



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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Batı'yla İlişkiler



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8 May 2013

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1. IRAQ

- **Sadr and Hakim discuss, in Najaf, the strategic partnership**

Najaf / NINA / Muqtada al-Sadr, the head of the Sadr movement received on Wednesday 8, May in Najaf Ammar al-Hakim, the head of the Supreme Islamic Council.

An informed source, close to al-Hakim said that "The two sides discussed the political process in general and the strategic partnership between the Sadrists and the Supreme Council, which represents in the cooperation in forming the local governments, according to providing services to the citizens in all areas."

It is mentioned that the Ahrar bloc, of the Sadr movement, officially announced that its strategic partner in the formation of the local governments and the provincial councils is the "citizen bloc" taking into consideration the openness to all the winning blocs, without putting red lines on any candidate, whether in Najaf or other provinces.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GHKELG

- **INA calls people, political blocs to pressurize parliament to pass Debaathification Law**

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Karim Elewi of the Iraqi National Alliance stressed that "The parliament chairmanship failed in including the Debaathification Law within the agenda of Tuesday regular session, calling the political blocs and the Iraqi people to pressurize the parliament to pass this law.

Elewi told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The parliament passed during Tuesday session, a number of important law drafts but it failed in enlisting other important laws including the Debaathification Law and the Infrastructures Law as well as other law drafts that would help upgrade the political process to better."

"The Baath Party involved in bloodshed crimes against the Iraqi people over the past years and it still commits the bloodshed crimes against the Iraqis and caused great sufferings to them, calling the people and the political sides to pressurize the parliament to approve the Debaathification Law as being important one," he added.

The parliament held its regular session on Tuesday while it did not include the

Debaathification Law within the session's agenda.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33548:ina-calls-people-political-blocs-to-pressurize-parliament-to-pass-debaathification-law-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Shura Council approves draft law of Atomic Energy Commission**

Shafaq News / Ministry of Science and Technology announced on Tuesday, that the Shura Council approved the draft law of the National Commission for Atomic Energy and submitted it to the Iraqi Cabinet for approval.

The Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission after its formation will put a strategy of costs and timings of nuclear programs for peaceful purposes, and the preparing staff during the rebuilding of the material base, and the creation of infrastructure establishment of nuclear systems.

“Shura Council approved a draft law on the National Energy commission that has been sent to the cabinet for approval to forward it to the parliament,” The deputy of the

ministry, Fouad al-Moussawi told “Shafaq News”.

Iraq seeks soon to form the Atomic Energy Commission directly linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology and the National board for of radiation control directly linked to the Ministry of Environment in an effort to revive its peaceful nuclear program.

Iraqi nuclear sites were subjected to destruction, especially Tuwaitha site which was destroyed in the eighties of the last century; the Iraqi government represented by the Ministry of Science and Technology is conducting dismantling and liquidation of the site process.

Tuwaitha nuclear research facility - which was built in the sixties of the last century on an area of 56 square kilometers south of Baghdad - consists of many buildings, which included waste treatment activities and others focused on a number of techniques to enrich uranium.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6032-shura-council-approves-draft-law-of-atomic-energy-commission-.html>

- **Sadrist movement calls to apply justice on De-Bathification law**

Shafaq News / Ahrar bloc of the Sadrist movement confirmed on Wednesday not voting on any amendment to the accountability and justice law, while confirming that the law needs “fair application” not amendments.

Ahrar bloc demanded officially yesterday from the parliament speaker to postpone the first reading of the amendments of accountability and justice law.

“Ahrar bloc emphasized that the law of accountability and justice need to apply properly not to modification, unfortunately, the law was not applied properly, there are people included in De-Baathification law but were excluded by the Prime Minister, and this is a violation to the law that is supposed to be applied on everyone,” A member of the bloc , Hussein Kadhim told “Shafaq News”.

The cabinet approved the amendment draft to accountability and justice law earlier, which would cancel the ban for senior officials of the outlawed Baath Party to take over government positions.

The amendment raised debate among the political parties as Ahrar bloc represented by the Sadrists , Badr and Fadhila movements rejected the amendment and vowed to confront it if reached the parliament to approve it , but National Alliance announced in a statement about that all its affiliated blocs either supported or pledged not to object on the amendment.

Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces are witnessing since more than 120 days demonstrations and sit-ins against the federal government and Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki demanding to cancel the Justice and Accountability Law, Article 4 terrorism and release detainees.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6036-sadrist-movement-calls-to-apply-justice-on-de-bathification-law.html>

- **Barzani recalls Kurdistan front: Let's unite our ranks**

Shafaq News / The President of Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani called on Tuesday, the Kurdish political forces for unity, stressing that the current developments in the region require everyone to be on the level of the historical responsibility.



“The front is a successful experience in uniting Kurdish political forces,” Barzani, wrote on his personal page on the social networking site (Facebook) on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding Kurdistan Front , briefed by “Shafaq News”.

Kurdistan Front was founded in 1987 and included a number of political parties that were fighting the former regime, including Kurdistan Democratic Party led by the late , Idris Barzani then President of the Kurdistan region , Massoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani as well as a number of other parties.

The front contributed after the spring uprising in 1991 and the withdrawal of services and management of the former regime from Kurdistan in the political process construction in Kurdistan and establishing a semi-autonomous region of Baghdad and electing a parliament and regional government through general elections in 1992.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6031-barzani-recalls-kurdistan-front-let-us-unite-our-ranks.html>

- **British newspaper: Maliki created suitable atmosphere for jihadists return to Iraq**



Shafaq News / “Financial Times” British newspaper believed on Tuesday, that the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki will lead to “divide” Iraq as a result of giving priority to the “sectarianism interest “and hit the protests in areas with a Sunni majority , describing Maliki as “preparing a suitable atmosphere for the return of armed factions to the country on the back ground of those reasons.

“The collapse of the United Iraqi state was a result of historical factors that swept the Middle East, particularly the conflict in Syria , the fear of failure in Afghanistan , conflict in

Iran and the failure of two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians,” The newspaper said in an article published under the title “the vanishing of Iraq” briefed by “Shafaq News”.

The newspaper added that “10 years after the invasion of Iraq, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a Shiite Muslim could not put the interest of the country above sectarianism as he did not make any effort to share power in Iraq, which threatens to divide the country “.

“Maliki, who hit with an iron fist the Sunni organized protests in many parts of the country, closed many of their own media, thus he is creating a very suitable atmosphere for jihadists to return to the country,” according to the article.

The Iraqi army forces raided last month the Sit-in Square of Hawija southern Kirkuk province, killing and wounding dozens, including soldiers.

Attacks on the security forces of the army and police forces and the Awakening forces loyal to the government have increased in the provinces of Anbar, Nineveh, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salahuddin after military forces stormed the Sit-in Square of Hawija.

It seems that Hawija town inflamed the feelings of the demonstrators in Iraq, which threatens the possibility of a sectarian conflict return that took place in Iraq in 2007 and 2006 , probably no one come out of it as a winner and thousands were killed due to its impact .

“New York Times” newspaper quoted in its edition on Sunday of US officers intelligence as saying that “Al-Qaeda will not assume the leadership of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq in the future, but it will be led by an organization led by senior members of the former Baath party established by former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein , in reference to the Naqshbandi organization .

The Naqshbandi organization is of armed groups accused of “terrorism” and responsible for numerous acts of violence that have taken place over the past years, it has emerged for the first time in 2008 through publications Blog on its name and spreads in areas of northern Iraq and has extensions with Islamist militants in Kurdistan region.

Anbar, Nineveh , Salahuddin, Diyala and Kirkuk provinces are witnessing for more than 120 days demonstrations and sit-ins against the

federal government and Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6028-british-newspaper-maliki-created-suitable-atmosphere-for-jihadists-return-to-iraq.html>

2. IRAN

- **Iran's UNESCO Envoy Condemns Sacrilege of Islamic Sanctities**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Mohammad Reza Majidi in a statement strongly condemned the sacrilege of Islam's religious sanctities, and urged international bodies to take the necessary actions to safeguard Islam's holy sites.

Armed rebels affiliated to the Wahhabi extremists attacked the mausoleum of Hojr ibn Oday in the Damascus suburb of Adra last week and exhumed his grave taking his remains to an unknown location.

"It goes without saying that historical places like the one which was recently destroyed are cultural assets of all nations having unique values and it is an obligation to safeguard

them against destruction and desecration," the statement said.

"It is quite obvious that committing such ugly acts by Wahhabi extremists in Syria is indicative of their lack of belief in Islamic and humanistic values and blatant violation of religious sanctities," it added.

The statement added that the extremist and radical groups sow the seed of discord, animosity, hatred and division through indulging in violence, terror and massacre of innocent people as well as sacrilege of the sanctities.

The Nusra Front, affiliated to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization, has taken up the responsibility for the desecration of Oday's grave.

Hojr was a staunch supporter of the first Shiite Imam Ali (PBUH) and led the army of Muslims to victory in several crucial battles. He and his sons finally fell victim to their loyalty to Imam Ali (PBUH) and were murdered at the order of the Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah in the year 660 CE.

Yet, the Wahhabi extremist groups continued their desecration of Shiite sanctities and

damaged the mausoleum of another highly revered Shiite figure in Jordan on Saturday.

The Wahhabis attacked the mausoleum of Ja'far al-Tayyar, a close companion of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and the brother of Shiite Islam's first Imam, and torched his grave in Karak province in Southern Jordan today.

The sacrilege of Islamic sanctities has aroused intense feelings in Muslim lands, specially in Shiite communities.

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei strongly condemned the recent desecration of the shrine of a highly revered Shiite figure in Syria by Wahhabi extremists, and called on all Muslims across the world to continue their protests against the sacrilege of Islamic sanctities.

Addressing a large number of Iranian officials in Tehran on Monday, the Supreme Leader praised the Sunni Muslims' reaction to the Wahhabi extremists' attack on the mausoleum of Hojr ibn Oday, one of the close companions of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), in the Damascus suburb of Adra, and said their protest displayed the high level of their vigilance and deep insight.

"Muslims' reaction to this bitter accident and condemnation of this move should continue because if scientific figures, intellectuals and political elites of the Islamic Ummah don't fulfill their duty, conspiracies will not stop at this limit," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

He said that Muslim intellectuals and scholars should prevent any further spread of such plots by means of political methods, religious fatwas (decrees), articles and other peaceful measures.

Ayatollah Khamenei referred to the clear footprints of enemies revealed in such sacrilegious moves, and blamed those who have kept silent on the development, saying, "International organizations and figures as well as those politicians who mourn for the destruction of an ancient artifact, have kept mum about this flagrant insult."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168260>

- **Iran Cautions Turkey about Provocative Moves along Syrian Borders**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The regional states should avoid escalating the critical conditions in Syria, a senior Iranian foreign ministry official said after Turkey started wargames along the borders with Syria.

Addressing reporters in his weekly press conference in Tehran on Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast referred to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's verbal attack against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Turkey's 10-day military maneuvers along the Syrian borders, and said, "The sensitive conditions of the region need the regional states' wisdom and any mistake which ignites military conflict in Syria will have heavily dire consequences for the region due to the complicated nature of the issue."

"The regional states would be better off if they make their utmost efforts to end conflicts instead of military moves and providing the ground for the trans-regional states' military intervention," he added.

Mehman-Parast reminded that stability in Syria will bring security to the neighboring states and their borders.

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=9107168072>

- **Egypt's President Mursi Stresses Iran's Key Role in Settlement of Syrian Crisis**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Egyptian President

Mohammad Mursi in a recent letter to high-ranking Iranian officials has stressed Tehran's irreplaceable role in the settlement of the Syrian crisis, a senior aide to the Iranian Supreme Leader said.

"Egyptian President Mr. Mursi had stressed in the letter that solution of the Syrian problem, and rather all other regional issues, is impossible without Iran's partnership," Supreme Leader's Advisor for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati said, addressing a large gathering of people in the Northwestern city of Tabriz on Tuesday night.

"All people, including friends and foes, admit this reality that Iran plays a key role in this regard," Mursi said in his letter, according to Velayati.

Late in April, Mursi sent two envoys to Iran to follow up Cairo's proposal to establish a quartet in a bid to discuss and help soothe the crisis in Syria.

The delegation comprised Egyptian president's chief of staff Refaa al-Tahtawi and his foreign relations advisor Essam el-Haddad.

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

In April, a senior Iranian diplomat said Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are slated to hold a meeting on Syria in the very near future in a bid to discuss and help soothe the crisis in the Muslim country.

"Egyptian authorities will announce the date of the quadrilateral meeting between Tehran, Cairo, Riyadh and Ankara," Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian said.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister pointed to mediating role of Iran and Egypt in the Syrian crisis, and said, "Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi's initiative for the settlement of the crisis (in Syria) was discussed during my recent visit to Cairo."

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armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

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<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168284>

- **Iran Calls for Strong Reaction against Israeli Attacks on Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran once more condemned the Zionist regime's Sunday attack on Syria, and called on international bodies to halt such aggressions by Israel.

"It is now the time to deter Israel from carrying out such aggression against the people of the region," Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said during a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.

Salehi arrived in Damascus for talks with the Syrian President in the wake of two separate Israeli airstrikes on a suburban Damascus area last week.

A large number of the world countries, including Iran, Russia, China and Yemen condemned the Israeli aggression against Syria. Lebanon, which borders both Israel and Syria, also condemned the air strikes and called on the UN Security Council to condemn violations of its air space by Israel.

On Sunday, Israeli rockets struck the Jamraya research center in the vicinity of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out an airstrike targeting a research center in a suburb of Damascus after heavy losses were

inflicted on al-Qaeda-affiliated groups by the Syrian army.

Syria's Foreign Ministry sent letters to the United Nations and its Security Council stating that Israel's aggression shows the links between Tel Aviv and terrorist groups operating in Syria including the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front.

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told reporters in Damascus on Sunday that Syria had the right and the duty to defend its people by all available means and it would not give in to Israeli acts of aggression.

The Israeli attacks on Syria have made the Middle-East more dangerous, the Syrian information minister said.

Also a senior Syrian military source told the Russia Today on Monday that the Zionist entity used depleted uranium shells in the strike in Syria.

"When the explosion happened, it felt like an earthquake, and then a giant golden mushroom of fire appeared. This tells us that Israel used depleted uranium shells," the source said.

The Sunday Israeli aggression was Tel Aviv's second strike on Syria in three days and the third in the last five months.

The Jamraya facility was also targeted in an Israeli airstrike in January.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168266>

- **Iran Strongly Rejects Claims about Relations with Al-Qaeda**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran categorically denied some recent allegations about links with the terrorist Al-Qaeda group, and said such baseless claims are raised by those states which support terrorists themselves.

"The report is baseless and unfounded; the Islamic Republic officials' way of thinking about terrorist groups is clear," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast said in his weekly press conference in Tehran on Tuesday.

"We are the biggest victim of terrorist acts and raising such claims is part of Iranophobia and Islamophobia projects," he added.

Mehman-Parast underlined that those countries which raise such claims are staunch advocates of terrorist groups, including the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO, also known as the MEK, PMOI and NCRI), and said, "This issue is clear to the world public opinion and the western countries should stop categorizing terrorists to good and bad and should recognize the rights of independent regional states."

The MKO, founded in the 1960s, blended elements of Islamism and Stalinism and participated in the overthrow of the US-backed Shah of Iran in 1979. Ahead of the revolution, the MKO conducted attacks and assassinations against both Iranian and Western targets.

The group started assassination of the citizens and officials after the revolution in a bid to take control of the newly-established Islamic Republic. It killed several of Iran's new leaders in the early years after the revolution, including the then President, Mohammad Ali Rajayee, Prime Minister, Mohammad Javad Bahonar and the Judiciary Chief, Mohammad Hossein Beheshti who were killed in bomb attacks by MKO members in 1981.

The group fled to Iraq in 1986, where it was protected by Saddam Hussein and where it helped the Iraqi dictator suppress Shiite and Kurd uprisings in the country.

The terrorist group joined Saddam's army during the Iraqi imposed war on Iran (1980-1988) and helped Saddam and killed thousands of Iranian civilians and soldiers during the US-backed Iraqi imposed war on Iran.

Since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the group, which now adheres to a pro-free-market philosophy, has been strongly backed by neo-conservatives in the United States, who argued for the MKO to be taken off the US terror list.

In September 2012, the last groups of the MKO terrorists left Camp Ashraf, their main training center in Iraq's Diyala province. They have been transferred to Camp Liberty transient facility near Baghdad.

The US formally removed the MKO from its list of terror organizations in early September, one week after the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, sent the US Congress a classified communication about the move. The decision made by Clinton enabled the group

to have its assets under US jurisdiction unfrozen and do business with American entities, the State Department said in a statement at the time.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168070>

- **Iran holds 7th court session to hear Kahrizak case**



The seventh court hearing has been held for three Iranian judges over the death of three detainees who lost their lives while they were held in the now-closed Kahrizak Detention Center in the Iranian capital, Tehran, during post-election events in 2009.

The Tuesday session was held behind closed doors in the Iranian capital and lasted for four hours.

Saleh Nikbakht, the defense attorney presenting the family of Amir Javadifar - one of the detainees who died in Kahrizak - said Director General of Tehran's Prisons Sohrab Soleymani and four Kahrizak detainees had appeared in the hearing as witnesses.

In December 2009, a statement from the Judicial Organization for the Armed Forces announced that, according to forensic information, three of those detained during the country's post-election events died while being held at the Kahrizak facility.

The prison was ordered shut by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in July 2009.

Nikbakht said after the hearing that, "I have decided not to speak because [former Public Prosecutor of Tehran] Saeed Mortazavi said if we talk, he will talk, too."

Mortazavi has been accused of involvement in the deaths of the three detainees.

The next court session is scheduled to be held on May 13, Nikbakht added.

Ali Kamrani, whose son was among the three detainees who died in Kahrizak, also

commented on the court hearing after the session.

According to Kamrani, Director General of Tehran's Prisons Soleymani was asked during the session whether the Kahrizak facility had been a legal detention center. He responded that it was not, Kamrani said.

Abdolhossein Rouholamini, the father of another of the dead detainees, said those who had appeared in the hearing were told by the court not to reveal the details of the session, but that they were at liberty to talk about their sentiments toward the hearing.

We are satisfied with the court and this satisfaction is increasing, Rouholamini added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/08/302431/iran-holds-7th-hearing-on-kahrizak-case/>

- **Coalition of Five to reach consensus on registration for election: Aboutorabi-Fard**

Iranian presidential hopeful Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard says the Coalition of Five will reach a consensus in the next few days on which of the coalition's members

should register for the country's 11th presidential election.

He made the remarks in a speech at a university in the city of Karaj on Tuesday, the Fars News Agency reported.

Aboutorabi-Fard also said his years-long political experience shows that "Iran's executive branch as an exceptional capacity to develop the country."

The principlist hopeful stressed that the administrative decisions made by the 11th president "should be supported by expert and scientific" analyses.

The Iranian deputy Majlis (parliament) speaker went on to say that Iran has to try to reach the highest levels of political and economic powers in a world where bullying and the use of force has an upper hand in the global politics.

Yahya Al-e Eshaq, the chairman of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, former Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, General Inspection Office of Iran Director Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, and MP Mohammad Reza

Bahonar are the other members of the Coalition of Five.

The registration of hopefuls for Iran's presidential election, which will be held on June 14, officially began on Tuesday morning on the order of the Iranian Interior Ministry.

Hopefuls can register for the election until May 11.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/08/302378/coalition-of-five-to-reach-consensus/>

- **'Iran nuclear plan clear, operational'**

TEHRAN, May 6 (MNA) – Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman says reaching to an agreement with P5+1, provided that it is in NPT framework is becoming closer.

Ramin Mehmanparast said that a meeting had been arranged for Jalili and Ashton in May 15th in Istanbul, Turkey. "In the final round of talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, P5+1 had

proposed plans and demands on Iran's nuclear program. A midway meeting was held to begin the cooperation as a step forward to solve Iran's nuclear program issue, where we proposed an operational and detailed plan," explained Mehmanparast.

"The P5+1 representative stated their need to council with their relevant governments, and it was agreed that Ashton would inform Jalili of the result," said he, and believed that Iran's waiting would be indication of its rational approach which would hammer out an agreement between two sides.

"The optimum way to reach a desired outcome is the recognition by the P5+1 of our nuclear rights," he added. "According to NPT regulations, we have been adhered to our commitments, and would protect Iranian people's rights to enjoy nuclear science for peaceful purpose of development of the country," he asserted.

The Spokesman for the diplomatic body also added that "P5+1 might have doubts and concerns, but we could reach an accord to lessen their concerns and doubts in the agreement framework, if our nuclear rights are recognized."

Mehmanparast stressed that Iran expected that negotiations should not be delayed, and having the logical framework of the negotiations, we discuss the operational plans according to NPT framework.

He also pointed to phone call between Iran's FM and his Egyptian counterpart about quadrilateral negotiations of Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia on Syrian crisis. "Mr. Morsi proposed the four-sided plan to solve the crisis. Meetings were held, some in Foreign Ministry and experts levels. President-level negotiations were held in Cairo and Islamabad with three countries participating," explained he.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman commented on relations with the US. "The US should abandon enmity toward Iran, if it is to have a relationship, which both sides benefit from," he added. He also pointed to the Supreme Leader's remarks, who said that Iran was not optimistic about the US, neither had it had opposition.

"The very negotiation is possible, but it is very crucial that when the negotiation takes place and whether it is benefiting us," he asserted.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1821335>

- **Iran FM Salehi hold talks with President Assad in Damascus**

Iran foreign minister has met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus after his brief visit to Jordan where he warned against any foreign intervention in Syria.

Ali Akbar Salehi arrived in the Syrian capital on Tuesday, and went straight into talks with President Assad to discuss the latest developments in the crisis-hit country.

Salehi is visiting Syria in response to an invitation from Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem. He is also scheduled to hold key talks with high-ranking Syrian officials.

Earlier in the day, Salehi met with top Jordanian officials including his Jordanian counterpart, Yasser Judeh, Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour and King Abdullah II.

During his talks in Amman, the Iranian official reiterated Tehran's support for the Syrian people and government, and voiced the Islamic Republic's strong opposition to any foreign intervention in Syria.

He also called on the Syrian government and the opposition to resolve the country's crisis through negotiations.

Syria has been experiencing a deadly unrest since March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of security personnel, have been killed by foreign-backed militants, which Damascus says are trained and supported by the Western powers and their allies in the region.

Several international human rights organizations have accused foreign-sponsored militants of committing war crimes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/07/302339/iran-fm-meets-with-syrian-president/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Syrian Electronic Army Hacks Israel's Main Infrastructure (SCADA)**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian Electronic Army (SEA) launched a successful cyberattack on the main infrastructure system of Haifa, one of the most important ports in Israel, disrupting the operation of the servers in charge of

urban management systems and public utilities in the city.

The SEA said it has hacked into the Haifa infrastructural system at around 22:00 (local time) Monday night, underlining that the hacking was done in retaliation for the recent Israeli strike on a research center in suburban Damascus.

"We would like to announce that in response to the unfair and illegal attacks of Israel on DATE, the SEA has penetrated one of the main infrastructural systems (SCADA) in Haifa and managed to gain access to some sensitive data," SEA said in a message left for the Israeli operators of Haifa SCADA system.

"Also, the SEA is now able to cause irrecoverable damage to the Israelis' infrastructural systems," it added.

Israel staged an airstrike on Syria on Sunday, hitting the Jamraya research center in the vicinity of the Syrian capital, Damascus. Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out the airstrike - the third in the last few months - after heavy losses were inflicted on al-Qaeda-affiliated groups by the Syrian army.

The SEA warned that it could cause a major blast by continuing the attack on the servers of the Haifa infrastructural systems, but avoided further move due to inescapable human casualties as it did not want a story like the recent accident in Texas which claimed the lives of dozens of the people.

"This message carries a serious warning to the Israeli statesmen. They should know that not receiving a quick reaction to such childish ventures does not show the Syrian inability in doing so, but it is based on wisdom and humanity considerations. We do not approve of killing civilians and innocent people as this is an Israeli type of solution," added the message.

"Also an advice to those who left their homelands for many years, dreaming a happy and safe life, deceived by politicians whose deed is much far from their slogans; Do the best to express your objection to Israeli policies, since we do not like to see innocent people getting killed like in Texas, US, but this time in Haifa."

The SEA has recently gathered a name for itself in the hacking market by successful attacks on a wide range of the western media, most notably the hacking of AP Twitter

accounts and sending of bogus messages which wreaked havoc on stock exchanges. The hackers tweeted that President Obama had been injured in a bomb attack at the White House, causing a temporary 143-point drop on the Dow Jones industrial average.

In an apparent effort to cause disruption and embarrassment in the West and to spread support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the SEA has so far hacked the Guardian, the BBC (including BBC weather, BBC Arabic Online and BBC Radio Ulster), France 24 TV, the National Public Radio in the United States, al-Jazeera, the government of Qatar, El, and Sepp Blatter, the president of football's governing body Fifa, whose Twitter account was hacked.

Cybersecurity experts told the Guardian that the SEA attacks are designed to disrupt and embarrass the West and pro-Israeli lobbies, states and entities.

In the BBC case, the SEA, which emerged two years ago, hacked into the Twitter accounts of the British broadcaster and sent nine bogus tweets in an hour, including some with anti-Israeli sentiments, and others saying "Long Live Syria", and the "Syrian Electronic Army Was Here".

Guardian itself believes that the SEA attack was a reprisal for a number of leaked emails from the Assads and their inner circle that it had published.

Hours after the cyber-attack began, the SEA said it has targeted the Guardian for spreading "lies and slander about Syria" and said it was in a "state of war with the security team of Twitter".

But this last cyberattack is certainly a boost in the platform of SEA operations as it required much more sophisticated knowledge and capabilities compared with the previous hackings; giving the Syrian Electronic Army the opportunity to rise to a different level of fame.

SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) is a type of industrial control system (ICS). Industrial control systems are computer controlled systems that monitor and control industrial processes that exist in the physical world. SCADA systems historically distinguish themselves from other ICS systems by being large scale processes that can include multiple sites, and large distances. These processes include industrial, infrastructure, and facility-based processes.

Industrial processes include those of manufacturing, production, power generation, fabrication, and refining, and may run in continuous, batch, repetitive, or discrete modes.

Infrastructure processes may be public or private, and include water treatment and distribution, wastewater collection and treatment, oil and gas pipelines, electrical power transmission and distribution, wind farms, civil defense siren systems, and large communication systems.

Facility processes occur both in public facilities and private ones, including buildings, airports, ships, and space stations. They monitor and control heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC), access, and energy consumption.

Hackers usually leave a couple of files for their colleagues to prove that their allegations are true. The SEA has left the following files on its website to show others in the hacking industry that it has had a successful security breach and hacking into the Haifa SCADA system.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168206>

- **Envoy Deplores Israel's Air Raid on Syria as "Unjustifiable, Provocative"**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mohammad Khazayee strongly condemned the recent Israeli airstrike on Damascus as "unjustifiable and provocative", and called on the international community to show proper reaction to the move.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the current president of the UN General Assembly, Khazayee said that the Israeli aggression against Syria was "a serious violation of the international laws".

"Nothing can justify the use of force and aggression against an independent country and the aggressor should be accountable for the consequences of its illegitimate move which has endangered international peace and security," the Iranian diplomat stated.

He added that the Israeli move will seriously increase tension and instability in the region.

On Sunday, Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out an airstrike targeting a research center in a suburb of Damascus after heavy losses were inflicted on al-Qaeda-affiliated

groups by the Syrian army. According to Syrian media reports, Israeli rockets struck the Jamraya research center.

Syria's Foreign Ministry sent letters to the United Nations and its Security Council stating that Israel's aggression shows the links between Tel Aviv and terrorist groups operating in Syria including the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front.

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told reporters in Damascus on Sunday that Syria had the right and the duty to defend its people by all available means and it would not give in to Israeli acts of aggression.

The Israeli attacks on Syria have made the Middle-East more dangerous, the Syrian information minister said.

The Sunday Israeli aggression was Tel Aviv's second strike on Syria in three days.

The Jamraya facility was also targeted in an Israeli airstrike in January.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168044>

- **Israel plans to wage another war on Gaza: Islamic Jihad**

The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine has said the Israeli regime was planning to wage another war on the besieged Gaza Strip, Press TV reports.

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

"The Zionist enemy is getting ready for a major military operation on Gaza. We expect an escalation in the coming days but we are not sitting idle. Our military wing has been training for another war and it will not be a cakewalk for Zionists when they come to confront our fighters," said Khader Habib, a senior Islamic Jihad official.

The Israeli regime launched an eight-day war on Gaza last November, killing 177 Palestinians, including women and children.

Israel launched another war on the coastal enclave in December 2008-January 2009. More than 1,400 Palestinians were killed in the 22-day Israeli onslaught and thousands more injured.

Mustafa Sarsour, a college student, told Press TV he was sure Israel would wage another war on Gaza within days or weeks.

"Almost everyone you talk to in Gaza will tell you that they are worried about another war especially with continued Israeli threats," he said.

Analysts say the Tel Aviv regime has been issuing threats as a tactic to stop Palestinians from resisting Israel's aggression.

Hani al-Basous, a political analyst, said the Israeli forces might target leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in its new aggression as well as Palestinian infrastructure.

"This is part of Israelis psychological war ... on people and military in the Gaza Strip and to threat the people to get them under pressure all the time," he added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/08/302396/israel-plans-to-wage-fresh-war-on-gaza/>

- **Zionists seek clash between Muslims and Christians: Expert**

The Zionist-controlled US media has schemed against the public, fooling them into accepting the false idea that the religion of Islam accepts violence, Press TV reports.

“The American media, the Zionist media has made it look like it is Islam to be condemned, and it is Islam as the criminal,” said Hisham Tillawi, the host of Current Issues TV and radio.

The journalist went on to condemn Zionists for brainwashing people into believing the false concept that the religion of Islam is associated with terror acts including the Boston Marathon bombings and the September 11 attacks.

“Anyone with elementary knowledge knows that the religion [of Islam] does not condone the killing of civilians, the killing of children...Even at a time of battle - the Prophet (PBUH) told soldiers going into battle ‘don’t kill women and children’,” Tillawi said.

The activist added that the Zionists seek a clash of civilizations and “it is no secret that the Zionist media and the Zionists out there would love to see the Christian world against the Muslim world so they can be on top of the world basically - whatever is left of it.”

The Zionist regime under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been making huge efforts in the past years to press the US and other Western allies to join its military and sanctions endeavors against nations in the Middle East and Africa - including Iran, Lebanon and Syria - with fabricated claims.

“This has really nothing to do with the religion at all. It has to do with politics - it is the politics of civilizations that supposedly will be in conflict. They are moving according to this agenda that if you have the Western civilization against the Islamic civilization then probably those people who are planning this conflict of civilizations will win at the end,” Tillawi concluded.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/07/302345/zionists-seek-clash-of-civilizations/>

- **Report: Stephen Hawking joins academic boycott of Israel**

LONDON (Ma'an) -- Renowned British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking has pulled out of a high level conference in Israel in protest against Israel's treatment of the

Palestinians, British daily The Guardian reported Wednesday.

Hawking was set to participate in the Israeli Presidential Conference entitled 'Facing Tomorrow', due to be held later this month, but last week wrote a letter to Israeli president Shimon Peres to explain that he would not be attending.

The British Committee for the Universities of Palestine issued a statement, in coordination with Hawking, saying that it was "his independent decision to respect the boycott, based upon his knowledge of Palestine, and on the unanimous advice of his own academic contacts there".

The world-famous academic has visited Israel four times in the past, The Guardian reported, but condemned Israel's war on Gaza in 2009, telling Al-Jazeera that "the situation is like that of South Africa before 1990 and cannot continue."

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel was launched in 2004 and states that "boycotting Israeli academic and cultural institutions is an urgently needed form of pressure against Israel that can bring about its compliance with

international law and the requirements for a just peace."

In 2011, the University of Johannesburg severed ties with Israel's Ben-Gurion University in a campaign backed by over 400 South African academics and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The global movement for the campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions says that dozens of artists, musicians and cultural figures have refused to perform or canceled scheduled performances in Israel, including Bono, Snoop Dogg, Elvis Costello, Carlos Santana, Faithless, Naomi Klein, Ken Loach and many others

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=593303>

- **Israeli forces detain Grand Mufti of Jerusalem**

JERUSALEM (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces on Wednesday raided the home of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and detained him for interrogation, the Mutfi's office said.

Israeli intelligence officers broke into the home of Sheikh Muhammad Hussein in the

Jabal al-Mukabbir neighborhood of East Jerusalem and took him to the Russian Compound detention center, his office said.

"At 8.10 a.m. two vehicles from Israeli intelligence arrived at our house and detained my father, taking him to the Russian Compound detention center for interrogation," one of Sheikh Hussein's sons told Ma'an.

An Israeli police spokesman told AFP that the Mufti was being questioned on suspicion of involvement in a "disturbance" at the Al-Aqsa compound on Tuesday.

"Some chairs were thrown at a group of Jews on the Temple Mount," which Muslims refer to as Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Mickey Rosenfeld told AFP of the previous day's incident.

The Grand Mufti is in charge of Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa mosque.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=593323>

- **Israeli settlers enter Al-Aqsa compound under guard**

JERUSALEM (Ma'an) -- A group of settlers accompanied by Israeli forces entered the Al-Aqsa mosque compound on Wednesday for the second consecutive day, with Muslim worshipers prevented from praying at the holy site, locals said.



Israeli police officers erected several checkpoints at entrances to the Al-Aqsa compound and prevented all Palestinian women, and men under 50, from entering, witnesses said.

Elderly men were only allowed in after they had given their identity cards to Israeli officers.

Israeli forces evacuated all young worshipers who managed to enter the mosque for dawn prayers, allowing only employees of the endowment ministry, who work at the mosque, to remain.

Over 100 settlers then entered the Al-Aqsa compound at 7 a.m., entering through the Moroccan gate accompanied by Israeli forces.

A day earlier, a group of around 40 settlers toured the compound escorted by police officers to commemorate the eve of Jerusalem Day, a controversial national holiday in Israel celebrating the "unification" of the city, or occupation of East Jerusalem.

Israeli politicians, such as Likud's Moshe Feiglin, have in the past called for Jewish prayers at the compound, and control and access to the holy site is a particularly sensitive religious and political issue.

Earlier this year, PLO official Saeb Erekat slammed an attempt by Feiglin to enter the compound, calling it a "violation of the sanctity of the place as well as a direct provocation against Palestine, the Arab- and Muslim world."

The Al-Aqsa compound, containing the mosque and the Dome of the Rock, is the third holiest site in Islam and abuts the site where Jews believe the ancient Second Temple stood.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=593359>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Maghreb foreign ministers discuss integration, security**

Security co-operation and regional economic integration were at the top of the agenda as Maghreb foreign ministers met in Rabat on Sunday (May 5th).

The Maghreb needs a unified and integrated strategy to better face common security and economic challenges, officials agreed at the 31st session of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) Council of Foreign Ministers.

A regional approach is especially needed to deal with threats to security in light of the recent Sahel crisis, they stressed.

[Siham Ali] Regional integration is needed now more than ever, Maghreb diplomats say.

Security has to be the top priority, Libyan Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdelaziz said during a press briefing, adding that a

global solution must be found to the crisis in Mali.

"The task of the UN is above all to assist with the rebuilding of the state of Mali and to make the transition to democracy through free and transparent elections and the renewal of state institutions," stated Abdelaziz.

The Libyan official said he was pleased that Maghreb countries signed an agreement to establish a preventive security strategy.

Security problems can only be solved through a global approach based on development, the Maghreb ministers stated.

Algerian foreign minister Mourad Medelci expressed hope that the broad-based security vision would bolster economic activity.

The officials noted that co-operation is necessary to encourage investment by improving the business climate and harmonising customs and financial policies, the ministers noted. The parties agreed to finalise free trade protocols by

supplementing what has been done in the past.

The current situation in the Maghreb requires "a common and integrated strategy", stressed Moroccan Foreign Minister Saad Eddine El Othmani, adding that there needs to be political will to put the legal texts establishing the UMA into effect.

The ministers are well aware of the current challenges and the aspirations of the peoples of the Maghreb.

Young people should be made "central to the union's meetings in order to work out a Maghreb-wide strategy on young people, address the expectations of this social category and strengthen their sense of belonging to the Maghreb region", said UMA General-Secretary Habib Ben Yahia.

Maghreb officials agreed that regional co-operation needs to be jump-started in order to satisfy people's expectations.

"Developing the UMA's working mechanisms and tools is important if the desire for Maghreb unity based on solidarity and complementing one another

is to be realised," said Tunisian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Leila Bahria.

She highlighted the need "to create a free trade area and a Maghreb-wide bank, promote inter-Maghreb trade, facilitate the movement of capital and improve coordination in the field of security".

The foreign ministers also agreed to draft a common vision for dialogue with the European Union, according to Aouf Ben Mohamed.

They decided to set up a co-ordination mechanism between the five countries' ambassadors in Brussels to intensify dialogue, exchange of views and evaluation of EU stances, El Othmani said.

"This kind of meeting between Maghreb officials offers an opportunity to strengthen co-ordination and find the best ways of dealing with security and economic challenges," said political analyst Jamal Farhane. \

"There is an urgent need to overhaul partnership mechanisms to boost the region's economy in particular," he added.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/05/07/feature-01

- **Algerian Islamist party picks new leader**

Algeria's Movement for a Peaceful Society (MSP) voted in Abderrezak Mokri as head of the Islamist party on Saturday (May 4th), replacing Bouguerra Soltani.

In choosing Mokri as party leader, activists followed the hard-line wing of the party and sealed the split with the government that began with the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

The fifth MSP congress, which was held over the week-end in Algiers, brought together Islamist leaders from several nations, including Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Egypt, and even Palestinian movement Hamas.

MSP leaders said they wanted to send a clear message to the Algerian government about the movement's determination to follow the path of opposition.

The election of Mokri as MSP leader symbolised the decision made by the

party's grassroots, which had accused the leadership of making too many concessions to the government.

According to Liberté, "MSP has chosen a leader known for his radical attitude towards the government. This will move the party even further away from the policy of entryism which it espoused until it withdrew from the coalition in December 2011."

"By an overwhelming majority -177 votes to just 65 for the former chairman of the party's advisory council, Abderrahmane Saidi, the party has opted for a radical path by advocating a complete break with the government," El Watan editorialised.

"And the symbol of this movement is, of course, Abderrezzak Mokri, who has worked for several years already to bring the MSP back to its original position," the paper added. "He was the man responsible for the party's split with the coalition government (RND, FLN and MSP) that was created just before the 2004 presidential election, which has been the main victim of the Arab Spring."

In response to these criticisms, the new MSP leader countered that he was "on a mission of peace, not war or revolution", adding that those who feared him were "either incompetent or corrupt".

Mokri claims that under his leadership, the party will be "clearly and candidly" in opposition "We don't want a revolution, because that is dangerous for the country. We want to bring about a peaceful change by keeping up the pressure on the government," Morki said.

Yet the ambitions expressed by the MSP's new leader are at odds with the climate on the streets of Algeria. Many young people do not regard Islamist parties highly and believe that they have no chance of taking power in Algeria.

"Do they (the Islamists) think that a revolution can be imported from elsewhere and that all they have to do is grow a beard, wear a kameez and recite a few verses of the Qur'an to get round us?" asked Amine Larab, a management student. "They're fakes. They are in the business of politics, like all the other parties, and in politics, everyone lies,

everyone makes promises and fails to keep them."

His friend Reda Bouhali burst out laughing when he read the press reports about the MSP congress, saying: "It's a party that can't make up its mind: one day it's in government, the next it's in opposition. What credibility does it have left now?"

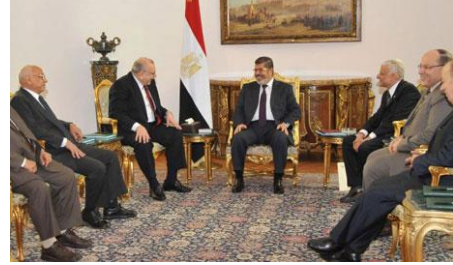
Older people were even more wary, as they lived through the days of the now-dissolved Islamic Salvation Front.

"We will never let these men with beards come back and create problems for us. We've suffered enough because of them," said teacher Nadia Guermadi.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/05/07/feature-03

- **Egypt's judicial authority bill: A needed 'purge' or 'massacre' of judiciary?**

Opponents of judicial authority bill say law aims to 'Brotherhoodise' judiciary, while bill's Islamist proponents say legislation is needed to 'purge' Egypt of Mubarak-era judges



Representatives of the Egyptian presidency and the heads of Egypt's top law courts will meet on Wednesday in preparation for a scheduled 'justice conference' to be held within the context of the ongoing crisis between Egypt's judiciary and the Muslim Brotherhood – the group from which President Mohamed Morsi hails – regarding a proposed judicial authority law.

The scheduled justice conference will be the second of its kind in Egypt's recent history, with the first having been held in 1986. The upcoming conference was called for by President Morsi after a number of Egyptian judges openly defied a judicial authority draft law proposed by the moderate-Islamist Wasat Party in Egypt's Shura Council (the upper house of parliament, currently endowed with legislative powers).

The law, if passed, many judges argue, would result in the retirement of a large number of judicial officials, paving the way for authorities to appoint judges loyal to the Brotherhood.

The bill reduces the retirement age for judges from 70 to 60, which would effectively pension off about a quarter of Egypt's 13,000 serving judges. While opponents describe the law as a 'massacre' of the judiciary to the benefit of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood, proponents argue it is a necessary step aimed at 'purging Egypt's judiciary' of Mubarak-era officials.

MPs who proposed the law argue that the retirement age was gradually increased from 60 to 70 during the rule of ousted president Hosni Mubarak in order to prolong the terms of those judges loyal to the former regime.

This gradual increase of the retirement age during the Mubarak era was severely criticised by many independent-minded judges at the time, some of whom joined the fight for judicial independence. These included Ahmed Mekki, the Morsi-appointed justice minister who recently

resigned – ironically – against the backdrop of the current crisis.

'Brotherhoodisation' of Egypt's judiciary?

Opponents of the bill, meanwhile, see the move as one engineered by the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Shura Council, which aims to infuse Brotherhood members and sympathisers into Egypt's judicial system.

Fears that the Brotherhood was seeking to control various branches of the state were heightened by the method by which the current prosecutor-general, Talaat Abdullah, was appointed – namely, via a surprise constitutional declaration issued by Morsi last November that was widely condemned as 'dictatorial' by critics.

Now, Morsi's detractors contend that the Brotherhood is targeting the judiciary as it did the office of top prosecutor, which had been headed by judge Abdel-Meguid Mahmoud, long regarded as a Mubarak loyalist.

"What we're witnessing is a move to Brotherhoodise the judiciary," Judge Mohamed Hamed El-Gamal, former head

of Egypt's State Council, told Ahram Online. "Using this law, the Brotherhood will appoint its members to judicial posts, or we'll see Brotherhood sympathisers already in the judiciary promoted to high positions."

El-Gamal voiced concern about what he describes as Brotherhood ' sleeper cells ' – namely, judges aligned with the group, such as former Court of Cassation deputy Mahmoud El-Khodeiry, who ran on the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party list in 2011 parliamentary polls.

Nasser Amin, director of the Cairo-based Arab Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession, told Ahram Online that he entertains similar concerns regarding the proposed judicial authority law.

"This law would allow authorities to appoint their loyalists," said Amin, nothing that the law stipulates that 25 percent of newly appointed judges must be professional lawyers. This, Amin believes, will help lawyers associated with the Brotherhood and its allies join the ranks of the judiciary en mass.

Amin says the law would effectively retire all senior judges presiding over Egypt's most important courts. The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), which is in charge of new appointments, would be completely overturned as a result, he asserted.

El-Gamal, believing it is the intent of the presidency and the Brotherhood to adopt such measures, says it is against established judicial tradition worldwide to have judges with political affiliations.

"The judiciary is like the police or the army; you can't have judges obedient to the Brotherhood's leadership, as this would inevitably lead to conflicts of interest," El-Gamal said.

Amin worries that such an arrangement would enable the Brotherhood to clamp down on its political opponents.

Nabil Abdel-Fattah, an expert on Islamist movements and director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Historic and Social Studies, draws a dark picture of the impact of such a law on politics.

Abdel-Fattah likewise believes that if the Brotherhood is allowed to appoint its

supporters to the judiciary as a result of the bill, Egyptians would be faced with judges who answer to the Brotherhood's leadership.

"The nature of the Egyptian judicial system would be transformed," said Abdel-Fattah, arguing that the modern judicial system established in Egypt in the twentieth century would be undermined by the tendency of conservative judges to issue outdated rulings.

"The unity of the judicial system is at risk; there may even be an inclination to return to Sharia courts," he said, referring to Ottoman-era religious courts that some Salafist sheikhs want to see re-established. Muslim Brotherhood figures, however, have not voiced any intention to establish such courts.

The draft law, asserts Abdel-Fattah, would also lead to rulings against media outlets not aligned with Brotherhood policies. Islamists, including President Morsi himself, are carrying out a campaign against media outlets that oppose them, which they accuse of corruption and loyalty to the ousted Mubarak regime.

Abdel-Fattah says that judges loyal to the Brotherhood would not hesitate to issue rulings that would negatively impact free speech or order the arrest of opposition activists – a view shared by Amin.

Fears unfounded, say Islamists

Islamist politicians, for their part, say such fears are baseless. Ramadan Battikh, constitutional law professor and Shura Council MP for the Wasat Party – which proposed the draft law – told Ahram Online that such criticisms were unjustified.

According to Battikh, it is judges themselves who control legislation. The SJC is the authority on new judicial appointments, he says, and so therefore the executive has nothing to do with it. "The argument by the bill's opponents doesn't hold any water; reducing the retirement age had been one of the judges' demands to begin with," he said.

However, speaking to government daily Al-Ahram, Assistant Justice Minister Hisham Raouf objected to the proposed judicial authority law, saying it

represented an attempt to infringe on Egypt's judiciary.

"While we objected to previous increases in judges' retirement age under Mubarak, our objections had only been based on our resistance to any form of political exploitation," he said.

While he didn't speak of an attempt by the Brotherhood to "take over" the judiciary, Raouf told Al-Ahram that the judicial authority bill would effectively "demolish" Egypt's judicial institution.

Raouf, like others, voices concerns that many of the more experienced judges will be lost and that the move would serve to hinder judicial processing due to the large number of cases that would have to be transferred to new judges.

Raouf said the main reason for Mekki's resignation was the fact that the bill wasn't referred to any judicial body for review. He pointed out that there had been a judicial authority bill – which judges helped draft – that had been presented to the People's Assembly (the lower house of Egypt's parliament,

dissolved last year by military order), but which had been shelved.

"Where were those who are calling for a new judicial authority law and who are attacking the judiciary when the other bill was shelved?" he asked, saying that, contrary to what the Islamists are saying, the bill in its current form does not aim merely at judicial reform.

The Wasat Party, meanwhile, said it won't withdraw its draft law following President Morsi's meeting with top judges, at which the president promised to personally adopt a judicial authority law drafted by judges to be presented to the Shura Council.

However, Battikh told Ahram Online that, despite his party's refusal to withdraw the bill, the judges' draft would be given priority when it is eventually finalised.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70873/Egypt/Politics-/Egypst-judicial-authority-bill-A-needed-purge-or-m.aspx>

- **Survey Probes Role of Religion in Tunisian Society**

Though Tunisia is perceived as one of the most liberal countries in the Arab world, a recent survey shows that religion strongly influences some aspects of society, such as attitudes toward Sharia law and marital relations.

Fifty-six percent of respondents favor making Sharia the official law of Tunisia and 93 percent reported that women should always obey their husbands, according to a poll released last week by the Pew Research Center, a U.S.-based think tank.

The report, entitled “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society,” surveyed Muslims from 39 countries.

Researchers interviewed 1,450 Tunisian Muslims for the study, with Pew asserting that a representative sample was taken of all 24 governorates in the country. But the data for Tunisia was collected in November and December 2011, meaning a year and half has passed between the interviews and the report’s release.

Attitudes regarding the role of Islam in governance were mixed. While a majority favored making Sharia the country’s official law, 40 percent of those interviewed believe that Tunisian law already follows Sharia very or somewhat closely and 72 percent believe Sharia can have multiple interpretations. Fifty-eight percent believe that religious leaders should have some political influence in Tunisia, but only 42 percent say that religious judges should decide family law and property disputes.

Imam Taieb Ghozzi of the influential El-Okba Mosque in Kairouan told Tunisia Live that the report’s assertion that 56 percent of Tunisians support the implementation of Sharia in Tunisia seems accurate, although he would prefer the number was a little higher.

“Sharia is not about cutting off hands and legs and implementing the stoning of adulterers,” Ghozzi said. “Sharia needs people who can interpret and analyze it deeply and delve into its meaning.” It must be implemented rationally, he said, taking international law into consideration and making adjustments based on the context of modern life.

Responses in the report suggest that Islam has a strong influence on some attitudes toward the role of women in Tunisian society. In addition to the vast majority of respondents reporting that women should obey their husbands, only 15 percent of those surveyed said that daughters and sons should have equal inheritance rights. While a majority of Tunisians polled did not approve of honor killings against women for premarital sex or adultery, 38 percent believed that it could be justified in some circumstances.

On other issues related to the role of women, the Tunisian responses could be seen as more liberal. Eighty-one percent of respondents believe a woman should be able to divorce her husband. Eighty-nine percent believe a woman should decide for herself whether to wear the veil — a higher number than the Palestinian territories or any of the five other Middle East and North African countries surveyed. Tunisians were also less supportive of polygamy than any other Muslim population surveyed, with 67 percent disapproving of the practice.

The Tunisians polled expressed a general disapproval of homosexuality, drinking alcohol, abortion, and extramarital sex. For each of these issues, over 80 percent of Tunisians polled said that they were morally wrong. Slim majorities said that divorce and family planning were morally acceptable.

One hundred percent of the respondents said that all or most of their friends are Muslim, and 45 percent stated that they believe in evolution. Fully 59 percent said that they did not use the Internet.

Bakhta El-Quadhi of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women was shocked by the vast majority who agreed that a wife should obey her husband.

“This represents a kind of patriarchy that is overwhelming Tunisian society,” she said. “The preachers and imams lead us to such a mentality, but it is not a problem of religion, it is a problem of the use of religion.”

Ghozzi agreed that women should obey their husbands, but emphasized that this conviction has limitations.

“He should not treat her as a slave,” he said; She must obey him in religious matters and when interests are shared, but marriage is ultimately a partnership. He emphasized that men should not order their wives to stop working if they wish to have a job.

El-Quadhi was skeptical of the low support for equal inheritance for men and women.

“I don’t think this is accurate,” she said. “This should be higher. I know some conservative religious families that still believe girls and boys should have the right to equal inheritance.” She said that this mindset was caused by misinterpretation of a verse in the Quran.

She felt that 89 percent was the minimum level of support in Tunisia for freedom regarding wearing the veil.

“Even veiled women do not impose their choice on others,” she said. She added that it was rare to meet anyone, even conservative Islamists, who would not stand next to a non-veiled women.

Ghozzi said he thought the number was too high and misrepresents actual

sentiments regarding the veil in Tunisia. It might make sense if one were talking about the niqab (a veil covering the face) he asserted, but not about the veil in general.

“The veil is widely disseminated in Tunisian society today,” he said, “even among educated women.” He believes that the veil does not discriminate against or suppress women, and says that veiled women should be free to leave the home and meet people “without fear or weakness.”

Ghozzi said that the figure stating 81 percent of Tunisians support a woman’s right to divorce is exaggerated.

“Divorce is not in the hands of women,” he said, but qualified this in cases when the husband in mistreating her.

El-Quadhi feels that the mindset of Tunisian since the poll data was gathered in late 2011 may have become more conservative.

“The attitudes of Tunisians will have changed, with an increase of intolerance due to the increased presence of

preachers,” she said. Tunisian administrations are also filled with officials who want to show the public they are good people by overtly displaying their religious commitment, she added.

Ghozzi also said the role of religion in Tunisian society is in flux.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/05/07/survey-probes-role-of-religion-in-tunisian-society/>

- **Political Parties Agree on Right to Strike**

Political parties reached a consensus yesterday regarding the right to strike as a high-level national dialogue process resumed in Carthage.

They agreed to remove restrictions on the right of workers to strike that had been outlined in the draft constitution, Mouldi Riahi of Ettakatol, one of the ruling Troika parties, told state news agency TAP. Previously, the draft demanded that, even during strikes, public equipment and supplies must be protected and essential

utilities must continue “to meet the urgent needs of citizens.”

Nadia Chaabane, a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) member affiliated with Al Massar party, previously told Tunisia Live that the draft article would “oblige all public facilities to continue working during the strike.”

The national dialogue process includes the three parties in the ruling coalition plus several opposition parties. Nidaa Tounes and Al Jomhuri, two opposition parties, stopped participating in April following disagreements over the nature of the country’s future political system, according to Sami Tahri, press officer for the General Union of Tunisian Workers (known by its French acronym UGTT).

But with the recent announcement by Ennahdha’s Shura Council that the party will advocate for a mixed political system, Al-Jomhuri and Nidaa Tounes rejoined the dialogue, Tahri said.

Maya Jribi, secretary general of the Al Jomhuri opposition party, told state news agency TAP that the parties have reached a consensus over the nature of

the Tunisian political system through the national dialogue process.

Abdel Hamid Jelssi, a member of Ennahdha's political bureau, said that his party is eager to support initiatives aimed at reaching a consensus with opposition parties regarding fair and transparent elections, according to the national TV website.

Tunisia's leading labor union will also be restarting its own long-delayed national dialogue process.

A dialogue was initiated in October of last year by the UGTT to establish a consensus among Tunisian politicians over the constitution and the future of the country, but this been put on hold.

The UGTT will now host a national dialogue conference on May 16. More than 56 political parties will participate in this conference, which will address scheduling the election and finalizing the drafting of the constitution, said Ghassen Kessibi of the UGTT.

This conference will be co-organized by the Tunisian League of Human Rights and

the National Commission of Lawyers, Tahri said.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/05/07/political-parties-agree-on-right-to-strike/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Berri sets date for key session on elections law

BEIRUT: Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri scheduled a plenary session of the legislature on May 15 to study a new electoral law to govern this summer's polls.

On Tuesday Berri warned rival political factions that they would have to choose between the current "1960 law" and the Orthodox Gathering proposal if they fail to reach agreement on a new voting system by the end of next week.

Berri's warning came amid a flurry of political activity aimed at narrowing the gap over a new electoral formula to replace the controversial 1960 law, with the March 8 and March 14 parties in a race against time ahead of next week's

Parliament sessions, which could prove crucial for a voting system.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Berri said he would convene Parliament for four consecutive days starting from May 15 to May 18 in the hope that lawmakers would be able to agree on a new law to govern the June elections.

MP Ahmad Fatfat warned Wednesday that lawmakers from the Future parliamentary bloc to which he belongs would pull out of the legislative session if the Orthodox proposal is put up for a vote.

“The Future [bloc] will withdraw from the May 15 plenary session if the Orthodox law is raised in the meeting,” Fatfat told the Voice of Lebanon radio station.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-08/216324-berri-sets-date-for-key-session-on-elections-law.ashx#axzz2ShJ6ngDO>

- **EU envoy voiced importance of Lebanon disassociation**

EU envoy to Lebanon Angelina Eichhorst on Wednesday met with caretaker Prime

Minister Najib Miqati and stressed how important it is that Lebanon follow its official policy of disassociation from the conflict in Syria.

A statement issued by envoy Eichhorst's office reported her as saying that “Lebanon had chosen a policy of disassociation which the EU supports, and called on all parties in Lebanon and in the region to respect this position.”

“Eichhorst expressed the European Union's concern by the recent developments in Syria and called on all to respect the principle of sovereignty and to refrain from any action which could undermine the already fragile situation in the region,” the statement added.

Lebanon has been beset by a divide over the conflict in neighboring Syria, with Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah vowing to protect Shiites in Syria amid reports of fighters from his party aiding the regime in its fight against rebels.

The divide over the Syrian crisis in Lebanon was further emphasized by a call made by Sunni cleric Ahmad al-Assir on Monday, urging Muslims and the

Lebanese people to fight alongside the rebels in Syria.

The firebrand Sunni cleric rose to prominence for his outspoken opposition to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his calls for disarming Hezbollah.

Regional tension increased over the weekend after Israel hit targets in Syria overnight Thursday and Saturday.

Baabda Palace is satisfied with the ongoing contacts and coordination between rival Christian factions to agree on a new electoral law that ensures better representation for all segments of society, according to sources familiar with the issue.

Maronite Bishop Boulos Matar, a special emissary of Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai, met President Michel Sleiman at Baabda Palace Tuesday to brief him on the outcome of his talks with a number of political leaders, including Speaker Nabih Berri, MP Walid Jumblatt and former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, on a new electoral law. Matar's talks with these leaders stemmed from the need for inter-

Christian rapprochement, whose signs began with the weekend contact between Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun and his archfoe, Lebanese Forces chief Samir Geagea.

The Aoun-Geagea phone conversation was followed two days later by a meeting between Geagea and caretaker Energy Minister Gebran Bassil, from the FPM, at Geagea's residence in Maarab.

During the meeting with Matar, Sleiman encouraged inter-Christian agreement on a new electoral law but said it should serve as the springboard for national consensus, which is more important than an inter-Christian rapprochement. This is especially because Lebanon is facing a crucial stage, requiring people to abandon their sectarian alignments and ponder a nonsectarian electoral law, the sources said. Matar, the sources added, quoted the patriarch as saying that inter-Christian agreement on a new electoral law would eventually be reached under the president's sponsorship.

According to Baabda sources, Sleiman rejects seeing an agreement on a new electoral law linked to the formation of a

new Cabinet, because each issue had its own constitutional mechanism. With regard to the FPM-LF contacts, sources following the issue said the talks were based on a conviction among Christian leaders that the endorsement of a new electoral law was of utmost priority, even at the expense of the formation of a new Cabinet.

The FPM-LF contacts have shaken up the impasse over the electoral law after Bkirki signaled its acceptance of a hybrid vote law, combining proportional representation with a winner-takes-all system. Last week's visit by Marada Movement leader Suleiman Franjeh to Kataeb MP Sami Gemayel at the latter's residence in Bikfaya came in the framework of promoting a hybrid vote law based on proportional representation rather than on a majority system, the sources said.

The Aoun-Geagea conversation and Geagea's meeting with Bassil came after Aoun had received information ahead of Sunday's Israeli airstrike on Syria, warning of "a dangerous security deterioration internally," as one source put it. Aoun and Geagea have agreed on constant

coordination in order to protect Christian areas from any security incidents as a result of other groups' struggle over the crisis in Syria, they said.

According to the sources, Geagea and Bassil discussed laying the foundations for an electoral, and not political, alliance if the elections are held on the basis of the 1960 law, with the possibility of the Kataeb Party and the Marada Movement joining this alliance.

The LF and the FPM have decided to await Rai's return from South America to brief him on what they had agreed on, the sources said. They also agreed to bolster the presidency, by halting verbal attacks on Sleiman. The LF and the FPM will each consult with their Muslim allies and while Aoun said he could guarantee the participation of Hezbollah, but not Berri, Geagea promised to persuade the Future Movement to accept this alliance, the sources said.

The two sides also agreed that Bassil serve as a permanent liaison between the LF and the FPM, with a meeting between Aoun and Geagea possibly materializing before Friday, the sources said.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/eu-envoy-voiced-importance-of-lebanon-disassociation>

- **Sleiman backs Christian accord on vote law**



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<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-08/216267-sleiman-backs-christian-accord-on-vote-law.ashx#axzz2ShJ6ngDO>

6. SYRIA

- **Russia, US Agree To International Syria Talks**

Russia and the US will hold a new international conference later this month in an attempt to push the Assad regime and Syrian opposition into talks on a political transition.

The two countries agreed on the need to convene talks "as soon as possible" and said they would aim to build on a transition plan set out last year in Geneva.

Speaking after talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and other officials, US Secretary of State John Kerry said that plan "should not be a piece of paper", but rather "the roadmap" for peace.

Mr Kerry, who arrived in Moscow on Tuesday for crucial talks aimed at shifting Russia's stance on Syria, said the goal is still to bring the Assad regime and opposition representatives together for talks on an interim government.

The Geneva plan was an agreement in June last year on the need for a transitional government in Syria, but the opposing sides have disagreed on how to implement it, and critically as to whether Syrian President Bashar al Assad would need to step down first.

In his first visit to Russia since becoming Secretary of State, Mr Kerry emphasised the need for the two countries to work together on the issue and insisted they shared common ground.

He said: "The United States believes that we share some very significant common interests with respect to Syria: Stability in the region, not having extremists creating problems throughout the region and elsewhere."

For his part, Mr Putin reportedly kept Mr Kerry waiting three hours for their meeting at the Kremlin, fiddled with his

pen while his guest spoke, and made no mention of Syria in his own public remarks.

Russia has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions proposing sanctions on the regime and remains emphatically opposed to any suggestion of military intervention in the conflict.

Its Foreign Ministry expressed serious concerns on Monday at what Moscow said were signs that international public opinion was being prepared for the possibility of armed intervention and said it was examining reported Israeli air strikes near Damascus on May 3 and 5.

Russia has warned that further military action in the country could destabilise the region, and pointed to claims that Syrian rebel forces have used the nerve agent sarin against civilians in the country.

Mr Kerry's visit coincides with the first anniversary of Mr Putin's return to the Kremlin, in a year that has seen relations between the two countries strained on a number of fronts, not least US criticism of Russia's record on human rights.

But the US Secretary of State said the two countries could co-operate on other issues, and that Mr Obama was looking forward to a planned meeting with the Russian leader at the G8 summit next month.

Mr Kerry said: "He (Mr Obama) is looking forward to seeing you on the side of the G8 in Ireland and would reiterate that there are many issues, economic, economic cooperation, the challenges of North Korea, Iran, Syria and many other issues on which he believes that we could cooperate very significantly."

Mr Putin did not mention Syria in his televised remarks, but talked in general terms about the need to work together.

He said: "We recently had a substantial phone conversation with President Obama. And we had an opportunity to discuss many aspects of our relations.

"I think it is very important that our key ministries, our foreign ministries and agencies, work together to resolve the acutest issues of the modern world."

Gone was the optimistic talk of a "re-set" in US-Russian relations that characterised the American approach to the Kremlin during Barack Obama's first term.

In its place seems to have emerged a more pragmatic approach to the areas of common interest between the two countries, not least counter-terrorism in the wake of the Boston bombings.

Sergei Markov, a former United Russia member of parliament, now vice-chancellor of Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, told Sky News the visit was an opportunity to improve relations between the pair.

He said: "At the moment Russian-American relations are very bad, but both presidents do want to improve the situation. This is a new stage.

"The fact that the Secretary of State is meeting the president is not unusual - the secretary is a messenger of the president, so it is really is a dialogue between presidents."

But Mr Markov warned the chances of a breakthrough on Syria were slim.

He said: "There are very small chances to reach a deal on Syria, because there are too many contradictions in their positions.

"Russia has military interests in Syria: it has a military base there and several arms contracts. The US seems to have found the only country with which we have a good relationship in the region - there are countries with a worse democratic record in the region - why doesn't the US meddle in their internal politics?

"Russia opposes the changing of regimes by force. If the US changes the regime in Syria, they might want to do the same with Iran, and then who is next, Belarus? Russia doesn't want this."

http://web.orange.co.uk/article/news/russia_and_us_agree_international_syria_talks

- **West seeks to spread war in Syria: British journalist**

The West and its regional allies seek to spread the conflict in Syria by aiding the militants operating in the country and

refusing to facilitate a political resolution of the conflict, says a British journalist.

“If they were genuinely interested in saving lives ...[,] western leaders would be using their leverage with the rebels' regional sponsors to negotiate a political settlement,” Seumas Milne wrote in an article in the Guardian on Tuesday.

The British journalist further said the US, Britain, France and their regional allies, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Jordan, are funding the militants in Syria.

“Airlifts of arms to the Syrian rebels, coordinated by the CIA, have increased sharply in recent months to become what one former US official calls a ‘cataract of weaponry’. British and American forces are training rebel fighters in Jordan. The worth of US aid to the Syrian opposition has doubled to \$250m, while the EU has now lifted its oil embargo to allow exports from rebel-held areas.”

“The result will certainly be to ratchet up the death toll and spread the war,” Milne added.

He further pointed to the recent Israeli acts of aggression against Syria and said, “Israel is clearly intervening in the war” in Syria.

On May 5, Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out an air attack targeting a research center in a suburb of Damascus, following the heavy losses of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups inflicted by the Syrian army. According to Syrian media reports, Israeli rockets struck the Jamraya research center. The Jamraya facility had been targeted by another Israeli airstrike in January.

Milne described the Israeli airstrike on Syria as “unprovoked and illegal,” which was supported by “the US and British governments.”

The British journalist also pointed to the fact that the US and other Western governments as well as Israel are “making common cause with al-Qaida.”

In an interview with Press TV, Dr. Kevin Barrett, an American political analyst earlier shed light on the relations between the Israeli regime and the al-Qaeda terrorists in Syria.

According to the political analyst, Israel, working with groups such as the terrorist al-Nusra Front, has crafted the current war on the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to spread instability in the region.

The al-Nusra Front, which has pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, has been behind many of the deadly bombings targeting both civilians and government institutions across Syria since the beginning of violence in March 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/08/302439/west-seeks-to-spread-war-in-syria/>

- **Syrian army regains control of strategic town in south**

The Syrian Army has regained control of a strategic town in southern Syria following heavy clashes with foreign-backed militants operating inside Syria.



Reports say the Syrian forces have released the town of Khirbet Ghazaleh on Wednesday from the militants after about two months of clashes. The town is situated near the Jordanian border.

According to the opposition sources, some 1,000 militants withdrew from the town after they lost hope that aids would come from Jordan.

The sources also said that the Syrian Army's success in the area has raised resentment among militants over what they consider as lack of support from Jordan in their fight against the Syrian government forces.

On May 4, the Syrian troops drove out militants from towns of Aziza and Tall Assan, located near the northwestern city of Aleppo.

The army also discovered tunnels dug by the militants in Aziza, and secured a

strategic bridge that linked several towns in the Aleppo countryside.

Earlier in the day, the Syrian forces regained control over two key areas in Ghouta, near the capital Damascus, where a large number of militants were killed in the operations.

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 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/2013/05/08/302430/syrian-army-captures-strategic-town/>

- **US and Russia bid to revive Syria peace talks**

UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi hails agreement between US and Russia on bid to find end to Syria conflict.

The United States and Russia have agreed to push both sides in Syria to find an end to the bloodshed, offering to hold an international conference in search of peace.

UN-Arab League envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi on Wednesday "warmly welcomed" the agreement, a statement from his office said.

"This is the first hopeful news concerning that unhappy country in a very long time," it said. "The statements made in Moscow constitute a very significant first step forward. It is nevertheless only a first step."

"There is every reason to expect" backing for the accord from the remaining UN Security Council permanent members, the statement said.

"It is equally important that the entire region mobilises in the support of the process," it added.

In talks which stretched late into the night, US Secretary of State John Kerry met first for more than two hours with President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday and

then for a further three with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"We agreed that Russia and the United States will encourage both the Syria government and opposition groups to find a political solution," Lavrov told reporters at a concluding news conference that ended after midnight.

Hopefully by the end of May the two ministers working together could convene an international conference to build on the Geneva accord agreed by world powers last June for a peaceful solution in Syria, they said.

Al Jazeera's James Bays, reporting from the UN headquarters in New York, said that the meeting between Kerry and Lavrov was significant because for the first time both countries were on the same page with regards to the political solution for Syria.

But he said they have not yet resolved the fate of President Bashar al-Assad.

Geneva agreement

One such solution is the Geneva communique. The agreement, which was reached by world powers on June 30, set out a path towards a transitional government.

The accord was never implemented because the temporary ceasefire for which it also called was never put in place.

"We believe that the Geneva communique is the important track to end the bloodshed in Syria," Kerry said, describing the agreement as a roadmap to a "new Syria".

During his meeting with Putin, Kerry said: "The United States believes that we share some very significant common interests with respect to Syria - stability in the region, not having extremists creating problems throughout the region and elsewhere."

In response, Putin said his government has agreed "to cooperate in maintaining the stability" in Syria and make sure the country does not descend into further violence, Al Jazeera's David Chater, reporting from Moscow, said.

He also reported that Putin announced that he will hold separate one-on-one talks with President Barack Obama at the G-8 Summit in Northern Island on June 16 and 17.

Both the US and Russia endorsed a plan for a political solution for Syria last June but have differed over how to implement it.

Kerry said President Obama also believes Russia and the US could cooperate "significantly" on issues including North Korea, Iran and economic ties, which both sides said have not lived up to their potential.

Kerry's visit is part of an effort to improve relations between Russia and the US, which have been strained by disagreements over issues including human rights and Syria since Putin's return to the Kremlin a year ago.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/05/20135716287710849.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Three killed in Abu Dhabi apartment fire

Three people were burnt to death and eight others — all Asians — sustained minor to moderate injuries in a residential apartment fire at the capital's prime Airport Road on Tuesday evening.

According to the Abu Dhabi Police, the fire broke out in a nine-storey building late in the afternoon after the Asr prayers, claiming three lives and injuring eight. The blaze erupted on the third floor, destroying the entire apartment. The smoke that spread to other apartments forced people to take refuge on the rooftop and outside.

"The Central Operations Room of the Abu Dhabi Police received a call about the fire at 4.20pm. Firefighters and other rescue and safety teams from different civil defence and police centres rushed to the site. The priority was to put out the fire and evacuate the building. This was done quickly to prevent further casualties. In the fire, three people were killed and eight injured people were rushed to hospital," said Captain Abdullah Al

Tamimi, Head of Customer Services and Public Relations Directorate of Civil Defence.

He said the area was cordoned off by the police and traffic department patrols to avoid any hurdle in the rescue operation. Hundreds of people had gathered around the area. “The fire was brought under control as soon as the fire brigades had the access to the floor. It was a big fire which destroyed the apartment and claimed three precious lives. As one team was engaged in putting out the blaze, another team evacuated all the residents. The smoke that spread to other apartments caused suffocation,” Al Tamimi said.

He said all those affected by the smoke were treated on the spot by a team of paramedics. “Immediately after putting out the blaze, we started the cooling process of the entire building with high-tech equipment so that the residents could return,” he added.

Al Tamimi said an investigation is already under way to find out the cause of the fire and if the building management had taken all safety measures.

He called on the public not to crowd near such accident sites as it impedes traffic and prevents the arrival of the civil defence and ambulance vehicles to the site.

Eyewitnesses said they saw many people, including bachelors and families, coming out of the building in a terrible condition. “They were coughing after inhaling smoke,” said Mohammed Rashid, an Emirati.

Another eyewitness, an Indian watchman of a nearby build-ing, said he was having a nap in his room after prayers when he smelled smoke and rushed out of his room, only to find the blaze in the building.nissar@khaleejtimes.com

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/inside.asp?xfile=/data/crime/2013/May/crime_May18.xml§ion=crime

Sedition case hearing to continue on May 12, 13

The state security circuit of the Supreme Federal Court has set May 12 and 13 to continue the hearing of defendants in a

case of 94 people accused of forming an illegal and clandestine organisation. On Tuesday, the court heard the final pleadings of the Public Prosecution and a number of defendants.

Tuesday's hearing was opened with the Public Prosecution recounting the charges and what had been said by the prosecution witnesses.

In its indictment sheet, the Public Prosecution added some information like demonstrations and rallies held in front of the UAE embassy in the UK, an attempt to mount pressure on UAE embassies in Geneva and France, setting up of a human rights organisation in Europe, and dealing with 10 human rights organisations aiming to defame the country.

A number of the defendants who worked with tourist companies tried to portray a tarnished image of the country to their customers, to achieve their goals, the Public Prosecution said, noting that, by doing so, the defendants were trying to gain the support of foreign organisations, and force the country to recognise the organisation. It alleged that they wanted to gradually control the Civil Society organisations and then proceed to get

memberships in the FNC and key areas of the government.

The Public Prosecution said evidence showed that the defendants had met with the Deputy General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and requested him to support them, and held a meeting with President Mohammed Mursi of Egypt, and Turkey's Prime Minister Rəcəb Tayyip Erdoğan. Some of them even held meetings with US Deputy Consul-General in the UAE, and with members of the European parliament.

Pieces of evidence also showed that the organisation members had coordinated with an Iraqi man to act as a middleman to meet with members of the US Congress. The chargesheet said all the international meetings of this group aimed at building up relationships to mount pressure on the UAE government, and to win foreign opinion against the UAE leadership.

According to the Public Prosecution, the defendants had issued an internal edict (Fatwa) that legalises lies and spreads fake news on arrests in the UAE.

The defendants had also worked on supporting the Islamic movements and the Muslim Brotherhood in the AGCC countries, pointing out that they are the worthy inheritors of the rule.

While asking the court to levy strictest punishment on them, the Public Prosecution said they also opened multi-lingual TV channels, websites and social networking sites to gain sympathy of different nationalities to support them in achieving their objectives.

After the first recess, a number of accused gave their pleadings. They all underlined their loyalty and allegiance to the country and rulers of the emirates. The accused wondered how such serious charges were brought against them, categorically denying all such charges. They said they are committed to the UAE Constitution and laws, and that their religion does not allow them to disobey the Ruler.

Each one of the accused talked about his career history as most of them are well known trainers and academicians in the Emirati society.

Some of the accused told the court that the allegations in the arraignment sheet were wrong, including the charge that they attempted to sneak and penetrate into the security bodies of the country, as well as speaking to foreign channels for defaming the country. The judge, in a reply to the accused's plea, advised them to focus on what was stated in the investigation and not the prosecution's indictment memo.

They said they are from families close to the royal family and some of them had worked long for the Rulers and have good relationship with the country. "How come that we think of capturing the rule," one accused wondered.

Some of the accused have narrated the infringements they and other members of Al Eslah Society had faced over the past years like how had they been ordered retirement and others.

One of the accused pointed out that he will confront anybody who tries to seize the power. "How can I do such an act when my allegiance is to the country," he asked. The same accused said he will do

whatever the Ruler orders him even if he is ordered to stay in jail for ten years.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/inside.asp?xfile=/data/courtroundup/2013/May/courtroundup_May23.xml§ion=courtroundup

- **Tanzania arrests three Emiratis, one Saudi over deadly church attack**

Arusha's governor says investigations are still going on, noting that those arrested are only suspects who can be released or brought to trial.

ARUSHA (Tanzania) - Tanzania has arrested three Emirati men and a Saudi national over deadly church bombing, officials said Wednesday, clarifying earlier reports they were all from Saudi Arabia.

Five Tanzanians have also been arrested following the Sunday attack on a packed church in the northern city of Arusha that killed three people.

"There are three nationals of the United Arab Emirates and a Saudi... they were arrested while trying to cross the border"

into Kenya, Arusha's governor Magesa Mulongo said.

None of those arrested have been charged yet, he added.

"Investigations are continuing. They are only suspects at this time. They can be released or brought to trial; it will depend on the results of the investigations."

The bomb attack, which no group is known to have claimed yet, was described by Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete as "an act of terrorism" and was one of the worst such incidents to hit the east African country in years.

More than 60 people were injured when attackers hurled a bomb into the compound of the newly built Saint Joseph's Roman Catholic church.

The church, in the Olasti district on the outskirts of Arusha, was celebrating its inaugural mass at the time and was filled with worshippers, many of whom were sitting on benches outside.

Arusha is a town popular with tourists visiting the Serengeti national park and snowcapped Mount Kilimanjaro.

The Vatican's ambassador to Tanzania, Archbishop Francisco Montecillo Padilla, was among those attending mass at the church but was not harmed.

Officials have given no indication as to who might have carried out the attack, but tensions have been high between Tanzania's Christian and Muslim communities in recent months.

Kikwete, who said he was "shocked and deeply saddened" by the incident, has called on people to remain calm while police investigate the attack.

Around half of Tanzanians are believed to be Christian, and around a third Muslim, although there are no official figures.

In neighbouring Kenya -- whose troops invaded southern Somalia in 2011, prompting warnings of revenge by the Al-Qaeda linked Shebab insurgents -- several churches have been targeted in attacks similar to the Arusha blast.

While Tanzania does not have troops in Somalia, it is home to Islamist groups connected to radical groups in the wider region including the Shebab, according to United Nations experts.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58618>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

'4 Afghan policemen killed in bomb blast'

Four Afghan policemen have been killed and another wounded in a roadside bomb explosion in Afghanistan's eastern province of Ghazni, Press TV reports.

The blast occurred on Tuesday when a bomb planted by Taliban militants went off near Ghazni city.

The injured has been taken to a nearby hospital.

Taliban militants frequently use roadside bombs against foreign troops and Afghan armed forces.

Thousands of people have lost their lives in various parts of Afghanistan since the

US invasion in 2001. The country continues to be plagued with insecurity and violence, despite the continued presence of foreign forces.

After more than a decade of war, Washington has repeatedly been blamed for failing to keep its promises of bringing peace and security to Afghanistan.

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

- **'Afghans hold new anti-Pakistan rallies'**

Thousands of Afghans have held fresh anti-Pakistan rallies to protest against the recent border clashes between the two countries and Islamabad's support of militants in Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

Chanting slogans against Pakistan in the Afghan capital, Kabul on Tuesday, the protesters blamed Islamabad for what they said supporting terrorists carrying out bombings in Afghanistan.

In the provinces of Nangarhar and Kandahar, Afghans took to streets on the same day to protest against Islamabad's

alleged meddling in domestic affairs of the country and the border dispute.

On Monday, both countries' border guards clashed in a disputed border area near Nangarhar Province for the second time in a week.

In reaction to the clashes, Afghan lawmakers called for an end to diplomatic ties with Islamabad.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry also said in a strongly-worded statement that Pakistan will bear responsibility for the consequences of further clashes.

Similar fighting in the same area left an Afghan soldier dead and two Pakistani border guards injured last Tuesday.

The two neighbors have accused each other of beginning the firing on the border.

Relations between Kabul and Islamabad have been strained in recent months, especially over the delicate issue of the demarcation of their border.

The recent conflict focuses on a military gate which is partly built by Pakistan at a site that Afghan officials say is inside Nangarhar Province.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has ordered his top officials to take immediate action to remove the gate and other Pakistani military installations near the Durand Line.

Pakistan recognizes the Durand Line, the 1893 British-mandated border between the two neighbors, but Afghanistan says that activity by either side along the Durand Line must be approved by both countries.

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

- **Pakistan vote campaign halts over Imran Khan injury**

Pakistan's main parties on Wednesday suspended campaigning for weekend polls in honour of politician Imran Khan, who was in hospital with head and back injuries after falling at an election rally.

Television footage showed the retired cricket star and head of the Pakistan

Movement for Justice party (PTI) flat on his back in a hospital bed, wearing a neck brace, looking pale and groggy after his fall in the city of Lahore.

Doctors have advised one week's rest, throwing the reminder of his campaign for Saturday's election into jeopardy, but say his injuries are not life-threatening.

A televised statement that Khan gave from his bed overnight, urging people to vote for his party, has since been re-released as a "paid content" advertisement for his PTI party, seeking to tap into a sympathy vote.

"I did whatever I could for this country. Now remember 11th May, come out and vote for PTI without considering its candidates, just vote for PTI," the 60-year-old said in a weak voice.

Hospital spokesman Khawaja Nazir told AFP that Khan had one main head injury, two "fractures" to his back and a small injury to his shoulder.

"There is nothing serious to his injuries. He is in a private room, he is not in the ICU (intensive care unit). He has been shifted

from the ICU to a private room,” Nazir said.

Doctors are expected to provide a further update on his condition at 0900 GMT, but Nazir said that he has been “initially advised one week rest”.

Shafqat Mehmood, a spokesman for Khan’s PTI party, acknowledged that the injuries could stop Khan appearing at any further election rallies.

“It is clear that general campaign will continue, but Imran Khan may not appear in the rallies now, we will have to see the doctors’ advice,” he said.

Mehmood said that other men who fell from the lift with Khan were “fine” and were back home with their families with only minor injuries.

Khan, who won only one seat in 2002 and boycotted polls in 2008, has led an electric campaign, galvanising the middle class and young people in what he has called a “tsunami” of support that will propel him into office.

Saturday’s vote will mark a democratic milestone in a country ruled for half its history by the military, as the first time a civilian government has served a full term and handed over to another through the ballot box.

Khan’s main rival, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who is tipped to win the election, called off campaigning on Wednesday and conveyed his sympathies.

“Nawaz Sharif decided to suspend all his election campaign-related engagements scheduled for today,” PML-N spokesman Siddiqui Farooq said.

“Sharif had plans to address several rallies in Punjab but they have been cancelled now. We have not given any advertisements against PTI, we are running a positive campaign,” he added.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which controls Pakistan’s biggest city of Karachi, also announced on Twitter its leader Altaf Hussain, who is in self-exile in London, would not address supporters by telephone due to Khan’s condition.

Khan's fall was the latest dramatic twist to an election campaign that has been overshadowed by a series of attacks on politicians and political parties which have killed 111 people since mid-April, according to an AFP tally.

The Pakistani Taliban have condemned the polls as un-Islamic and directly threatened the outgoing ruling party, the secular Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and its main coalition partners, the MQM and the Awami National Party.

On Wednesday, a suicide bomber killed two people and wounded 23 others outside a police station in the northwestern district of Bannu, police said.

A female civilian and a policeman were killed when the suicide car bomber crashed into a barrier outside the station, local police chief Abdul Ghafoor Afridi said.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/international/2013/May/international_May241.xml§ion=international

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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