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Subject: Fw: UNSCO Daily Press Brief, Friday, 13 May, 2011
Date: Sat, 14 May 2011 06:34:17 +0000

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Sent: Fri May 13 03:06:25 2011
Subject: UNSCO Daily Press Brief, Friday, 13 May, 2011

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Diplomacy:

Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad said Thursday that Israel was trying to break the will of the Palestinian people by seizing their tax revenues through an "act of piracy." "The will of people will not be broken; they are determined to gain their freedom and independence by September," he said. "Suspending their tax revenues is simply an act of desperation." (Maan News)

A senior Fatah official Abbas Zaki said on Thursday that the Palestinian Authority would not be able to prevent another intifada in the face of stagnant peace talks with Israel. "The Palestinian leadership facing a [diplomatic] impasse could not quiet the Palestinian street who had watched the achievements of other [Mideast] peoples," he said. (Israel Army Radio)

Palestinian Affairs:

Hamas leader Ismail Haneya in the Gaza Strip on Thursday called on the upcoming Palestinian unity government to maintain "achievements" made by Hamas security forces. "The upcoming government must build a national establishment in the West Bank and Gaza based on the faith of maintaining national security," he said. He also called for keeping armed resistance against Israel. (Xinhua)

In preparation for a third intifada march, which it is hoped will start on Friday, 13 May, Egyptian activists had called on Egyptians to march to the Gaza Strip through the Rafah border crossing on 15 May. The event, which has been dubbed "March to Palestine Day", is intended to mark the anniversary of Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe). (Al-Ahram, Egypt)

Tens of thousands of sms flooded the mobile phones of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, urging them to take part on the third Intifada march. The messages also urged participation in similar events on Sunday. (Al-Ahram)

Egypt on Thursday urged activists to cancel the rally encouraging Egyptians to cross into Gaza in support of the Palestinian cause. In a statement, authorities called on activists to focus on internal issues and "to prevent any repercussions that might result from this march." (AP)

Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal said that for the time being Egyptians are not required to march to the Gaza Strip. He said that, "advocating the cause by taking a political stance, sending relief aid, boycotting and sending prayers is a must at the moment. We do not ask you to march." (Al-Masry Al-Youm, Egypt)

Members of the US Congress issued a letter to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday in which they urge him to stop the departure of another flotilla to the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)

Israeli Internal Affairs:

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak officially launched his breakaway party Thursday evening along with four fellow party members and dozens of supporters in Tel Aviv. Barak would be leaving his post as head of the Labor Party, and would be forming a new party, Atzmaut (Independence). (Haaretz)

Syria:

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has ordered troops not to fire on pro-democracy demonstrators, a rights campaigner said, ahead of Friday prayers. Louay Hussein said Assad's adviser Bouthaina Shaaban told him in a phone call on Thursday that "definitive presidential orders have been issued not to shoot demonstrators and whoever violates this bears full responsibility." (Reuters)

The Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists said troops have killed 700 people, rounded up thousands and indiscriminately shelled towns during the protests. (Reuters)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Thursday warned Syria it will face more international pressure over its crackdown on popular protests. "There may be some who think that this is a sign of strength but treating one's own people in this way is in fact a sign of remarkable weakness," she said. "The recent events in Syria make it clear that the country cannot return to the way it was before," she said. (AFP)

EU diplomacy Chief Catherine Ashton said Thursday that the EU may consider extending sanctions against Syria to include President Bashar al-Assad himself. "President Assad is not on the list but that does not mean the foreign ministers would not return to this subject," she said. (AFP)

Russia is attempting to suppress a UN report that says Iran has been breaking a UN arms embargo by shipping weapons to Syria, Western diplomats said on Thursday. "Russia has objected to the publication of the report as an official Security Council document," a council diplomat said. "It's obviously an attempt to protect Bashar al-Assad," another council diplomat said. (Reuters)

Regional:

Qatar said Thursday it was withdrawing from a mediation bid by Gulf Cooperation Council in the Yemen conflict which stalled after the country's leader refused to sign a GCC-brokered deal. The decision was based on "indecision and delays in the signature of the proposed agreement" and "the intensity of clashes" in Yemen. (AFP)

Egypt's anti-graft agency interrogated former President Hosni Mubarak and his wife for the first time on Thursday evening, to examine charges they enriched themselves illegally. (MENA, Egypt)

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