



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Proces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliği

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Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

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Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler

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20 APRIL 2017

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1. IRAQ

- **Jubouri, German Foreign Minister Discuss Ways To Increase International Support For Iraq militarily, Humanitarian And Relief**

House Speaker, Salim al-Jubouri discussed with German Foreign Minister Ziegmar Gabriel ways of coordination and cooperation between Iraq and the international community in order to increase military, humanitarian and relief support. A statement from Jubouri's office said the two sides discussed the latest developments in the security and political scenes, and the victories achieved by the Iraqi security forces against Daesh organization.

More Details:

http://www.ninanews.com/News_Details.aspx?Hqu6mGZL%252fefDXC9HOCQfSA%253d%253d

- **IS members including leaders, Baghdadi's relative killed in western Mosul**

Federal Police has declared killing a relative of Islamic State supreme leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and other group leaders in western Mosul. "The troops targeted IS leaders through shelling," Lt. Gen. Shaker Jawdat, chief of Federal Police, said in a statement. "The forces killed abu Baraa al-Daghestani, a military official, and his aide abu Abd al-Rahman al-Zemari in al-Jisr al-Khames region, north of the Old City."

More Details:

<http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/members-including-leaders-baghdadis-relative-killed-western-mosul/>

- **Kurdistan Region's Decision Most Suitable Solution for Its Situation: German FM**

Sigmar Gabriel, the German vice-chancellor and foreign minister, said a referendum on Kurdistan Region independence is an internal issue which should be discussed by Bghadad and Erbil. The German foreign minister met with Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani earlier today. A press conference followed the meeting in which both leaders highlighted the significant support the German government has been providing to the Kurdistan Region during the battle against the Islamic State (IS).

More Details:

<http://www.basnews.com/index.php/en/news/kurdistan/344445>

- **US tries to identify chemical agent used by ISIS terrorists in Mosul**

ISIS terrorists used a chemical in an attack on Iraqi forces in Mosul over the weekend, and the agent has been sent for testing to try to identify it, the US general commanding coalition ground forces in Iraq said, as reported by Reuters. Major General Joseph Martin, speaking to Pentagon reporters via videoconference, said ISIS terrorists had lobbed chemical shells at Iraqi security forces in west Mosul but the attack had "had no impact."

More Details:

<http://www.thebaghdadpost.com/en/story/9596/US-tries-to-identify-chemical-agent-used-by-ISIS-terrorists-in-Mosul>

- **Iraqi forces liberate new neighborhood in west Mosul**

The Iraqi Army, alongside the Federal Police forces, liberated a new district inside the western sector of Mosul, local activists reported on Thursday. According to the reports from Mosul, the Iraqi Armed Forces liberated the Al-Thuwrah Neighborhood after several days of intense clashes with the Islamic State (ISIL) terror organization.

More Details:

<https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/iraqi-forces-liberate-new-neighborhood-west-mosul/>

- **Belarus, Iraq healthcare ministries sign memorandum of understanding**

The healthcare ministries of Belarus and Iraq have signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation. The document was signed by Healthcare Minister of Belarus Valery Malashko and Healthcare Minister of Iraq Adeelah Humood, BelTA learned from the Head of the External Affairs Department of the Healthcare Ministry Anatoly Grushkovsky after the visit of the Healthcare Ministry's delegation to Iraq's Baghdad and Karbala.

More Details:

<http://eng.belta.by/society/view/belarus-iraq-healthcare-ministries-sign-memorandum-of-understanding-100600-2017/>

- **Al-Sisi supports national reconciliation, efforts to fight terrorism in Iraq**

Egypt is committed to supporting Iraqi unity and sovereignty and the efforts that aim at restoring security and stability in Iraq, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said in his meeting on Tuesday with the head of the Iraqi National Alliance, Ammar al-Hakeem. The meeting called for a strategic alliance between Iraq and Egypt in the fields of politics, economics, security, and counterterrorism, indicating that this alliance is the culmination of the countries' historical roles and will benefit their status on the Arab and regional levels.

More Details:

<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2017/04/19/al-sisi-supports-national-reconciliation-efforts-fight-terrorism-iraq/>

- **Clashes in West of Mosul Cause 336,000 Displaced People in Iraq**

At least 336,000 people left the western part of Mosul since February 19, when the Iraqi Government resumed its attacks to expel the Islamic State (ISIS) from the city, the United Nations reported Wednesday. According to the Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) the total of displaced civilians in Mosul reaches 484,000, including those forced to leave the eastern neighborhoods, freed from the Jihadists in the middle of January.

More Details:

<http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?o=rn&id=11919&SEO=clashes-in-west-of-mosul-cause-336000-displaced-people-in-iraq>

- **Iraq opens new Tigris bridge escape route for people**

Iraqi's army has built a new pontoon bridge over the Tigris River south of Mosul, after flooding had blocked all crossing points, opening an escape route for families fleeing fighting between government forces and Islamic State. On Friday, the army dismantled makeshift bridges linking the two parts of Mosul due to heavy rain, forcing residents leaving Iraq's second-largest city to use small boats.

More Details:

<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=397400>

- **US approves \$295.6 mln arms sale to Iraq**

The Pentagon said on Wednesday the U.S. State Department had approved a 295.6-million-U.S.-dollar worth of arms sale to Iraq. According to a statement by U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the military equipment would include two Peshmerga infantry brigades and two support artillery battalions. "These artillery battalions and infantry brigades will operate under the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Peshmerga (KRG MOP) with the concurrence of the central government," said the statement.

More Details:

http://www.china.org.cn/world/2017-04/19/content_40656071.htm

- **Iraq may seek exemption from OPEC oil cuts to boost own output -Hakim**

Iraq may seek to be exempt from a deal between oil exporters to reduce global supply in order to support crude prices and ask to boost its own output, the leader of the nation's Shi'ite ruling coalition Ammar al-Hakim told Reuters. OPEC is due to meet in May to decide on an extension of supply curbs decided late last year to lift prices.

More Details:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-opec-oil-idUSL8N1HS1N6?rpc=401&>

- **More than 1,300 IS militants killed by UK air strikes on Iraq in one year**

British air strikes in Iraq have killed more than 1,300 Islamic State fighters in 12 months, according to new figures. A further 111 militants are thought to have been wounded as a direct result of attacks by UK forces. The figures have been released after a written parliamentary question by Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, who asked the Ministry of Defence how many militants from the terrorist group had been killed by British forces in Iraq from December 2 2015 to December 2 2016.

More Details:

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/more-than-1300-is-militants-killed-by-uk-air-strikes-on-iraq-in-one-year-35638459.html>

- **Iran appoints IRGC general as ambassador to Iraq**

Iran has appointed an Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) general as new ambassador to Iraq. Iraj Masjedi, who is a senior adviser to Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC Quds Force, handed his credentials to Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari, IRNA news agency reported. The Quds Force of the IRGC is responsible for operations outside of Iran, including Iraq and Syria.

More Details:

<http://en.trend.az/iran/politics/2744674.html>

2. SYRIA

- **Pentagon needs to double down in battle for Syria's Badia**

With Gen. James Mattis making his first official visit as secretary of defense to Saudi Arabia, one particular point of commonality is the matter of Arab tribal forces (many from the Shammar tribal confederation) fighting against Daesh in eastern Syria. These forces are increasingly under attack by

the Syrian regime's air force, yet they have made impressive battlefield gains that have rattled Daesh's senior leadership.

More Details:

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1087221>

- **Syria: Anti-Assad Christian Militia Requests U.S. Aid to Fight Jihadists**

Fighters from an anti-Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad Christian militia have urged U.S. President Donald Trump to assist them in combating the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) and al-Qaeda in Syria. The Syriac Military Council (MFS) militia is identified by some news outlets as the armed wing of the Mesopotamia National Council (MUB) that primarily represents Assyrian Christians in northeastern al-Hasakah province in Syria.

More Details:

<http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2017/04/19/syria-anti-assad-christian-militia-requests-u-s-aid-to-fight-jihadists/>

- **OPCW: Sarin used in Syria's Khan Shaykhun**

The Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) reconvened today to further address the allegation of chemical weapons use in the Khan Shaykhun area of southern Idlib in Syria. OPCW's Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü informed Council members on recent developments regarding the OPCW Technical Secretariat's activities. This was reported by OPCW on the site of the organization.

More Details:

<http://112.international/politics/opcw-sarin-used-in-syrias-khan-shaykhun-16135.html>

- **Syria said to move jets to base used by Russia, fearing US strikes**

Syria has reportedly placed the majority of its warplanes under Russian protection out of fears US will conduct additional airstrikes on its military installations. US defense officials told media outlets on Thursday that nearly all of Syria's operational fixed-wing aircraft were now stationed at Hmeimim Air Base, just south of the port city of Latakia.

More Details:

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/syria-said-to-move-jets-to-base-used-by-russia-fearing-us-strikes/>

- **The anti-chemical weapons technology that could help rebuild Syria**

The US “Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency” (Darpa) is an elite organisation tasked with developing secretive military technologies. True to form, its logo is oddly reminiscent of a supervillain’s – imposing and stark. Some of its projects, too, are futuristic weapons with darkly amusingly self-aware names, such as Mahem - a kind of self-forging molten metal spear that can penetrate armour. But not all of Darpa’s programmes add to the chaos of conflict. They have recently developed prototypes of a self-contained treatment system to neutralise chemical weapons and “scrub” the chemical-tainted earth clean.

More Details:

<http://www.newstatesman.com/world/2017/04/anti-chemical-weapons-technology-could-help-rebuild-syria>

- **IRM Calls for Urgent Action for Better Humanitarian Access to Syria**

Islamic Relief Malaysia (IRM) urges the international community to act swiftly in ending the escalating Syria s conflict so as to secure better humanitarian access into that country. IRM Country Director, Zairulshahfuddin Zainal Abidin, citing the severely damaged hospitals in Khan Sheikhoun in Syria s north-western Idlib province due to the recent deadly chemical attack, said that the incident has indirectly interrupted humanitarian assistance and aid from being delivered to the victims.

More Details:

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/wn/newsworld.php?id=1349398>

- **More than half of Russians say air operation in Syria must go on — poll**

More than half of Russians (53%) believe that the country should go ahead with the air operation in Syria, while 34% opposed the idea, as follows from an opinion poll by the national public opinion research center VTsIOM, published on Thursday. "Fifty three percent believe that the military operation in Syria must go on, while 34% are against it," the pollster said. The share of Russians who want the operation in Syria to end has grown from 25% in 2016.

More Details:

<http://tass.com/society/942270>

- **Syria in Past 24 Hours: Over 10 Civilians Killed in US-Led Coalition Airstrikes in Raqqa**

More civilians were killed and wounded in the US-led coalition air raids in two different regions in Raqqa province. The US-led coalition warplanes bombed the town of Ma'adan in the Eastern countryside of Raqqa city, killing five civilians and wounding three others. In the meantime, the

fighter jets targeted al-Monqiyeh neighborhood in al-Tabaqa city in Western Raqqa, killing two civilians and wounding several others.

More Details:

<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13960131000178>

- **Tokyo court dismisses lawsuit of war photographer Japan prevented from flying to Syria**

The Tokyo District Court has dismissed a lawsuit brought by a freelance photographer seeking the quashing of a government order preventing him from traveling to war-torn Syria to work. In the lawsuit, Yuichi Sugimoto, 60, claimed the Foreign Ministry's order that he forfeit his passport infringed on his right to freedom of travel and of the freedom of the press guaranteed by the Constitution.

More Details:

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/19/national/crime-legal/tokyo-court-dismisses-lawsuit-of-war-photographer-japan-prevented-from-flying-to-syria/#.WPiavPnyjcs>

3. IRAN

- **Iran Underlines Necessity for Effective, Inclusive Combat on Terrorism**

The Iranian foreign ministry, which recently hosted the expert meeting of Astana conference on Syria, stressed the need for effective and inclusive fight against terrorism and efforts to find a way to end the Syrian crisis. "In the framework of the International Meeting on Syria (Astana Process), Tehran hosted the Expert Meeting and the meetings of the Joint Group by the three Guarantor States, on April 18-19, 2017," the foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

More Details:

<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13960131000197>

- **Iran presidential election facing no security threat: Interior Ministry**

The Iranian deputy interior minister for security affairs says the country's 12th presidential vote and the city and village council elections are facing no security threat. Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, Hossein Zolfaqari said Iran had foreseen any possible security issues that could arise throughout the elections and had kept a watchful eye on all developments both inside and outside the country.

More Details:

<http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/04/19/518690/Iran-presidential-election>

- **FM issues statement on Guarantor States meeting in Tehran**

In the framework of the International Meeting on Syria (Astana Process), Tehran hosted the Expert Meeting and the meetings of the Joint Group by the three Guarantor States, on April 18-19, 2017. In Tehran meetings, delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Turkish Republic discussed the draft documents proposed to the three parties, including documents pertaining to the ceasefire regime (declared on 30 December 2016 in Syria) and its implementation, exchange of detainees and abductees. A delegation of experts from the United Nations joined the trilateral meetings as observers, bringing in invaluable expertise and technical assistance.

More Details:

<http://en.mehrnews.com/news/124900/FM-issues-statement-on-Guarantor-States-meeting-in-Tehran>

- **U.S. says Iran complying with nuclear deal, yet vows inter-agency review**

In a press statement on Tuesday, the U.S. Department of State notified the Congress that Iran is complying with the nuclear deal, the very first such notification under the Trump administration. "The U.S. Department of State certified to U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan today that Iran is compliant through April 18th with its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in a letter to Paul D. Ryan, speaker of the House of Representatives.

More Details:

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/412746/U-S-says-Iran-complying-with-nuclear-deal-yet-vows-inter-agency>

- **President Rouhani arrives in Shiraz**

President Hassan Rouhani arrived in Shiraz, Fars province, on Wednesday evening to participate in a commemoration ceremony for Saadi Shirazi and to open several developmental projects. The president is in Shiraz to take part in Saadi commemoration Day and also to inaugurate many developmental projects, including a hospital, a stadium, an addicts revitalization center, many libraries, numerous medical centers, and several industrial and agricultural projects.

More Details:

<http://www.irna.ir/en/News/82499550/>

- **Dehqan: Terrorists commit crimes with US-made weapons**

Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan said on Wednesday that Takfiri-Wahhabi terrorists commit crimes with US-made weapons across the world, particularly in Syria and Iraq. The Iranian minister's remarks was in response to a recent claim made by US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who had earlier said Yemen's Houthi movement is firing "Iranian supplied missiles" into Saudi Arabia, IRNA reported.

More Details:

<http://www.iran-daily.com/News/191173.html>

- **Trump directs national Security Council to review Iran nuclear deal**

Donald Trump has directed a National Security Council-led review of Iran nuclear deal, Sputnik reported. US President Donald Trump directed a National Security Council-led interagency review whether the Iranian nuclear deal met the US interests, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in a letter to Speaker of the House of Representatives Paul Ryan.

More Details:

<http://en.trend.az/iran/politics/2744028.html>

- **US Envoy Wants to Shift UNSC Session's Focus from Israel to Iran**

The United States' Ambassador to UN Nikki Haley will try to use the US rotating presidency of the UNSC and turn the spotlight of a Thursday meeting from Israel to Iran, according to media reports. Haley, who holds the rotating presidency of the United Nations' top decision-making body for April, wants to use a monthly meeting on "the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" to tackle Tehran's role in Yemen and Syria and its support for Hezbollah, topics she sees as more central to the theme of Middle East peace.

More Details:

<http://ifpnews.com/coverage/04/us-envoy-wants-shift-focus-iran/>

- **Iranian MPs Laud Launch of New Phases of Southern Gas Field**

More than 200 Iranian lawmakers praised the coming into operation of the new phases of the giant South Pars Gas Field in the southwestern port city of Asalouyeh. In a statement read out in an open session of the parliament on Wednesday, the legislators hailed the concurrent inauguration of five phases of the South Pars Gas Field, tapping into of the oil layer of the gas field, and launch of four petrochemical projects on Sunday, April 16, as "a golden page" in the history of the Islamic Republic.

More Details:

<https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2017/04/19/1384092/iranian-mps-laud-launch-of-new-phases-of-southern-gas-field>

4. ISRAEL – PALESTINE

- **Hezbollah deputy leader: Israel deterred from war**

Hezbollah's deputy leader Naim Qassem said Thursday morning that the terror movement had sufficiently deterred Israel, convincing its leaders not to launch a war on the northern border. Qassem added that Israel's fear of incurring high casualty tolls in any prospective war also accounts for its decision to avoid a renewal of hostilities.

More Details:

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4951377,00.html>

- **Abbas: I am ready to meet Netanyahu any time under patronage of Trump**

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday made several significant statements in favor of a dialogue with Israel and a hastening of the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians in an official interview with Japanese newspaper Ashai Shimbun. "I am ready to meet the prime minister of Israel any time in Washington under the patronage of President Trump," Abbas declared.

More Details:

<http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Abbas-I-am-ready-to-meet-Netanyahu-any-time-under-patronage-of-President-Trump-488395>

- **Gun attack damages Red Cross offices in Hebron, none hurt**

An unidentified group of gunmen on Wednesday night fired several bullets at the International Committee of the Red Cross compound in the West Bank City of Hebron, a spokesperson for the international aid group said Thursday. "Around 11 last night, several bullets were fired at our premises in the city of Hebron. No staff was there at the time as it was late at night," ICRC spokesperson Rima Kamal told The Times of Israel.

More Details:

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/gun-attack-damages-red-cross-offices-in-hebron-none-hurt/>

- **Liberman justifies High Court decision**

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman today (Thursday) justified the High Court decision to allow limited opening of supermarkets on Sabbath in Tel Aviv. "I welcome the High Court's decision to approve the opening of supermarkets and commercial compounds in Tel Aviv on Shabbat," the Defense Minister wrote.

More Details:

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/228341>

- **Who Makes Millions off Israel's Top Cyber Spy Agency**

Check Point Software Technologies is one of Israel's biggest high-tech success stories. Founded nearly a quarter of a century ago, it pioneered computer firewalls, today employs more than 3,000 people and has a market cap of some \$18 billion.

More Details:

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/1.782129>

- **Israeli forces raid home of slain Palestinian, summon family members for interrogation**

Israeli forces raided the home of slain Palestinian Suhaib Mashahra in the Jerusalem-area village of Sheikh Saad on Wednesday night, after the 21-year-old was shot dead by Israeli forces when he hit an Israeli bus with his car at a junction near Israel's illegal Gush Etzion settlement bloc. Witnesses told Ma'an that Israeli forces raided the village, before entering and searching Mashahra's home. Israeli forces then summoned Mashahra's mother and his brothers Nimr and Omar for interrogation with Israeli intelligence, according to the family.

More Details:

<http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=776527>

- **Israeli army violently suppresses rally in support of hunger striking prisoners**

A Palestinian sustained rubber-coated steel bullet injury and others suffocated from tear gas inhalation on Thursday in clashes that erupted outside Ofer military camp and prison, west of Ramallah, when Israeli forces violently suppressed a rally organized in support of Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli jails, according to WAFA correspondent. Forces fired a barrage of rubber bullets and tear gas canisters to disperse the rally, shooting and injuring a protester. Dozens others suffocated due to tear gas inhalation.

More Details:

<http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=EdTF6fa77356580334aEdTF6f>

- **Palestine’s Hamas sets conditions for talks with Fatah**

Hamas on Tuesday set three conditions for sitting down with a delegation from rival Palestinian movement Fatah, which is expected to visit the Hamas-run Gaza Strip within days. “We will not sit down with the delegation before [Palestinian] President Mahmoud Abbas retreats from his recent decisions to cut the salaries of [Palestinian Authority] employees working in Gaza, reduce subsidies for Gaza’s poor, and raise taxes on Gaza’s only functioning power plant," leading Hamas member Khalil al-Hayya said at a Tuesday press conference.

More Details:

<http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/palestine-s-hamas-sets-conditions-for-talks-with-fatah/799636>

- **What will France’s election mean for Palestine?**

On Sunday, voters in France will choose the two top candidates to face each other in a runoff election on 7 May and become the country’s next president. The election is being closely watched amid the wave of right-wing, xenophobic populism sweeping a “developed” world that has seen middle class incomes and security decimated as inequality soars to the highest levels in half a century.

More Details:

<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/what-will-frances-election-mean-palestine>

- **Secret meetings held for resumption of unconditional Israel-Palestine talks**

Secret meetings are being held with the objective of resuming unconditional Israel-Palestine talks without a timetable, informed Palestinian sources revealed on Tuesday. According to Palestine’s Al-Manar Radio, the anonymous sources said that international and regional parties, including Arab states, are behind the meetings attended by Israeli and Palestinian officials in Middle East capitals.

More Details:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170419-secret-meetings-held-for-resumption-of-unconditional-israel-palestine-talks/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **NCHR ‘baffled’ by alleged vote tampering in Central Badia**

Nearly seven months after the 2016 parliamentary elections, the National Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) is “still baffled” about the circumstances that led to alleged tampering with several ballot boxes in the Central Badia.

More Details:

<http://jordantimes.com/news/local/nchr-baffled%E2%80%99-alleged-vote-tampering-central-badia>

- **King offers condolences over Saudi military plane crash**

His Majesty King Abdullah II, Wednesday, sent a cable to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, condoling him over the death of a number of officers and non-commissioned officers from the Saudi armed forces, after their military helicopter crashed late Tuesday.

More Details:

<http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleNO=34852#.WPisWfmLTcs>

- **Gov't expects economic growth at 3pct in 2017 -- Industry minister**

Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply, Yarub Qudah said the government expects in the budget plan for the current fiscal year that the national economy will grow by 3 percent while exports are set to expand by 8 percent. He added that public debt now comprises 94.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), saying the budget deficit will reduce public spending on capital projects.

More Details:

http://petra.gov.jo/Public_News/Nws_NewsDetails.aspx?lang=2&site_id=1&NewsID=298526&CatID=13

- **Aoun: The Time Has Come to Draft a New Electoral Law**

President Michel Aoun said on Thursday the time has come for Lebanon to have a new electoral law to govern the upcoming parliamentary elections. “After nine years, it is about time to draft a new voting system,” said Aoun addressing visiting families from the Upper Metn region.

More Details:

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/228776-aoun-the-time-has-come-to-draft-a-new-electoral-law>

- **European Union Delegation: committed to provide support for the preparation, implementation of timely parliamentary elections in Lebanon**

The European Union and its Member States closely follow the on-going discussions between political parties in Lebanon to agree on a law governing the next parliamentary elections, and take note of the decision of President Aoun to adjourn Parliament sessions for one month. We encourage political parties to make the best use possible of this period in order to reach consensus on a new law. Conducting timely, peaceful and transparent parliamentary elections is an important step to ensure the normal functioning of the Lebanese democratic institutions, in the interest and for the benefit of the Lebanese people.

More Details:

<http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/78319/European-Union-Delegation-Committed-to-provide-support-for-the-preparation-implementation-of-timely-parliamentary-elections-in-Lebanon>

- **Mass resignations at Arslan's Lebanese Democratic Party reported**

85 members and leaders of the Lebanese Democratic Party in the Rachaya district and Western Bekaa area submitted their resignations en masse on Wednesday, Lebanese media reported late Wednesday. The Lebanese Democratic Party is headed by MP Talal Arslan, a member of the Hezbollah-led March 8 alliance.

More Details:

<http://yalibnan.com/2017/04/20/mass-resignations-at-arslans-lebanese-democratic-party-reported/>

- **Speaker Berri: Proportionality Means Salvation, Vacuum Means Death**

Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri informed the deputies on Wednesday during the regular meeting with the deputies that he had received today the budget law draft and directly referred it to the Finance and Budget Committee to study it. The Parliament department distributed the said law draft on the deputies.

More Details:

<http://english.almanar.com.lb/243296>

- **New political crisis threatens Lebanon with disagreements over election law**

Lebanon's electoral law crisis intensifies as various proposals submitted by Lebanese politicians have failed to please the different factions and groups. In light of the current deadlock, the country has two difficult options. The first is to extend the parliament's term during a session scheduled on May 15, and the second is parliamentary vacuum, which threatens the work of the country's constitutional institutions.

More Details:

<http://www.albawaba.com/news/new-political-crisis-threatens-lebanon-disagreements-over-election-law-964918>

6. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **S. Arabia accepts Iran's conditions for Hajj pilgrimage: MP**

A member of the parliament presiding board said on Wednesday that Saudi Arabia has accepted Iran's conditions for sending pilgrims to Hajj. After a stampede in Mina on September 24, 2015, in which 464 Iranian pilgrims lost their lives Tehran said it would not send pilgrims to Hajj otherwise their safety is guaranteed.

More Details:

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/412750/S-Arabia-accepts-Iran-s-conditions-for-Hajj-pilgrimage-MP>

- **Iran's defense chief rejects US claim of sending arms to Yemen**

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan has rejected the US allegation that Tehran is sending weapons to Yemen, saying the claims were made as Washington continues to supply arms to terrorists committing crimes in different parts of the world, including in Syria and Iraq. Dehqan's remarks came in response to US Defense Secretary James Mattis, who during a visit to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, accused Iran of supplying missiles to Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah fighters.

More Details:

<http://www.iran-daily.com/News/191181.html>

- **GCC anti-extremism efforts highlighted**

Kuwait's Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Mohammed Al-Jabri said the biggest threat facing the Gulf communities is the extremist ideology. "The GCC peoples are in dire need of guidance and enlightened thought and this is what the ministries of Awqaf (religious endowments) do," the minister told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

More Details:

<http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/781817>

- **Mattis in Riyadh to boost US-Saudi alliance**

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis is in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to reinvigorate the Riyadh-Washington alliance, with both countries seeing a common adversary in Iran and its “destabilising” activities. The US and Saudi Arabia have a decades-old relationship based on the exchange of American security for Saudi oil.

More Details:

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/mattis-in-riyadh-to-boost-us-saudi-alliance-1.2013856>

- **Yemen welcomes any Int'l peace initiative**

An official of the Supreme Political Council welcomed any international position to support a political and negotiating solution in Yemen, in a statement received by Saba on Thursday. "We welcome any international stance to support a political and negotiating solution in Yemen that preserves sovereignty and territories of the country, including the road map presented by the United Nations and the US former foreign minister as a negotiating ground," the official said in the statement.

More Details:

<http://www.sabanews.net/en/news462521.htm>

- **Yemen rebel land mines ‘killed and maimed hundreds’**

Yemen’s Houthi rebels have killed and maimed hundreds of civilians and prevented many of the displaced from returning to their homes, an international rights group said on Thursday. Human Rights Watch said the Shiite rebels, who are allied with the forces of the country’s former president, have used land mines in at least six provinces since March 2015, when a Saudi-led coalition launched its military campaign against them to restore the internationally recognised government.

More Details:

<http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/yemen-rebel-land-mines-killed-and-maimed-hundreds>

- **Bahrain Crackdown: 52 Activists Sentenced to 313+ Years in Prison**

A Bahraini rights group said the Manama regime sentenced 52 political prisoners to a total of more than 313 years in jail over the last week alone. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) said the 52 detainees received the prison sentences between April 10 and 16, according to the Bahrain Mirror news website, Al Ahed reported. The report further said three other detainees have also received life sentences over the last week.

More Details:

<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13960131000736>

- **Bahrain in Talks with Gazprom, Rosneft on LNG Supplies**

Bahrain is holding talks on the supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) with Russian energy companies Gazprom and Rosneft, Bahrain's Oil Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Khalifa told Sputnik on the sidelines of an oil media forum Thursday.

More Details:

<https://sputniknews.com/business/201704201052808334-bahrain-rosneft-gazprom-lng-supplies/>

- **ICC Qatar to set up two key commissions this year**

The International Chamber of Commerce Qatar (ICC Qatar) is planning to set up two commissions in Qatar this year. The first will be Digital Economy Commission while the second will be Trade and Investment Commission, said a senior official of ICC, yesterday. This will increase the number of commissions to five as ICC Qatar has commissions on banking, arbitration and energy and environment.

More Details:

<http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/20/04/2017/ICC-Qatar-to-set-up-two-key-commissions-this-year>

7. EGYPT

- **Egypt receives second German-built submarine**

Egypt's defense ministry received a new Type 209 submarine S41 from German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems on Wednesday. The event marks the second out of four scheduled deliveries. Egypt formally received the undersea vessel at the coastal city of Alexandria, according to Anadolu Agency.

More Details:

http://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2017/04/19/Egypt-receives-second-German-built-submarine/4231492626371/?utm_source=sec&utm_campaign=sl&utm_medium=1

- **PM imposes curfew in some parts of Sinai**

Prime Minister Sherif Ismail announced that a curfew will be imposed in the area between Tal Rafah in the eastern part of Sinai, through the international borderline, reaching to Al-Ouga in the west

until Al-Halal Mountain. Curfew was also ordered in the north, from west of Al-Arish city, through the coast and the border line in Rafah and in to the south from Halal mountain until Ouga on the border.

More Details:

<http://www.egyptindependent.com//news/pm-imposes-curfew-some-parts-sinai>

- **Egypt, Ethiopia discussions confirm strength of bilateral relations**

President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi asserted Egypt's interest in strengthening and developing its relations with Ethiopia in various fields during his meeting with Workneh Gebeyehu, the Ethiopian foreign affairs minister, on Wednesday. During the meeting, both officials discussed bilateral relations and ways to advance them, as well as highlighting the strength of their relations.

More Details:

<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2017/04/19/egypt-ethiopia-discussions-confirm-strength-bilateral-relations/>

- **One policeman killed, civilian injured in IED blast in Egypt's North Sinai**

One Egyptian policeman was killed and a civilian injured in an IED blast that hit an armoured vehicle in Egypt's North Sinai city of El-Arish, state news agency MENA reported on Thursday. Egypt's security forces have been battling a decade-long militant Islamist insurgency on the Sinai Peninsula, which intensified following the ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013.

More Details:

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/265289/Egypt/Politics-/One-policeman-killed,-civilian-injured-in-IED-blas.aspx>

- **Pentagon chief pledges support for Egypt's Sisi**

US Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and top brass in Cairo on Thursday, pledging support for the American ally on his first regional tour. The brief visit, with Mattis later setting off to Israel, came after Sisi hit it off with Trump during a White House meeting earlier this month.

More Details:

<http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/pentagon-chief-pledges-support-for-egypt-s-sisi/article/490750>

- **Egypt Army Says ISIS Leaders Killed in Sinai Air Strikes**

Air strikes have killed 19 members, including several leaders, of Egypt's ISIS affiliate in the Sinai Peninsula where the extremists are waging an insurgency, the Egyptian military said on Thursday. In a statement on its official Facebook page, the military said the air strikes were directed at militants in Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which pledged allegiance to ISIS in November 2014 and adopted the name Sinai Province.

More Details:

<http://english.aawsat.com/asharq-al-awsat-english/news-middle-east/egypt-army-says-isis-leaders-killed-sinai-air-strikes>

- **Egypt qualifies 5 firms to set up Aswan power plant**

Egypt's New and Renewable Energy Authority (NREA) has qualified five companies in the tenders to set up a power plant in Kom Ombo in Aswan with a capacity of 20 MW, in cooperation with the Agence Francaise De Developpement (AFD). The winning companies include Sterling and Wilson, TBEA Energy, and Shanghai Electric, along with a Spanish company and an Egyptian company, Daily News Egypt reported, citing sources at NREA.

More Details:

http://www.tradearabia.com/news/OGN_323765.html

- **Chairman of Egypt's leading newspaper resigns**

The chairman of Egypt's biggest-selling state-owned newspaper, Al-Ahram, resigned Wednesday after protesting about interference in the running of the publication. Ahmed El-Sayed Al-Naggar had been among prominent journalists who criticized the government's transfer of two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia in April last year.

More Details:

<http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/chairman-of-egypts-leading-newspaper-resigns/800888>

- **Egypt parliament speaker discusses counterterrorism with Trump advisor**

Nick Ayres, a political strategist and advisor to US President Donald Trump, paid a surprise visit to Egypt's parliament on Wednesday, where he discussed bilateral relations with parliament speaker Ali Abdel-Aal. "Speaker Abdel-Aal [discussed with Ayres]... the necessity of Egyptian-American strategic partnership in fighting terrorism," said a statement by the Egyptian parliament's press office.

More Details:

8. NORTH AFRICA

- **Misratan representatives visit Moscow; next stop Grozny**

A mainly military Misratan delegation has been having talks in Moscow with top Russian defence and foreign ministry officials as well as members of the Russian parliament, the Duma, as the Kremlin continues its own efforts to broker peace in Libya. Led by Abdulhamid Al-Dubaiba who has long had close links to the Russians, the delegation includes the city's military council leader, Ibrahim Ben Rajeb, as well as the Bunyan Marsous-appointed Sirte military governor, Ahmed Abu Shahma, Tripoli defence ministry spokesman Mohamed Al-Ghasri plus Bunyan Marsous commander Mohamed Essa and Yousef Ben Yousef, the former head of Misrata local council.

More Details:

<https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/04/19/misratan-representatives-visit-moscow-next-stop-grozny/>

- **Sellal: Berber spring, milestone in history of Algeria's fight for enshrinement of its identity**

Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal said Wednesday, in Oran, that the anniversary of the Berber spring celebrated on the 20th April of each year represents "a milestone in the history of Algeria's fight for the consecration of its identity," adding that cultural diversity is "Algeria's true wealth." In a speech made during his meeting with local authorities and representatives of the civil society at the end of his visit to the province of Oran, the Prime Minister said that his visit coincides with the celebration of "two key dates in the history of Algeria's fight for the enshrining of its identity: Day of Knowledge (16 April), and Berber Spring (20 April)," adding that "every wise reader of history knows that our people paid a heavy price for centuries to defend its principles and the foundations of its identity."

More Details:

<http://en.aps.dz/algeria/17887-sellal-berber-spring,-milestone-in-history-of-algeria%E2%80%99s-fight-for-enshrinement-of-its-identity>

- **Key Points of the Othmani Government Program**

Saad Eddine Othmani made his first public appearance in parliament as head of government to present his coalition's program, both to representatives of the nation and the Moroccan public. Whether his presentation will make Moroccans worried, assured, or indifferent is yet to be determined. But, what is sure is that some of the measures announced will certainly create public controversy.

More Details:

<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/04/214546/key-points-othmani-government-program/>

- **Algeria's Messahel in talks with Saleh and Hafter**

Algeria's minister for Maghreb, Arab and African affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, was in eastern Libya today for meetings with Khalifa Hafter and House of Representatives (HoR) President Ageela Saleh. The meeting with the HoR chief, in Beida, came first. A HoR statement said Saleh updated Messahel on the latest developments related to the Libyan Political Agreement. Also attending were Mohamed Dayri, the Beida-based interim government's foreign minister, and Hafter's main political advisor Abdelbasit Al-Badri, who is also the Libyan ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

More Details:

<https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/04/19/algerias-messahel-key-algeria-foreign-official-arrives-in-beida-for-hafter-and-saleh-talks/>

- **Package of measures for Sfax, says Youssef Chahed**

Premier Youssef Chahed, who started Thursday a two-day visit to Sfax, said a host of decisions will be announced. Target sectors include health, infrastructure, development, sports and environment, Chahed indicated as he arrived at Sfax-Thyna Airport. These measures are geared towards restoring confidence in a region that played a crucial role in the national liberation movement as well as in January 14 Revolution.

More Details:

<https://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Politics/8939246-package-of-measures>

- **In Tunisia, activists finally catch a break against a powerful tycoon**

Fadil Aliriza is an independent researcher and journalist currently based in Tunis. Six years after the start of the Arab Spring, Tunisia continues to cling to its precarious status as the Arab world's sole parliamentary democracy. This week, however, a battle between a politically well-connected TV station and a group of anti-corruption activists is spotlighting a fundamental question: Who really controls the Tunisian state, citizens or tycoons?

More Details:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/20/in-tunisia-activists-finally-catch-a-break-against-a-powerful-tycoon/?utm_term=.200e5cfe705c

- **Tunisia, Libya strengthen financial ties with \$43M bank agency**

The Tunisian-Libyan Bank has launched a new agency with a capital of 100 million Tunisian dinars (\$43.4 million) in Monastir, in the framework of partnership between Tunisia and the Libyan Foreign Bank. The Tunisian-Libyan Bank network in Tunisia is now made up of 15 agencies employing 250 executives and agents.

More Details:

<http://www.albawaba.com/business/tunisia-libya-strengthen-financial-ties-43m-bank-agency-965354>

- **Greater laws needed in Tunisia to curb child labour, says minister**

Tunisia's social affairs minister has called for new policies to be introduced to keep children in school until the age of 16 and prevent child labour. Mohamed Trabelsi called for the pressing need to "establish adequate policies...to guarantee that children go to school until they are at least 16 years old." We have 100,000 children who leave school early for one reason or another, especially in the rural regions. It mainly affects girls.

More Details:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170419-greater-laws-needed-in-tunisia-to-curb-child-labour-says-minister/>

- **NGO denounces 'discriminatory' policies for disabled students in Morocco**

The Moroccan ministry of education has denied claims that it has suspended special provisions in examinations for students with learning disabilities. The accusation was made by the National Union of Associations (UNAHM) within the field of mental illness and disability, which called the move "discriminatory" when it condemned the decision by the ministry to suspend the new list of procedures for Year 6 examinations earlier this month.

More Details:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170419-ngo-denounces-discriminatory-policies-for-disabled-students-in-morocco/>

9. AFGHANISTAN – PAKISTAN

- **Moscow Not About To Challenge U.S In Afghanistan: Envoy**

The Russian Ambassador to Kabul Alexander Mantytskiy said on Wednesday at a press conference in Kabul that Moscow is not interested in challenging the United States and NATO in Afghanistan nor is

it following a hidden agenda regarding the country. “We do not have any hidden agenda in Afghanistan; similarly, we do not have the will to compete with the United States in Afghanistan,” Mantytskiy told the press conference.

More Details:

<http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/moab-was-warning-iran-and-russia-envoy>

- **You committed an immense atrocity against Afghans, Karzai tells Trump**

The former Afghan President Hamid Karzai has told Trump that he has committed an immense atrocity against the Afghan people. “My message to President Donald Trump today is that he has committed an immense atrocity against the Afghan people,” He said in a Twitter post.

More Details:

<http://www.khaama.com/you-committed-an-immense-atrocity-against-afghans-karzai-tells-trump-02611>

- **Zardari condemns SC decision, demands resignation from PM**

Co-Chairman Pakistan People's Party Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday condemned the Supreme Court's decision on Panama Leaks case and demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Speaking to the press, along with the party stalwarts, Zardari said, "I condemn this nine-month joke with the nation. I condemn this justice and judgment;" further adding, "today democracy and justice were adversely affected."

More Details:

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/138824-Zardari-condemns-SC-decision-demands-resignation-from-PM>

- **Panamagate verdict: PML-N declares 'victory', Supreme Court orders JIT probe of Sharif family**

Neither a clean chit nor a disqualification: the drawn out Supreme Court (SC) case probing the Sharif family's alleged corruption in the Panamagate case ended today as the court ordered the formation of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to probe how the family's money was transferred to Qatar. The prime minister and his party breathed a collective sigh of relief, as the fear of an 'extreme verdict' — the premier's ouster — dissolved and gave way to celebrations.

More Details:

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1327961/panamagate-verdict-pml-n-declares-victory-supreme-court-orders-jit-probe-of-sharif-family>

- **Neighboring countries supporting Taliban in various forms: Jahid**

Interior Minister Lt. Gen. Taj Mohammad Jahid on Wednesday chaired a high level security meeting in the capital of northern Balkh province. The minister was briefed on the security situation in Faryab, Sari-i-Pul and Jawzjan provinces at the meeting in Mazar-i-Sharif. Governor Atta Mohammad Noor, Wolesi Jirga members, provincial council members and common people attended the grand meeting.

More Details:

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2017/04/19/neighboring-countries-supporting-taliban-various-forms-jahid>

- **Two civilians injured in unprovoked firing by India along LoC**

An elderly man and a teenage girl sustained injuries in unprovoked cease fire violation by Indian forces along the Line of Control (LoC). According to Inter Services Public Relations on Sunday, Indian troops opened unprovoked firing in Chirikot sector, targeting the civil population of village Chaffar. As a result of firing a 60 years old man and a 15 years old girl sustained injured.

More Details:

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/191888-Two-civilians-injured-in-unprovoked-firing-by-India-along-LoC>

- **4 militants killed, hideout eliminated in A-29 strike in South of Afghanistan**

At least four militants were killed and their hideout was eliminated in an airstrike involving the newly-deployed A-29 Super Tucano aircraft in southern Uruzgan province of Afghanistan. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) said the militants were targeted in the vicinity of Tarinkot city, the provincial capital of Uruzgan province.

More Details:

<http://www.khaama.com/4-militants-killed-hideout-eliminated-in-a-29-strike-in-south-of-afghanistan-02610>

- **Afghanistan's Entrenched Systemic Torture**

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani really doesn't want to talk about torture. He made that clear this month when, in a scene that could have been scripted for US President Donald Trump, he tried to shut down veteran Tolo news reporter Sharif Amiry for daring to ask what the Afghan government was doing about allegations that 1st Vice President Dostum had abducted, tortured and sexually assaulted a rival. But Ghani's refusal to answer won't make those concerns go away. And it begs an even more awkward question: Is his administration really incapable of enforcing the rule of law in even such a blatant case of alleged torture by one of its own top officials?

More Details:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/19/afghanistans-entrenched-systemic-torture>

- **Panamagate Pakistan: Supreme Court Orders Further Investigation**

Pakistan's Supreme Court Thursday ordered the formation of a joint investigation team to examine allegations of corruption against the country's prime minister and his sons. The decision by a five-member bench, headed by the country's chief justice, also ordered Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his sons Hassan, and Hussein Nawaz to appear before the investigation team.

More Details:

<http://www.voanews.com/a/panamagate-pakistan-investigation/3818161.html>

10.TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST

- **Ankara holds symposium on North Africa, Iran, Turkey**

More than 200 experts from around the world will gather in Ankara on Thursday to discuss political, social, economic and security issues in the region. The Ankara Center for Iranian Studies and Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University are the co-organizers of the three-day International Symposium on Continuity and Change in North Africa, Turkey and Iran.

More Details:

<http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/ankara-holds-symposium-on-north-africa-iran-turkey/800966>

- **Fugitive Al-Qaeda Convict Arrested in Central Turkey**

Turkish media reports said a fugitive who was convicted in absentia for involvement in a 2003 bomb attack against HSBC bank in Istanbul and of membership in Al-Qaeda has been arrested. The man, identified by his initials Z.C., was arrested in a village in the central Turkish province of Cankiri, where he was working as an acting village imam, Anadolu reported.

More Details:

<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13960131000565>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Firuze Yağmur Gökler.*

It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle

Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.

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