said in its Wednesday edition that the instructions gave full powers to the governors of the provinces of Tamanrasset, Illizi, El Oued, Tébessa, Khenchela, Souk Ahras and El Tarf because they were at the head of the security committees of their provinces.

This allows them to mobilise all means and put all security sections on alert for intervention. The instructions stress the need to be fully mobilised without delay to thwart any infiltration attempt coming from the two neighbouring countries to Algeria.

They also call on governors to hold daily meetings for members of the security committee and submit reports on any

movements. The governors are expected to forward these reports to the crisis cells in the defence and interior ministries.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/05/10/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/05/10/feature-01)

- **Tunisians rally against terror threat**

Hundreds of Tunisian police officers, human rights activists, journalists and political party representatives gathered in Tunis on Friday (May 10th) to protest against terrorism.

The protest outside the National Constituent Assembly came on the heels of a series of warnings issued by police unions against terrorism. To maintain the security of citizens and the homeland, they say they need both material and moral support.

The National Union of Tunisian Security Forces Syndicates (UNSFST) called for the country "to unite in one word and one attitude, far from narrow partisan and political interests or factional and personal accounts, and to see accurately the

dangerous security situation and threats toward the country".

The union's open letter called for the support of all institutions and a clear security strategy by concerned parties.

"There cannot be an economy, investment, democratic transition, social peace or life without security," the syndicate cautioned.

Tunisia is currently witnessing clashes between security forces with extremist groups in Jebel Chaambi in Kasserine province near the Algerian border. A number of security forces and soldiers were wounded by mines planted by the terrorists.

According to Interior Minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou, these extremist groups are part of the Okba Ibn Nafi battalion affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

"Political leaders will not hesitate today to address issues and aggressions targeting the security of the homeland and those in charge of it and also to address in strict terms the dangers that threaten the country," Constituent Assembly Speaker

Mustapha Ben Jaafar said Friday after meeting with union leaders.

Union spokesperson Imed Belhadj Khelifa told Magharebia that the meeting with MPs "was very positive".

"They were sympathetic to our demand to apply the law after we made them face the reality of the security situation in the country," he said

"We made them face their historical responsibility and offered solutions to restore security to the country," the union spokesman added. "We told them literally, it is time to invest in security, because without security no other investments will succeed."

The Association for Work and Development addressed a letter of support to the security forces and the army on the occasion of their protest. The group called for the Constituent Assembly and the government "to intervene immediately in order to provide the country with an effective legal arsenal to respond to terrorism and create the necessary legal protection for the forces of order and security so that they can

carry out their mission with respect for the law, individual freedoms and human rights".

The association called also for the government "to establish a security policy that takes into account the nature of the threats faced by the country and present the National Constituent Assembly with the necessary adjustments to the state budget in order to provide the resources needed to meet this challenge".

For her part, Lobna Bettayeb, a housewife who participated in the security forces' demonstration, said, "I came here to show them our love and support. They are sacrificing their youth in order for us to enjoy peace. This is the least I can do."

"They need our support and assistance," commented student Ramiz Ksouri, another rally participant. "The day has come when we need to stand together and address violence and terrorism."

The protest saw slogans condemning terrorism and calling for the independence of the security forces as well as signs calling for their legal and financial rights.

One policeman participating in the protest scoffed at the financial compensation for security elements wounded in the line of duty.

"Can you believe that the danger compensation does not exceed twenty dinars? Is this the value of our lives?" he asked.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/05/13/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/05/13/feature-01)

- **Bedouins might form army to secure Sinai: Tribal leader**



Ibrahim Al-Manei decries the state's heavy-handedness against Bedouin locals, and argues that police forces will 'never' return to the same extent as before to the troubled region

The security problems in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula since the January 2011 revolution have become a topic of concern for many; but the inhabitants of the region also complain about a chronic lack of development, which is contributing to the other problems.

In tones of despondency, head of the Sinai Tribes Union Sheikh Ibrahim El-Manei gave Ahram Online his own account of the Bedouins' struggle at his estate in the Mahdiya region, near Egypt's eastern border.

With the only paved road in North Sinai clogged with desert sands swept by adverse winds, getting to Al-Manei was far from easy.

There was also a total absence of security forces on the road from North Sinai's capital, Al-Arish. The route was hard to follow; even road signs would not have helped without a Bedouin guide.

Al-Manei seemed quite undaunted by the security absence in vast areas of the peninsula.

"Police [forces] will never return as before," he said, saying that the relationship between the police and the people of Sinai has become one of deep animosity and desire for vengeance.

Development remains elusive

Over the last few decades, Egypt has celebrated the liberation of Sinai from Israeli occupation in 1982, despite there being no tangible shift in policy towards the neglected region.

"There is no development; the region has long been clinically dead," he asserts. "People are completely marginalised. No wonder they have taken to arms and drugs trafficking, jihadism or crimes."

With an ailing economy and an unaffordable budget deficit, the tribesman has a grim outlook on the long sought-after development in the region. The only way out, he believes, is capitalising on the peninsula's own resources.

On agriculture, for example, Al-Manei says, a lot of farm lands need an electricity supply to extract water from wells. He suggests digging one well every 3-4 km to

irrigate lands. This will be implemented, he says, only by supplying medium-voltage electricity lines to kickstart agriculture in the region. Yet now, the tribal leader believes only the country's army can establish other production and industrial projects, rather than foreign or local investors who, he argues, do not discern the area's needs.

Despite recurrent security breaches in the peninsula's Areas B and C (where Egypt's military presence is restricted under the 1979 peace treaty with Israel), the existing security is still weak and ineffective: frontier areas still act as a launch-pad for the rockets of jihadist groups into Israel, and subterranean tunnels have been dug beneath Egypt's borders with both Palestine and Israel.

Security reinforcement

The Egyptian army had announced plans to set up a buffer zone along Egypt's eastern frontier – at a depth of 5km – in a bid to shut down Gaza's smuggling tunnels, a move roundly criticised by Al-Manei.

"Buffer zones, which will swallow 1,000km of our lands and displace 75 percent of the population of Gaza's Rafah just because the army fails to maintain a necessary presence, will undermine our national security," said Al-Manei, who has met with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and Minister of Defence Abdel Fatah El-Sisi on multiple occasions.

"We will never allow any entity to do something we are not convinced by."

The head of the Egyptian army's engineering department told Ahram Online that, because of the objections of local inhabitants, the army is considering proposals to impose a buffer zone of only half a kilometre either side of the border.

Numerous Israeli reports claim the Egyptian army is currently reinforcing its presence at various points in the peninsula, raising concerns among some Israeli officials, although even if accurate such action would not constitute a violation of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

The army is instead making logistic security arrangements in view of the high

level of arms among Sinai's Bedouins, which Al-Manei sees as part of a deep-seated culture in Sinai and among Bedouins and desert communities, rather than a post-revolution phenomenon.

Refuge from state oppression

Some military officials are reportedly seeking amendments to security arrangements in the peace treaty with both the US and the Israeli sides, a move which Al-Manei takes issue with.

"Most of the people in Sinai take refuge from the repression of the police state in the treaty."

According to him, before the revolution, thousands of local Bedouins were detained and dozens of women, whom Bedouin communities consider to be a 'red line' in terms of their protection and treatment, were locked up in the notorious [now-disbanded] State Security Investigations Service (SSIS) prisons.

The situation is no different under Morsi, elected in June 2012, whose government has taken its cue, he says, from the

regimes of former presidents Mubarak and Gamal Abdel Nasser.

He cited an incident under Morsi's rule when a drug trafficker killed a police officer in the Al-Nahda area of Cairo's Dar al-Salam district: police in retaliation tortured Bedouins living in the area, an old sheikh was dragged by a police vehicle and later lynched, and 400 head of cattle and 30 homes were set ablaze.

In Al-Manei's view, there should not be a security presence in the peninsula, whether police or military one.

"Camp David has limited sovereignty in the peninsula, yet works in our interests given the heavy-handedness of the state."

#### Army of Bedouins

Throwing yet another thunderbolt, Al-Manei said that plans to form an army of Bedouins to be entrusted with maintaining their own security are currently on the table.

"This would be a major alternative should the state's policies follow the same heavy-handed tactics with Bedouin society,

across the country not just in Sinai," he warned, citing Iraq's Pashmerga (armed Kurdish fighters) as an example of private armies.

The tribal head argues that if the Sawarka tribe, to which he belongs, and the Tarabein tribe, see eye to eye, many things would be possible.

#### Jihadism on the rise

Al-Manei seems equally unalarmed by jihadism in the peninsula (particularly near Area C's borders and throughout Area D, the border with Israel and Palestine), which has been a stronghold of roughly 7,000 jihadists who possess arms enough for urban warfare.

Having close ties with them, Al-Manei says jihadists see Israel as a bitter foe, yet believes the government has to embrace them so as to stem militancy within some of these groups. He went on to claim such militants are "fiercely patriotic."

"They bear no grudge towards the army, which has never been the target of their weapons."

## Resettlement of Palestinians

There have been persistent rumours in Egypt about the possibility of resettling Palestinians in Sinai, with an independent Palestinian state still seeming unachievable in the near future. Al-Manei describes such stories as fabrications for political purposes.

"I am present at the [Rafah] border crossing every day. I know what is going on," he says. "Neither [rival Palestinian groups] Hamas nor Fatah would accept this. And we, the inhabitants of Sinai, would never permit any [foreign] people to hold our lands."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/71311/Egypt/Politics-/Bedouins-might-form-army-to-secure-Sinai-Tribale.aspx>

- **Government May Ban Annual Salafist Meeting**

Following clashes between Tunisian police and Ansar al-Sharia over the weekend, conflicting reports have emerged over whether the government will ban the

third congress of the Salafist group, scheduled for May 19 in Kairouan.

The group is expecting 40,000 people from all regions of Tunisia to attend the event, Seifeddine Rais, spokesperson for Ansar al-Sharia, told Shems FM radio yesterday.

Minister of Interior Lotfi Ben Jeddou said Friday that his ministry is still reviewing Ansar al-Sharia's permit application for the congress, according to Mosaïque FM. He emphasized that, according to law, all groups must obtain pre-authorization before holding public meetings and events.

"We haven't decided yet regarding the meeting of Ansar al-Sharia," Ben Jeddou said.

"With God's will, it will take place," Rais said.

He said that the meeting will be a peaceful event that will examine the state of Tunisia.

"If it is banned, one cannot predict the reaction of the participants who are

already frustrated with the way things have been going,” Rais added. “If it is banned, what revolution and what freedom are you talking about? ... Preaching to God does not require an authorization from the government everywhere in the world.”

Rais also accused the government of targeting Ansar al-Sharia, citing recent statements by the group’s leader Abu Iyadh that Tunisian authorities have become “tyrants.”

“Right after the government received funds from abroad, we heard of the ban of Islamic kindergarten, and public religious meetings,” Rais said. “The term ‘tyrants’ is used to refer to those who are ruling without using Sharia (or Islamic law), which is the case of Tunisia. The government said they are not going to apply Sharia.”

He also called on members of Ansar al-Sharia to remain calm and to avoid any tension. He claimed the group has documents that incriminate government officials.

Abdelhamid Jelassi, a member of the ruling Ennahdha party’s Shura Council, responded to Rais on Shems FM, saying that Salafists are not Ennahdha’s enemy — only ignorance and dictatorship are.

“We do not have anything against him,” he said. “All these people are Tunisians. It is just that the country existed in a state of repression for over 60 years and the revolution triggered a battle of identity.”

Ansar al-Sharia held its first congress in Tunisia after the 2011 revolution and a second congress in May 2012 that drew around 3,000 to 5,000 participants. Both events took place in Kairouan, which is considered one of Islam’s holiest cities.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/05/14/government-may-ban-annual-salafist-meeting/>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **U.S. offers \$10 million more for refugees in Lebanon**

BEIRUT: The United States is offering Lebanon an additional \$10 million to help support Syrian refugees in the country, a

statement from President Michel Sleiman's press office said Tuesday.

Sleiman met in Baabda with Philip Gordon, a special assistant to United States President Barack Obama for Middle East issues. Sleiman and Gordon discussed the relationship between Lebanon and the U.S., regional issues, developments in Syria and the increasing number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, according to the statement.

Lebanon has struggled to deal with a huge influx of Syrian refugees to the country over the past two years. The United Nations is now helping over 460,000 refugees in the country, while local organizations say there are many more people in need of aid.

The announcement of the new funds brings the total U.S. contribution of aid for Syrian refugees in Lebanon to \$93 million.

Gordon, a coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf Region, praised Sleiman's role in preserving stability in Lebanon and stressed the importance of holding parliamentary elections scheduled

for June, according to the statement from Sleiman's office.

Gordon also said the U.S. would maintain its support for the Lebanese Army in order to enhance the military's capabilities along the border and inside Lebanon, the statement said.

Gordon also held separate talks with Speaker Nabih Berri and Lebanese Army commander Maj. Gen. Jean Kahwagi in the presence of U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Maura Connelly, according to the National News Agency.

Berri separately met with Hervé Ladsous, a United Nations official for peacekeeping operations, for talks on the peacekeeping force in the south. Ladsous also held talks with Kahwagi.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-14/217051-sleiman-meets-white-house-adviser.ashx#axzz2TGyvZDTj>

- **Lebanon official to Syria for hostage swap talks**

BEIRUT: General Security head Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim returned to Syria Tuesday

to negotiate a hostage swap for kidnapped Lebanese, a security source told The Daily Star.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Ibrahim carried with him a list of over 300 female detainees in Syrian prisons that rebels want released in exchange for nine Lebanese Shiites who were kidnapped last year.

Ibrahim, who traveled to Damascus through the Masnaa border crossing, has made similar trips to Syria recently in an effort to negotiate a hostage swap.

During a brief visit to Damascus Sunday, Ibrahim handed Syrian authorities a list of demands from the rebel group holding the hostages.

“Officials in Damascus told Ibrahim that Syria will do what it can to help in the negotiations for the release of the Lebanese pilgrims,” a General Security official told The Daily Star.

The rebel group, located in the Aleppo district of Azaz, issued their demands after months of international diplomatic efforts to release the hostages who were

kidnapped last year. The hostages were on a religious pilgrimage before being kidnapped according to their families.

Families of the captives have stepped up protests against Turkish organizations in Lebanon in recent weeks in an attempt to pressure Ankara to do more to secure the release of the men. They have closed roads and offices near Turkish cultural centers and airlines.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-14/217052-lebanons-ibrahim-to-syria-for-hostage-swap-talks.ashx#axzz2TGyvZDTj>

- **Lebanese speaker: I am a centrist**

Lebanese Speaker Nabih Berri said that he is entitled to be represented in the upcoming cabinet as “a centrist.”

“President Michel Suleiman has recently taken stances that removed him from the centrist circles, while Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam is, at the end of the day, a member of the March 14 group... Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt is not centrist in the

direct political meaning of the word. If there's anyone who could be called centrist, it is me," Berri said in remarks published on Tuesday by As-Safir newspaper.

"I was the one who pioneered the national dialogue table in 2006, which was later picked up by the president. I was the one to sacrifice a Shiite ministerial seat to facilitate the formation of the cabinet of PM Najib Miqati."

The speaker also voiced his objection to the cabinet formula proposed by Salam that would include 24 ministers with eight ministers each for the March 8 and March 14 groups and eight ministers for centrist parties.

"We cannot accept it, since, on the surface, it is based on balanced representation, but it practically gives the majority to the March 14 group."

Salam is having to jump over hurdles in an attempt to form a government ahead of the scheduled parliamentary elections. Representation within the upcoming cabinet is being contested between the opposed March 8 and March 14 groups,

while new electoral law proposals are being debated and will be put to vote in parliament on May 15.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese-speaker-i-am-a-centrist>

- **Syria militants fire mortars at Lebanese town: Report**

The foreign-sponsored militants in Syria have fired mortars into the Lebanese town of Hermel near the Syrian border, Lebanon's state media say.

The Lebanese National News Agency (NNA) said on Sunday four mortars slammed into the heart of Hermel, which is situated about 100 kilometers (62 miles) northeast of the capital, Beirut.

One of the mortars landed near the Imam Sadr Educational Foundation. One rocket fell near the Hermel Public Hospital on the eastern entrance of the town, while the last rocket hit a hill overlooking the Assi River.

Hermel was also hit by four mortars in a similar event on May 9.

The terrorist group al-Nusra Front in Syria has threatened to continue shelling the Lebanese town.

“As of Monday, May 13, we will continue shelling Hermel and surrounding villages with rockets and tank shells,” the terrorist group stated.

On April 19, Lebanon said it was planning to file a complaint with the Arab League over a deadly attack by the militants in Syria on the Lebanese soil.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour stated that the security situation in Lebanon was deteriorating due to the ongoing turmoil in the border region.

“Lebanon security and stability are being threatened. We are preparing a memo to hand out to the Arab League on the violations... on our borders. Last week, two Lebanese civilians lost their lives due to shelling from armed Syrian opposition,” the Lebanese foreign minister said.

“The armed [Syrian] opposition has adopted this attack, and has pledged more such attacks in the future. So, we are

notifying the Arab League with this as it should take full responsibility over the issue,” Mansour added.

Turmoil has gripped Syria since March 2011. The Syrian government maintains that the chaos in the country is being orchestrated from outside.

The militants also carry out mortar attacks against residential areas in Syria.

On Sunday, two people were injured when the militants targeted the al-Mazzeah neighborhood of the capital, Damascus. The projectiles also damaged a number of buildings.

Syria’s official news agency SANA reported on the same day that the Syrian army carried out successful mop-up operations against the militants on the outskirts of the capital.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has warned that if the “terrorist forces take control the situation will inevitably spill over into neighboring countries and create a domino effect throughout the Middle East and beyond.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/13/303231/syria-militants-hit-lebanese-town/>

## 6. SYRIA

- **Iran, OIC Voice Common Position in Opposition to Military Intervention in Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu in a meeting in Jeddah underlined the necessity for preventing military intervention in Syria.

The meeting was held in Jeddah on Monday on the sidelines of a meeting of the foreign ministers of the OIC contact group on Mali, including the top diplomats of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Senegal, Niger, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone.

During the meeting, the two officials stressed their opposition to the military intervention in Syria, the necessity for finding a political solution to the current crisis and stopping the conflict and bloodshed in the country.

The two sides also reiterated their concern about the activities of extremist groups in Syria.

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

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

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

The newspaper, quoting opposition activists and US and foreign officials, reported that Obama administration

officials emphasized the administration has expanded contacts with opposition military forces to provide the Persian Gulf nations with assessments of rebel credibility and command-and-control infrastructure.

Opposition activists who several months ago said the rebels were running out of ammunition said in May that the flow of weapons - most bought on the black market in neighboring countries or from elements of the Syrian military in the past - has significantly increased after a decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169748>

- **Turkey's policies on Syria bring shameful catastrophe: Iran MP**

A senior Iranian lawmaker has lashed out at Turkey for arming and training militants, who are the main factor behind the killing of innocents in Syria.

Turkey has clear policies on Syria and the Turkish government has caused a tragedy

in the Arab country by supporting terrorist groups which brought shame to the Muslim world, Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi said Monday.

He added that all events taking place in Syria are because of policies pursued by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

"It is expected that the Turkish government reconsider its policies on Syria and cooperate with countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to establish stability and peace," Boroujerdi stated.

The Iranian legislator emphasized that the restoration of peace and stability in Syria would be in favor of Turkey and all other countries in the region.

Boroujerdi's remarks came after Turkey, which supports militants fighting against the Syrian government, accused Syria of being behind the two car bomb attacks in the Turkish border town of Reyhanli on May 11 which killed 46 people. However, the Syrian government has dismissed the claim.

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told a news conference on Sunday that Damascus “did not commit and would never commit such an act because our values would not allow that.”

The Syrian minister blamed the Turkish government for the Reyhanli bombings and the ongoing foreign-sponsored turmoil in Syria.

“It is (Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip) Erdogan who should be asked about this act... He and his party bear direct responsibility,” he said.

No group has claimed the responsibility for the attacks. Turkish authorities say nine people have been arrested in connection with the attacks.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/13/303325/turkey-policies-on-syria-shameful/>

- **Syria says ready for joint inquiry on Turkey attacks**

Syria is willing to carry out a joint investigation with Turkey into deadly

attacks in the border town of Reyhanli that Ankara has accused Damascus of masterminding, a Syrian minister said on Tuesday.

"If the government of [Prime Minister Recep Tayyip] Erdogan calls for a joint, transparent investigation by the two countries, we have no objection, in order to find the truth," Information Minister Omran al-Zohbi said.

"The truth must be announced to the Syrian and Turkish people," official media quoted him as saying.

The twin car bombings that rocked the town of Reyhanli in southern Turkey on Saturday killed 51 people and wounded dozens more.

Erdogan told parliament on Tuesday that 13 people have been held by police in connection with the attacks, the deadliest to hit Turkey since the beginning of the uprising in neighboring Syria in March 2011.

Turkey has blamed a radical Marxist group affiliated with President Bashar al-Assad's

regime for the attack. Damascus has denied any involvement.

Ankara has sided with the rebels fighting to topple Assad's regime and has taken in around 400,000 refugees as well as army defectors and repeatedly called on the international community to act on the unfolding crisis.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-says-ready-for-joint-inquiry-on-turkey-attacks>

- **Syria opposition warns of danger to Al-Qusayr residents**

Syria's opposition National Coalition warned Tuesday that 30,000 civilians in the rebel-held town of Al-Qusayr faced an "extremely dangerous situation" as regime troops prepare to attack.

President Bashar al-Assad has "mobilized military forces in the direction of the city of Al-Qusayr, in the province of Homs," the statement said, describing reports of dozens of tanks and large groups of soldiers on the outskirts of the town.

"The Syrian Coalition stresses that this is an extremely dangerous situation. We warn civil society of these new crimes that Assad may soon commit against the residents of Al-Qusayr."

The statement called on NGOs to head to Al-Qusayr and for quick international action "to help save 30,000 civilians facing imminent danger."

"We ask the [UN] Security Council to issue a decision forcing Lebanon to control its borders, and thus guarantee the withdrawal of Hezbollah members from Syrian territory," the coalition said.

Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, an Assad ally, has dispatched its fighters to battle alongside regime troops in the Al-Qusayr region, near the border with Lebanon.

The regime has made recapturing the town and the area in central Homs province a key objective, and fierce fighting has raged in the vicinity for months.

In recent weeks, regime forces backed by Hezbollah and members of the National

Defense Forces, a pro-regime militia, have advanced in the region, taking a string of villages and reportedly surrounding the town of Al-Qusayr on three sides.

A military source last week said leaflets had been dropped on the town, urging civilians to leave via a safe passage, but activists in Al-Qusayr said no leaflets were dropped and there was no safe way out.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has also expressed concern about what might follow a regime advance into the town of Al-Qusayr, a rebel bastion which has resisted the army for the past year.

The head of the Britain-based monitoring group, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP that he feared a "massacre" in the town.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-opposition-warns-of-danger-to-al-qusayr-residents>

- **Syria spurns efforts harming sovereignty**



Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi says his country will not be part of any effort that harms its sovereignty, in an apparent reference to an upcoming international conference on Syria due in Geneva.

Zoabi's remarks on Monday were made in response to a Moscow-Washington proposal for an international conference to end the unrest in Syria.

During an interview with Lebanese al-Manar TV, the information minister added that only the Syrian people are to decide about the country's presidency through democratic voting.

Although Zoabi said his country "cautiously" embraced the initiative, he added that Damascus needed to know more details regarding the conference before announcing its decision to attend it.

" We are in need to know whether the Russian-US understanding is as important as the political solution and its necessity as a choice that applies to everyone and whether it is really a sole choice for the Americans and their allies in secret and in public."

The minister said that the Syrian government has supported a comprehensive national dialogue that does not exclude any body or group, since the crisis started in 2011.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/14/303435/syria-spurns-efforts-harming-sovereignty/>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

### • Sunni-Shiite divide looms over region

Syria may spill over in more ways than one

Syria's protracted conflict has turned into a proxy war between President Bashar al-Assad's Shiite ally Iran and Sunni Arab Gulf countries, threatening neighboring countries with large Muslim communities, such as Lebanon and Iraq, with sectarian spillover, something that experts believe plays in favor of the Damascus regime.

Last October, Reuters reported that Iraqi Shiite militants are fighting in Syria, alongside President Bashar al-Assad's troops. In recent weeks, the number of Hezbollah fighters killed in Syria has increased significantly, a figure estimated at over 100 by Hezbollah's former secretary, Sheikh Sobhi Toufayli.

"Dictatorships, especially those such as the Assad regime which have undergone training in eastern Europe, have learnt to penetrate tribes, sects, and political parties in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq and manipulate them when needed,"

says Nadim Shehadeh, analyst at Chatham House.

This manipulation of local Lebanese and Iraqi factions includes playing on their sectarian fears. “One such example is the threat of destruction of the Shiite holy shrine of Sayyida Zeinab,” emphasizes Shehadeh. Zeinab was the daughter of Imam Ali, who is revered by Shiites, and his wife Fatima, Mohammad’s daughter.

According to Reuters, some defectors from the Iraqi Mehdi army fighting in Syria said they were securing the Sayyida Zeinab shrine, as well as Shiite neighborhoods. A similar argument has been voiced by Hezbollah, whose secretary general Hassan Nasrallah has partly justified the deployment of the party’s fighters in Syria by arguing they were defending Sayyida Zeinab’s shrine as well as Lebanese Shiites residing in the Kousseir border region. “The regime is using religious reasons to mobilize the Shiite community. It has extended of the myth of [the 680 Battle of] Karbala to encompass Shiite holy shrines in Syria. Lebanese and Iraqi Shiites fighting in Syria are thus doing it for ideological reasons,”

says AUB political science professor Dr. Hilal Khashan.

In addition, both Iraqi and Lebanese members of Lebanese Hezbollah or Moqtada al-Sadr's Iraqi Mehdi Army, the Badr group, and Asaib al-Haq, among other factions who follow Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have argued that the Syrian uprising threatens the interests of the Shiite community and the resistance axis.

“Like any other dictator, Assad wants to prove that he is irreplaceable and indispensable and that his removal will cause chaos. He has used this weapon repeatedly in the past. In Lebanon he has armed Hezbollah... while in Iraq he manipulated al-Qaeda,” points out Shehadeh.

Alongside Shiites defending the Assad regime, the war in Syria has also attracted hordes of Sunni jihadi fighters from across the region who have joined the rebel cause. A call for jihad has been recently issued in Lebanon by the Salafi Sheikh Salem Rafei. On the other hand, the involvement of Iraqi jihadis in the Syrian conflict was recently crystallized by the announcement made by the emir of Al

Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, detailing the rebranding of his organization into the “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant,” a conglomeration which would include the Syrian Jabhat al-Nusra group (a proposal rejected by al-Nusra).

This dangerous escalation on both sides of the Sunni-Shiite divide will encourage Lebanese and Iraqi factions involved in it to drift away from their central state and further strengthen their ties with sectarian regional actors.

Both Iraqi and Lebanese governments have implemented a policy of non-interference in Syria. However recent developments are threatening the precarious status quo. According to a recent report by Crisis Group, the standoff in Iraq between Sunni Arab protesters and the central government has begun “a perilous, downward slide toward confrontation. On 23 April, Iraqi security forces killed 50 people in a demonstration in the Sunni town of Hawija, in Kirkuk governorate.” The report stated that Sunni Arab were feeling disenfranchised and alienated by Baghdad and experiencing mounting solidarity with their Syrian brethren next door, sharing

“feelings of hostility toward a purported Shiite axis linking Hezbollah, Damascus, Baghdad, and Tehran.”

Similarly, tensions have been on the rise in Lebanon. The country has been plagued with a power vacuum, exacerbated by the inability of the prime minister-designate to form a government and the possible postponement of the next parliamentary elections. Hezbollah’s deeper involvement in Syria has triggered widespread resentment among the country’s Sunni community, which, like its Iraqi counterpart, identifies with the rebels. Khashan believes that the involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian war will have serious long-term repercussions, as Syrians will not easily forgive the Party of God’s support for the Assad regime. The ever-increasing number of Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon may exacerbate the tensions, eventually bringing them to a head.

Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq are now thus forming an arc of instability, which might trigger a regional doomsday scenario.

“There is a real danger of spillover: Sunni and Shiites (from both Lebanon and Iraq)

who are fighting in Syria might one day bring the conflict closer to home,” says Shehadeh.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reports/features/sunni-shiite-divide-looms-over-region>

- **Human Rights Watch urges fair trial of Saudi cleric**

Human Rights Watch has called on Saudi Arabia to hold a fair trial for a prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, who is an outspoken critic of the Al Saud regime.

The rights organization issued a statement on Saturday calling on Saudi authorities to provide Sheikh Nimr with “immediate access to adequate medical care for gunshot wounds received during his arrest 10 months ago.”

The rights group also said that the Saudi regime should “conduct an immediate bail review (for Sheikh Nimr), as international law requires.”

Sheikh Nimr was attacked, injured and arrested by Saudi security forces en route

to his house in the Qatif region of Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province on July 8, 2012.

The arrest sparked protests in the oil-rich province. The cleric appeared before court on March 26 for the first time since his arrest.

Saudi prosecutors are seeking the death penalty for Sheikh Nimr.

Sarah Leah Whitson, the Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said on Saturday, “As a court debates whether to kill Nimr al-Nimr and string his corpse to a pole, he is suffering from the gunshot wounds he sustained when security forces arrested him.”

“It is outrageous that a man of his standing has been targeted in this way and that authorities have ignored his family’s repeated pleas for adequate medical care.”

There have been numerous demonstrations in Eastern Province since February 2011, with protesters primarily calling for political reform and an end to widespread discrimination.

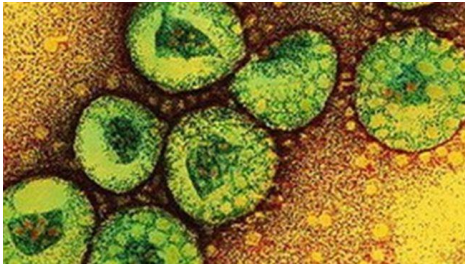
Anti-regime protests intensified, however, since November 2011, when security forces opened fire on protesters in Qatif, killing five people and leaving scores more injured.

In October 2012, Amnesty International called on Saudi authorities to stop using excessive force against the protesters

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/12/303090/hrw-urges-fair-trial-of-saudi-cleric/>

- **SARS-like virus kills 15 in Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabian Health Minister Abdullah Al Rabie says at least 15 people have died from a new deadly respiratory virus related to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).



“The number of people who contracted the virus in the kingdom since

August/September is 24, of whom 15 have died,” Al Rabie told a news conference in the capital Riyadh on Sunday.

In addition, Al Rabie said three more people are suspected of having contracted the virus in Saudi Arabia.

The novel coronavirus, also known as nCoV-EMC, is a cousin of SARS. The virus first emerged in the Middle East, and was discovered on September 2012 in a Qatari man who had recently traveled to Saudi Arabia.

On Tuesday, the World Health Organization said 11 people had died in Saudi Arabia from the virus since last year.

Since September 2012, the World Health Organization has been informed of 30 confirmed cases of the virus, and 18 of the patients have died.

Cases have been reported in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Qatar, Britain and Germany, and health officials have said the virus has likely already spread between people in some circumstances.

Health authorities are trying to find out how humans are contracting and spreading the virus and what the best remedy to treat it is.

It does not appear to be as contagious as SARS, which killed some 800 people in a 2003 epidemic.

The novel coronavirus is most closely related to a bat virus. Scientists are considering whether bats or other animals like goats or camels are a possible source of infection.

The WHO has advised countries to test any people with unexplained pneumonia.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/13/303192/sarslike-virus-kills-15-in-saudi-arabia/>

- **Bahrain grants citizenship to 240 UK citizens**

King Hamad pays rich tribute to robust ties with United Kingdom

Manama: Bahrain has granted its nationality to 240 British citizens, King

Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa has said, adding that his country was home to 9,000 permanent British residents.

“There are some 9,000 permanent British residents in Bahrain making a major contribution to the prosperity of the kingdom as they have always done,” King Hamad said. “Indeed I am proud to say that, by due legal process, we have granted Bahraini nationality to 240 British citizens as they themselves had requested and whose loyal service more than justified it,” the Bahraini monarch said at a reception ceremony he hosted as he attended the first International Windsor Endurance Festival at Windsor Great Park.

King Hamad who accessed the throne in 1999 upon the death of his father Shaikh Eisa Bin Salman Al Khalifa lauded the robust relations between the two island kingdoms.

“The first Treaty of Friendship was signed in 1820, nearly 200 years ago, and it remained until replaced by a new one in 1971 on Britain’s withdrawal from the Gulf – a unilateral decision of which my father said – “Why? - No one asked you to go”!. In fact for all practical and strategic

purposes, the British presence has not changed and it remains such that we believe we shall never be without it,” he said.

“So I am happy to say that the relationship is as strong as ever – perhaps even stronger. We have the closest cooperation across a wide range of activities and especially in the field of defence where we are each seeking to expand the British presence in our country to mutual advantage. To that end we signed a new Defence Cooperation Accord in October last year,” the king said.

The king said that Bahrain was going through a phase of “remarkable economic regeneration.”

“There are major projects underway in housing, including substantial social housing, and for expansion in the oil sector, but above all in transport. Before long Bahrain will be connected to its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as a result of the ambitious plan to create a railway linking all the GCC states. Underpinning these exciting projects the economy continues to grow at 5 per cent a year,” he said.

Bahrain’s total banking assets in the United Kingdom amounted to \$11.1 billion that do not include any other investments Bahrain has with the United Kingdom.

“This encouraging picture of a dynamic and happy country is not always the one reflected by the western media. But as Disraeli said – ‘It is easier to be critical than correct.’ Of course the unrest of 2011 has had an impact and it continues in a small number of villages to this day. We are doing our best to tackle it through dialogue and the improvements we have put in place in our legal and policing procedures in which we have had much support from the UK authorities. Unfortunately we are dealing with a small but violent minority inspired and supported by elements outside the kingdom. But we remain confident that we will achieve an outcome satisfactory to all,” he said.

In December, Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa heaped special praise on the United Kingdom for supporting Bahrain.

“I would personally like to thank many in the West who were very kind to me and what I have tried to achieve by promoting dialogue between all of the disparate groups here in the Kingdom of Bahrain,” prince Salman told a gathering of senior civilian and military figures at the Manama Dialogue. “However, I would in particular like to thank the diplomats, the leadership and the government of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth of the UK. You have stood head and shoulders above others. You have engaged all stakeholders. You have kept the door open to all sides in what was a very difficult and sometimes unclear situation. Your engagement and your help in police reform and judicial reform, and your direct engagement with the leadership of the Kingdom of Bahrain and with members of the opposition, has saved lives, and for that I will be personally eternally grateful. Thank you.”

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-grants-citizenship-to-240-uk-citizens-1.1182895>

- **Law upgrades to help boost accountability: Mohammed**



The continuous development of the federal government laws and financial systems primarily aims to preserve the public fund and consolidate accountability and transparency regarding the state’s general revenues, His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, said during the cabinet meeting at the Presidential Palace on Sunday.

Lt. General Shaikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs, attended the meeting.

The Council of Ministers approved the bylaws of the federal law on the state’s general revenues. The new bylaw No. 01 of the year 2011 on the state’s general revenues is aimed at coordinating

financial policies, upgrading the efficiency of law and financial systems to support the general budget, specifying rights and terms of reference for revenue generating authorities, exercising control over revenues to achieve transparency, as well as to oblige authorities to set strategies to develop sources of revenue.

The cabinet also endorsed the agreement between the UAE and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which includes a request from IATA to open a regional office in Abu Dhabi to support its activities in the region.

Shaikh Mohammed said the agreement indicates that the UAE has become a regional and international hub for the aviation industry and the hosting of aviation events. He added that the office would add more expertise and knowledge to Emirati cadres regarding the streamlining of international air traffic.

The Council of Ministers approved an amendment to restructure the Board of Directors of the Federal Electricity and Water Authority (Fewa). Ayesha Omer Al Midfa, Director of Infrastructure projects at the Ministry of Public Works was

named as a member to replace Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed Belhaif Al Nuaimi, Minister of Public Works.

The cabinet approved the restructure of the Board of Directors of Emirates Development Bank, chaired by Khalid Mohammed Salem Belami.

It also approved the setting up of an office for legal affairs at the Secretariat of the Cabinet at the Ministry for Cabinet Affairs. This will provide legal support and counselling to the cabinet and the ministerial councils. The office will prepare legal research and studies, study draft laws and interpret memoranda and federal decrees, and enable the spread of legal knowledge among federal employees.

The cabinet approved the agreement between the UAE and Turkey on electricity generation and the extraction of brown coal (lignite and sub-bituminous coal) from Al Bustan province in Turkey. It also endorsed the agreement between the UAE and Sri Lanka to set up a joint committee chaired by the foreign ministers of the two countries to

strengthen the economic ties of trade and tourism.

The Council of Ministers approved a number of agreements with Niger and Montenegro in the field of aviation, as well as a cooperative agreement with France on the technology of space remote sensing.

On the sidelines of the cabinet meeting, Shaikh Mohammed honoured employees of the 'UAE Government Leaders Programme — the second batch of Future Leaders'. He told them that the state needs distinguished and highly educated Emirati cadres in different specialisations.

“Leadership is a continuous journey of achievement and development and changing lives of people for the better,” Shaikh Mohammed said, noting that each person versed in his knowledge is a leader, and every top achiever is also a leader. And the best type of leadership is the one that makes a positive difference in the lives of others and adds something new to society.

<http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/inside.asp?xfile=/data/government/2013/Ma>

[y/government\\_May17.xml&section=government](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/inside.asp?xfile=/data/government/2013/Ma)

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • Iran Felicitates PML-N Victory in Pakistan's General Elections

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian foreign ministry on Sunday felicitated Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party for its landslide victory in the recent general elections in the South Asian country.

Nawaz Sharif on Sunday headed for a third term in office as Pakistan's Prime Minister after his Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) party took an unassailable lead over its rivals in landmark general elections that witnessed a huge turnout despite Taliban threats and bomb attacks..

Trends from 264 of the 272 parliamentary seats that went to the polls showed that the PML-N was set to bag in excess of 125 seats, while Imran Khan's Tehreek-e Insaaf (PTI) Pakistan and the Pakistan People's Party were lagging far behind with 34 and 32 seats, respectively.

In a statement on Sunday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Araqchi congratulated the successful parliamentary elections in Pakistan and Sharif's ability to win people's trust.

Araqchi further pointed to the close relations between Iran and Pakistan, and hoped for the further expansion of the bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107169426>

- **Finance minister disclose names of corrupt Afghan lawmakers**

Afghan finance minister, Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal in an unprecedented move on Monday disclosed the names of Afghan lawmakers involved in illegal activities.

The minister was summoned by Afghan parliament on Monday to brief lawmakers for his alleged comments regarding lawmakers involvement in illegal activities including smuggle of alcohol, fuel and flour from neighboring countries.

He said, “Lawmakers Haji Zahir Qadir representing Nangarhar province, Arif Rahmani representing Ghazni province, Sulaiman Khel representing Paktia, Samullah Samir, Hamidzai Lalai representing Kandahar province and Mohsini representing Baghlan province were involved in illegal activities.”

Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal initiated disclosing lawmakers names from Haji Zahir Qadir and said that he has continuously requested for financial aid from him to support “Peace Convoy” course.

According to finance minister Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal, the lawmaker, Haji Zahir Qadir has imported flour worth 269 million dollars illegally during the past two years.

Zakhilwal also added that lawmaker Hamidzai Lalai is importing alcohol and he has threatened a customs official to death after his illegal activities

were disclosed yesterday.

Other lawmaker, Samiullah Samim representing Farah province of Afghanistan was accused of fuel and

alcohol smuggle by Afghan finance minister Hazrat Omer Zakhil.

He said the lawmaker called from Germany and requested him to release five oil tankers which were seized for the smuggling of fuel in Farah province.

While pointing towards the smuggling activities in southern provinces of Afghanistan including Paktia and Paktika province, Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal said the customs officers of the two provinces were fired from their positions but Paktika lawmaker Mahmood Khan Sulaiman sent him money and requested to re-appoint his son as Paktika customs officer.

In the meantime finance minister Hazrat omer Zakhilwal accused lawmaker Mohammad Azim Mohsini representing Baghlan province for requesting the finance ministry to have illegal houses in Pul-e-Khumri city.

He also accused Arif Rahmani representing eastern Ghazni province for requesting the finance ministry to receive money and contracts.

Afghan finance minister, Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal's comments created furor among the Afghan lawmakers however they were allowed to speak during the assembly meeting.

Meanwhile Afghan lawmakers accused finance minister for similar illegal activities but Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal vowed to resign from his position if the allegations against him were proved to be true.

Zakhilwal also said that Afghan lawmakers cases have been forwarded to Afghan attorney general office for further legal actions.

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

- **US-Afghan ties strained over charges of soldier's role in torture, killings**

Dispute between US and Afghan officials over the involvement of a member of an American Special Forces unit in torture and murder of alleged Afghan insurgents has strained ties between Washington and Kabul.

While Afghan authorities are seeking the arrest and prosecution of a man named

Zakaria Kandahari, who they insist is a US-born American citizen, along with much of his unit, on torture and murder charges, American officials claim their forces are being wrongly blamed for “atrocities carried out by a rogue Afghan unit,” The New York Times reports Monday.

This is while the Afghan officials emphasize that they have “substantial evidence of American involvement” in employing “counterinsurgency tactics” in Wardak Province which has left scores of Afghans either killed or missing.

These officials say, according to the report, they have “testimony and documents” implicating Kandahari and his unit in the killings or disappearances of 15 Afghans in Wardak, further noting that Kandahari is “of Afghan descent but born and raised in the United States.”

At the center of the allegations mentioned by Afghan officials is an American Special Forces A team that has been based in the Nerkh district until recently.

They say among the evidence in their possession is a videotape of Kandahari “torturing one of the 15 Afghans, a man

they identified as Sayid Mohammad,” the report further states.

Afghan officials who have seen the videotape say “a person speaking English with an American accent can be heard supervising the torture session” being carried out by Kandahari.

An unnamed American official, speaking on condition of anonymity, is, however, cited in the report as confirming the existence of the video showing Kandahari but denying that he was an American citizen.

“Everybody in that video is Afghan; there are no American voices,” the official is quoted as saying, further claiming that Kandahari had been an “interpreter” working for the team in the Nerkh district “without pay in exchange for being allowed to live on the base.”

The report goes on to add that after investigating the events in the Nerkh district and finding the claims of American misconduct reliable, the head of the Afghan military General Sher Mohammad Karimi “personally asked the American commander at the time, General John

Allen, to hand Mr. Kandahari over to the Afghan authorities.”

“General Allen personally promised General Karimi that the American military would do so within 24 hours,” a senior Afghan official is quoted in the report as saying. “But the promise was not kept, nor was a second promise a day later to hand him over the following morning. The next morning they said he had escaped from them and they did not know where he was.”

The American official then claimed that the US military was not trying to shield Kandahari but that they just "lost contact with him.”

The development comes as American military forces have widely been cited for engaging in torturing, maiming, killing and even massacring suspects and civilians during their occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. On occasions, US forces took photos of their atrocities, boasting their misconduct as a sort of recreation.

A number of US soldiers have also admitted to killing Afghan civilians and

cutting off their body parts to keep as ‘souvenirs.’

The American military led the occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 by mostly NATO forces, vowing to root out terrorism in the country and bringing peace and security to the war-torn nation.

As the US-led occupation continues some 12 years later, however, terrorism, insecurity, mass displacement of civilians and narcotics production and distribution has surged enormously across the country.

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

- **In Kabul exhibit, a glimpse of Afghanistan's place in the Mughal Empire**

13 May 2013 – A just-opened exhibit is providing residents of Kabul with a glimpse into a time when Afghanistan belonged to a large empire made up of a wide range religions and nationalities.

Opened on Sunday in the city’s Babur Gardens, the exhibit, ‘The Mughals: Arts, Culture and Empire,’ presents numerous

prints from the collection of the British Library in London that explore the arts, science and life during that period, which lasted from 1526 to 1858.

At its peak, the Mughal Empire, founded by Babur, a prince from present day Uzbekistan, ruled over the area encompassing India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The exhibit contains several dozen drawings ranging from street scenes, to battles, to colourful portrayals of court life at the Red Fort in the Indian capital of New Delhi. Some of the images show the capital, Kabul, as it was 300 years ago.

"The Mughal era is an important part of the history of Afghanistan and the region, and Mughal art influences South Asian art substantially," said Sara Noshadi, a programme officer with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which works closely with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), one of the exhibit's organizers and sponsors.

"Art and cultural exhibitions of this quality are signs of peace and stability in post-conflict Afghanistan," Ms. Noshadi added.

UNESCO is the UN agency charged with building intercultural understanding through the protection of heritage and support for cultural diversity.

In recent years, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has dominated the international community's perceptions of the country, rather than its rich cultural heritage and history.

Efforts are underway to change this. At a UN-backed event last month, the south-eastern city of Ghazni was officially declared the Asian Capital of Islamic Culture for this year. At the time, UNESCO noted that the declaration underlines the fact that Afghanistan does have a number of important cultural heritage sites and there are many Islamic sites in need of preservation.

The Government of Afghanistan is planning a series of activities to highlight Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage throughout 2013. The events include a UNESCO-organized international conference in Kabul next month aimed at raising the profile of Ghazni.

One point the Kabul exhibit makes is that the Mughals were able to rule over an empire composed of subjects from different religions and nations. The exhibit suggests that one reason the Mughals were able to thrive and build a strong cultural identity is that they promoted a degree of religious and cultural tolerance.

“The exhibit is important because it sheds light on Afghanistan’s long history and culture,” said an AKTC documentation officer, Mohammad Shafiq Mashai. “The Mughal period was a time of great cultural and artistic growth which shows that people can change their mind and their attitudes through interaction with other cultures.”

Other sponsors of the exhibit are the British Library, the Norwegian Embassy and the Afghan Ministry of Culture. Organizers expect 35,000 visitors will take in the exhibit, which ends on 25 June.

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

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM** research assistant **Miray Başar**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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