



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

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1. IRAQ

Hakeem stresses that the symbolic meeting of the country's leaders accomplish marvelous success

Leader of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, stressed that the symbolic meeting of the country's leaders, held recently, has achieved marvelous success.

In his speech during the festivity of the night of the Prophet's ascension, held on Saturday, June 8, Hakeem praised attending his invitation by all political leaders. He said that the meeting intended to break the political deadlock and break the ice, as well as provide positive environment for dialogue, clarifying that the meeting did not intend to solve all of Iraq's problems.

Hakeem called on the political forces to follow up the step of symbolic meeting with other steps by sitting around a table to realize national harmony; stressing the necessity to contain disagreements within the meetings' lobby and not take them to the media.

He expressed hope to keep up bilateral and three partite political meetings. Hakeem demanded the Executive Body to keep political leaders in the picture in the decision-making.

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

Khalil: Oil, Gas Law, Peshmerga rights, Article 140, issues that Maliki is to deal with in his visit to Kurdistan

Kurdish Alliance welcomed the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to the Region

to discuss issues agreed on by the Federal Government.

Kurdish Alliance's official, Mahma Khalil, told NINA on Saturday, June 8, that Maliki's visit to the Region is considered a step to bring points of view closer together and to discuss issues related to the Federal Government's practices, as well as implementing the Constitution and the principles of national partnership, in addition to other issues.

Khalil added that, "The Oil and Gas Law, the rights of the Peshmerga and Article 140 are among the most important issues to be discussed."

He added that the Kurdish demands are not new, they require coordination and consultation, they will remain until they are implemented.

It is worth mentioning that during his recent visit to Baghdad, Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, met with the Federal Cabinet, discussing with them the seven points of Erbil Agreement, they got initial agreement.

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

11/ suspected of Nukhaib incident arrested, south of Ramadi.

Security source in Anbar arrested today 11 suspected of Nukhaib incident, during a security crackdown carried out south of the city of Ramadi.

The source said to NINA : " Joint forces of army and police carried out a wide security crackdown in Nukhaib, Southern Ramadi led

to the arrest of 11 suspected and found a cache of weapons and explosives.

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

MP demands PM to hold the next Cabinet's meeting in Anbar and Nineveh

The MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Wahda al-Jumaili demanded Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to hold the next meetings of the Council of Ministers in Anbar province and later in Nineveh to create a national reconciliation between the government and the people of these two provinces. "

She said in a press statement on Saturday 8, June: "Holding Cabinet's meeting in the Kurdistan region, especially in the capital Erbil is a good initiative to demonstrate the size of the communication between the federal government and the provincial government in addition to make the Kurd Ministers feel that they are part of this country and do not work only for the region."

She added: "The presence of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in the provinces of Anbar and Nineveh and hold the Cabinet's meeting there will make the people there feel that they are part of this country and that the government is interested in them and meet their demands and creates a case of national reconciliation between the government and them and end the demonstrations after the protesters feel that there are figures in the government, represented by Prime Minister, interested in meeting their demands. "

Jumaili called on the prime minister not to make a link between him and the demonstrators to meet their demands and should he has to be present in these two provinces and hold Cabinet meetings, dedicated to meet the demands of the demonstrators. "

It is scheduled that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki will visit Arbil tomorrow and hold a meeting of the Council of Ministers there.

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

Maliki's visit to Kurdistan is the last chance for good relations between the center and the region

The MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance, Hassan Jihad described the visit of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to Kurdistan and held a meeting of the Council of Ministers as the last chance to reach good relations between the center and the region.

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / "The recent visit of the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani to Baghdad has contributed significantly to improve the atmosphere between the center and the region in addition to the initiative of President of the Islamic Supreme Council, Ammar al-Hakim."

He stressed that "the visit will address many issues and outstanding problems between the two governments and agreed upon in the framework of the constitution and the remaining will be discussed in the House of Representatives."

He explained: " The meetings will focus on several topics, including oil and gas law and amend the federal budget as well as the subject of compensation for the victims of the Anfal operations at the time of the former regime and the possibility of appointing a representative for the Kurdistan region in Baghdad and a representative of the federal government in Erbil, indicating that this visit represents a step in the right direction in the case of agreement on these contention points and some other points. "

It is scheduled that the cabinet will hold its next in the city of Arbil on Sunday.

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

MP: Putting conditions before negotiating with the government is an obstacle to complete the demands of the demonstrators

The MP, of the State of Law coalition, Haider al-Jurani described putting conditions before negotiating with the government, on the demands of the demonstrators, a dangerous precedent and an obstacle to any positive direction of the Government in completing many demands of the demonstrators.

Al-Jurani said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The events that took place and the demonstrations are politically and regional motivated, noting that House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi has contributed in fueling these demonstrations. "

He added: "Al-Saadi is a cleric and he decreed sanctity of Iraqi blood and called for dialogue with the government, therefore any obstacles in front of these dialogues are in favor of

those who want to disrupt the unity of Iraq and do not want dialogue, stressing that these conditions are launched by the extremists who want to tear Iraq, and Nujaifi's project of province is a clear prove on this. "

Jurani stressed that Nujaifi and those who mandated him should be realistic and deal responsibly with the big challenges facing the country and be a real part of the political process because they have very sensitive positions and represented in the Parliament. "

He explained that "The head of the Islamic Supreme Council, Ammar al-Hakim launched a national initiative to bring the views and calm atmosphere and put points on the letters, and this is the first step towards serious dialogue to resolve many issues, so this initiative must be hailed, adding that those who want put conditions and obstacles do not want to agree with this initiative.

The head of the House of Representatives, Osama al-Nujaifi put a condition to meet with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, which to accept the initiative of Sheikh Abdul-Malik al-Saadi and bring the killers of the demonstrators and worshipers in Fallujah, Hawija, Mosul and Diyala to the judiciary.

Nujaifi said in a press conference, held in Ramadi yesterday in the presence of Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha and outgoing Finance Minister, Rafie al-Issawi: "The initiative of Sheikh Abdul Malik al-Saadi is mature and accepted by all Iraqis and the government has to deal with it positively."

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

MP criticizes the silence of the federal government about Peshmerga's interventions in Kirkuk

The MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Yassin al-Obeidi criticized what he called the silence of the federal government about the Peshmerga moves in Kirkuk province.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that the Peshmerga forces of the Kurdish parties are moving now in the province of Kirkuk, suspiciously without any deterrent from the federal government. "

He added: "This silence cannot be explained, unless there is an agreement between the federal government and the Kurdish parties gives them freehand in this province and if there is no agreement, the Kirkuk's Arabs are demanding the government to intervene to stop these abuses, warning of the consequences of leaving these issues unaddressed."

Kirkuk's administration had started, days before, digging a trench around the city, which was considered by politicians in Kirkuk, isolation the city of Kirkuk from other Arab cities.

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

Holding Cabinet session in Arbil is a step to end the crisis between the center and the province

The MP, of the citizen bloc, Habib al-Turfi described holding the meeting of the cabinet in Erbil as a step in the right direction to end the crisis between the central government and the province.

He told the reporter of the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "The meeting is an extension of what happened in the symbolic meeting, which was held in the office of President of the Islamic Supreme Council Ammar al-Hakim"

He said: "This meeting will stir stillness on topics of the crisis and its causes as well as laws that disrupted in the House of Representatives for the lack of consensus between the federal government and the provincial government"

He added that: "The meeting will contribute in resolving things since there are many disrupted laws, including the oil and gas and the law of the Federal Court, which has been put for a vote several times , because there is no common views regarding the vital laws in addition to other important laws, which are supposed to be completed in the second legislative session. "

He stressed that: "all Iraqi politicians have to sit together even if there was disagreement among them, because Iraq is bigger than politicians' disagreement, stressing that the homeland and the citizen should be their superior aim."

It is scheduled the Cabinet will hold its weekly meeting tomorrow in Erbil.

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

2. IRAN

Iran raps Canada MPs for anti-Iran rights allegations

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Araqchi has condemned recent remarks by a number of Canadian parliamentarians

regarding the human rights situation of the Islamic Republic.

In a meeting titled "Iran Accountability Week" in late May, a group of Canadian legislators criticized human rights in Iran, alleging that the Islamic Republic violates the rights of Iranians, including women and ethnic minorities.

In reaction, Araqchi described the remarks as "ridiculous" and "politically motivated", adding the comments came as the Canadian government was facing political illegitimacy due to the country's 2011 election fraud.

The Iranian diplomat said that the allegations against Iran came as the Canadian Federal Court has confirmed that the country's 2011 federal election was fraudulent. He also criticized Ottawa for failing to take necessary measures regarding the genocide of Canada's aboriginal people.

"While the Canadian Federal Court has confirmed fraud in the [2011] federal election of the country and certain other important issues such as the genocide of Canada's aborigines ... have also not been addressed yet, Canadian public opinion expects the country's Parliament to seriously and immediately deal with such issues," Araqchi said.

In late May, the Canadian Federal Court confirmed that the country's 2011 federal election, which led to the victory of Stephen Harper's government, was fraudulent. The court emphasized in a ruling that it has found in no uncertain terms that widespread election fraud took place during the vote.

Araqchi also expressed hope that Canadian lawmakers would address the plight of the

aboriginals, in particular the issue of the hundreds of missing women and aboriginal girls.

Native Canadians remain among the poorest members of the Canadian society with most of them suffering poor educational, economic and social conditions.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/08/307865/iran-raps-canada-mps-for-antiiran-remarks/>

Leader stresses importance of Muslim unity against West

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has underlined the need for the Muslim world to unite against the West which has launched an open war on Muslims.

Addressing a group of Qur'an scholars attending the 30th edition of the Tehran International Qur'an Competitions on Saturday, the Leader said "unity and agreement among Muslims is an urgent duty."

Ayatollah Khamenei added that the Holy Qur'an invites Muslims to remain united and avoid division, and is against the colonialist way which creates discord among Muslims and fuels religious prejudices.

The Leader said discord among Muslims would result in "bloodshed, blind terrorism and its horrible consequences" and serve the interests of the Israeli regime, urging Muslims and Islamic governments to keep vigilant in facing such threats.

Pointing to the Islamophobia wave launched by the West, Ayatollah Khamenei said Western enemies have waged an open war on

Muslims and therefore the Muslim world needs to strengthen its internal capabilities.

The Leader emphasized that unity, solidarity and focusing on commonalities can further empower Muslims.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/08/307819/leader-stresses-muslim-unity-against-west/>

Iran awaiting Russia's response to S-300 proposal: Iranian envoy

Iran is awaiting Russia's response to Tehran's proposal to drop its lawsuit against Moscow over its failure to honor a contract on the delivery of S-300 air defense systems.

"The ball is in Russia's court, but we are ready to continue cooperation on S-300," Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Mahmoud Reza Sajjadi said on Friday, Interfax News Agency reported.

Iran filed a complaint with the International Court of Arbitration in Geneva against Russia's state-run arms export company Rosoboronexport in 2011 after Moscow failed to comply with its commitments to deliver S-300 air defense systems to the Islamic Republic.

On June 6, 2013, Sajjadi told Interfax News Agency that Tehran will withdraw its lawsuit if Russia honors its contract. He said if Iran sees that Russia has changed its position on the delivery of S-300 systems, the Islamic Republic will also "change its conduct."

The Iranian ambassador's remarks came after Russian Technologies (Rostech) CEO Sergei Chemezov said on May 30 that Moscow seeks to reach a settlement with Tehran to withdraw its lawsuit against Rosoboronexport

over the canceled deal as Russia's chances "to win the case are very slim."

Chemezov said that the US had applied heavy pressure on Moscow to stop the agreement under the pretext that the deal was against the sanctions of the UN Security Council.

The Russian official, added, however, that Washington later changed its rhetoric, saying the UN resolution did not specifically mention the S-300 system and claiming that Russia had acted on its own.

Under a contract signed in 2007, Russia was required to provide Iran with at least five S-300 defense systems.

Russia, however, refused to deliver the systems to Iran under the pretext that they were covered by the fourth round of the UN Security Council resolutions against Iran.

The Iranian Army has previously announced that it is manufacturing an indigenous missile defense system similar to the Russian S-300 and will unveil it in the next Iranian calendar year (beginning March 21, 2014).

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/08/307773/iran-awaiting-russias-reply-on-s300s/>

Tehran raps terrorist attack against Iranian pilgrims in Iraq

Iranian Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned Friday's deadly terrorist attack against Iranian pilgrims in Iraq.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Araqchi on Saturday described the attack as indiscriminate, unjust, and counter to all human and Islamic principles.

Sixteen Iranian pilgrims were killed in a terrorist bomb attack in the Iraqi city of Muqdadiah in Diyala Province, about 80 km northeast of the capital Baghdad, on Friday morning.

The blast, killing nearly 20 people overall, ripped through the pilgrims' bus, which was heading for the holy city of Najaf. At least 45 others, many of them thought to be Iranians, were also wounded in the bombing.

The perpetrators of such terrorist attacks are either direct lackeys of the enemies of the Muslim community or have been "entrapped" in enemy plots, said the Iranian official.

He emphasized that Iran reserves the right to take to task through legal channels those who sponsor and arm the terrorists, adding that Tehran will definitely follow the issue up in due time.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for Friday's bloody attack.

In another terrorist attack on May 25, five Iranian pilgrims were killed and 20 others injured after a booby-trapped car hit their bus near the city of Samarra, some 125 km north of Baghdad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/08/307762/iran-raps-terror-attack-on-pilgrims-in-iraq/>

NAM urges UN Human Rights Council against discrimination

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has urged the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) against adopting a selective and political approach with regard to the issue of human rights.

Speaking as the head of NAM in an address to a UNHRC session, Iranian Ambassador to the UN Office in Geneva Mohsen Naziri-Asl voiced the bloc's deep concern over the UNHRC's growing trend of adopting resolutions against developing countries.

Unfortunately, this trend has been used as a tool to serve political interests and is in violation of the founding principles of the UNHRC, Naziri-Asl said, warning that such a policy could undermine cooperation in promoting and supporting human rights.

NAM believes that the international community should investigate the human rights situation in different countries without any discrimination, and not differentiate between developed and developing nations, he noted.

He said that NAM attaches great significance to the promotion and support of human rights. Naziri-Asl further highlighted the movement's determination to promote, observe, implement and support human rights based on the universally acknowledged principles of human rights as well as the UN Charter and international law.

NAM believes that the issue of human rights must be pursued via a constructive, non-hostile, unselective, and apolitical approach and based on dialog, justice, impartiality and transparency, he said.

Naziri-Asl emphasized that such an approach should be based on respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the domestic affairs of countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/08/307747/nam-urges-unhrc-against-discrimination/>

All military approaches against Syria doomed to failure: Iran envoy to Lebanon

Iran's ambassador to Beirut says the Syrian Army's recent headways against foreign-backed militants prove that all military bids against the Arab country are doomed to failure.

"The victories of the Syrian Army proved that [the crisis] in this country has no other solution but dialog and that all types of military [approaches] are doomed to failure," Ghazanfar Roknabadi said in a meeting with a group of Lebanese authors and university professors on Friday.

"Enemies waged a global war against Syria and targeted the country's unity and stability by making use of all inhumane methods, including the killing of women and children, but all their efforts have failed over the past two years," he added.

"They [enemies] have now understood that they are unable to overthrow the Syrian establishment, which enjoys the support of the majority of its people," he pointed out.

On Thursday, Syrian forces liberated the Quneitra Crossing - situated between Syria and the Golan Heights - after heavy clashes with anti-government gunmen.

Also on Thursday, the Syrian troops recaptured the town of al-Daba'a. This came after the Army liberated the strategic town of Qusayr on Wednesday following three weeks of fighting with the militants.

Syria has been gripped by a deadly unrest since March 2011, and many people, including

large numbers of government forces, have been killed in the violence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/08/307741/any-military-bid-against-syria-doomed/>

Any plan for Syria without Iran will fail: ambassador

The Iranian ambassador to Damascus says Iran is the most important player in the region, and the West has no alternative other than taking Iran's views into consideration at the Geneva 2 conference, because otherwise their plans for Syria will end in failure.

"Whether Iran is present at this conference or not, it is the main player in developments in the region, and they are compelled to take Iran's views and the interests of the people of the region into consideration, otherwise their plans will fail," Ambassador Mohammad Reza Sheibani told the Fars News Agency in an interview published on Saturday.

For two years, some regional and Western countries tried to ignore Iran's views on how to settle the Syrian conflict, and this not only led to the failure of their policies in the region but also to suffering for the people of the region, he added.

Sheibani said divisions among opposition groups and the inability to reach a consensus on the agenda of the talks have led to a postponement of the conference.

He went on to say that Iran is the only country in the region that has a "strategic view" toward regional developments.

The ambassador also expressed hope that regional and international players would act in such a way at the Geneva 2 meeting so that the Syrian conflict can be brought to an end.

In addition, he said 14 groups, comprising opponents and allies of the Syrian government, will be coming to Tehran for a meeting in the near future.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/108335-any-plan-for-syria-without-iran-will-fail-ambassador>

Iran dismisses Canadian MPs' claims of human rights violations

Iran has dismissed Canadian MPs' claims that human rights are being violated in the Islamic Republic, calling on Canada to address its own human rights record instead of leveling allegations against other states.

The Canadian government is suffering from a lack of political legitimacy given a recent ruling which stated that electoral fraud had taken place in the 2011 prime ministerial election, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Araqchi said on Saturday.

He made the remarks in response to the fact that Canada's Parliament, according to the Jerusalem Post, hosted Iran Accountability Week from May 27 to June 2 in Ottawa, during which the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee unanimously adopted motions calling on Iran to stop "state-orchestrated policy of wanton executions" and "release its political prisoners."

The motions also asked that Iran cease using stoning and flogging as punishment and "desist from its persistent and pervasive assaults on the rights of women."

Araqchi said that Canada had a poor understanding of the realities on the ground in Iran, adding that the Canadian people expect their parliament to immediately investigate the violation of the rights of the indigenous people of Canada.

According to the Jerusalem Post, Irwin Cotler, a former Canadian justice minister and current Liberal MP, spearheaded the week of events in Ottawa. He and his fellow parliamentarians from a broad range of parties in the House of Commons condemned the alleged assault on the human rights of the Iranian people.

"We are witness to state-sanctioned assaults that are tantamount to crimes against humanity, including the highest per capita rate of executions in the world; the imprisonment and silencing of more journalists and bloggers than any other country; the persistent and pervasive assault on women's rights; the targeting of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly the Baha'i and the Kurds; the criminalization of fundamental freedoms of speech, association and assembly; and the imprisonment of opposition leaders, human rights defenders, and the lawyers who would defend them," Cotler said.

Iran Accountability Week in Canada coincided with increased U.S. congressional focus on Iranian government human rights violations and new U.S. Treasury sanctions targeting Iranian officials for stamping out personal freedoms.

Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Illinois) told the Jerusalem Post, "I applaud my friend, Irwin Cotler, for his leadership on the Iran Accountability Week in Canada, and for his efforts to mobilize other

parliamentarians to stand in solidarity with the people of Iran.”

Kirk, who works with Cotler on an intra-parliamentary committee addressing the Iranian issue, added, “It is my hope that the U.S. Congress and governments throughout the world will join Canada in the campaign to speak out against the atrocious human rights abuses of the Iranian regime. I look forward to working with Mr. Cotler to increase awareness of this issue through our Iranian Political Prisoner Global Advocacy Project.”

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/108334-iran-dismisses-canadian-mps-claims-of-human-rights-violations>

Labor would ‘reconsider joining the coalition’ to advance peace talks Yachimovich, speaking amid furor after deputy minister tells

Times of Israel government is against two-state solution, says she won’t let Netanyahu fall for pursuing talks with PA

Opposition leader Shelly Yachimovich on Saturday urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to take steps toward a political peace agreement with the Palestinians, adding that her party would consider joining the coalition if such a step were necessary to achieve that goal.

The Labor Party leader, speaking at a Shabbat culture series in Ness Ziona, said there wouldn’t be a “better Palestinian partner in the next few years” and that the dramatic shifts around the Middle East are not in Israel’s favor. The majority of lawmakers in the Knesset support peace talks, she added.

Yachimovich’s comments came in apparent response to statements made by Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon during an

interview with The Times of Israel, which was published on Thursday, in which he argued that a strong majority in the government and the coalition oppose a two-state solution with the Palestinians and would block the creation of a Palestinian state if such a proposal ever came to a vote.

The Danon interview, with its no-nonsense summation of the anti-Palestinian statehood mindset of most coalition members, has made international headlines, and apparently prompted discomfort in the Prime Minister’s Office.

The Prime Minister’s Office took the unusual step of contacting The Times of Israel on Shabbat to firmly distance itself from Danon’s comments.

His remarks “do not represent the position of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the government of Israel,” sources in the PMO said in response to Danon’s interview.

Yachimovich beseeched Netanyahu to take “brave steps” toward peace talks.

“The opposition won’t behave like the opposition on these matters, but will support you from its benches,” she said, adding that although Labor strongly disagrees with the social and economic policies of Netanyahu’s Likud, her party would nonetheless “reconsider offers to join the government” if necessary.

“We will not let you fall because of it [the pursuit of peace talks],” Yachimovich said, directing her comments at the prime minister.

She explained that the Labor Party would support the prime minister and provide him a political safety net to advance peace talks. “We are saying to you, Netanyahu, ‘go forward.’”

Earlier this week, during his first major interview with an Israeli news outlet since he became deputy minister, Danon said the current government would not back a two-state peace agreement with the Palestinians.

“Look at the government: there was never a government discussion, resolution or vote about the two-state solution,” Danon said. “If you will bring it to a vote in the government — nobody will bring it to a vote, it’s not smart to do it — but if you bring it to a vote, you will see the majority of Likud ministers, along with the Jewish Home [party], will be against it.”

The sources in the Prime Minister’s Office said Saturday that the prime minister “is interested in a resumption of negotiations without preconditions,” and that his positions regarding support for a two-state solution remain in force.

“Netanyahu calls on the president of the Palestinian Authority to restart talks without delay at which all issues will be raised to discussion,” the sources said. “The Palestinian Authority will raise its demands, and Israel will raise its demands which include, among others, stringent security arrangements, recognition of Israel as the nation state of the

Jewish people, and the declaration of an end to the conflict.”

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/labor-would-reconsider-joining-the-coalition-to-advance-peace-talks/>

PMO, distancing itself from deputy minister’s comments, says gov’t wants two-state solution

The Prime Minister’s Office on Saturday firmly distanced itself from comments made to the Times of Israel by Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon that a strong majority in the government and the coalition oppose a two-state solution with the Palestinians and would block the creation of a Palestinian state if such a proposal ever came to a vote.

Danon’s comments “do not represent the position of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the government of Israel,” the sources said in response to Danon’s interview, which was published on Thursday.

Taking the highly unusual step of contacting The Times of Israel during Shabbat to make Netanyahu’s position clear, the sources went on to say that the prime minister “is interested in a resumption of negotiations without preconditions,” and that his positions regarding support for a two-state solution remain in force.

“Netanyahu calls on the president of the Palestinian Authority to restart talks without delay at which all issues will be raised to discussion,” the sources said. “The Palestinian Authority will raise its demands, and Israel will raise its demands which include, among

others, stringent security arrangements, recognition of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, and the declaration of an end to the conflict.”

The sources indicated that it was very important that Netanyahu’s position be prominently restated.

It would appear that Danon’s comments, which have been widely reported, have discomfited the prime minister and caused dismay in the international community, exposing the government’s internal divide on the issue just as US Secretary of State John Kerry heads back to the region on June 11-12, for his fifth visit since taking office, in an effort to get Israel and the PA back to the negotiating table. Earlier in the week, Kerry warned that this might be the last chance to secure a two state solution. “The status quo is simply not sustainable,” Kerry said. “We will find ourselves in a negative spiral of responses and counter-responses that could literally slam the door on a two-state solution.”

Danon’s statements to The Times of Israel came in his first major interview with an Israeli news outlet since he became deputy minister.

“Look at the government: there was never a government discussion, resolution or vote about the two-state solution,” Danon said. “If you will bring it to a vote in the government — nobody will bring it to a vote, it’s not smart to do it — but if you bring it to a vote, you will see the majority of Likud ministers, along with the Jewish Home [party], will be against it.

Danon further said that Netanyahu calls for peace talks despite his government’s opposition because he knows Israel will not arrive at an agreement with the Palestinians in the near future. “Today we’re not fighting it

[Netanyahu’s declared goal of a Palestinian state], but if there will be a move to promote a two-state solution, you will see forces blocking it within the party and the government,” Danon said.

The deputy minister said “there is no majority for a two-state solution” among the 31 lawmakers that make up the Likud-Yisrael Beytenu Knesset faction. The Likud party’s central committee, about 10 years ago, passed a motion against the creation of a Palestinian state, Danon said, adding that “legally” the party was opposed to the concept of two states for two people.

In a much touted 2009 Bar-Ilan University speech, Netanyahu in principle agreed to a Palestinian state, on the condition that it be demilitarized and it recognizes Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. In recent weeks the prime minister has vowed to cooperate with US efforts to restart peace negotiations and has repeatedly called on Palestinian leaders to resume talks without preconditions.

But several key members of the current government, including Deputy Foreign Minister Ze’ev Elkin, Deputy Transportation Minister Tzipi Hotovely, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, Deputy Knesset Speaker Moshe Feiglin, coalition chairman Yariv Levin and other senior Likud MKs, are staunchly opposed to a two-state solution, advocating instead the partial or complete annexation of the West Bank to Israel. The entire 12-member Jewish Home faction, including three ministers, likewise rejects the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

The members of the remaining parties in the coalition — Yesh Atid and Hatnua — endorse a two-state solution, yet together have merely

25 Knesset seats, compared to a combined 43 mandates of Jewish Home and Likud-Beytenu.

Speaking to The Times of Israel in his Knesset office, Danon said that there is currently zero debate about the two-state solution within the Likud because there is no “viable partner” on the Palestinian side and it seems unlikely that peace talks would resume any time soon.

If Kerry were to get the talks restarted, however, and Netanyahu and the Palestinians agreed on the implementation of a two-state solution, “then you have a conflict” within the government, Danon said. “But today there is no partner, no negotiations, so it’s a discussion. It’s more of an academic discussion.”

Asked whether Netanyahu truly is in favor of a two-state solution, Danon replied that the prime minister tied the creation of a Palestinian state to conditions he is certain the Palestinians will not agree to. “He knows that in the near future it’s not possible.”

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/pmo-urgently-distancing-itself-from-deputy-ministers-comments-says-government-wants-two-solution/>

3. ISRAEL – PALESTINE

Gunman kills 6 in Santa Monica shootings, police say Three miles from Obama fundraiser, black-clad man shoots up California college before being taken down by authorities

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (AP) — A gunman with an assault-style rifle killed at least six people in Santa Monica on Friday before police shot him to death in a gunfight in the Santa Monica College library, authorities said.

Santa Monica Police Chief Jacqueline Seabrooks told reporters the rampage began at a house in the coastal city before the gunman, dressed all in black, made his way to Santa Monica College.

Seabrooks said he killed two people in the house, which caught fire, two more people as he moved several blocks toward the campus, and then two more on campus.

He entered the library and fired on other people but didn’t hit them, Seabrooks said.

Several students in the library reported hearing gunfire, and one witness said he heard a woman scream.

“The officers came in and directly engaged the suspect and he was shot and killed on the scene,” Seabrooks said.

She identified the gunman as 25 to 30 years old and dressed all in black, wearing what appeared to be a ballistic jacket.

The campus was searched for a second shooter, and a man dressed entirely in black, with the words “Life is a Gamble” on the back of his sweatshirt, was seen being taken into custody by law enforcement officers. He did not appear to be wounded.

“We are not convinced 100 percent that the suspect who was killed operated in a solo or alone capacity,” Seabrooks said.

All of this unfolded about 3 miles from where President Barack Obama was attending a fundraising luncheon.

Three women with gunshot wounds were admitted to Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, said Dr. Marshall Morgan, the chief of emergency medicine. One died, another was in surgery, and the third was in serious condition but doing well, he said.

Three other women went to UCLA Medical Center Santa Monica with relatively minor injuries, Morgan said. One has shrapnel-type injuries and the two others had injuries not related to gunfire, he said.

Jeff Furrows of the Santa Monica Fire Department said there was extensive fire damage inside the home where two bodies were found, and one of the wounded women was found with a gunshot wound in a car nearby.

Jerry Cunningham Rathner, who lives near the house, said she heard gunshots and came out onto her porch to see a man shooting at the residence. Soon, the building erupted in flames and was billowing smoke.

The gunman, dressed in black and wearing an ammunition belt, went to the corner and pointed a rifle at a woman in a car and told her to pull over, Rathner said. He then signaled to a second car, also driven by a woman, to slow down and began firing into the vehicle.

“He fired three to four shots into the car — boom, boom, boom, right at her,” said Cunningham, who went to the woman’s aid and saw she was wounded in the shoulder.

“I can’t believe she didn’t have worse injuries,” Cunningham said.

She said the gunman then abducted the woman in the first car and drove away.

From there, the scene shifted to Santa Monica College, located in a neighborhood of strip malls and homes more than a mile inland from the city’s famous Santa Monica Pier, Third Street Promenade and its expansive, sandy beaches.

Jimes Gillespie, 20, told The Associated Press he was in the college’s library studying when he heard gunfire, and he and dozens of other students began fleeing the three-story building.

“As I was running down the stairs I saw one of the gunmen,” said Gillespie, who described

the shooter as a white man in his 20s, wearing cornrows in his hair and black overalls. He said the man was carrying a shotgun.

Gillespie believed there were two shooters because he heard two kinds of gunfire — a shotgun and a handgun — but only saw one person.

“The shotgun blast was first. It was either him or the partner who shot eight to 10 handgun shots,” Gillespie said. “Then after I saw the gunman I heard more shots and I ran out of the library through the emergency exit.”

As Gillespie ran across campus, he said he saw a car in front of the English building that was riddled with bullet holes, had shattered windows and a baby’s car seat in the back.

Another student, Khwanfa Wilepananon, said he and a friend were on the library’s third floor when they heard a loud bang and a woman’s scream coming from the first floor. As he and a friend fled downstairs, he said they heard two shots.

“It was so scary,” said Wilepananon. “It was so dark and I was scared. We didn’t know what to do.”

Santa Monica police Sgt. Rudy Flores said numerous witnesses called to report that the shooting near the college began with a man

on a street corner near the college firing shots at vehicles, including a bus.

California Highway Patrol Officer Vince Ramirez said his agency began receiving 911 calls just minutes before noon.

“We understand one shooter was taken into custody shortly after we arrived,” he said.

The two-year college, with about 34,000 students, was in the midst of final exams Friday. It was quickly locked down by police, and students were told to leave.

As the drama unfolded, Obama was attending a fundraising luncheon about 3 miles away.

Secret Service spokesman Max Milien said the agency was aware of the shooting but it had no impact on the president’s event.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/gunman-killed-6-in-santa-monica-shootings-police-say/>

Syrian TV: Regime troops take control of another rebel-held town Village of Buwaydah between Qusair and Homs seized by government forces; car bomb kills seven in Homs

BEIRUT (AP) — A suicide bomber detonated his explosives-laden car Saturday in Syria’s central city of Homs, tearing through an area largely populated by the regime’s Alawite sect

and killing seven people, a state-owned TV station reported. Meanwhile, government troops took control of a key village as the regime presses its offensive to clear a path between Damascus and the Mediterranean coast.

With the help of Lebanese Hezbollah, President Bashar Assad's regime has been chasing rebels from long-held strategic areas linking the capital, Damascus, with the government stronghold areas along Mediterranean coast. It gained momentum this week after seizing the strategic city of Qusair and the army has begun advancing north toward the cities of Homs and Aleppo.

Syrian state TV also said Saturday that government troops took control of the village of Buwaydah between Qusair and Homs after intensive clashes.

Abu Bilal al-Homsi, an activist in the old quarter of the city of Homs who has links with several rebel groups, said via Skype that rebels sustained heavy losses late Friday as they attempted to flee the village with their wounded and civilians. Al-Homsi asked to be identified by his alias because of security concerns.

The state-owned Al-Ikhbariya TV said the attacker detonated the explosives-laden car in a busy area near a roundabout in the Homs neighborhood of Adawiya, which largely houses Alawites, members of a minority sect that is an offshoot of Shiite Islam. The report said the seven killed included three women and a teenager, and said 10 other people were

wounded as the blast heavily damaged nearby houses and vehicles.

Television footage showed frantic residents running around, blood splattered on the ground and a badly mangled car. Other cars on the street were also damaged. A reporter from the station on the scene said the car was carrying about 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of explosives.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a network of informants inside Syria, confirmed that the car was booby-trapped. It also said seven were killed, citing preliminary reports.

Nobody claimed responsibility for the attack, but car bombs are the usual tactic employed by Sunni extremists among the rebel ranks.

The rebels are largely from Syria's Sunni Muslim majority and have been joined by Sunni fighters from other countries, while the government is backed by fighters from the Shiite guerrilla Hezbollah group, making the conflict increasingly sectarian in nature.

Homs, the capital of the province of the same name, is home to one of the biggest Alawite communities in Syria and is widely seen as pro-Assad. The rebels are in control of the city center, including its old quarter, but are besieged by regime forces on the outskirts.

Many towns north of Homs also are rebel-controlled, but Hezbollah-backed government forces have been clearing rebels from villages and towns to the south. Fierce fighting in the area in the past three weeks has left dozens of rebels, troops and Hezbollah fighters dead and hundreds wounded.

Government forces also battled rebel fighters north of Aleppo and by a military air base that has been under rebel siege for weeks. Clashes in the suburbs of Damascus, meanwhile, left seven people dead, including a rebel and a medic who was treating an injured fighter, according to the Observatory.

The Lebanese Red Cross announced that it has evacuated 38 people who were wounded in Qusair from the Syrian border to hospitals in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley over the past two days.

The Syrian conflict started with largely peaceful protests against Assad's regime in March 2011, but later degenerated into a bloody civil war that has killed more than 80,000 people, according to United Nations officials. It also has spilled over the borders with Lebanon, Israel, Turkey and Iraq, threatening to ignite a broader regional conflict.

Syrian rebels briefly captured a crossing point along a cease-fire line with Israel in the contested Golan Heights. It was later recaptured by government troops, but the fighting prompted Austria to announce it was

withdrawing its peacekeeping contingent from a UN force that patrols the Israeli-occupied area.

Russia had offered to send its troops to replace the Austrians at the Golan, but the United Nations said the disengagement agreement that established the cease-fire along the Israel-occupied Golan does not allow the participation of troops from a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

On Saturday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov wrote on his Twitter account that the cease-fire agreement was outdated and called on the UN Security Council to consider new arrangements.

If the UN Security Council "truly is concerned about the tension in the Golan Heights, sending a Russian military contingent there is the solution," Gatilov wrote. "And there's no need to refer to 40-year-old limitations. The tasks of supporting peace and stability require a different way of political thinking. Deciding which countries can join the UN contingent in the Golan is not within the competency of the UN General Secretary's spokesperson. It's an issue for" the Security Council.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/syrian-tv-regime-troops-took-control-of-additional-rebel-held-village/>

Police accused of brutality at Jerusalem protest One injured, seven arrested as several hundred demonstrators gather in opposition of government's economic policies

Protesters against proposed plans to export much of Israel's natural gas, as well as government budget cuts, met with stiff police resistance Saturday night when they attempted to march on the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem.

The approximately 250 protesters encountered a large police presence, including Border Police, mounted police and a water cannon truck, according to protest organizers.

Participants in the protest charged police with use of excessive force after at least one individual was injured. One man, Yishai Oltchik, wrote on Facebook that a police officer had kicked him for no apparent reason, and that mounted police officers trampled other protesters as well.

Police spokesmen Mickey Rosenthal said officers arrested seven protesters — including two of the organizers of the demonstration — after they impeded the Jerusalem Light Rail, causing significant delays. Six were released after questioning, and one remained in custody for charges of disturbing the peace.

Rosenthal denied charges of excessive force, noting that the protest “was not coordinated with police” and that the demonstration was met with “no police brutality whatsoever.”

The activists voiced opposition to the government's consideration of measures to export up to 50 percent of Israel's recent natural gas finds as well as sweeping austerity measures, including an increased value added

tax, recently approved by the Netanyahu government.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/police-accused-of-brutality-at-jerusalem-protest/>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

A battle over water has turned into a war of colorful rhetoric between Ethiopia and Egypt over the flow of the Nile, which begins in the African highlands but keeps Egypt from being swallowed entirely by desert.

An ambitious Ethiopian dam project is diverting Nile waters that Cairo says will reduce the river's northward flow. The Egyptians have stumbled into crisis mode: At a meeting hosted by President Mohamed Morsi this week, several politicians, unaware TV cameras were rolling, suggested sabotaging or threatening to bomb the dam.

Egypt can coordinate with Ethiopian rebels and “use them as a bargaining chip with the Ethiopian government,” mused Younis Makhyoun, leader of an ultraconservative Islamist party. “If all this fails, then there is no choice left for Egypt but to play the final card, which is using the intelligence service to destroy the dam.”

Ethiopia on Thursday summoned the Egyptian ambassador to explain such “hostile remarks.”

An embarrassed Morsi has reassured Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn that he preferred diplomacy to fighter jets and intrigue. But the matter — Egypt has indicated that it would demand the dam not be built — illustrates Cairo's reliance on the Nile and how swiftly passions can be riled in a nation that receives 95% of its water from the river.

"Egyptians are peaceful by nature, but they have a historical entitlement to Nile water," Saad Katatni, head of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood's political party told Al Ahram newspaper. "And it is their right to defend it by any means necessary.

"The first option is the diplomatic approach. If this doesn't succeed, we can resort to international arbitration."

The project in question is the \$4.2-billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and hydroelectric plant, which is 20% complete. Ethiopia says that the plant will spur development in one of Africa's poorest countries and that during construction over the next three to five years the dam will not "significantly affect" the flow of water into Egypt. Ethiopia says the flow will not be affected after the dam is built.

"We do not have any plan to harm downstream countries," said Alemayehu Tegen, Ethiopia's minister for water resources. "If Egypt has some issues to discuss with Ethiopia, we are very ready to discuss them."

He added, "River diversion does not stop the flow of water to the downstream countries. River diversion means it is the rerouting of the river flow to facilitate the construction in the riverbed, nothing else."

Under colonial-era agreements, Egypt and neighboring Sudan were granted the bulk of the Nile's flow. But in recent years upstream African countries, including Ethiopia and Uganda, have made it clear that they are not bound to old treaties and pacts. Growing populations and demands for jobs and

agriculture in East Africa have changed the dynamics.

Much of what is unfolding is a tale of poor nations in a new era, desperately trying to meet demographic and economic demands by drawing from a river that has sustained civilizations for millenniums. Egyptians say their fate is more reliant on the Nile compared with Ethiopia. Although about 85% of the Nile's water originates in Ethiopia, which has an annual rainy season, the country gets only 3% of its water supply from the river.

Ethiopia, which has endured drought and famine, says it is entitled to larger shares and suggests Cairo has exaggerated the impact of the dam. Egypt alleges it may lose as much as 20% of its Nile flow during the dam's construction.

That prospect is expected to force stricter conservation efforts in the fertile Nile Delta, which for generations has practiced less than efficient irrigation. Unlike his predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, who was aloof toward much of Africa, Morsi has stepped up diplomacy with nations along the river to avoid a deepening crisis.

"Every 4 billion cubic meters of water that Egypt loses will lead to the waste of 1 million acres of agricultural land and this will in turn lead 2 million families to lose their jobs," said Hani Raslan, an expert on the Nile basin for Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. "This will widen the nutrition gap in Egypt and increase imports because the land will no longer produce."

Egypt is straining amid two years of political unrest after the overthrow of Mubarak. Water and gas shortages are common, foreign currency holdings have dwindled, and the

economy is in severe straits. A disruption of water to the delta could jeopardize farms, crops and further imperil the economy.

"Egypt will never surrender its right to Nile water and all options [to safeguard it] are being considered," Morsi's office said this week.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/middleeast/la-fg-egypt-ethiopia-20130607,0,979581.story>

Don Apollinaire Malumalu elected President of the Independent National Electoral Commission

On June 7th Don Apollinaire Malumalu was elected President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), by the National Assembly, the legislative chamber of the Congolese Democratic Republic Parliament.

Don Malumalu was President of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), which organized and monitored the 2006 presidential elections. The name of the Catholic priest had been indicated by the Subcommittee "religious confessions" on behalf of civil society.

Some Congolese newspapers point out that don Malumalu is considered an expert in organizing elections not only for having organized the 2006 elections but also for his several election observer missions in different parts of the world.

In a note of May 13, the Episcopal Commission of the DRC (CENCO) reaffirmed the prohibition to priests, religious men and women to "participate actively in political parties and associations at a political level, as well as state institutions, at all levels, responsible for organizing the elections " The press release

also stated that CENCO "did not present a clergyman to become a member of INEC."

"It goes without saying that if a clergyman is engaged in INEC will go clearly against the canonical norms of the Catholic Church (see canon 287, 672 and 739) and against the common position of the Bishops of CENCO " the statement concluded.

[http://www.fides.org/en/news/33788-
AFRICA CONGO DR Don Apollinaire Malumalu elected President of the Independent National Electoral Commission#.UcK1T-dSi4Q](http://www.fides.org/en/news/33788-AFRICA_CONGO_DR_Don_Apollinaire_Malumalu_elected_President_of_the_Independent_National_Electoral_Commission#.UcK1T-dSi4Q)

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

Amman, Christian Arab media discuss peace, justice and human rights

The Catholic Center for Studies and Media, in collaboration with the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Social Communications, will give a lecture entitled: "The average Christian Arabs in the service of justice, peace and human rights beings" Monday, June 10.

The conference, which starts on the 10th of June and runs for two days, hosts Patriarch Fuad Twal, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, the president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications who arrives in Jordan next Sunday. Dr Mohammad Momani, Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communication will also participate in the conference as well as Former Prime Minister Faisal Fayeze, along with a number of religious clerics from the different churches, Islamic scholars , media personnel working in Jordan in addition to local , Arab and foreign media representatives.

In a press release, Father Rifat Bader, director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media , has said that this conference comes as a continuation of a larger conference held in Beirut in April 2012, which was organized by the Pontifical Council itself and attended by Patriarchs of the East, in which conclusion came the recommendation to organize similar conferences in the different countries of the Middle East.

Fr Bader clarified that Jordan was chosen as a role model to the Arab Christian media due to the improvement noticed since the establishment of the Catholic Center for Media and Studies, which has become a link between the local society and the International Media Agencies particularly those belonging to the Catholic churches in the world. He added that this promotes coordination and develops cooperation in urging these International media agencies in the near future to organize pilgrimage and tourist trips to Jordan which in turn will assist in spreading the Jordanian model and message worldwide.

The Amman conference will focus on the role of Arab Christian media during these particularly difficult times the Arab Region is witnessing, describing it as a civilized contribution and a natural reflection of the civilized contribution that Arab Christians make and will continue to make in serving their societies and all health, social and educational related areas.

According to Fr. Rifat Bader, this conference will bring to light the development of the media in Jordan in general, showing the

Kingdom as the bridge between the East and the West, also will focus on the continuous development in the Arab Christian media in Jordan which works on confirming the co-existence between Muslims and Christians and showing the civilized role played by Christians in serving their country and society, through its support for values for justice, peace and human rights in their country Jordan, and in the Arab region thirsting for reassurance and peace.

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Amman,-Christian-Arab-media-discuss-peace-justice-and-human-rights-28148.html>

Reporting the turbulent and controversial Middle East: Conference on the role of the Christian Arab media

The two-day workshop organized by the Catholic Center for Studies and Media on the contribution offered by the Christian Arab media at the service of justice, peace and human rights begins on Monday, June 10 in Amman. Main promoter of the initiative is Father Rifat Bader, director of the Catholic Center. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal, Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli - President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications-, the Jordanian Minister for Communications Mohammad Momani, former Jordanian Prime Minister Faisal Fayez and a vast team of ecclesiastics, Islamic scholars and operators involved in the media sector in Jordan and other Arab Countries will attend the conference.

The conference will focus on the role played by the Christian Arab media in reporting the turbulent and controversial moments of the so-called "Arab spring". In a comment entrusted to Fides Agency, Father Bader indicates the American University of Madaba -

supported by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and recently inaugurated in the presence of King Abdullah II of Jordan - as an example of the contribution offered by the initiatives inspired by the Christians to the development of Arab societies, in the sign of a fair and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims.

http://www.fides.org/en/news/33785-ASIA_JORDAN_Reporting_the_turbulent_and_controversial_Middle_East_Conference_on_the_role_of_the_Christian_Arab_media#.Uck75udSi4Q

6. SYRIA

The United States could make a decision as early as this week on whether to arm Syrian rebels, aU.S. official said on Monday.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the question of whether to arm rebels is on the agenda of White House meetings during the early part of this week.

The possible move by the United States to arm the rebels who are fighting President Bashar al-Assad's government forces, was first reported by the Associated Press late on Sunday.

Separately, an Obama administration source said that U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has put off his planned trip to the Middle East in order to attend the meetings in Washington.

The renewed focus comes two years into the uprising against al-Assad that has sparked civil war and seen at least 80,000 people killed.

Assad, whose Alawite minority is an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam and whose family has ruled Syria for more than four decades, is backed by Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

There are increasing concerns that Assad may be gaining the upper hand in the conflict as forces loyal to the government recently captured the key town of Qusair.

The United States and other governments are also weighing evidence that Assad's forces may have used chemical weapons, something U.S. President Barack Obama has said would cross a "red line".

<http://phuyennews.vn/international/7706206206305650>

A suicide bomber detonated his explosives-laden car Saturday in Syria's central city of Homs, tearing through an area largely populated by the regime's Alawite sect and killing seven people, a state-owned TV station reported. Meanwhile, government troops took control of a key village as the regime presses its offensive to clear a path between Damascus and the Mediterranean coast.

With the help of Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, President Bashar Assad's regime has been chasing rebels from long-held strategic areas linking the capital, Damascus, with the government stronghold areas along Mediterranean coast. It gained momentum this week after seizing the strategic city of

Qusair and the army has begun advancing north toward the cities of Homs and Aleppo.

Syrian state TV also said Saturday that government troops took control of the village of Buwaydah between Qusair and Homs after intensive clashes.

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Many towns north of Homs also are rebel-controlled, but Hezbollah-backed government forces have been clearing rebels from villages and towns to the south. Fierce fighting in the area in the past three weeks has left dozens of rebels, troops and Hezbollah fighters dead and hundreds wounded.

Government forces also battled rebel fighters north of Aleppo and by a military air base that has been under rebel siege for weeks. Clashes in the suburbs of Damascus, meanwhile, left

seven people dead, including a rebel and a medic who was treating an injured fighter, according to the Observatory.

In fighting elsewhere, rebels attacked a checkpoint manned by troops and pro-government gunmen in the central town of Salamiyeh, killing 11 of them and wounding more than 20, the Observatory said. It added that several rebels also were killed, although it didn't have a specific figure.

The Lebanese Red Cross announced that it has evacuated 38 people who were wounded in Qusair from the Syrian border to hospitals in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley over the past two days.

The Syrian conflict started with largely peaceful protests against Assad's regime in March 2011, but later degenerated into a bloody civil war that has killed more than 80,000 people, according to United Nations officials. It also has spilled over the borders with Lebanon, Israel, Turkey and Iraq, threatening to ignite a broader regional conflict.

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<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/2013/06/08/API/1306080591/Car-bomb-explodes-in-central-Syrian-city>

Russia Enlists Syrian Kurds

Members of the Supreme Kurdish Council (SKC), a body uniting Kurdish parties from Syria, went for their first official visit to Moscow on June 2 and met Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov in Moscow, despite internal differences

between Syrian Kurds. Moreover, they visited the Duma (Russian parliament) on Friday [June 7].

For Geneva II

Syrian Kurdish parties went to Moscow in order to secure participation of the Kurds in the international peace conference Geneva II. They did not participate in an earlier conference of the Western-backed Syrian opposition in Istanbul at the end of May, despite efforts of European countries to convince the Syrian Kurds to join the Western-backed coalition.

According to the website of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), "the meeting marked the first official invitation from Russia and aimed at establishing diplomatic relations between the two parties. Among the topics discussed were SKC's position on the Syrian regime and the role of the YPG [People's Defence Units, a militia of the PYD]."

Salih Muslim, PYD co-chair, Sinem Mohammed, co-president of the People's Council of Western Kurdistan, Ismail Hama, head of the Unity Party, Saud Melle, member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDP-S) and Ahmed Sulaiman, member of the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party of Syria, headed to Moscow from Erbil on June 2.

Salih Muslim said the Russians did not reject the demands of the SKC and stressed that both parties looked forward to strengthening their ties.

PYD member Alan Semo told Al-Monitor that Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov promised the PYD leader, "without you [the Kurds], there will not be any meeting in

Geneva," pledging the SKC would represent the Kurds of Syria in the conference.

The visit follows tensions between the PYD, affiliated to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and four smaller Kurdish parties united in the Democratic Political Union. The Union is supported by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani, who is also the president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and is closer to the policies of Turkey that backs the Syrian opposition against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Seventy-four members of the KDP-backed KDP-S were detained by the YPG near the Syrian border, after trying to sneak into Syria from Iraq. They were released after questioning a few days later. But KDP security forces closed the borders between the Kurdish areas of Iraq and Syria — a situation that remain until today.

Preceding the Russia visits, the Unity Party held talks with the Kurdish Progressive Democratic Party, which is more supportive of PYD policies and is financed by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). This resulted in the release of members of the Sheikh Mashuq Khaznawi brigade, a militia affiliated to the Unity Party, on May 30, and most likely a deal to head to Russia.

Furthermore, the Democratic Political Union decided at the last moment not to join the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), and only a representative of the Freedom Party went to Istanbul, despite an announcement by Khalid Saleh, the SNC's director of media, that the Democratic Political Union would join the Syrian opposition and participate in the six-day conference that took place between May 23-29.

Abdul Baqi Youssef, a member of the Unity Party told Yekiti Media, that they feared a negative reaction from the Kurdish population of joining the opposition bloc without the Kurdish National Council (KNC), a bloc of mostly Syrian Kurdish parties with the exception of the PYD.

Western countries tried to pressure PYD's rivals in joining the Syrian opposition bloc — to make the Syrian opposition more inclusive of minorities — but they failed to convince the Syrian Kurdish parties. The Kurdish parties are weary of the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood and opposition by Syrian politicians to Kurdish demands.

While the rivals of the PYD are undecided to join the Western-backed opposition, the PYD supports the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria (NCB), which supports a dialogue between Assad and the opposition and is against militarization of the conflict.

Despite these internal differences and tensions between KDP-backed parties and the PYD, this did not prevent Saud Melle and Ismail Hama, whose parties are backed by the KDP, to participate in the visit to Russia, following an invitation from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The leader of the PYD, Salih Muslim, headed to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from Europe before and visited Slemani, a PUK-stronghold of ailing Iraqi President Jalal Talabani that backs PYD policies to curtail influence of the KDP in Syria. But the PYD leader did not manage to visit Barzani to solve the problems between the PYD and KDP in Syria's Kurdish areas.

Ahmed Suleiman, a spokesman of the Supreme Kurdish Council, told Kurdish newspaper Rudaw, "Russia respects the Kurdish people in Syria and recognizes that the Kurds are following a legitimate struggle. The existence of the Kurdish people is denied and in the new Syrian constitution, the rights of Kurds must be recognized."

At a press conference in Moscow, Ismail Hama said that the Syrian Kurds would form an independent delegation, reported the Russian news agency Interfax. "As Kurds, we have been suppressed by the regime, and this went as far as ethnic cleansing 50 years ago. Hence, we really expect our national problem to be resolved or proposals for resolving our problem to be made. We have decided to form a separate and independent delegation at the conference," he reportedly said.

Lavrov emphasized that the Kurds should be included. "We believe all opposition structures in Syria should be given an opportunity to communicate their viewpoint and participate in the achievement of a compromise, which will ensure peace, stability and equal rights for all ethnic and religious groups in the country," he said.

In May, Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry decided to resume talks in Geneva on Syria in order to find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis. But so far, these talks seem unlikely since the Syrian opposition in exile refuses to participate in them without Iran and Hezbollah ending their military support for Assad in Syria, while opposition parties such as the NCB are willing to participate.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/syrian-kurds-participate-geneva-ii-conference.html#ixzz2Wkdx74lv>

7.ARABIA& PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

Demand for Asian maids soars

A surprising sight among the thousands of undocumented women from Indonesia and the Philippines at their consulates here is Saudis seeking to recruit them as housemaids.

Arab News has seen many Saudi women with their husbands and sons trying to convince these Asian women to work for them.

The rising demand for maids has been caused by various factors including cost and the approaching month of Ramadan.

Saudis know it is cheaper to recruit maids living in the country, considering that recruiting from outside costs around SR 15,000, and sometimes as much as SR 30,000.

There has also been a limited supply of housemaids from the Philippines recently with tightening of rules to protect their rights. The Philippine and Saudi governments only recently signed an agreement allowing Philippine maids to return to the Kingdom.

Indonesia still has a ban in place on sending its maids to the Kingdom. Saudi recruiters have been hiring Ethiopian and Sri Lankan maids. There have been reports that they are now considering getting maids from other Arab countries.

With rising demand, Asian workers are now able to negotiate salaries as high as SR 2,000 a month. Prior to the announcement of the grace period, maids from the Philippines were paid about SR 1,000 and those from Indonesia

SR 600 if Saudis recruited them directly from their countries.

The Philippine Consulate in Jeddah has received 12,000 passports of maids who have run away from their original employers. Most now want to stay and work in the country.

The Indonesian Consulate has not revealed how many passports of runaway maids it has received, but it is believed to run in the thousands.

Runaway maids earned in the region of SR 1,500 for Philippine workers and SR 1,000 for Indonesians, with brokers hiring out their services to Saudi families for a commission.

<http://www.arabnews.com/news/454368>

Four Somali children killed in house fire

Four children and a woman died from inhaling smoke in a fire that broke out in a house in Al-Saheefa district in Jeddah Thursday afternoon.

The dead were Somalis. The fire started in a room at the entrance of the first-floor two-room apartment. Rescue teams and firefighters evacuated seven residents and moved them to a nearby polyclinic. A 30-year-old woman was discharged from hospital after receiving treatment while a 7-month-old infant is being treated at King Abdul Aziz Hospital.

The dead children are three boys and one girl aged between 3 and 8 years. The woman who died was in her 20s. They died at King Fahd Hospital and Jeddah National Hospital.

The ceiling of the 2.9-square-meter room was burned and the fire damaged parts of the room above it on the second floor.

Investigations are under way to find out what caused the fire.

Another fire erupted Thursday in large warehouse for electrical supplies and cables, east of Breeman Bridge. The fire spread to another warehouse for spare parts, as well as a 10,000-square-meter workshop belonging to a company that sells electrical supplies.

Col. Said Sarhan, spokesman for Makkah Civil Defense, told Arab News that the fire broke out at around 1.30 p.m. and put out by 5 p.m. "As soon as we received the call, we sent 13 fire teams to the site. The fire had consumed the whole warehouse and the adjacent structures," he said.

"At 50 degrees Celsius and high winds, it took the blaze only seven minutes to reach many parts of the warehouse. There were no injuries to any of the workers or staff at the warehouse. We thank God that we could manage the fire in time, because there was a gas station just 50 feet from the site. Our firefighters' first action was to isolate the area in which the fire was spreading and prevent it from reaching the gas station," he said.

"It was a very close call. But we managed to control the fire," he added.

<http://www.arabnews.com/news/454367>

Bahrainis see warmer ties

A delegation from the Bahrain Management Society visited Jeddah with a view to promote relationship between the two countries.

The delegation visited the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce, Dallah Al-Barakah and the Islamic Development Bank. It also paid a visit to the

semi-museum of Saudi interior designer Huwida Simsim.

"We came here to perform Umrah, to visit different Saudi establishments to exchange knowledge in leadership management and to see the work of Saudi artist Huwayda Simsim. People would love to see and acquire her unique art reflecting Saudi Arabia's rich cultural heritage and the interesting themes and gifts," said Adel Hamed Abdulrahman, president of the Bahrain Management Society, a nonprofit organization.

He said the Kingdom has a lot of experience in development programs and has invested wisely in infrastructure, creating an excellent system for society as a whole. So it was very interesting to see how this was done and to share the thoughts and experiences common to both countries.

"We visited the JCCI and are planning to sign a memorandum of understanding with them, as well as with the IDB and other organizations which would help us to strengthen the relationship and understanding between the two countries," Abdulrahman said. "We will also sign a MoU with Huwida Simsim."

He also explained that there are a number of plans in the pipeline to enhance the mutual relationship.

"Simsim's work embodies the perfect concept of cultural exchange because she has put a lot of thought into her themes. We have also proposed many ideas to her and if these work out we will arrange an art exhibition for her in Bahrain and introduce her to people who are interested in such artworks," he said.

He further said that Simsim's work is a medium through which she is able to convey

the thoughts of the Saudi people, especially women. The current trend among Bahraini artists is graffiti and they are thinking about sharing their ideas with Saudi artists.

Lulu Al-Mutlaq, board member of the Managing Society and Businesswoman, was impressed by Simsim's art and said they hadn't expected to see such amazing works.

"Every corner of the museum has certain traditions on display," she said.

"Indeed, she has put in a lot of effort and taste into her stories. I am really impressed by her work. We are taking with us an excellent model of a Saudi interior designer. We will arrange for her to bring her work to Bahrain and other Gulf countries."

She also said that the delegates met many distinguished Saudi personalities and had a fruitful cultural exchange of thoughts and ideas. "It was a great start to talk about art, artists, our culture and traditions and creativity of both countries," she added.

Simsim thanked the Society members and people for their appreciation and said hard work always pays off.

She said that the visit of the Bahraini delegation would open many doors for the mutual cooperation of Saudi and Bahraini artists as well as the public. "We are planning to have many mutual business programs for the development of the artists of both countries," she said.

<http://www.arabnews.com/news/454363>

Saudi Arabia investigated in 26 'cases of dumping'

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has said that anti-dumping fines on four Saudi export brands out of a total of 10 brands continue to be imposed, adding that Saudi Arabia is one of the foremost Arab countries being investigated and fined.

In a report, the ministry clarified that the Kingdom faced 26 investigations, of which many were closed, with four cases still pending.

The United Arab Emirates came second on a regional level, with 21 cases pending and 11 anti-dumping fines levied.

China leads the list of countries being targeted by anti-dumping laws, with 916 cases against it and 664 fees imposed on its imports. This is followed by South Korea, with 306 investigations and 181 fines.

The report said chemical and petrochemical industries in Saudi Arabia and the Arab countries are one of the biggest industries being affected by investigations and fines. This is followed by textiles, steel, plastics and rubber.

It said the iron and steel sector is the biggest productive sector being subjected to investigation, followed by petrochemicals.

Mohammad Al-Kathiri, secretary-general of Foreign Trade, quoted the ministry's report as saying the Kingdom has suffered from the protectionist policies of certain countries, which accused Saudi Arabia of resorting to dumping. The charges were later proved false.

At the opening of a consultative meeting of the International Chamber of Commerce,

Saudi Arabia emphasized its keenness on trade liberalization and its wish to abide by World Trade Organization rules.

Embassy clears air on death of Indian housemaid

Clearing the air on the death of Indian housemaid Saraswathy Kalappara, whose body is lying at a Riyadh morgue, the Indian Embassy yesterday said: "As per the medical report issued by the forensic medical center at the King Saud Medical City, the cause of death has been determined as cardiorespiratory arrest due to illness."

The report said that "there was no visible injury or marks of violence."

Ashok Warriar, first secretary (community welfare) at the Indian Embassy, told Arab News that the 51-year-old Indian national died on March 29 this year and it appears that she had run away from her sponsor, a few months before her death.

According to the information gathered by the embassy, she was brought dead to the hospital.

Commenting on the formalities and issuance of a no-objection certificate on submission of a certificate of power of attorney by the family of the deceased, Warriar said the original copy of the power of attorney has not been received. He said that the embassy is verifying the details and "will do the needful accordingly."

He said that the sons of Saraswathy had no doubt regarding the cause of death of their mother. In an affidavit, dated April 1, they requested the embassy to release the body

"without complying with the formalities" and make arrangements to send the body to India.

It is not clear as to why they thought it necessary to record a statement like this in their affidavit.

Warriar said that one Manikandan Bahuleyan wrote to the embassy saying that there is no friend of the deceased in the Kingdom.

"This is incorrect as the embassy is aware of a friend named Sainaba, who informed the family about the death and her telephone number was also furnished by Saraswathy's family," said Warriar.

"When the mission contacted her, she said that she was informed by a driver from Tamil Nadu working in Saudi Arabia. The efforts by the embassy to contact this driver did not succeed."

On June 4, the Indian mission received a communication from one Muralidharan heading an illegal organization named Fokasa, he said, adding that Muralidharan claimed that the embassy was not sending the body, "even though all the documents are clear and valid." It is mystifying how he came to such a conclusion with certainty, he said.

He said that Fokasa itself is running without the prior approval of the government.

<http://www.arabnews.com/news/454361>

Preparing youth to become responsible

The nongovernmental organization, Rekaaz, recently held three events aimed at bringing Saudi youth together and educating them on how to become caring and responsible citizens.

The events were for young people between the ages of 15 and 25 and held at the Hyatt Mall on May 22, Al-Azizia Mall in Rabwa on May 18 and Panorama Mall on May 8, said Sultan Al-Harhi, a spokesman for the group.

Al-Harhi thanked two local companies, Babaker and Atatnia, for their support. He said three well-known guests were invited on the three occasions. They were Ibrahim Al-Duwaish from Qassim, Mohammad Al-Areify from Riyadh and Mohammad Al-Awabi from Kuwait.

“They all spoke inspiringly about selflessness, love and camaraderie to get across the message of friendship as a powerful tool binding mankind,” he said. The motto of the presentations was “What you say is what you are,” he added.

He said the presentations were aimed at preparing the Saudi youth to become friendly, caring and responsible. He said these qualities would prepare them to become better citizens. “They will become the leaders in various fields of business and industry.”

Over the past four years, Rekaaz has presented shows at different venues. The themes include respect for mothers, self-esteem, desire to succeed in life and responsibility toward society.

He added that they had also visited 13 schools for girls in the Saudi capital in connection with Rekaaz’s projects. He said the organization gave away books to help youngsters develop their personalities and to learn how to deal with different types of people.

He added that the themes of Rekaaz’s presentations are timely because the

Kingdom’s growing population means Saudis are become alienated from each other.

“This is becoming worse because of materialism brought about by prosperity. Rekaaz is all about uniting people and making connections,” he said.

He said Faisal Abu Thnain, a member of the Al-Hilal soccer club, was invited as a speaker and spoke about friendship. “He was very effective, probably because as a soccer player, he had shown sportsmanship which is inextricably linked to friendship,” he said.

<http://www.arabnews.com/news/454360>

8. AFGHANISTAN – PAKISTAN

Angry Pakistan summons US envoy after drone strike

Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan: A US drone strike killed nine people in northwest Pakistan, security officials said, prompting newly sworn-in Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to summon America's envoy on Saturday to protest against such attacks.

The missile strike, on a compound near the Afghan border in the North Waziristan region late on Friday, was the first US drone attack in Pakistan since Sharif was sworn in on Wednesday. There was no information about the victims.

In his inaugural address, Sharif called for an immediate end to the US drone strikes.

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the demand for an immediate halt to the attacks was repeated on Saturday.

"It was conveyed to the US charge d' affaires that the government of Pakistan strongly condemns the drone strikes, which are a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity," the ministry said in a statement.

"The importance of bringing an immediate end to drone strikes was emphasized."

The attack came 10 days after a similar US strike killed the Pakistani Taliban's second-in-command, Wali-ur-Rehman, and six others in a major blow to the militant group.

President Barack Obama said last month the United States would scale back drone strikes, only using them when a threat was "continuing and imminent".

Drone casualties are difficult to verify. Foreign journalists must have permission from the military to visit the Pashtun tribal areas along the Afghan border. Taliban fighters often seal off the sites of drone strikes immediately.

<http://www.ndtv.com/topic/pakistan/news/page-8>

Nisar Khan to be Pakistan government's point man for dealing with Taliban

Islamabad: Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan will be the new Pakistan government's point man for dealing with law and order problems and a Taliban insurgency

while Power Minister Khwaja Asif has been entrusted the tasking of addressing a crippling energy crisis.

Khan, a hawk considered close to the military and a political heavyweight from the Rawalpindi region, was allocated the Interior Ministry hours after 25 members of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's council of ministers were sworn in yesterday.

Asif, a former banker, has been allocated the crucial water and power portfolio at a time when cities and towns across Pakistan are coping with power cuts of up to 20 hours a day.

According to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division, Zahid Hamid was allocated the law and justice portfolio, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi petroleum and natural resources, Abdul Qadir Baloch states and frontier regions, Ishaq Dar finance and revenue, Khwaja Saad Rafiq railways, Ghulam Murtaza Jatoi industries and production, Birjees Tahir Kashmir and Gilgit affairs, Pervez Rashidin information and broadcasting, Kamran Michael ports and shipping and Sadaruddin Rashidi overseas Pakistanis affairs.

Among the ministers of state, Mian Baleegh-ur-Rehman was given the education portfolio, Khurram Dastagir Khan science and technology, Usman Ibraheem housing and works, Sheikh Aftab Ahmed parliamentary affairs, Jam Kamal Khan petroleum and natural resources, Abdul Hakeem Baloch railways, Anusha Rehman Khan information technology and telecom, Saira Afza ITarar

health sciences regulation and coordination and Pir Muhammad Amin-ul-Hasnat religious affairs.

The Cabinet Division also notified the appointment of former minister Sartaj Aziz as Advisor to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs and Capt (retired) Shujaat Azeem as Advisor to the Prime Minister on Aviation. PML-N leader Sanaulah Zehri and former envoy Tariq Fatemi have been appointed Special Assistants to the Prime Minister.

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/nisar-khan-to-be-pakistan-government-s-point-man-for-dealing-with-taliban-376958>

Mining of data is called crucial to fight terror

Washington: In early September 2009, an email passed through an Internet address in Peshawar, Pakistan, that was being monitored by the vast computers controlled by U.S. intelligence analysts. It set off alarms. The address, linked to senior al-Qaeda operatives, had been dormant for months.

Investigators worked their way backward and traced the email to an address in Aurora, Colo., outside Denver. It took them to Najibullah Zazi, a 24-year-old former coffee cart operator, who was asking an al-Qaeda facilitator about how to mix ingredients for a flour-based explosive, according to law enforcement officials. A later email read: "The marriage is ready" - code that a major attack was planned.

What followed in the next few days was a high-speed cross-country pursuit in which the police stopped Zazi on the George Washington Bridge, let him go, and after several false starts, arrested him in New York. He eventually pleaded guilty to plotting to carry out backpack bombings in the city's subway system.

It is that kind of success that President Barack Obama seemed to be referring to Friday in California when he defended the National Security Agency's stockpiling of telephone call logs of Americans and gaining access to foreigners' email and other data from Microsoft, Google, Yahoo and other companies.

He argued that "modest encroachments on privacy" - including keeping records of phone numbers called and the length of calls that can be used to track terrorists, though not listening in to calls - were "worth us doing" to protect the country. The programs, he said, were authorized by Congress and regularly reviewed by federal courts.

But privacy advocates questioned the portrayal of the program's intrusion on Americans' communications as modest. When Americans communicate with a targeted person overseas, the program can vacuum up and store for later searching - without a warrant - their calls and email, too.

Obama acknowledged that he had hesitations when he inherited the program from George W. Bush, but told reporters that he soon became convinced of its necessity. "You can't

have 100 percent security and also then have 100 per cent privacy and zero inconvenience," he said. "We're going to have to make some choices as a society." To defenders of the NSA, the Zazi case underscores how the agency's Internet surveillance system, which was set up over the past decade to collect data from online providers of email and chat services, has yielded concrete results.

"We were able to glean critical information," said a senior intelligence official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "It was through an email correspondence that we had access to only through Prism."

John Miller, a former senior intelligence official who now works for CBS News, said on "CBS This Morning," "That's how a program like this is supposed to work."

Veterans of the Obama intelligence agencies say the large collections of digital data are vital in the search for terrorists. "If you're looking for a needle in the haystack, you need a haystack," Jeremy Bash, chief of staff to Leon E. Panetta, the former CIA director and former defense secretary, said on MSNBC on Friday.

Under the program, known as Prism, intelligence officials must present Internet companies with specific requests for information on a case-by-case basis, showing that the target is a foreigner and located outside the United States, a senior law enforcement official said Friday. If the NSA

comes across information about a U.S. citizen during the search, it turns over that material to the FBI for an assessment, the official said.

An administration official said Friday that agencies were evaluating whether they could publicly identify particular terrorism cases that came to the government's attention through the telephone or Internet programs.

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., chairman of the House intelligence committee, said Thursday that the program "was used to stop a terrorist attack." He did not identify the plot, or explain whether the call logs in the case would have been unavailable by ordinary subpoenas.

Two Democratic senators on the intelligence committee who have been warning about the bulk collection of records under the Patriot Act, Ron Wyden of Oregon and Mark Udall of Colorado, said Friday that their study of the calling log program has convinced them that it was not worth its cost to privacy.

"As far as we can see, all of the useful information that it has provided appears to have also been available through other collection methods that do not violate the privacy of law-abiding Americans," they said.

In contrast to the call log program, there appears to be greater public evidence that programs like Prism have led to specific useful information. The Prism program relies on a 2008 law, the FISA Amendments Act that

allows surveillance without individualized warrants if targeted at foreigners abroad, even if it takes place on domestic soil.

In December, when Congress was preparing to vote on extending the FISA Amendments Act, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who is chairwoman of the Senate intelligence committee, linked the law to eight recent terrorism-related cases, saying, "these cases show the program has worked."

The cases included plots to bomb the New York Federal Reserve Bank, the U.S. Capitol, locations in Tampa, Fla., and New York City and troops returning from combat overseas. She also listed a plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in the United States; plans by three men to travel to Afghanistan "to attend terrorist training and commit violent jihad"; and a conspiracy to provide support to a terrorist group in Uzbekistan called the Islamic Jihad Union.

While most of those accused in those cases pleaded guilty - and therefore much of the evidence against them was not publicly disclosed - another case involving two Pakistani-American brothers in Florida accused of planning to set off a bomb in New York is still active, as is one involving a Chicago-area teenager accused of planning to bomb a bar.

In both cases, the defense attorneys have cited Feinstein's statement and demanded to know whether any evidence against their clients was swept up under the 2008 surveillance law that undergirds Prism. If so,

they said, they want to challenge the evidence as unconstitutional.

But prosecutors in the Florida case have told a judge that they are not required to say whether the evidence came from an order under the 2008 law. Last year, the Supreme Court threw out a challenge to the law - without any review of its constitutionality - because the plaintiffs, a group of Americans who communicate with people overseas, could not prove that they had come under surveillance.

The Justice Department had assured the justices that it would notify criminal defendants if any evidence obtained or derived from such surveillance was used against them. Alexander Abdo of the American Civil Liberties Union, which helped bring the Supreme Court case, said the government's shifting stance amounted to "playing a shell game with Americans' privacy rights."

"It's a strategy meant to insulate the 2008 law from judicial review, and thus far the strategy that has succeeded," he said.

Still, in the Chicago case, the defense attorney, Thomas Anthony Durkin, said there was circumstantial evidence that his client, Adel Daoud, 19, came to the government's attention by activities that were swept up in surveillance targeted at overseas websites.

Durkin said that last spring, his client read an issue of "Inspire," the English-language propaganda magazine of al-Qaeda's branch in Yemen. Daoud, he said, had been researching a high school term paper on al-Qaeda.

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/mining-of-data-is-called-crucial-to-fight-terror-376859>