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## Summary

### Egypt

#### Presidential campaign

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) instructed its members and provincial officials to stay away from a campaign supporting Gamal Mubarak, the younger son of President Hosni Mubarak, to run for Egypt's presidency. "The NDP neither supports nor discourages any such campaign. Egypt is a democracy and everyone can support the person whom he believes can lead the country," the independent Al-Masry Al-Youm quoted a senior official at the party as saying. According to the same official whom the newspaper did not name, Ahmed Ezz, the NDP's liaison secretary, had warned the party's provincial officials against joining this campaign, which asks Egyptians to sign a document requesting younger Mubarak to run in Egypt's presidential elections next year. Al Wafd, Egypt's largest liberal party, said it opposed hereditary succession in Egypt. "Egypt is not a building or property to be passed on from one person to another," el-Sayed el-Badawi, the chairman of the party told a rally of Egypt's opposition on potential guarantees for elections.

Supporters of Mohamed ElBaradei for president launched another round of their campaign in Alexandria. They are collecting signatures for the campaign's petition, entitled "Change." "We have received an 85 percent positive response so far," said campaign member. Kuwaiti authorities arrested three Egyptian members of the campaign to support ElBaradei for the 2011 presidential election, said Hamdi Qandil, spokesperson for the National Association for Change.

The Ghad Party has begun its own poster campaign to counter that launched by the Popular Coalition for the Support of Gamal Mubarak. Ayman Nour, the former president of the Ghad Party, said that members have printed posters of Gamal Mubarak--policies secretariat of the National Democratic Party and potential contender in the 2011 presidential election--that read, "Egypt is Larger than You" and "Stop."

A campaign to support President Hosni Mubarak's son to follow in his father footsteps has been launched by an unlikely leftist who has been busy scattering posters and slogans in slums and poor neighborhoods in support of [Gamal Mubarak](#). Kordi, who was expelled from the leftist [Tagammu](#) party following his official endorsement of Gamal, claims that 4,000 Egyptians have joined his coalition. He said he is not impressed by opposition candidates and insists that he is acting independently and without the support of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party. "I haven't and will not contact Gamal Mubarak until the coalition gathers enough voices to force him to run in the elections," said Kordi.

Egyptian human rights bodies said this week. In a joint statement the Forum of Independent Human Rights Organizations condemned the "repression, prosecution and terrorization" of political activists who are campaigning for "guarantees of transparency and integrity in the parliamentary and presidential elections and constitutional amendments which will provide competitive and free presidential elections". Activists from the Muslim Brotherhood and the April 6 Youth Movement have been gathering signatures for the National Coalition for Change's petition which calls for seven political reforms.

A top Egyptian ruling party official says his party will elect its presidential candidate in May or June of next year, a few months ahead of a scheduled election. President Hosni

Mubarak, who has ruled Egypt since 1981, could stand for re-election. But there have been concerns about the 82-year-old Mubarak's health since he underwent surgery in Germany.

Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested in Alexandria while gathering signatures for the National Coalition for Change's petition for change. The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) says that state security investigations officers raided and searched the homes of nine MB members at dawn on Sunday. A total of six men were detained because the other three were not at home at the time of the raid.

A one-day conference of the Coalition of Egyptian Opposition Parties called upon President Mubarak to respond to calls aimed at ensuring free and fair elections, Gamal Essam El-Din reports. The Coalition of Egyptian Opposition Parties (CEOP), which includes the official opposition parties of the Wafd, Tagammu, the Nasserists and Democratic Front, held a one-day conference on 8 August calling upon President Hosni Mubarak to respond to calls aimed at amending the 1956 law regarding exercising political rights. Speaking for the coalition on Sunday night, El-Sayed El-Badawi, chairman of the Wafd Party, said, "Opposition parties are united that legal guarantees are urgently needed to ensure that the upcoming parliamentary elections are marked with integrity. **Geo strategic front**

Egypt said it has received U.S. assurances that may help in restarting direct peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel. Egyptian presidential spokesman Suleiman Awwad did not disclose details of the U.S. assurances, which come on the eve of a crucial Arab League meeting to determine the future of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is under intense international pressure to restart direct peace talks with Israel frozen in 2008. Arab foreign ministers will meet Thursday to consider the matter of direct talks, potentially adding more pressure on the Palestinian president. Abbas has insisted he will only upgrade the current U.S.-mediated indirect talks with Israel if it agrees to a halt on settlement construction and accept a Palestinian state in West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

#### **Economic front**

Egypt will not raise local wheat prices or cut bread subsidies after a Russian wheat export ban sent world prices soaring, a government minister was quoted as saying by a state newspaper on Sunday. Egypt has signed contracts for the purchase of 540,000 tonnes of wheat from Russia for delivery between Aug. 1 and Sept. 10. Egypt consumes around 14 million tonnes of wheat annually and relies on foreign supplies for about half of its requirement, making it the world's largest wheat importer. Hefty state subsidies keep bread affordable in Egypt, where one fifth of the population lives on less than \$1 per day according to UN figures.

#### **Iraq**

##### **Political front**

A high-ranking Iraqi official says Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law bloc has made a key offer in an attempt to break the five-month deadlock over forming a new government, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq reports. Khalid al-Asadi, a leading member of the Shi'ite-led State of Law, told RFE/RL on August 12 that the bloc had offered the Al-Iraqiyah bloc led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi the post of parliament speaker and the chairmanship of a strategic-policy council that will have executive powers in return for nominating Maliki to a second term as prime minister. He added that his bloc is

waiting for Al-Iraqiyah's response to the offer, and "if they accept it will signal the end of the impasse." State of Law and Al-Iraqiyah -- the top two vote-getting parties in the March 7 parliamentary elections -- have been unable to find an acceptable power-sharing arrangement.

The Iraqi army will require American support for another decade before it is ready to handle the country's security on its own, Iraq's army chief of staff told AFP on Wednesday. Lieutenant General Babaker Zebari said Iraq's politicians had to find a way to "fill the void" after American troops withdraw from the country at the end of next year under a bilateral security pact. "At this point, the withdrawal (of US forces) is going well, because they are still here," Zebari said. "But the problem will start after 2011; the politicians must find other ways to fill the void after 2011, because the army will be fully ready in 2020.

### **Geo strategic front**

The Iraqi government has ruled out reconsidering the date of U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, saying Baghdad will stand by the complete pullout deadline set for 2011. Government spokesman said although the Iraqi Army might not be fully prepared to take control of the country's security by the end of 2011, Baghdad will not renegotiate the deadline. "The Iraqi Army will not be 100 percent ready... it will not be ready to the extent it aspires to be... By the end of 2011 it will not be ready as required," CNN, but added this will not pave the way for the extension of US stay in Iraq. His remarks came one day after the Iraqi Army chief of staff, General Babakir Zebari, said that the Iraqi army would not be able to ensure the country's security for another decade.

### **Lebanon**

#### **Political front**

Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's "evidence" implicating Israel in the murder of Lebanese former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has failed to sway his political rivals and left analysts divided over its impact. "The press conference is likely part and parcel of a strategy of self-defense," Mustafa Alloush, a former MP and member of the Future Movement, founded by Hariri, told AFP on Tuesday. "If the aim is to convince us of Israel's guilt, then this evidence should be placed in the hands of the relevant authorities and jurisdiction." At a Monday night press conference, Nasrallah produced several undated clips of aerial views of various areas in Lebanon, including the site of the Hariri assassination in mainly Sunni west Beirut several years prior to the murder.

Figures issued by the Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) indicate that Lebanon ranked third among 12 Arab countries in the value of overall export credit insurance contracts signed in 2009, as reported by Byblos Bank's Lebanon This Week. Dhaman provides insurance coverage to Arab and non-Arab investments in its member countries against non-commercial risks, as well as insurance against commercial and non-commercial risks for inter-Arab and worldwide export credits. As an exporter, Lebanon signed \$77 million worth of export credit insurance contracts in 2009, accounting for 13 percent of the total value of such contracts. Lebanon signed \$85.9 million or 13.7 percent of the total value in 2008.

#### **Geo strategic front**

#### **State Department Defends U.S. Assistance to Lebanon**

U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner has defended U.S. assistance to Lebanon and said it contributes to "regional stability as a whole." Toner suggested that the While

House does not share Congress' fears that aid to the Lebanese army will be turned against Israel. "We will review the security assistance program to Lebanon so that we can do better to address Congress' concerns and to continue to provide military assistance to the Lebanese army," Toner said. Hizbullah Ready to Provide Data to Lebanese Authorities: 'And The Rest is Their Business' Hizbullah announced readiness to hand over to Lebanese authorities footage allegedly intercepted from Israeli surveillance planes of the site of the murder of ex-PM Rafik Hariri prior to his 2005 assassination.

### **Social front**

Two local television stations have dropped an Iranian-produced series on the life of Jesus Christ, after a storm of complaints that the material was offensive to Christians. General Security denied that it had issued an order to stop the series, entitled "The Christ," which was being broadcast on NBN and Hizbullah's Al-Manar Television. It said the two stations made the decision voluntarily, following the commotion. "The Directorate of General Security confirms that no such decision was declared. Rather, General Security had made a series of efforts with the management of both NBN and Al-Manar, religious authorities, and concerned politicians, in order to reach a conciliatory decision to stop broadcasting the series, as an initiative taken by the management of both networks." On Friday, Maronite Bishop Beshara Rai called for a news conference at the Catholic Media Center in Jal al-Dib, which saw members of the public gather to voice their objections to the series. The news conference, which was scheduled to begin at 12 noon, was postponed for about an hour to allow Information Minister Tarek Mitri to take part.

Two Shiite Muslim television stations in Lebanon canceled a controversial program about Jesus on Friday, saying they do not want to stir up sectarian conflict in the country. The 17-episode program, which was produced in Iran, describes Jesus from an Islamic point of view. Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet and a teacher, but not the son of God. The debate has particular resonance in Lebanon, an Arab nation of 4 million people with a grim history of sectarian strife. The country's population is divided into 18 sects, including Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians and Druse. Al-Manar, a television station run by Lebanon's powerful militant group, Hezbollah, and the National Broadcasting Network, NBN, started airing the program this week at the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Christian priests and politicians quickly protested, saying the topic might endanger national coexistence. The program does not show respect to "Jesus, the church and Christianity," Catholic Maronite Archbishop Bechara el-Rai told reporters Friday. Shortly before el-Rai's news conference, Al-Manar and NBN issued a statement saying the program "shows the great personality of God's prophet Jesus, the son of Mary, peace be upon him." But, the statement said, the stations decided to stop airing the program in respect to other Lebanese sects. Information Minister

In Lebanon, where everyday conversations have long been sprinkled with French and English, many fear the new generation is losing its connection to the country's official language: Arabic. The issue has raised enough concern for some civil groups to take action. "Young people are increasingly moving away from Arabic, and this is a major source of concern for us," says Suzanne Talhouk, 33, a Lebanese poet who heads "Feil Amer," an organization launched last year to promote Arabic. "The absence of a common language between individuals of the same country means losing the common identity and cause," Talhouk said. In a nod both to its members' sense of urgency and the ir language

fixation, the group's name is the Arabic grammatical term for an imperative verb. Arabic is believed to be spoken as a first language by more than 280 million people.

## **Detailed news**

### **Egypt**

#### **Political front**

##### **NDP prepares for legislative vote**

The Egyptian Gazette Online - The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) will field 805 candidates in the coming parliamentary elections, which will be held next November, a top party official has said. NDP Secretary-General Safwat el-Sherif said 508 party members were to be named by the end of this week as viable candidates for the November polls, which will be free and fair, local media reported Saturday. The legislative vote is unlikely to re-shape the political landscape, analysts said. The NDP and opposition party candidates are to run for seats in the 518-seat legislature. El-Sherif said that the NDP candidates would be selected "to enrich the country's political life". The legislature is already dominated by the ruling NDP, with opposition groups standing little chance of gaining a significant number of seats in the upcoming elections.

##### **6 Islamists to stand trial in Egypt**

The Egyptian Gazette Online - Prosecutors in this Egyptian coastal city Monday ordered six members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood to appear before a court on Tuesday on charges of disrupting the public order. The defendants were arrested while distributing leaflets calling for change in Egypt, their families said. Over the past few weeks, pro-democracy groups, motivated by Mohamed ElBardei, the former chief of the international nuclear watchdog, have started collecting signatures pushing for constitutional changes in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood, banned in Egypt since 1954, has started a campaign to collect such signatures.

##### **President's intensive public appearances aim to counter rumors, boost trust in government, says analyst**

Daily News Egypt August 15, 2010: While President Hosni Mubarak's repeated public appearances attempted to counter rumors about a possible decline in his health, it also aimed to regain citizens' trust in the government, observers say. Last weekend witnessed what analysts described as the "intensive presence of Mubarak" in the holy month of Ramadan. On Saturday, Mubarak inaugurated the new Saft El-Laban highway, which connects Cairo and Giza governorates with the Ring Road. At a cost of LE 900 million, it took almost two years to complete the mega-project that aims to alleviate the traffic flow in Greater Cairo. Officials said that the 9.3-kilometer corridor will solve 30 percent of traffic congestion in Cairo. In the inauguration speech, Mubarak used the occasion to address issues of concern to all Egyptians, mainly water and bread. "Citizens seemed to have lost trust in the government strategy of running utilities after the recent power cuts, water shortages and wheat crisis as well as road accidents, which represents a crisis in the way the government manages utilities," Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies researcher Nabil Abdel-Fattah told Daily News Egypt. Mubarak said that Nile

water “will never go beyond Egypt's borders,” instructing the government to maximize water resources in the country. He further called on the government to expand sea water desalination projects and use modern technology to generate new crops that can be irrigated by sea water to meet the increasing need for food supplies. Mubarak’s statements were seen as an attempt to reassure Egyptians that the recent regional dispute among Nile Basin countries over rights to Nile water will have no impact on their well-being. Over the past few months, Egypt and Sudan have been leading a diplomatic battle with Nile Basin countries that want a bigger share of over the river’s water. Moreover, recent reports said that Israel negotiated with the Nile riparian countries to get a quota of the river’s waters in exchange for funding some water and development projects in these countries, official Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported Saturday. But both sides denied these reports. In the late 1970s, Israel officially asked Egypt's late president Anwar El-Sadat to provide them with Nile water, almost one year after the two countries signed a peace treaty. On Sunday daily independent Al-Masry El-Youm newspaper quoting former advisor to Minister of Irrigation Diyaa Eddin El-Qoussy as saying that Mubarak’s statements affirmed that Egypt would not comply with the demands of the Nile Basin countries or any state that shares interests with Israel. Also during the inauguration, Mubarak quizzed PM Ahmed Nazif about the cultivation of wheat and achieving self-sufficiency. Nazif said that the government has been seeking means of raising the yield. Mubarak also tackled accidents caused by trailers on highways. In this respect, the president announced that the two-year grace period for trailer trucks that ends in August 2010 will not be renewed “to preserve the souls of citizens.” Also Saturday, Mubarak inaugurated the renovated Islamic Art Museum in downtown Cairo’s Bab El-Khalq district. Rumors have recently spread about a possible deterioration of Mubarak’s health. The rumors gained strength when the international press published reports about the alleged decline of the president’s medical condition. In response, the state-owned media launched a counter campaign where officials decisively denied that the president was sick. Another potential reason for the president’s boosted public appearances, according to Abdel-Fatah, is the recent campaigns for and against the nomination of his 47-year old son, Gamal, for president in 2011.

## **Presidential campaign**

### **NDP warns against Gamal campaign**

The Egyptian Gazette Online - The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) Wednesday instructed its members and provincial officials to stay away from a campaign supporting Gamal Mubarak, the younger son of President Hosni Mubarak, to run for Egypt's presidency. "The NDP neither supports nor discourages any such campaign. Egypt is a democracy and everyone can support the person whom he believes can lead the country," the independent Al-Masry Al-Youm quoted a senior official at the party as saying. According to the same official whom the newspaper did not name, Ahmed Ezz, the NDP's liaison secretary, had warned the party's provincial officials against joining this campaign, which asks Egyptians to sign a document requesting younger Mubarak to run in Egypt's presidential elections next year. The campaigners, spearheaded by former member of the leftist Tagammu Party Magdi el-Kordy, said they had collected 22,000 signatures for Gamal to run for presidency through their website. "Our campaign, "Your



Vote is a Trust", is not an invitation to a monarchy," said Ahmed el-Menshawi, the co-ordinator of the campaign. Gamal Mubarak, 46, a former investment banker in London, returned to Egypt a decade ago to become a member of the ruling party. Opposition claims that he is being groomed to succeed his father, a claim denied by both Mubaraks. Gamal is the secretary of the NDP's influential policies committee. He is also believed to be one of the architects of the liberal economic policies the Government has been adopting since 2004. Around 20 lawyers, spearheaded by Samir el-Shishtawi, filed a report with the Prosecutor General against Ayman Nour, the founder of el-Ghad Party, accusing him of inciting hatred for Gamal and depriving him of his constitutional right to stand in presidential elections. Nour who is leading a campaign against Gamal's running for presidency shrugged his shoulders "It's an honour for me to call on citizens not to elect Gamal Mubarak," said Nour.

### **Egypt's Wafd against hereditary succession**

The Egyptian Gazette Online- Al Wafd, Egypt's largest liberal party, Sunday night said it opposed hereditary succession in Egypt. "Egypt is not a building or property to be passed on from one person to another," el-Sayed el-Badawi, the chairman of the party told a rally of Egypt's opposition on potential guarantees for elections. Egyptians will elect a new legislature next November while presidential elections are due to be held later in 2011. "We will not accept hereditary succession," he added. Opposition claims that President Hosni Mubarak, who has been in power since 1982, is grooming his younger son Gamal to succeed him. Both Mubaraks have vehemently denied such claims. Mubarak has yet to say if he will seek a sixth term.

### **Supporters of ElBaradei for president campaign in Alexandria**

Supporters of Mohamed ElBaradei for president launched another round of their campaign in Alexandria on Tuesday. They are collecting signatures for the campaign's petition, entitled "Change." "We have received an 85 percent positive response so far," said campaign member Mohamed Samir. Meanwhile, campaigners in Daqahlia claimed they were attacked in a mall while collecting signatures. "The mall security attacked us, tied us up, and kept us in their office," said campaign member Ahmed el-Barmawy. "Then they beat us and kicked us out." Mall security, however, said they asked the campaigners to leave because they were bothering female shoppers, and denied that they attacked them. The police later asked them not to clash with the campaigners, identifying them as ElBaradei supporters.

### **3 members of ElBaradei campaign arrested in Kuwait**

Two days ago Kuwaiti authorities arrested three Egyptian members of the campaign to support ElBaradei for the 2011 presidential election, said Hamdi Qandil, spokesperson for the National Association for Change. The three members are Tareq Tharwat, campaign coordinator, Farrag Nasr and Walid Nasr. Qandil rejected the idea of contacting the Egyptian Foreign Ministry to find out why the three men were arrested and to push for their release. "I can't rule out the possibility that the ministry played a role in their arrest," he said, "especially after 500 Egyptians who work there [Kuwait] announced they are joining the campaign and the association." Leaders from the National Association for Change are contacting officials in Kuwait to find out the reasons behind

the arrests, and are calling for their release, said Qandil. Their arrests came only a few hours after the group announced the inauguration of a new headquarters for the association in Kuwait. In related news, Qandil said the association's branch in Great Britain currently has approximately 300 Egyptian members, and is led by Salah Abul Fadl. The branch's first meeting was held two days ago, and they issued a statement condemning the clashes that took place on 6 April in Egypt. "The security forces' excessive use of force against protesters is proof that the collapsing Egyptian regime is in panic," the statement said. The statement also held the regime responsible for what it described as grave violations of human rights by the police. ElBaradei intends to issue a document answering all the questions in the minds of Egyptians who are aspiring for change and those who would like to understand ElBaradei's ideas, said Mohamed Hashem, manager of a publishing house. The document, he said, is not an election platform, but rather represents ElBaradei's vision for change. A group of intellectuals will start preparing this document today, he said.

### **Ghad party launches poster campaign to challenge Gamal Mubarak**

The Ghad Party has begun its own poster campaign to counter that launched by the Popular Coalition for the Support of Gamal Mubarak. Ayman Nour, the former president of the Ghad Party, said that members have printed posters of Gamal Mubarak--policies secretariat of the National Democratic Party and potential contender in the 2011 presidential election--that read, "Egypt is Larger than You" and "Stop." In a conference titled "Change Through Political Parties," held two days ago at the headquarters of the Constitutional Party, Nour said that he saw pro-Gamal posters in the Cairo districts of el-Darb el-Ahmar, Mousski, and Gammaliyya. Nour added that shop owners claim they felt obligated to display the posters to avoid harassment from officials because the posters were distributed by employees of local district councils. Abdel Halim Qandil, Kefaya coordinator, and Mamdouh Qenawi, Constitutional Party chief, confirmed that they are participating in the anti-Gamal campaign. Nour, for his part, urged the National Association for Change (NAC) to revive its campaign against succession, which they called Mayohkomsh(He Won't Rule). Meanwhile, Facebook activists have launched a new campaign to gather signatures on ElBaradei's pro-reform statement. They called on Egyptians to carry the Egyptian flag for one week from 13-21 August, which will coincide with the anniversary of the 10 Ramadan war (also known as the 6 October war). The campaign will be in response to the poster campaign by supporters of Gamal Mubarak. For their part, the Popular Coalition for the Support of Gamal Mubarak will begin a campaign to gather signatures on a petition nominating Gamal for the presidency. Magdi el-Kordi, coordinator for the coalition, said members of the campaign have already started gathering signatures in six governorates. "If ElBaradei's campaign intends to gather one million signatures, we will gather five million," el-Kordi told Al-Masry Al-Youm.

ElBaradei's supporters have been out on the streets for five months but, according to el-Kordi, have only gathered 100,000 legitimate signatures. The rest are those of Muslim Brotherhood members who sign upon instructions from their Supreme Guide.

### **EGYPT: Coalition pushing Gamal Mubarak for president**

July 30, 2010 A campaign to support President Hosni Mubarak's son to follow in his father footsteps has been launched by an unlikely leftist who has been busy scattering posters and slogans in slums and poor neighborhoods in support of [Gamal Mubarak](#). "I can see him [Gamal] completing the process his father started. I was impressed by his visits to shanty areas," said Magdi Kordi, who, to the ire of opposition parties, is leading a drive called the Popular Coalition for Gamal Mubarak's Support. Kordi, who was expelled from the leftist [Tagammu](#) party following his official endorsement of Gamal, claims that 4,000 Egyptians have joined his coalition. He said he is not impressed by opposition candidates and insists that he is acting independently and without the support of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party. "I haven't and will not contact Gamal Mubarak until the coalition gathers enough voices to force him to run in the elections," said Kordi. Gamal Mubarak, 47, heads the NDP's policies committee. Despite spiraling speculation that he is being [prepared](#) to take over his father's seat, party officials have sought to distance themselves from Kordi's coalition, saying that that "President Hosni Mubarak is the only person who'll have the final say on the party's next nominee." Nonetheless, analysts and opposition figures believe that NDP officials may benefit from Kordi's effort: It raises Gamal Mubarak's profile and, if it fails, the party bears no responsibility. Political analyst Amr Chobaki said the appearance of posters supporting Gamal Mubarak, who lacks foreign policy experience and has never served in government, is a test to see how Egyptians will react to the possibility of the son succeeding his father. "Whether Gamal knows of it or not, this campaign could well be orchestrated by some NDP top members, because I don't think anyone would volunteer in a campaign supporting Gamal Mubarak," Hassan Nafaa, who is the general coordinator of the [National Front for Change](#) says. "There must be something cooked by the NDP amidst the growing mystery over their party's next presidential candidate," Nafaa adds. The mystery Nafaa mentioned is increasing anxiety among millions of Egyptians on whether Hosni Mubarak will nominate himself come 2011 or if the 82-year-old, whose [health](#) has been the center of national concern over the last few months, will choose his son. While the younger generation of NDP members is convinced of Gamal Mubarak can run the country, the party's old guard reportedly has its doubts.

### **Gamal Mubarak evades question on presidency**

In response to a question on whether he intends to run for the presidency in the upcoming elections, Gamal Mubarak, assistant secretary general of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and secretary of the NDP Policy Committee, evaded the question asked by Magda Hamdi, a student at el-Wadi el-Gadid University in the Faculty of Agriculture. Acknowledging his evasion of the question, Mubarak commented "It seems that whenever questions are delayed, they become more heated." Another student stood up and highlighted the mistrust between citizens and the government, and addressed Mubarak, the son, saying, "I wish I could follow your lead. I want to know how you reached this position, as you are an example to me."

This dialogue was held by Gamal Mubarak with students at el-Wadi el-Gadid University, Thursday, in Luxor city. Those who speak about the retreat of the Egyptian state in the region are thinking with a 1960s mentality, Gamal said, adding "The world has changed and the same policies that worked for a certain period cannot be applied [now]. However, there are people in our society whose thinking stopped during this period." The scope of

freedom the opposition party obtained to promote their ideas and platforms is "unprecedented", he maintained. In the international scene, there are Egyptian-Iranian differences on the vision for the future of the region, Mubarak stressed, but "we are against striking Iran and support a peaceful resolution to the issue." Addressing Egyptian-American relations, he added, "The tense relationship with the United States over the past five years is evidence that we are not within the US' orbit. Aid from the US is not vital to the Egyptian economy, although it has helped in our development over the past years, and there are mutual interests between the two countries." Egypt, he said, must remain present within the international scene and expressed his relative optimism about Egyptian efforts over the last few years. The Upper Egyptian governorates have begun to see their share of job opportunities due to public and private investment, and the industrial sector has achieved more in the past four years than it did in the 15 years before that, Mubarak added. On the same topic, Mubarak acknowledged there is a problem with the concentration of investments in certain governorates, specifically Greater Cairo, Lower Egypt and some industrial zones. Because of this, many governorates believe that the only result has been the unfair distribution of investment and job opportunities between Upper and Lower Egyptian governorates. This is a result of investor preference for industrial zones with ample infrastructure. Therefore, incentives should be granted to those who invest in Upper Egypt, Mubarak said, adding that "we seek to resolve some of the problems in the agriculture sector during the [upcoming] NDP congress." In the same session, Ahmed el-Maghrabi, minister of housing, responded to a question on the prevalence of businessmen as ministers, and suggested there are several watchdogs in Egypt which examine this phenomenon. He stressed there is no reason to exclude expertise from government due to someone's background, and that change should be based on what has been achieved and what changed after the individual assumed the position. This has been the case in the past, and there is no problem with it now, he added.

Growth is not taking place equally in all geographic areas and attempts to provide job opportunities has sometimes proved to be a failure, said the minister. He later described US President Barack Obama's receiving of the Nobel Peace Prize as a "surprise", particularly since he entered the White House only one week before nominations for the prize closed.

### **Prosecutor shelves 'defamation' complaint against Nour**

Marwa Al-A'sar/Daily News Egypt August 13, 2010: Public Prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmoud shelved Thursday a complaint submitted by 20 members of the Organization for Defending Police and Citizens against Al-Ghad party president Ayman Nour, accusing him of inciting the public "to hate" Gamal Mubarak. The organization members further accused Nour, also the opposition party's founder, of defamation and attempting to deprive President Hosni Mubarak's 47-year old son of his constitutional right to run in the next presidential election. In a statement, Mahmoud said that the issue of running in the presidential race has not been brought up yet, "which makes this complaint or any similar ones irrelevant." As for the defamation charges, Mahmoud noted that nobody other than Mubarak, the son, has the right to complain unless the complainant has a power of attorney to act on his behalf. "The public prosecutor's decision is consistent with logic and reason," Nour told Daily News Egypt Friday. Nour described the

compliant as “stupid and illegal.” “I confessed that I did all what they charged me with...and I said I was ready to present evidence that Gamal Mubarak is not qualified to rule Egypt. But the prosecutor was quite wise to shelve the complaint and avoid me going through this process,” Nour added. Earlier this month, Al-Ghad opposition party launched a counter campaign to the “The Popular Coalition to Support Gamal Mubarak” for the presidency in the 2011 elections. The campaign adopted the slogan “Egypt is Too Big For You” and was joined by a number of opposition groups and parties including the Constitutional Party, the Kefaya Movement for Change and Youths for Change. “The campaign is not against Gamal Mubarak as a person. Rather, it is against the idea of pleading for his approval to rule Egypt,” Nour previously told Daily News Egypt. “This is very humiliating to the ... Egyptian people who are far greater than this,” he added. Led by Leftist Tagammu Party member Magdy El-Kurdy, the pro-Gamal Mubarak campaign drew wide criticism from opposition groups and parties, some of whom interpreted it as a means to rally support for Mubarak in his father’s lifetime. Wall posters that put forward Mubarak, the son, as a potential candidate for the 2011 presidential poll were spotted end of July on walls in some lower-income neighborhoods carrying the slogan “Gamal...Egypt,” followed by new ones that read “Gamal for All Egyptians.” In 2005, Nour ran for the presidential elections and a few months later, was sentenced to five years in prison for allegedly forging powers of attorney required to start his new party, charges he claimed were politically motivated. Nour was released in February 2009 on medical grounds. Even though he is legally banned from practicing any political activity for five years after he completes his sentence, Nour recently announced his intention to run for president in 2011.

### **Rights groups warn against gov't bias in elections**

Sarah Carr /Daily News Egypt August 15, 2010: Free parliamentary and presidential elections are “impossible if state bodies are not neutral”, 11 Egyptian human rights bodies said this week. In a joint statement the Forum of Independent Human Rights Organizations condemned the “repression, prosecution and terrorization” of political activists who are campaigning for “guarantees of transparency and integrity in the parliamentary and presidential elections and constitutional amendments which will provide competitive and free presidential elections”. Activists from the Muslim Brotherhood and the April 6 Youth Movement have been gathering signatures for the National Coalition for Change’s petition which calls for seven political reforms. Supporters of presidential hopeful Hamdeen Sababy, head of the Karama Party have also been gathering signatures. Rights groups have reported several incidents of campaigners being harassed by security bodies. The latest of these incidents targeted Bassem Aboul Magd, Sabahy’s campaign coordinator. Aboul Magd was arrested by state security investigations on Aug. 10 after refusing a summons from an officer in Alexandria, the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) said. On Wednesday, five cars bearing images of Mohamed ElBaradei were seized in Alexandria after they were used in a rally in support of the National Coalition leader. The Forum warns of “the consequences of restricting access for peaceful expression of ideas and the demands of political opponents, while supporters of the ruling party and one of its candidates are empowered to launch election campaigns freely. “Double standards, use of the

emergency law and an arsenal of laws which restrict the freedoms of political opposition groups have serious consequences for the future of the political process in Egypt at this crucial turning point.”

### **Egypt ruling party to name presidential candidate in mid-2011**

July 26, 2010: A top Egyptian ruling party official says his party will elect its presidential candidate in May or June of next year, a few months ahead of a scheduled election. President Hosni Mubarak, who has ruled Egypt since 1981, could stand for re-election. But there have been concerns about the 82-year-old Mubarak's health since he underwent surgery in Germany in March to remove his gall bladder and a benign growth in the lining of his small intestine. Mubarak has rejected calls to name a vice president who could be a potential successor. Mufid Shehab, parliamentary affairs minister, said Sunday night that 6,000 members of the National Democratic Party will vote for the presidential candidate next year.

### **Brotherhood members arrested in Alex for promoting petition for change**

Daily News Egypt August 9, 2010: Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested in Alexandria while gathering signatures for the National Coalition for Change's petition for change. The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) says that state security investigations officers raided and searched the homes of nine MB members at dawn on Sunday. A total of six men were detained because the other three were not at home at the time of the raid. "Security bodies have launched successive campaigns against individuals calling for change and democracy. It would seem that demanding reform has become the most serious of offences, especially outside Cairo. These latest detentions come only days after 15 people supporting the [petition for change's seven] demands were detained in Alexandria," an ANHRI statement issued on Monday reads. ANHRI says that the group of 15 was charged with "threatening public peace and security." Seven were released, six were detained for 15 days while two others were released on bail of LE 10,000. Two of the group were released on Monday morning. "This confirms the government's intention to track down and impose restrictions on political opponents before the upcoming parliamentary elections and deny its competitors any opportunity to take part in free elections," ANHRI says. The MB announced in July that it would be collecting signatures for the petition for change launched by Mohamed ElBaradei, the former director of the International Atomic Energy Agency. On the MB website ([www.tawkatonline.com](http://www.tawkatonline.com)), 463,540 signatures have been collected, while 94,035 people have signed the petition on the National Coalition for Change's page ([www.taghyeer.net](http://www.taghyeer.net)). Abdel-Rahman Youssef from the National Coalition for Change says that a total of approximately 600,000 signatures have been gathered including signatures collected offline.

### **'No elections without guarantees'**

A one-day conference of the Coalition of Egyptian Opposition Parties called upon President Mubarak to respond to calls aimed at ensuring free and fair elections, Gamal Essam El-Din reports. The Coalition of Egyptian Opposition Parties (CEOP), which includes the official opposition parties of the Wafd, Tagammu, the Nasserists and Democratic Front, held a one-day conference on 8 August calling upon President Hosni

Mubarak to respond to calls aimed at amending the 1956 law regarding exercising political rights. Speaking for the coalition on Sunday night, El-Sayed El-Badawi, chairman of the Wafd Party, said, "Opposition parties are united that legal guarantees are urgently needed to ensure that the upcoming parliamentary elections are marked with integrity. We think that the law on the exercise of political rights should be amended as soon as possible and that President Hosni Mubarak, by invoking his constitutional powers, is urged to respond to our calls even if the two houses of parliament -- the People's Assembly and Shura Council -- are not currently in session," El-Badawi said. Called "No elections without guarantees" the conference, which drew between 3,000 to 4,000 supporters, stressed that "legislative amendments should focus on scrapping the existing individual candidacy system in favour of adopting the proportional representation slate system which is designed to ensure that political parties and minorities like Copts and women are well represented in parliament." El-Badawi explained that the required amendments should also re-define the roles of the Higher Election Commission (HEC) which is entrusted by the 1956 law with supervising the elections of the People's Assembly entirely. "The law entrusted HEC with 16 roles and powers and we believe that some of these should be quickly amended or redefined to ensure that the polls are well monitored and supervised," said El-Badawi. According to El-Badawi, a document prepared by the Wafd Party and endorsed by the coalition, stated that the HEC should be headed by the chairman of the Court of Cassation, the highest judicial authority in Egypt, rather than the chairman of Cairo's Appeal Court as currently stated by the 1956 law. "In addition," added El-Badawi, "all HEC members should be senior Cassation Court judges and all should be entrusted with selecting the polling stations, regulating their performance and ensuring that they are well supervised and monitored by one or two judges." The Wafd document also demanded that HEC takes direct responsibility for monitoring voting booths and has the final say on the appeals filed against the results of the elections. The document stressed that HEC members should have full control over the police forces. "Police forces required for safeguarding the polls should take their orders only from the HEC chairman rather than from the interior minister and that the number of these forces should be equal to the number of polling stations," said the Wafd document, adding, "It is a must that all the polling stations should be entirely and freely monitored by information media and civil society organisations." The document, however, refrained from stipulating that international organisations have a role in monitoring the polls. It concluded by calling upon HEC to make an overall review of the lists of voters and that these lists "should be quickly revised in accordance with the newly-designed national identity cards". El-Badawi indicated that the coalition's demands for amending the 1956 political rights law should be implemented before 17 September. "If not implemented before this date, the General Assembly of the Wafd will meet to decide whether to boycott the elections," said El-Badawi. El-Badawi said the coalition's requirements for free and fair elections do not mean that the coalition's calls for constitutional reforms, which include amending articles 76, 77 and 88, will take a back seat. "Our calls for sweeping constitutional reforms, announced in the coalition's conference in March, still top our agenda and are necessary for political reform in Egypt and averting a scenario of inheritance of power," said El-Badawi, adding that, "the people of Egypt will never allow inheritance because it is not a product or a piece of real estate that can be inherited." Observers and media people noted,

however, that the CEOP conference, organised by the Wafd Party, was ignored by many politicians. The Nasserists, which are an integral part of the coalition, did not bother to send a single representative. Ahmed Hassan, secretary-general of the Nasserist Party, told Al-Ahram Weekly that, "the Nasserists are well aware of the Wafd's document on election guarantees but the party took a decision that it will participate in the People's Assembly elections whether the guarantees were accepted by the regime or not." Hassan said an initial list of 41 Nasserist candidates has already been prepared for the election race. The Wafd Party itself announced on Sunday that an initial list of 125 candidates will be fielded in the PA elections. The list includes most of the Wafd's eight current MPs in parliament, adding to a list of female candidates, top of whom is Mona Makram Ebeid, a former member of parliament and a professor of politics at the American University in Cairo. The leftist Tagammu Party found it enough to send a delegation, headed by its secretary-general Sayed Abdel-AAL, to attend the conference. Al-Ahali, the Tagammu's weekly mouthpiece, announced last week that an initial list of 50 candidates, including seven women, will be fielded in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The CEOP conference was ignored by the National Assembly for Change (NAC) which was founded in February by Mohamed El-Baradei, the former director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency to crusade for political and constitutional reform in Egypt. Hassan Nafaa, NAC's coordinator, said NAC is in favour of boycotting elections. "We do not believe that the ruling National Democratic Party [NDP] will respond in any way to the Wafd document on election guarantees and so there will never be any real guarantees ensuring the integrity of elections," said Nafaa, adding that, "the best way to exert pressure on the regime to democratise is to stick to NAC's slogan 'Let's all boycott the elections or participate in all'." Nafaa and NAC's position are supported by Osama El-Ghazali Harb, chairman of the Democratic Front Party which forms a part of CEOP. Harb, who was the only party chairman who attended the one-day conference, emphasised that his party was strongly in favour of boycotting the elections. "We believe that there will be no real guarantees and that the politics of boycotting is the best tool to exert pressure on the NDP regime," said El-Ghazali. Some rank-and-file Muslim Brotherhood members attended the conference. Saad El-Husseini, a Brotherhood deputy, told the Weekly that, "the group rejects the Wafd's document request that the individual candidacy system be scrapped because this system helps both independents and party-based candidates win seats." According to El-Husseini, "the proportional representation system goes against independents which form the majority of candidates." Many observers believe that the 8 August conference reflected the Wafd's agenda rather than the demands of all CEOP members. Gamal Zahran, a professor of political economics and an independent MP, told the Weekly that, "the conference showed that the coalition suffers from deep divisions and that regardless of any guarantees, most of the parties will speed up participating in the elections at the end." As expected, NDP leaders responded coolly to the CEOP conference in spite of the fact that most of the party's senior leaders, with the exception of Gamal Mubarak, had received an official invitation. NDP leaders, however, were keen to emphasise that "the possibility of amending the 1956 law on THE exercise of political rights ahead of November's parliamentary elections is completely ruled out." Fathi Sorour, speaker of the People's Assembly and a member of the NDP's political politburo, told an Alexandria Bibliotheca meeting last week that it was by no means expected that legislative or constitutional amendments would be adopted ahead of



parliamentary elections at the end of this year or even presidential elections next year. Joining forces with Sorour, Mohamed Kamal, the NDP's secretary for indoctrination and training, told Al-Ahram on Tuesday that "the possibility that the 1956 political rights law would be amended ahead of the polls is very difficult. "The last amendments introduced to this law were made in 2007 and most of them were designed to ensure that integrity is the hallmark of parliamentary elections because a commission including senior judges noted for impartiality is entrusted with monitoring the elections from beginning to end," explained Kamal, adding that "the law also allows civil society organisations to participate in monitoring the elections."

### **Presidential campaigns ignite**

The pro-Gamal Mubarak campaign continued for the second week, with organisers taking it to cyberspace and densely populated Nile Delta governorates, reports Gamal Essam El-Din. Although one year away, campaigns for the presidential elections have heated up. A large number of young people have stepped up a campaign aimed at supporting a presidential bid by Gamal Mubarak, the 47-year-old son of President Hosni Mubarak and chairman of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) influential Policies Committee, in 2011. Supporters of Gamal Mubarak, or members of the so-called Popular Coalition for the Support of Gamal Mubarak (PCSGM), turned to popular social networking websites Facebook and Twitter to urge people to say "yes" for Gamal Mubarak and "participate" in voting for him as president of Egypt in 2011. Going hand-in-hand with the above, PCSGM members have also kicked off a campaign for supporting Gamal Mubarak in the densely populated Nile Delta governorates. On 6 August, a group of between 30 and 50 members toured the Nile Delta governorate of Sharqiya to gather signatures in support of the nomination of Gamal Mubarak from ordinary citizens. They were led by PCSGM Coordinator Magdi El-Kordi, 54, a former member of the leftist Tagammu Party until he was expelled for his support of Gamal Mubarak. The organisers distributed tens of posters featuring Gamal Mubarak and bearing the words "Participate with us in supporting Gamal Mubarak". PCSGM leaders toured some Sharqiya villages and cities without visiting Zagazig, the governorate's capital. El-Kordi said citizens supporting Gamal Mubarak were required to show their identity cards first to ensure the validity of their signatures. "Those who approve providing their signatures should write that they have decided that PCSGM act on their behalf in supporting the nomination of Gamal Mubarak," said El-Kordi. El-Kordi did not give any specific figures about those who have already signed, but said the number is in the thousands and is increasing all the time. According to El-Kordi, PCSGM has printed 200,000 copies of forms to be signed by supporters of Gamal Mubarak as an initial step and until more than five million signatures are collected in the lead up to presidential elections. He also indicated that, "a CD featuring the achievements of Gamal Mubarak and bearing the title The embattled Gamal Mubarak will be distributed among supporting citizens." The second station stop for the PCSGM campaign was Mansoura, the capital of the governorate of Daqahliya. El-Kordi said tens of PCSGM young supporters plastered hundreds of Gamal Mubarak's posters everywhere in the densely populated city of Mansoura. "The posters are highly welcomed by ordinary citizens," El-Kordi asserted. Mansoura is the birthplace of Ayman Nour, leader of the Ghad Party who has led a ferocious opposition campaign against President Mubarak and his son Gamal since 2005. El-Kordi said the PCSGM would be

soon opening offices in other governorates until it covers all of Egypt. Supporters of the pro- Gamal Mubarak campaign were keen to emphasise that, "their support for Gamal Mubarak is motivated by admiration for his liberal policies" and that their campaign "is just volunteer work" and that they do not receive "money from any NDP sources". According to El-Kordi, PCSGM was founded three months ago and now has 17 offices in six governorates (Cairo, Helwan, Beni Sweif, Sharqiya, Daqahliya and Beheira). "We focus on densely populated cities, villages and towns at first and this is why we began with Cairo's popular districts where hundreds of posters of Gamal Mubarak were distributed," El-Kordi said. The reaction of NDP leaders to the PCSGM campaign remains ambiguous and even divided. Some NDP prominent businessmen took many by surprise when they announced their full support for the nomination of Gamal Mubarak in 2011's presidential elections. Ibrahim Kamel, a member of the NDP secretariat-general and an associate of Gamal Mubarak, told independent newspapers two weeks ago, "the NDP would most likely give its support for the nomination of Gamal Mubarak in 2011's presidential elections in the event that the NDP's leader President Hosni Mubarak, opted to stand down." Kamel, however, denied that the NDP is involved in promoting the PCSGM. Hossam Badrawi, a leading member of the NDP, emphasised that "Gamal Mubarak would be the natural candidate of the NDP in 2011's presidential elections if President Mubarak decided to step down and declined to run." Speculation is also rife that some NDP officials close to Gamal Mubarak, such as Mohamed Kamal, the NDP's secretary for training and indoctrination, have already formed a special committee tasked with giving financial and administrative support to the PCSGM. Kamal, however, denied that he has any role in supporting pro-Gamal Mubarak posters and the cyberspace campaign. According to Kamal, Gamal Mubarak has no relation with Facebook groups that support his candidacy for the presidential elections. He added that discussing the NDP's candidate for the presidential elections is premature. The NDP's old guard leaders, however, have continued issuing vehement denials that the NDP stands behind the PCSGM. The NDP's secretary-general, Safwat El-Sherif, said the NDP is currently preoccupied with preparing its platform and list of candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2010. Alieddin Hilal, the NDP's secretary for media affairs, said: "It is rude to discuss the NDP's nominee for 2011's presidential elections right now, while President Mubarak is still on top of the party's leadership." The conflicting statements issued by NDP members on Gamal Mubarak's nomination was interpreted by opposition activists as reflecting serious divisions among the party's old and new guard. Hassan Nafaa, a Cairo University politics professor and coordinator of the National Assembly for Change (NAC), led by former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Mohamed El-Baradei, said "Businessmen and young leaders close to Gamal Mubarak are pushing for his candidacy while old guard politicians, receiving their powers from the 82-year-old President Hosni Mubarak, want to remain in their positions and continue enjoying their privileges." The PCSGM is the last in a series of door- knocking campaigns aimed at collecting signatures from ordinary citizens. The NAC kicked off a campaign two months ago with the objective of amending the constitution and allowing independent figures like El-Baradei to submit a presidential bid. Political activist Ayman Nour also launched a campaign aimed at disrupting Gamal Mubarak's campaign, under the title "Egypt is too big for you". Nour says that his campaign drew 2,000 supporters in one week. A fourth campaign, aimed at supporting

the nomination of Hamdeen Sabahi in the presidential elections, leader of the pan-Arab Karama Party, said it has collected 10,000 supporting signatures.

### **Old hand becomes new head**

The legal battle over the leadership of the liberal Ghad Party reached a climax with the election of Ayman Nour as its chairman, Mona El-Nahas reports. In defiance of legal barriers banning him from practising his political rights, Ayman Nour, founder of the liberal Ghad Party, was elected on Friday as the new party chairman. Nour managed to garner 273 votes, while only 34 votes went to his rival Yasser Abdel-Hamid, the party's deputy chairman. Although separated from Nour in 2009, Gamila Ismail was keen to attend the general assembly in her capacity as a member of the party's higher council. Ismail voted for Nour saying he was the best to lead the party in the coming stage. Following the announcement of the election results, Nour said the Ghad Party was back and capable of offering an alternative to the regime. He added his party will be in the vanguard of political powers calling for reform and change. Last Friday's general assembly was held in the wake of a final ruling issued in June by the Supreme Administrative Court, by means of which Ihab El-Kholi, the then party chairman was no longer recognised as the chairmanship seat holder. Moussa Mustafa Moussa, who has for years been battling for the party leadership, first with Nour, then with El-Kholi, viewed the ruling as settling the long legal dispute about the party leadership in his favour. Since 2005, the year when Nour finished second to President Hosni Mubarak in the first multi-candidate presidential polls, the party has been divided into two wings, one led by Nour, the other by Moussa. Vowing to take the necessary legal measures against Nour and his group if they use the name of the Ghad Party in their meetings or in any political activity, following last week's general assembly Moussa hurried to file an official complaint against them. According to Samir Abdel-Azim, Moussa's lawyer, the complaint is now with the Qasr Al-Nil prosecution. In the complaint, Abdel-Azim accused Nour, together with three top party leaders from Nour's group including Wael Nawwara, Ghad's secretary-general, of impersonating a political party and holding a meeting in violation of the law. Abdel-Azim also accused the head of the advertisement department at the independent Al-Dustour newspaper of publishing false news. An advertisement heralding the date for holding Nour's general assembly was published in Al-Dustour before party elections. "The prosecution summoned Nour and his group but they did not attend," Abdel-Azim said. Nour and his men see their legal stand as 100 per cent correct. "Measures of holding the general assembly conform with the conditions stipulated by the party's internal statutes," said lawyer Abdel-Rehim Amr from Nour's side. On June's court ruling, Amr insists that, "it's true that the ruling did not recognise El-Kholi as the party chairman. Neither did it recognise Moussa ." As Nour's lawyer argued following the issue of the ruling, the seat of the party chairman has become vacant, something which necessitated the election of a new chairman through fresh party polls. "And this is what happened during last Friday's general assembly, during which Nour was chosen as the Ghad chairman via fair elections," Amr said. However, not everyone from Nour's group welcomed Nour's election as the new party chairman. A few hours before the general assembly, dozens of members from the Ghad branch in Alexandria submitted their resignations to protest against Nour's running in the party polls despite his criminal record. A lawsuit was filed before the Administrative Court by Hisham Farag, a Ghad

member from Alexandria, who called for banning Nour from running in the party elections. Nour said he will be more than happy to accept such resignations as he expects to get a large number of new members in return. Nour's insistence to lead the Ghad Party will cause the party to lose both legitimacy and the opportunity to run in the presidential polls due to be staged in 2011, those who resigned believed. In December 2005, Nour was sentenced to a five-year jail term on charges of forging membership proxies necessary for registering his party. Nour insisted that the charge was fabricated with the aim of undermining his political career. In February 2009 Nour was released on health grounds, but that did not mean that he was cleared of the forgery charge. According to Article 25 of the penal code, an individual with a criminal record is not allowed to practice any of his political rights until six years after his release. However, since the date of his release, Nour has argued that he has the necessary legal cards which will enable him to overcome obstacles hindering him from practising his political rights, including the right to run in polls. He was reluctant to elaborate further, saying he did not want further surprises. "If anyone has legal proof to contest Nour's right to run in polls, why doesn't he submit it right now? And we are ready with our own strong evidence in reply," Amr said.

### **Opponents of Gamal Mubarak ridicule posters**

July 29. 2010 Magdy el Kordy is waging a one-man campaign for Gamal Mubarak's candidacy in next year's presidential elections. Mr el Kordy, 54, a technician, has plastered posters of President Hosni Mubarak's youngest son across working-class areas of the capital and vows to soon bring them to other provinces. He was a member of the leftist al Tagamu party, but was kicked out a few days ago for putting up the posters. "I can see him completing the process after his father. I was impressed by his visits to shanty areas and his bias towards the class I and most Egyptians belong to," Mr el Kordy said. But Gamal Mubarak, who was once considered the heir apparent to Hosni Mubarak, is seen as an increasingly unpopular choice, even by the ruling party. There is a belief that those who are of Hosni Mubarak's generation are opposed to Gamal succeeding his father. Senior members in the army and the intelligence service do not want a non-military man in office, analysts have said. The emergence of the Gamal Mubarak posters came after his disappearance from the political scene, especially since the return of Mohammed ElBaradei, 68, the former chief of the UN nuclear agency (IAEA) in February, who is seen by many here as the strongest potential presidential candidate. Mr ElBaradei's supporters, along with the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest opposition group, have collected more than 350,000 signatures on petitions to amend the Egyptian constitution so independents such as Mr ElBaradei can run in presidential elections. Some observers say Gamal Mubarak is busy preparing for the upcoming legislative elections at end of this year. Others, such as the opposition figure Abdel Halim Qandil, say that "the succession dream or scenario is in tatters like the absurd, political begging campaign of Gamal's posters". "It seems that President Mubarak couldn't muster the consent and support of the army and intelligence for his son's succession," said Mr Qandil, a spokesman for Kefaya, or Enough, a small opposition group which in 2004 was the first to protest against the inheritance of power by Gamal. The ruling National Democratic Party denies that it is responsible for Mr el Kordy's posters. "The posters campaign is an individual act. The ruling party has nothing to do with it," Mohammed

Kamal, the secretary of training and political education in the NDP, said in a phone interview. "We don't know the guy [el Kordy] and were really surprised to see this. "It doesn't serve any purpose. The party hasn't selected its candidate for presidential elections yet," said Mr Kamel, who is a confidant of Gamal's. Gamal Mubarak, 46, a millionaire and a former investment banker in London, returned to Egypt a decade ago to become a member of the NDP and was seen by most political observers as Hosni Mubarak's heir. Gamal Mubarak is the secretary general of the NDP's influential policy committee, and is responsible for appointing cabinet members. He is also one of the architects of the liberal economic policies the government has been adopting since 2004. Hosni Mubarak has been in power since 1981, but his poor health has again intensified the speculation about who will succeed him. Unlike his predecessors, Hosni Mubarak never appointed a vice president, and has not yet said if he will run in next year's presidential elections, which will probably take place in Sept 2011. The NDP will choose its candidate for the presidency in May or June 2011 in a special convention, Mufid Shehab, the minister of state for legal and parliamentary affairs, said Monday in an interview with the private Egyptian television channel ON TV. Mr Shehab's comments came just few days after Ali Eddin Helal, the chairman of the media committee in the NDP, said during a conference with university students in Alexandria that "the talk about other NDP candidates despite the presence of President Mubarak is rude". The last two weeks saw renewed talk about Hosni Mubarak's health, mainly in foreign media, and drew belated denials from the president's spokesman, Soliman Awaad. He had his gall bladder and a growth on his intestine removed in March. The opposition leader Ayman Nour, 46, who finished a distant second to Hosni Mubarak in the country's first contested presidential election in 2005, started touring the neighbourhoods where Gamal Mubarak's posters are posted, warning people of the dangers of hereditary power and Gamal's role in Egypt's economic problems, Mr Nour told the National. "The people are making fun of these posters," he said. He said his party is preparing its own posters that will tell a different story about Gamal.

## **Nile issue**

### **'Nile water not to go outside Egypt'**

MENA - President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday Egypt would never provide any other country outside its borders with Nile water, and urged the Government to better use water of the world's longest river. "Nile water will never allow outside Egypt's borders," the official Middle East News Agency (MENA) quoted Mubarak as saying Saturday. The Egyptian leader, whose country and its southern neighbour Sudan are leading a diplomatic battle with other Nile Basin countries, did not name any country who requested to get Nile water. However, reports have been recently rife over Israeli negotiations with the Nile riparian countries to get a quota of the river's waters in exchange for funding some water and development projects in these countries. Both sides deny the reports. Israel officially asked Egypt's late president Anwar el-Sadat to provide them with Nile water in the late 1970s, almost a year after the two countries signed a peace treaty.

### **Egypt eyes Mediterranean gas hub**

Jul 28, 2010 - Eni SPA, Egypt's largest foreign oil and gas operator, signed a strategic framework agreement with the Egyptian government and government oil and gas entities

to develop joint upstream and downstream initiatives even as it brought a Western Desert field on line 45 days after its discovery. Eni said the agreement reinforces its cooperation, which dates to 1954, with Egypt's Ministry of Petroleum and state Egyptian General Petroleum Corp. (EGPC) and Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Co. (EGAS). The agreement follows a May 2009 cooperation initiative and calls for:

- Initiatives in the Mediterranean basin through a joint venture between Eni, EGPC, and-or EGAS including mutual information exchange and joint studies to pursue common projects.
- The participation of EGPC and-or EGAS in Eni upstream oil and gas activities outside Egypt, including development of oil fields in Iraq and Gabon.
- An initiative sponsored by the ministry that seeks to secure rights for Eni to acquire gas transportation capacity in the Arab Gas Pipeline system in accordance with the intergovernmental measures already present among the countries involved with the pipeline.

The Arab Gas Pipeline transports gas from Egypt to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon and may be expanded and interconnected to other gas transport systems in the future. The parties also envisage flexibility to use this system for physical gas swaps and transportation of purchased gas to and from Egypt.

The above mentioned initiatives will form the foundation for developing a preeminent Mediterranean gas hub in Egypt, Eni said. Eni, which operates in Egypt through its subsidiary International Egyptian Oil Co., (IEOC) placed on production Arcadia field on the Meleiha concession and plans to drill four more wells in 2010-11 to bring output to 3,000 b/d of oil equivalent. Eni didn't give the discovery well's rate but said it is producing from the Lower Cretaceous Alam El Bueib formation and proved gas potential in the Jurassic Katatba formation.

Eni, through IEOC, has a 56% participating interest in the concession. The other owners are OAO Lukoil 24% and Mitsui & Co. 20%. Agiba Petroleum, an operating entity owned equally by IEOC and the EGPC, is the operator of Arcadia.

Agiba is shooting a 3D seismic survey on Meleiha targeting deep Lower Cretaceous and Jurassic formations that bear unexploited exploration potential.

### **Let's step back**

Egypt is working to get Nile Basin countries to return to the negotiating table, Dina Ezzat reports. While pursuing broad cooperation with Nile Basin countries, Egypt is also working to "encourage" them "resume" negotiations on a controversial agreement adopted by the majority in May to redistribute Nile water shares. "We are very keen that the upstream countries resume negotiations. And we are asking development partners in Nile Basin countries to encourage them resume negotiations," said an official Egyptian source. In May, four out of seven upstream Nile Basin countries joined the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), despite the announced opposition of the two lower stream countries, Egypt and Sudan. The NBI is designed to cut the water shares of both Egypt and Sudan. Cairo and Khartoum insist the agreement is legally null and void. They say no new agreement can overturn previous agreements, even those signed during the British colonial period. Following the signing of the NBI, Egypt expressed much anger and resentment at the move. This reaction was later contained as Cairo opted for a "cooler" approach that included top-level talks and the exchange of visits with leaders of

concerned countries. Today, Egyptian officials report that this approach of "containment" is scoring "some success", but they still anticipate hard times ahead. "We have made some progress in the containment of bad feelings in upstream countries. We have been somewhat successful in conveying the message that Egypt is not being hostile towards them, and that Egypt is keen to find a way by which all the Nile Basin countries have sufficient water resources to cover their needs -- now and in the future," said the same official. According to this official, the Egyptian strategy in handling the Nile water issue spans two tracks: first, to help upstream countries reduce their considerable water losses so their needs can be sufficiently covered without cutting the annual 55 billion cubic metre share allocated to Egypt; second, to resume negotiations on the NBI to avoid legal disagreement amongst relevant countries. In applying this strategy, Egypt has been offering its expertise to upstream countries to maximise their water usage efficiency. It is also working to improve its own water usage efficiency. Egypt is in particular promoting projects to cut down the considerable loss of Nile water in south Sudan and Ethiopia. Cairo has been soliciting the support of donor states in this strategy. "We are telling all concerned that we are not in the business of harming the interests of upstream countries, but we cannot accept that our interests be harmed either," the official said. The final result of the Egyptian diplomatic exercise is not clear yet. Upstream countries have not given any nod of approval to the Egyptian call for the resumption of NBI negotiations. And donors have not promised long- term commitment to the Egyptian call for "prior notification" on plans to finance water or irrigation projects -- especially high capacity dams -- on the Nile. "We have very clear legal rights, both in relation to our annual share and in relation to prior notification, but we are saying that we are still willing to negotiate a deal that would provide all Nile Basin countries with water security," the official said. A round of new consultations among Nile Basin countries is due in autumn, tentatively, at the level of ministers of water and irrigation. At this meeting Egypt would again propose the "resumption of NBI negotiations".

## **Geo strategic front**

### **Egypt: US assurances may boost direct peace talks**

Wed Jul 28, – Egypt said Wednesday it has received U.S. assurances that may help in restarting direct peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel. Egyptian presidential spokesman Suleiman Awwad did not disclose details of the U.S. assurances, which come on the eve of a crucial Arab League meeting to determine the future of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is under intense international pressure to restart direct peace talks with Israel frozen in 2008. Arab foreign ministers will meet Thursday to consider the matter of direct talks, potentially adding more pressure on the Palestinian president. Abbas has insisted he will only upgrade the current U.S.-mediated indirect talks with Israel if it agrees to a halt on settlement construction and accept a Palestinian state in West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused to be pinned down on a framework for negotiations. This week The Associated Press obtained a Palestinian document that revealed that Mitchell warned Abbas that if he does not agree to direct talks, President Barack Obama will not be able to help the Palestinians achieve a state of their own. The indirect talks and a partial Israeli freeze of settlement building will end in

September. Awwad said that Obama has committed to exerting efforts toward direct peace talks aimed at creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel . He said President Hosni Mubarak has received a letter from Obama, followed by calls from Vice President Joe Biden and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, all signaling a U.S. commitment to establish a Palestinian state. "These are all indications which we hope are pursued and yield Arab and international consensus to launch direct peace talks with a time table and clear terms of reference," Awwad said.

#### **Assurances from the U.S. might convince Abbas to restart the talks.**

Netanyahu has called for resumption of direct negotiations without conditions. He has accepted the concept of a Palestinian state but has refused to outline his stance on the main issues, including borders, before the talks resume. In a speech Tuesday in Jerusalem, Netanyahu said a Palestinian state must be demilitarized and recognize Israel as a Jewish state. He also demanded undefined security arrangements. Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said the Arab foreign ministers are looking to hear from Abbas about the reassurances he also received from the Americans. Egyptian officials say enthusiastic engagement from Obama could help efforts to resume direct talks. But the Palestinian document noted that Mitchell demanded Palestinian agreement for direct talks before Obama gets involved.

#### **Peres, Mubarak call for direct peace talks**

Aug. 1 (UPI) -- Egypt and Israel's presidents Sunday called to engage in direct peace talks with the Palestinians as soon as possible at the outset of a meeting in Cairo. Israel and the Palestinians must embark on direct peace talks and not waste the window of opportunity that has opened before them, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and visiting Israel President Shimon Peres said during a two hour work meeting. At the outset of the meeting, Peres told Mubarak that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is keen to start direct talks with the Palestinians immediately in an effort to reach a signed agreement based on a two-state solution, Peres' office said in a statement. Peres thanked Mubarak for maintaining a strong stand in the midst of extremists seeking to torpedo the peace process and said: "Israeli and Egyptian mothers and sons owe you a debt of gratitude. Israel respects and recognizes your efforts to maintain calm and stability in the Middle East, as well as your efforts to secure the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit." Peres' office said the two also discussed the Iranian nuclear threat and the recent sanctions imposed on Iran, efforts made to release Shalit and other issues aimed at strengthening the strategic ties between the two countries. Egyptian intelligence head Gen. Omar Suleiman and Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit also met with Peres' military attaché Brig. Gen. Hasson Hasson, and agreed to establish a joint team to search for Israeli soldiers missing in action in Egypt since the Yom Kippur War, Peres' office said.

#### **Economic front**

##### **Egypt will not raise local wheat prices**

CAIRO- Egypt will not raise local wheat prices or cut bread subsidies after a Russian wheat export ban sent world prices soaring, a government minister was quoted as saying



by a state newspaper on Sunday. Egypt has signed contracts for the purchase of 540,000 tonnes of wheat from Russia for delivery between Aug. 1 and Sept. 10 . Egypt consumes around 14 million tonnes of wheat annually and relies on foreign supplies for about half of its requirement, making it the world's largest wheat importer. Hefty state subsidies keep bread affordable in Egypt, where one fifth of the population lives on less than \$1 per day according to UN figures. "The subsidy programme will not be affected as a result of this sudden price hike," Social Solidarity Minister Ali Musailhi was quoted as saying by al-Ahram newspaper. "We have no intention of raising the prices of subsidised commodities." Finance Minister Youssef Boutros-Ghali said in June he aimed to cut subsidies, which make up around a quarter of state spending, in order to raise spending on education, health and other social services in the 2010-2011 fiscal year without increasing the deficit. The government's subsidy budget assumes an average wheat price of \$200 per tonne compared to a recent market price of \$240, according to a CI Capital research note. Russia imposed the temporary wheat export ban after the worst heatwave on record ravaged crops, pushing wheat prices to their highest in almost two years. Egypt has signed contracts for the purchase of 540,000 tonnes of wheat from Russia for delivery between Aug. 1 and Sept. 10 and is now seeking an additional 60,000 tonnes of wheat per month to make up for the shortfall. Egyptians traditionally increase their consumption of wheat during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins this week. Egyptian authorities are scheduled to hold an emergency meeting later on Sunday to draft a plan to ease the effect of the Russian export ban, the trade ministry said on Sunday. Nomani Nomani, chairman of Egypt's General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC), said on Thursday Egypt had more than four months' wheat supply for the local market, but that GASC was "continuously present" in the international market.

### **Egypt sees trade with South America tripling**

(Reuters) - Egypt could triple its trade with South American trade bloc Mercosur over the next few years as it pushes to secure food supplies, its trade minister said on Tuesday. Egypt signed a free trade agreement on Monday with Mercosur, which groups agricultural exporters Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. "We have \$2.5 billion of trade between Egypt and the Mercosur. With the free trade agreement we can double, or triple that number easily in the next few years," Rachid Mohamed Rachid said in an interview. Egypt imported \$1 billion of Argentine goods in 2008, including soy beans, soy oil, corn and beef and sold goods worth \$111 million to Argentina. "Our population today is 80 million; we'll go to 100 million in the next decade, so our consumption of food will increase and this is one of the reasons why we're here because we want to partner and secure our source of food for the future," Rachid said. As a country that would like to secure at least 5 million tonnes of wheat a year, it is in Egypt's interest to have a diversified base of supply, he added. Egypt's exports to Brazil, the largest economy in Latin America, totaled \$218 million in 2008. Its imports, which include meat, sugar and aircraft, came to \$1.4 billion, according to Egyptian Trade Ministry data. Rachid said the deal is likely to boost Egyptian investment in South America and vice versa and could prompt other Arab countries to expand their trade with the region. "It's a very important new event, new link, new chapter in the relation between the Middle East and Latin American countries ... I'm sure other (countries) will follow," he said. Rachid said Egypt also expects to start negotiations for a free trade agreement with Russia, a big

supplier of grains to the country, in the next six months and with South Africa before the end of the year. "We're trying to expand our providers... and at the same time balance the risk of the existing markets," he said. Asked about plans to grant eight new cement licenses to boost output, Rachid said Egypt will issue the permits before the end of the year. But he added the government may not be able to supply energy to firms that obtain them. Egypt aims to increase cement output by 40 percent to 80 million tonnes by 2015 to meet growing local demand. "It can be part of the conditions that we will not be able to supply energy ... which will mean that the companies will have to make their own deals, either with foreign companies operating in Egypt or importers," he said.

## **Social front**

### **Top Islamic institution slams Quran-burning plan**

Thursday, August 12, 2010 - The world's pre-eminent Sunni Muslim institution of learning has condemned a Florida church's plans to host a Quran-burning ceremony on Sept. 11. In a statement carried by local media on Thursday, Al-Azhar's Supreme Council in Egypt accused the church of "stirring up hate and discrimination" and called on other American churches to condemn the event. The Dove World Outreach Center is planning to burn the Islamic holy text on church grounds in remembrance of the victims of 9/11. Organisers are using its website and social-networking sites like Facebook to promote the event. The Gainesville made headlines last year after distributing T-shirts that read "Islam is of the Devil."

## **Iraq**

### **Political front**

#### **Iraqi Political Stalemate Raises Security Fears**

Security personnel and rescue workers gather at the site of a bomb attack in Kut, about 150 kilometers southeast of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, on August 3. Violent militant groups are seeking to fill the vacuum created by Iraq's stalled political process amid a drastic reduction of United States troops based in the country, a senior American military commander has warned. Brigadier General Ralph Baker, deputy commander of U.S. forces in central Iraq, said this week the failure of Iraq's squabbling politicians to form a government had increased the prospects of an upsurge in violence and intercommunal strife. His comments to journalists in Baghdad came as the U.S. military pushes ahead with plans to reduce the number of troops in the country from 65,000 to 50,000 by the end of this month ahead of full scheduled withdrawal by 2011. They also followed a recent spate of attacks, including two bombings in the southern port city of Basra on August 8 that killed at least 43 people. Figures released by Iraqi officials showed July was the deadliest month for civilians for more than two years, with 396 civilians, 50 Iraqi soldiers, and 89 police officers reported killed. The U.S. military has disputed the figures, putting July's death toll at 222, including six Americans. The incidents have come against a backdrop of prolonged disagreement between the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, and his principal rival, Iyad Allawi, over who should form the next government following the March parliamentary elections. Baker said that while there had been a downward long-term trend in violent attacks, they had risen over "the last week or two" amid

widespread frustration over the political uncertainty. "As we look at the violence and we study it, one of the theories we have is that as the time between this government forming continues to extend itself, the Iraqi citizens become very frustrated with the political process," Baker said. "We believe that one of the aims of the criminals and the terrorists and the insurgents is to take advantage of the concern and the angst that the citizens have right now about the government's formation in an attempt to intimidate them. And the reason they want to intimidate the population is because the citizens in Baghdad, for the last six to eight months, have been instrumental in sharing information with the security forces which has led to some very effective targeting against Al-Qaeda and other militia groups."

**Insurgent Foothold?** Baker predicted that insurgent groups would attempt to "discredit the government and discredit the security forces" in an effort to gain a foothold. Adding credence to that forecast has been a decision by traffic police in Baghdad to arm themselves with Kalashnikovs following the killing of at least 12 patrol officers over a single week. The policemen are thought to have been targeted as part of an effort by insurgents to undermine law and order. In an interview with Reuters, Maliki acknowledged that he was "part of the problem," but said only a strong government with majority support could halt a drift toward further violence. "I'm sure that if the next prime minister is weak and not supported by the majority of political blocs, entities and parliamentarians, the big danger is it will affect the unity of Iraq and the security situation," Maliki told the agency. "Militias and gangs will return. Al-Qaeda will return and there will be conflicts. There are many people lurking who are waiting to seize any gap. We need a man who knows the map of existing challenges, diplomatic, external and internal relations, national unity, national reconciliation and the unity of Iraq." Recent events have fueled fears that Iraqi government forces will not be capable of maintaining security once U.S. troops withdraw. Last week, Saddam Hussein's former deputy, Tariq Aziz, now in prison for crimes against humanity, told Britain's "The Guardian" newspaper that U.S. troops should stay and said President Barack Obama's planned withdrawal amounted to "leaving Iraq to the wolves." U.S. commanders have admitted that insurgent groups, including Al-Qaeda, remain active though weakened but have expressed cautious optimism about Iraqi forces' preparedness to deal with them. A senior Iraqi commander, Lieutenant General Ali Ghaidan, declared on August 9 that the country's forces were "fully prepared" to take over from the Americans. "Our security forces are well prepared and will be responsible for keeping security in the country," Ghaidan said. "We are fully prepared to take all the responsibilities from the U.S. forces during this phase. At the end of 2011, we will be responsible for the entire security situation in Iraq." **Iraqi Preparedness** But Joost Hiltermann, Middle East and North African deputy program director at the International Crisis Group, says question marks remain about Iraqi readiness. "I think here and there they are [ready], or in some aspects of their mission but there are absolute weaknesses as well that need to be understood," Hiltermann says. "In terms of being able to carry out operations, often with the support of American troops that are embedded with the Iraqi forces, their capability is quite good. But the Iraqi forces are weak in logistics and in intelligence, especially intelligence coordination and proper use of information that is collected. And of course, the Iraqis don't have an air force and they don't have air capability and so this would have to be provided by American forces for the foreseeable future." U.S. military planners have

voiced concern about the ability of neighboring Iran to foster instability. Baker accused Iran of training insurgents on its territory before sending them into Iraq to carry out attacks. He also cited intelligence reports that, he said, suggested Iran's Shi'a Islamic regime had been aiding Sunni groups, including Al-Qaeda. "We are looking into intelligence reports that we've received that Iran has started to talk to Sunni insurgent groups and tried to get them to sponsor acts of violence in Iraq," General Baker said. "And we know for several years that Iran has been suspected of harboring Al-Qaeda leadership and even members of [Osama] bin Laden's family under house arrest in Iran." According to Hiltermann, Iraqis such as Tariq Aziz harbor deeper fears of long-term Iranian domination, partly born of memories the bloody eight-year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. Both concerns may be overdone. While Iran is preoccupied with making life difficult for U.S. forces while they remain in Iraq, it has no interest in seeing the country descend into chaos in the long term, Hiltermann says. And any Iranian ambitions for establishing hegemony over its neighbor are likely to be counterbalanced by the interests of Turkey and Arab states. "That's the question: whether Iran will be able to exploit the American absence to the point of establishing dominance or something less than that. And I suspect it's something less than that because Iran is not the only contender here," Hiltermann says. "There is Turkey, which has been highly proactive on the diplomatic front and in engaging Iraq in strategic agreements. There are the other Arab states, that clearly don't see eye-to-eye with Iran on Iraq's future. And the United States may be withdrawing all of its troops by the end of 2011 but it will still have a significant diplomatic and economic and military presence, even if indirect militarily. And so I think Iran will not be able to simply take over the place. It's not going to be like that."

### **Iraqi Party 'Makes Offer' To Break Government Deadlock**

A high-ranking Iraqi official says Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law bloc has made a key offer in an attempt to break the five-month deadlock over forming a new government, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq reports. Khalid al-Asadi, a leading member of the Shi'ite-led State of Law, told RFE/RL on August 12 that the bloc had offered the Al-Iraqiyah bloc led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi the post of parliament speaker and the chairmanship of a strategic-policy council that will have executive powers in return for nominating Maliki to a second term as prime minister. He added that his bloc is waiting for Al-Iraqiyah's response to the offer, and "if they accept it will signal the end of the impasse." State of Law and Al-Iraqiyah -- the top two vote-getting parties in the March 7 parliamentary elections -- have been unable to find an acceptable power-sharing arrangement. But Muhammad al-Bayati, a leading official of the Iraqi National Alliance, the other major Shi'ite bloc, told RFE/RL that State of Law had been officially informed that talks with them will be conclusively broken off if they do not agree to drop Maliki and replace him with another candidate for prime minister. He said if State of Law failed to meet this condition, his bloc would initiate talks with Al-Iraqiyah and the Kurdish bloc. Asadi replied that these statements were views held by certain individuals and did not represent the Iraqi National Alliance's readiness to continue its talks with Maliki's bloc. Mahmud Othman, a leading member of the Kurdish bloc, told RFE/RL that the Kurds have circulated to the respective political factions a "road map" for national partnership, including settlement of all outstanding issues between the Kurdish regional

government and Baghdad. He did not elaborate on the proposal. Outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill said in a National Public Radio interview from Baghdad on August 12 that the pace of political progress in Iraq had accelerated in recent weeks and that "things may be heading in the right direction." The parliamentary elections were inconclusive, with Al-Iraqiyah, State of Law, and the Iraqi National Alliance winning 91, 89, and 70 seats, respectively, in the 325-seat parliament.

### **Army Chief: Iraq Needs US Military Support until 2020**

The Iraqi army will require American support for another decade before it is ready to handle the country's security on its own, Iraq's army chief of staff told AFP on Wednesday. Lieutenant General Babaker Zebari said Iraq's politicians had to find a way to "fill the void" after American troops withdraw from the country at the end of next year under a bilateral security pact. "At this point, the withdrawal (of US forces) is going well, because they are still here," Zebari said. "But the problem will start after 2011; the politicians must find other ways to fill the void after 2011, because the army will be fully ready in 2020. "If I were asked about the withdrawal, I would say to politicians: the US army must stay until the Iraqi army is fully ready in 2020." Zebari's remarks came as US forces were in the process of withdrawing thousands of soldiers from Iraq to meet an August 31 declaration of an end to combat operations by US troops. By that point, Washington has committed to having 50,000 troops stationed in Iraq, from about 64,000 now.

### **Geo strategic front**

#### **Iraq backs U.S. withdrawal deadline**

The Iraqi government has ruled out reconsidering the date of U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, saying Baghdad will stand by the complete pullout deadline set for 2011. Government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said although the Iraqi Army might not be fully prepared to take control of the country's security by the end of 2011, Baghdad will not renegotiate the deadline. "The Iraqi Army will not be 100 percent ready... it will not be ready to the extent it aspires to be... By the end of 2011 it will not be ready as required," al-Dabbagh told CNN, but added this will not pave the way for the extension of US stay in Iraq. His remarks came one day after the Iraqi Army chief of staff, General Babakir Zebari, said that the Iraqi army would not be able to ensure the country's security for another decade and that US troops should stay in Iraq until then. Al-Dabbagh said Zebari's comments reflect his own views and are not based on any government decision. The Iraqi government spokesman believes his country can solve its security problem through signing security pacts with its neighboring countries. The United States currently has 64,000 soldiers stationed in the war-ravaged Iraq, but plans to reduce that number to 50,000 by the end of August when the US ends its combat operations and switches to a training and advisory mission. According to a bilateral security agreement negotiated in 2008, all US troops are to leave Iraq by December 31, 2011

#### **Obama, National Security Team Hold Meeting on Iraq**

US President Barack Obama convened his national security team Wednesday to discuss the situation in Iraq, with just three weeks to go before the official end of the US combat

mission there. About 20 senior civilian and military officials were expected to attend the meeting with Obama in the super-secure White House situation room to consider the road ahead in a country whose leaders have still not formed a government five months after legislative elections. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Obama's national security adviser Jim Jones were joining the talks, as is the new director of national intelligence, James Clapper. The US military, which currently has about 64,000 troops in Iraq, is supposed to conclude its combat mission August 31, in keeping with a timetable announced by Obama shortly after taking office in 2009. The 50,000 US troops who will remain in the country beyond the deadline will be withdrawn by the end of 2011.

### **US troops to stay in Iraq beyond 2011**

Hundreds of US troops will stay in Iraq under the authority of the US embassy, after American forces' pullout from the war-torn country in 2011, a top White House advisor says "We'll be doing in Iraq what we do in many countries around the world with which we have a security relationship," AFP quoted Anthony Blinken, national security advisor for the vice president, as saying on Wednesday. He added that the US has tried to establish and keep some connecting issues with the countries it had experienced military presence by selling American equipment or training the native forces. "But when I say small, I'm not talking thousands, I'm talking dozens or maybe hundreds, that's typically how much we would see," Blinken further explained. The United States currently has 64,000 soldiers stationed in the war-ravaged Iraq, but plans to reduce that number to 50,000 by the end of August. According to a bilateral security pact, all US troops are to leave Iraq by the end of 2011. Iraq has witnessed a rise in violence in recent months as the country remains grappling with a five-month-long political impasse after the key March 7 general elections failed to produce a clear winner. The rising militancy culminated in July which became the deadliest month since 2008. According to figures provided by the Iraqi government, 535 people have been killed so far this year. More than 100 people have already lost their lives in August.

### **Iraq combat ops end Aug. 31, U.S. says**

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs has announced that the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq is on schedule. The U.S. says it will end combat operations in Iraq as scheduled on August 31 despite the recent surge in violence in the area, the White House said on Wednesday. "We're on target by the end of the month to end our combat mission" in Iraq, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs told reporters at a press briefing. The U.S. currently has 64,000 soldiers stationed in Iraq but plans to reduce that number to 50,000 by the end of August. According to a bilateral security pact, all U.S. troops are to leave Iraq by the end of 2011. However, on Wednesday Iraq's top army officer, Lt. General Babakar Zerbari, said he believes the withdrawal of U.S. forces is premature because foreign troops will be needed for another decade in Iraq. Zerbari's remarks might have been influenced by the fact that earlier in the day, eight of his soldiers were killed in an attack as a result of questionable security.

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### **Iraqi, U.S. Military Officials Say Iraqis Can Ensure Internal Security**

U.S. and Iraqi military officials have said that Iraqi security forces will have reached a sufficient level to ensure internal security by the time the remaining U.S. forces leave by 2012, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq reports. On August 12, the most senior Iraqi military officer, Lieutenant General Babakir Zebari, was quoted as saying that "the Iraqi Army will not be able to ensure the country's security until 2020." Defense Ministry spokesman Muhammad al-Askari told RFE/RL on August 13 that in terms of readiness, the Iraqi forces would be able to take over responsibility when U.S. troops depart at the end of 2011. But he said that "strategic capacity building, including the air force and air defenses -- to defend the country against external attacks -- will take longer, and this is what [Zebari] meant by his statements." Askari said a distinction should be made between taking over security, which he said Iraqi forces were capable of doing, and external threats. "But even in the latter case we are steadily building up a defense

capacity," he said. Brigadier General Ralph Baker, the deputy commander of U.S. forces in central Iraq, told RFE/RL on August 13, "We are confident that by December 31, 2011, the Iraqi security forces will be able to maintain internal security and they will have a minimum capability to provide external security." Baker concurred with Askari, adding that Iraq "still will not have a very modern air force or air defenses, and still will have limited conventional capability." Baker underlined that "it will be a decision of the government of Iraq: if they want to sustain a long-term military strategic relationship with the U.S., then we can assist in building that capacity." He pointed out that such a long-term strategic relationship exists with several countries in the Middle East, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. Military analyst Wafiq al-Yasiri told RFE/RL that Zebari "was speaking as a realistic professional soldier when he said the Iraqi Army will not be ready to defend the country's borders against external threats before 2020." He added that training and equipping a regular army for such tasks takes years longer compared to the time it takes to prepare and equip internal security forces.

## **Economic front**

### **New Iran Envoy Says Sanctions Won't Affect Iraq Trade**

Iran's new envoy to Baghdad said on Tuesday that the latest round of sanctions imposed on Tehran would not affect bilateral economic relations with Iraq. Hassan Danaie-Far's remarks to reporters came during his first news conference since arriving in the Iraqi capital to replace former ambassador Hassan Kadhami-Qomi. "The sanctions will not affect economic relations between the two countries," Danaie-Far said at the Iranian embassy in central Baghdad. The UN Security Council hit Iran with a fourth set of sanctions on June 9 over its nuclear program. The United States and European Union have since imposed even tougher measures of their own. "Economic relations (between Iraq and Iran) are on a natural path, despite having stopped for several decades," Danaie-Far said. "They are improving now, day by day." The Iranian ambassador said bilateral trade presently amounted to about seven billion dollars a year, adding: "This figure will increase in the near future."

## **Social front**

### **Lebanon**

### **Political front**

#### **Nasrallah's speech fails to meet high expectations Analysis**

Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's "evidence" implicating Israel in the murder of Lebanese former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has failed to sway his political rivals and left analysts divided over its impact. "The press conference is likely part and parcel of a strategy of self-defense," Mustafa Alloush, a former MP and member of the Future Movement, founded by Hariri, told AFP on Tuesday. "If the aim is to convince us of Israel's guilt, then this evidence should be placed in the hands of the relevant authorities and jurisdiction." At a Monday night press conference, Nasrallah produced several



undated clips of aerial views of various areas in Lebanon, including the site of the Hariri assassination in mainly Sunni west Beirut several years prior to the murder. Nasrallah, who has accused Israel of the February 14, 2005, bombing which killed Hariri and 22 others, said the footage was intercepted from unmanned Israeli MK surveillance drones. He conceded the images were not conclusive proof but noted that his party – which is believed constantly under surveillance by its arch-foe Israel – had no offices, positions or presence in the areas surveyed. Hariri’s allies initially blamed Syria for his killing but Damascus has consistently denied the allegations. Syria nonetheless withdrew its troops from Lebanon under international pressure in April 2005, ending a 29-year presence. Nasrallah last month said he was aware the UN-backed tribunal on the Hariri murder, which is expected to issue an indictment this year, would indict members of his Syrian- and Iranian-backed party, slamming it as an Israeli project. But his highly anticipated address Monday failed to live up to the expectations of the Lebanese and was at best received as circumstantial evidence – and a show of counter-espionage prowess. “No one took the evidence seriously or considered it objective,” said Hilal Khashan, a political science professor at the American University of Beirut. “Nasrallah was simply addressing his public,” Khashan told AFP. “He promised solid proof but instead offered new elements to support his rebuttal of the tribunal’s credibility and request they start anew.” Asaad Abu Khalil, a political science professor at California State University at Stanislaus, said the event was “a great political show” that aimed to sway Arab public opinion. “The expectations were high for the speech: in Lebanon, Hizbullah’s enemies did not want anything less than pictures of Israelis pulling the triggers on Hariri. That was not provided,” Abu Khalil wrote on his “Angry Arab” blog. “Hizbullah did something entirely different in this press conference: it recaptured Arab political opinion ... with images, and visual effects and background music and graphics.” But Fadia Kiwan, who heads the political science department at Saint Joseph University, said Nasrallah’s revelation was “extremely dangerous.” “There is no conclusive evidence on the involvement of Israel but [Nasrallah presented] relevant arguments that make it inevitable that this hypothesis be seriously examined,” she told AFP. Nasrallah’s statements have raised fears of a replay of the events of May 2008, when 100 people were killed in a week of fighting sparked by a government crackdown on the party’s private communications network. The government later repealed its decision. The Hizbullah leader on Monday said he was willing to cooperate with the Lebanese government on the Hariri murder and present the Cabinet, which includes two Hizbullah ministers, with his findings. He refused to specify what measures Hizbullah would take should the UN tribunal implicate the Shiite party. But a high-ranking government official, who requested his name be withheld, told AFP on Tuesday that he did not expect Hizbullah to take any drastic measures. “The indictment will be issued by an international body so even withdrawing from the government would be a very artificial, contrived step that would cause problems here in Lebanon without presenting any corroboration of the evidence presented yesterday,” the official said. “Turning the table on the Lebanese government would seem to me taking Lebanon hostage and saying ‘I’m threatening the international community that my own country will be paying the price,’” he added. “I don’t expect that.” Israel on Tuesday dismissed Hizbullah’s claims of their guilt as “ridiculous.”

### **Lebanon third among 12 Arab states in export credit insurance**

Figures issued by the Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) indicate that Lebanon ranked third among 12 Arab countries in the value of overall export credit insurance contracts signed in 2009, as reported by Byblos Bank's Lebanon This Week. Dhaman provides insurance coverage to Arab and non-Arab investments in its member countries against non-commercial risks, as well as insurance against commercial and non-commercial risks for inter-Arab and worldwide export credits. As an exporter, Lebanon signed \$77 million worth of export credit insurance contracts in 2009, accounting for 13 percent of the total value of such contracts. Lebanon signed \$85.9 million or 13.7 percent of the total value in 2008. Lebanon ranked ahead of Kuwait with \$50.3 million (8.5 percent), Bahrain on \$27.5 million (4.7 percent), Egypt with \$24.8 million (4.2 percent), Syria with \$24.4 million (4.1 percent), Sudan with \$10.5 million (1.8 percent), the UAE with \$9.4 million (1.6 percent), Oman with \$4 million (0.7 percent), Jordan with \$3.1 million (0.5 percent) and Algeria with \$1.8 million (0.3 percent). It came behind Saudi Arabia, which accounted for \$247.2 million, 42 percent of the total and Tunisia with \$109.6 million (18.6 percent). Lebanon did not sign any investment insurance contracts with Dhaman last year as an exported FDI. In parallel, Lebanon ranked in 13th place among 17 Arab importing countries with \$5 million worth of export credit insurance contracts signed in 2009, representing 0.85 percent of the total value of such contracts. Lebanon ranked in 8th place with \$16.8 million worth of such contracts signed in 2008. It also ranked behind the UAE whose credit insurance contracts of \$58 million, or 9.8 percent of the total, followed by Kuwait with \$47.8 million (8.1 percent), Saudi Arabia with \$47.5 million (8 percent), Jordan with \$41.3 million (7 percent), Syria with \$32 million (5.4 percent), Sudan with \$31.1 million (5.3 percent), Qatar with \$28.2 million (4.8 percent), Egypt with \$27.3 million (4.6 percent), Bahrain with \$26.7 million (4.5 percent), Tunisia with \$17.2 million (2.9 percent), Oman with \$16.4 million (2.8 percent) and Yemen with \$8.5 million (1.5 percent). It ranked ahead of only Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Mauritania. Lebanon was not a recipient of Dhaman-insured foreign direct investment last year. Further, Lebanon ranked in 14th place among 17 Arab countries in terms of total current contracts with \$20.7 million as at end-2009, of which \$16 million relate to current investment contracts and \$4.7 million to current export credit contracts. Lebanon ranked in 7th place with \$32.4 million in such contracts as at end-2008. Current contracts represent the value of insurance contracts whether executed or not for a country as a destination of imports and investments. Lebanon's total current contracts accounted for 2.1 percent of overall current contracts of Arab importing countries. Further, Lebanon accounted for 3 percent of current investment contracts and for 0.8 percent of current export credit contracts. Finally, Lebanon ranked in fifth place among 17 Arab countries in terms of total outstanding commitments, which represents the value of investments executed for investment guaranteed contracts and the value of shipments executed, but not yet repaid, of export credit insurance contracts. Lebanon's total outstanding commitments reached \$12.3 million, accounting for 3 percent of the total of all countries concerned. – The Daily Star.

### **Sleiman, Berri urge reforms at all levels of administration**

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri held talks Wednesday with President Michel Sleiman at Baabda Palace. Following the meeting, Berri told reporters that "the time for work has come." The state-run National News Agency said Sleiman and Berri agreed it was high

time to launch reforms on all levels of the administration. In remarks published by the newspaper Ad-Diyar on Wednesday, Sleiman voiced confidence that the current difficulties Lebanon was facing over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri would not lead to any deterioration in the situation in Lebanon. He said Israel was the only side interested in “blowing up the situation in Lebanon.” Fears of renewed strife in Lebanon have risen after Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said he expected that some “rogue members” of his party would be indicted by the STL. He dismissed the STL as an “Israeli project.” Asked about the threats of toppling the Cabinet if it neither halted its funding of the STL nor withdrew the four Lebanese judges participating in it, Sleiman said that the “tense rhetoric will not lead to an acceptable solution.” “Resorting to mind and always referring to dialogue is the effective solution to all the problems that the Lebanese face,” said Sleiman, adding that he relied on the fact that all parties were aware that no victor would emerge from any confrontation, but that all, and in particular the Lebanese people, would lose. Separately, Berri said in comments – published by the same newspaper on Wednesday – that the situation had become different since a recent news conference held by the Hizbullah leader. On Monday, Nasrallah presented to a news conference an extensive history of Israeli espionage and reconnaissance activities, demanding that the government form a committee to study information that he said should be investigated as part of the probe into Hariri’s assassination. Among different kinds of materials, he aired a series of excerpts of footage which he said the resistance had intercepted from Israeli aerial reconnaissance aircraft. The footage – which Nasrallah said predated Hariri’s killing – covered extensive shots of the area of the deadly truck bomb, along with the late premier’s residence and routes he usually took. “This isn’t a definitive proof,” he said, “but it opens up new horizons for the investigations.” Berri said the Lebanese government should take suitable steps regarding Nasrallah’s information. Also, the speaker said that the call for halting US military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) was gaining momentum in the US congress, adding that the military aid the US was giving to Lebanon was negligible compared to the military and financial support provided to Israel. A top US congressman has blocked \$100 million in aid to Lebanon’s military, saying he cannot be sure the country’s armed forces are not working with Hizbullah. Howard Berman, the Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement Monday that the hold had been in place since August 2, pointing to last week’s deadly clash between Israeli and Lebanese troops along the countries’ shared border. On August 3, two Lebanese soldiers and a journalist, along with a high ranking Israeli soldier, were killed during a shootout which erupted along the borders after Israeli soldiers attempted to uproot a tree which Lebanese officials said was located on the Lebanese side of a technical fence. “[The US] delivers half [of its aid to Lebanon] as training programs to the Lebanese Army, and the other half includes the delivery of vehicles, ammunition and some arms,” commented the speaker. “If the [US] puts a condition that we should not use the arms against Israel, doesn’t this mean that it wants us to use it inside Lebanon?” asked Berri. Berri promised to get arms “from underground” in the case of any suspension of US military aid to Lebanon. “The problem doesn’t lie in armament and we are not afraid of that, what is important is to preserve the army’s creed along with unity,” added Berri. The speaker saluted Sleiman’s efforts regarding the arming of the Lebanese military. While touring army positions along the

borders with Israel over the weekend, Sleiman called upon friendly states and Lebanese investors to help in securing arms for the LAF. He also promised to rush the approval of an armament plan through the Cabinet. When asked about any step that would be taken by the Cabinet regarding the matter, Berri responded by saying: "I am not the Cabinet."

### **Hizbullah to hand data on Hariri killing to Lebanon's judiciary**

Hizbullah official said Friday that the party would hand over data allegedly implicating Israel in the murder of ex-Premier Rafik Hariri to the Lebanese judiciary upon its request, which judicial sources say has been passed on verbally to the resistance. The judiciary's move follows a request by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare, but Hizbullah reiterated its position on the STL's probe committee, stressing that the party still doubted the court's credibility. "What Lebanon's [judiciary] asks for we will provide, and what they do with that is their responsibility," Administrative Affairs Minister Mohammed Fneish told AFP on Friday. Premier Saad Hariri, son of the slain former premier, is expected to tackle the STL's issue among other domestic and regional developments on Saturday during an iftar which is to be held at the premier's residence in Qoreitem, following his return from a vacation in Sardinia. Beirut MP Ammar Houry, a member of the Future Bloc, told The Daily Star that Hariri "will deal with the tribunal in general terms, and won't discuss details." He reiterated that the Future bloc's stance on the STL was expressed on Tuesday in an official statement, when the group welcomed all information, including that presented by the leader of Hizbullah, that could help in the investigation. Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has stressed that his party wasn't interested in cooperating with the STL, calling it an "Israeli project." Fneish told AFP that "our position has not changed, however. Our evidence is in the hands of the Lebanese government ... but that does not alter our view of the tribunal, which is that it has no credibility." Bellemare's office on Wednesday called on the Lebanese authorities to submit all material related to the murder in the possession of Nasrallah, who claims Israel was behind the February 14, 2005 bombing that killed Hariri and 22 others. A well-informed judicial source told The Daily Star that on the following day, Public Prosecutor Said Mirza informed Hizbullah security official Wafiq Safa about the STL's request. Mirza told the Central News Agency (CNA) on Friday that the judiciary has yet to receive any documents from Hizbullah, following the verbal request by the general prosecution. The STL statement came days after Nasrallah produced several undated clips of aerial footage of several areas in Lebanon which he said were intercepted from unmanned Israeli MK surveillance drones. The clips included footage of the site of the Hariri assassination and other areas of the western part of the capital, as well as footage of Sidon and the road leading to Hariri's residence in Faqra, Kesrouan. Nasrallah has repeatedly attacked the tribunal's credibility after Western and Israeli media reports claimed that the STL indictment would accuse Hizbullah members of involvement in the murder. Nasrallah said he would cooperate with the government and present the Cabinet with his findings. While parliamentary opposition officials called on the Cabinet to form a committee to investigate the murder, March 14 parties continue to voice trust in the STL and stress that no internal body could be substituted for the UN-backed tribunal. State Minister Jean Hogassapian stressed Friday "the impossibility of substituting the international probe by a local one, since the Lebanese judiciary's request for the STL to handle the investigations in the assassination means the file was closed in

Lebanon, and transferred to the STL completely.” Separately, Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt warned Friday against politicizing the STL, saying “it could lead to major tensions in the country particularly in line with Israeli threats which warned of strife following the issuing of the STL indictment.” Jumblatt made his statements in Paris during a meeting with Nicolas Gali, assistant to the French president’s diplomatic consultant Jean David Levitt. The meeting was later joined by US Secretary of State Assistant for Middle Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, who also held talks with Jumblatt. Jumblatt stressed during discussions the need “to weigh all options and assumptions and take into consideration all evidence that could lead to the truth.” For their part, the French and US officials stressed that their “administrations will not interfere in the UN probe and STL’s work,” The CNA reported. STL spokesperson Fatima al-Issawi told Al-Arabiya TV on Friday that Bellemare was the only authority entitled to conduct an investigation and indict individuals. Issawi also stressed that Bellemare’s office was autonomous from the tribunal. The Hariri assassination triggered an international outcry and led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005 after a deployment of almost three decades. The murder has been widely blamed on Syria, but Damascus consistently denies involvement. – The Daily Star with Agencies.

### **Geo strategic front**

#### **State Department Defends U.S. Assistance to Lebanon**

U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner has defended U.S. assistance to Lebanon and said it contributes to "regional stability as a whole." Toner suggested that the White House does not share Congress' fears that aid to the Lebanese army will be turned against Israel. "We will review the security assistance program to Lebanon so that we can do better to address Congress' concerns and to continue to provide military assistance to the Lebanese army," Toner said. Hizbullah Ready to Provide Data to Lebanese Authorities: 'And The Rest is Their Business' Hizbullah announced readiness to hand over to Lebanese authorities footage allegedly intercepted from Israeli surveillance planes of the site of the murder of ex-PM Rafik Hariri prior to his 2005 assassination. "Data and evidence in Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's possession has been made public ... Hizbullah, however, doesn't trust the International Tribunal or the international investigation," Hizbullah MP Nawaf Mousawi said in remarks published Friday by Ad-Diyar newspaper. He said Hizbullah was ready to provide such the information to the Lebanese judiciary. In response to a question about Lebanese authorities giving the data to Special Tribunal for Lebanon Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare, Mousawi said: "So what, it's their business." Bellemare has demanded Lebanese authorities to provide all the information in possession of Hizbullah. A well-informed political source, however, expressed concern that Bellemare's request was "merely an attempt to enhance the credibility of the International Tribunal." "We hope that they (tribunal) will take this issue seriously," the source told Ad-Diyar. "We will wait and see."

#### **Lebanon debates giving Palestinians rights**

Mohammed Al-Amin spends his days doing little more than playing billiards and smoking cigarettes in this sprawling Palestinian refugee camp, where gunmen roam narrow alleyways dotted with tin-roofed, cement-block homes. The 25-year-old studied dental lab technology but works at a small, grubby coffee shop in the camp, making \$100

a month. He dreams of working with a respected doctor in Lebanese society and being welcomed like any other foreigner, without being looked down on. “Sometimes I feel like a pressurized bottle that’s about to explode,” said Al-Amin, who was born in Ein el-Hilweh years after his family fled what is now Israel. “Why should three quarters of the Palestinian people here be selling coffee on the street?” The approximately 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, many of them born here, are barred by law from any but the most menial professions and are denied many basic rights. Now Parliament is debating a new law that would allow Palestinians to work in any profession and own property, as well as give them social security benefits. The bill, due for a vote on Aug. 17, is the most serious effort yet by Lebanon to transform its policies toward the refugees. But the proposal faces stiff resistance, because it has implications beyond expanding the refugees’ civil rights. Lebanon’s population of 4 million is divided between 18 sects, including Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians and Druze, and every community is highly sensitive to anything that could tip the balance of power in a country with a grim history of sectarian strife. Christians and Shiites are particularly worried about any possible permanent settling of the refugees, who are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. So Palestinians in Ein el-Hilweh are deeply skeptical there will be any change. “They are not fooling us,” said a woman pushing her handicapped mother on a wheelchair to a nearby clinic run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Her mother, 80-year-old Jamileh Salameh, lost her right leg in an Israeli air raid on Ein el-Hilweh in 1987. “Nobody cares about us, they will talk and talk but nothing will happen,” she said. The Palestinians in Lebanon are isolated in their camps to a higher degree than in any other Arab country. Some 4.7 million Palestinian refugees — who fled or were driven from their homes during the 1948 and 1967 Israeli-Arab wars — and their descendants are scattered across the Middle East, in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, according to UN figures. Their fate is one of the most emotionally charged issues in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Palestinian negotiators have demanded at least partial repatriation, but Israel has refused, saying an influx of refugees would dilute its Jewish majority and threaten the existence of the state. Unlike in neighboring Arab countries like Syria and Jordan where Palestinians enjoy more rights, the refugees in Lebanon live mostly on UN agencies’ handouts and payments from the rival Palestinian factions. Those who do work are either employed by UNRWA or as laborers at menial jobs such as construction. Beyond the legal restrictions on them, they also face deep prejudice from many Lebanese. The bitterness dates back to 1970, when the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat moved his base here after being expelled from Jordan in a bloody crackdown because his forces tried to form a government to rival Jordan’s. Many Lebanese have not forgiven Arafat’s fighters for attacking Israel repeatedly from southern Lebanon, giving Israel a pretext to attack villages and twice invade. The refugee camps — Ein el-Hilweh in particular — are notorious for their lawlessness. Lebanese troops patrol their perimeters but have no jurisdiction inside, part of an informal agreement with the PLO since the early 1970s. Factions of Palestinian fighters police the camps, but clashes and assassinations are common. The Palestinian leadership does not want refugees to gain citizenship, fearing it could deny them their right to ever return home. But it does support giving them civil rights. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt proposed the rights bill in June, and it has triggered a heated debate. Some lawmakers insisted Palestinians should not be granted any “privileges” as long as they do not answer to the

state's authority. Others argued that letting Palestinians work and receive social security would strain the economy. "They (refugees) are not entitled to any rights according to Lebanese laws — only some facilities that we can give them," said Christian leader Michel Aoun. Lawmaker Sami Gemayel of the right-wing Christian Phalange Party accused UN agencies of trying to pawn off responsibility for the Palestinians onto Lebanon. If that happens, he warned, "we will move step by step toward naturalization" of Palestinians. Parliament has split largely on sectarian lines over the bill, with Christians opposed and Muslims supporting. The result may be a compromise that grants broader work rights but keeps other restrictions like the ban on owning property. Fathi Abu Al-Ardat, a senior official with the main Fatah faction of the PLO in Lebanon, warns that disillusionment and frustration push young Palestinians toward radicalism. "Fanaticism and extremism thrive on misery and poverty," he said. "We should let them live a free, dignified life with the opportunity to work and move freely." Al-Amin, speaking in the coffee shop where he works, agrees. "We have education and talents," he said. "Given the chance, we can contribute a lot to Lebanese society."

### **Economic front**

#### **Energy minister issues new fuel prices**

The Daily Star The price of 20 liters of 95 octane gasoline rose by LL300, the price of 20 liters of 98 octane gasoline rose by LL200, the price of 20 liters of kerosene rose by LL400, the price of 20 liters of gasoil rose by LL400 and the price of a 12.5-kilogram bottle of cooking gas rose by LL300. According to a statement issued by Energy and Water Minister Jibril Bassil, starting August 11, 2010, the price of fuels across Lebanon are as follows: 98 octane gasoline at LL32,500 per 20 liters, 95 octane gasoline at LL31,900, kerosene at LL20,400, gasoil at LL20,700, diesel oil (for vehicles) at LL20,800, 10 kilogram butane fluid gas at LL14,500 and 12.5 kilogram butane fluid gas at LL17,600. – The Daily Star

#### **Small businesses hit hard by electricity cuts**

The Lebanese have survived wars, assassinations and even the global financial crisis. But one thing the citizens of this country can't cope with is the endless electricity rationing which has plunged the country into darkness for the past 20 years. In cities and towns outside of Beirut, the Lebanese are visibly irritated by the severe electricity rationing and on some occasions have blocked roads with burning tires and rocks to press the government to do something about the problem. Abdallah Hazim, the owner of a sweets shop, is one of many Lebanese who is fed up with the electricity cuts that plague his neighborhood in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli. "I have never thought of leaving Lebanon before but nowadays I am seriously thinking of moving to Bahrain because I am fed up with the electricity situation in this country," he said. Hazim said he won't be producing ice cream anymore because his losses have lately reached LL800,000 per day. "I am paying LL120,000 as a monthly subscription in private generators in return for a very limited power capacity," he said. "As you can see, the ice cream refrigerator is empty." Hazim said he would prefer to be an employee rather than a business owner in Lebanon because he is currently unable to secure a respectable profit. "At least employees receive fixed salaries at the end of each month," he said. Citizens in the South have been suffering from the same problem for a long time. Many in Sidon spent most of their time during the past two weeks on the beach because of the frequent electricity cuts

due to the burning of electric transformers in that area. "I've been losing a lot of money lately due to continuous electricity shortages," said Samer Zibawe, a meat and fish vendor, who added that he cannot afford to own his private generator. "The electricity shortage is reaching 20 hours per day and I am of course being obliged to get rid of any spoiled meat or melted ice cream." For their part, housewives are unable to complete their daily house chores as well. "The electricity cuts 10 hours daily and when it comes back it is too weak for me to wash or iron my family's clothes," said Mona Zobaydi. "I feel that my money is going to waste because generators owners have been also resorting to power rationing." Electricity rationing ranges between six to eight hours in the winter season in most areas. But the problem becomes even more horrendous in the summer season due to the incredible pressure on the aging and poorly maintained electricity plants. EDL has become a nightmare for successive governments as the cost of financing the losses of the state-run firm mounts every year due to the surge in the prices of oil in international markets. The annual deficit of EDL is more than \$1.5 billion each year, and in some years it has reached \$2 billion. Many energy ministers have submitted plans to solve the electricity problem but once they stepped down and another minister assumed responsibility, these plans were shelved and new ones were introduced. At one point, the previous government of former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora openly called for the privatization of the sector, arguing that the state has neither the money nor the experience to invest in the construction of new power plants. But this attempt to turn over the responsibility of running the power grid to the private sector ended in failure as the opposition parties and trade unions viciously fought Siniora's drive to privatize the energy sector. Against this backdrop, current Energy Minister Gebran Bassil decided to take the middle ground and persuaded both sides that the private sector could play a role in building the power stations, but without agreeing to literally sell them to private companies. This formula apparently pleased the divided Cabinet, which unanimously approved the minister's plan. The plan calls for allocating \$4.870 billion to boost power production from 1,500 MW to 4,000 MW in 2014. Out of this \$4.870 billion, the state will spend \$1.550 billion, the private sector \$2.320 billion and the remaining \$1 billion will come in the form of soft loans from the donor countries. The plan calls for investing another \$1.650 billion in the long run so Lebanon can produce 5,000 MW of electricity. "If we provided 24 hours of electricity and raised slightly the bill on consumers then Electricite du Liban (EDL) would start making a profit for the first time instead of suffering constant deficit," Bassil said when introducing his plan. The minister warned that if this plan were not adopted in full then the EDL would continue to bleed financially and total accumulated losses in 2015 would reach \$9.5 billion. Unsurprisingly, some citizens do not feel too optimistic about any new plans because the electricity situation in the country has been the same for years. "I don't think that there will be any changes ever in the electricity situation in Lebanon," said Bassam al-Tom, owner of a sweets shop in Tripoli. "I am 40 years old now and I have been hearing about new electricity plans since I was 18 but nothing has changed since then." Tom prefers to rely solely on private generators because he already pays a huge bill for that. "I am already paying LL1,600,000 per month for the private generator's subscription and I prefer not to pay for the regular electricity service," he said. "It won't be of any use because it cuts a lot." Tom's concerns were echoed by the owner of Kassab butchery in Dahiyeh, who said that he would like to switch to relying only on private generators. "The electricity cuts a lot



and this is affecting my shop equipment,” he said, adding that he paid \$840 a few days ago to fix his freezer. “I am already paying LL1,000,000 per month for a private generator subscription, so why do I have to pay a LL900,000 bill for regular electricity which constantly cuts and spoils my equipment?” He added that he had to get rid of LL2,400,000 worth of meat a few days ago because the regular electricity cuts at night and private generator owners do not provide him with power at that time.

### **Salameh: Economy not affected by clashes, STL debate**

Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh said Thursday the Lebanese economy was not affected by recent clashes in the south or by the debate over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Salameh made the remarks at a meeting with the Association of Banks in Lebanon at the Central Bank. “There were no fallouts from the recent clashes between the Lebanese Army and Israeli forces in the south or the ongoing debate over the international tribunal. This relaxation can be felt in the local market,” Salameh said. He stressed the Central Bank was still buying dollars from the local market, adding that the transfer of funds to Lebanon was still continuing at a fast pace and he expected bank deposits to grow by 10 percent this year. He said so far the balance of payments recorded a surplus of \$1.4 billion and reiterated that the Central Bank would not change its monetary policy. – The Daily Star

### **Anger rising in Tripoli at Ramadan food price hikes**

Celebrations and festivities are not the only thing to have increased with the beginning of Ramadan, as prices of food products have skyrocketed over the past week. Locals are complaining that traders and officials have taken advantage of the famous Ramadan meals, and the importance these gatherings have for believers, to hike the prices of all types of food products, whether meat, vegetables or fruits. In Tripoli, the public is blaming large-scale traders and government officials, accusing them of neglecting the people’s needs. A man buying vegetables in the market said the phenomenon has become an annual event, because Ramadan was a profitable season and officials didn’t pay attention to the people’s suffering. “The truth is that the state doesn’t care about the needs of the people, who are struggling without anyone to help lift their burdens,” he said, noting that Ramadan was meant to be a month of charitable works and good blessings. The month of fasting, which started on Wednesday, is an opportunity for believers to abstain from food and drink and focus on spiritual development. Believers fast from dusk to dawn and have two main meals to break their fasting. Nonetheless, the cost of all food products usually increases during this month, and this year is no exception. For example, four bunches of parsley cost LL1,000 before Ramadan, while only one bunch can be bought for the same price today. Moreover, the prices of red meat have gone up by LL2,000 and the value of one kilogram of chicken has risen by LL3,000. The “modifications” are evident throughout the country, and in Tripoli, some people have attempted to cheat the inflationary trend by heading to stores as late as possible to buy leftover food at lower prices. However, not all merchants are happy with the situation. Many shopkeepers say they are also suffering from the price increases and blame big dealers and officials for the injustice. Omar, a young man who works at a store selling vegetables, said the prices went up for no apparent reason, adding that people have started buying only what was strictly necessary. “This reflects negatively on the sales cycle,” he said. “We also reject this shameful situation but what can we do to confront the

big dealers? “I think the people should rise up and start a movement against poverty and hunger,” he commented. Abu Khodr, a butcher, agreed with Omar, saying the situation was out of his hands. “We can’t do anything about it because officials responsible for controlling prices and for setting the limits for big merchants aren’t ready to stand by their people,” he said. “Maybe their silence is deliberate because they have something to gain.” The voices of Tripoli locals are beginning to rise, along with the prices, and many have condemned officials, who they described as “enjoying lavish meals” during the holy month. The complaints aren’t limited to Muslims. A Christian local living in Tripoli condemned the price increase, describing it as unfair, and suggesting unified prices be imposed on merchants. “I’ve been living in the shopping district of Tripoli for a long time and, year after year during Ramadan, I see the prices go up without previous warning. Why don’t officials act to protect their people?” he asked.

### **Parliament to debate final sticking points in oil draft Tuesday**

Parliament is scheduled to debate the two remaining disputed clauses of a draft law to regulate the country’s oil sector on Tuesday, after joint parliamentary committees failed to conclude discussions on the issue this week. The parliamentary joint committees, headed by Speaker Nabih Berri, concluded their meeting Thursday and submitted the draft law for discussion by Parliament next week, after seven long rounds of deliberations in the past two months. The establishment and regulation of a sovereign oil fund, and a proposed governing body for the sector remain the center of debate between the Future Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement, with both parties arguing over the prerogatives of the fund’s governing body. The issue of Lebanon’s oil resources became topical after Israel started oil exploration off the Lebanese coast, with several Lebanese political groups expressing concern that Tel Aviv may seize oil from Lebanese territorial waters if the authorities fail to move quickly to endorse an oil draft law. The ratification of the oil law would allow Beirut to grant firms the right to drill for oil fields in Lebanese waters, which could help the government reduce the country’s \$52 billion debt, which marks one of the world’s highest debt-to-GDP rates at 147 percent. While Energy Minister and FPM official Jibril Bassil is demanding the formation of a higher committee headed by President Michel Sleiman to manage the oil sector’s revenues, Future Movement MPs are calling for the formation of a ministerial committee as the governing body of the sector. During the joint committees’ session, Mityeh-Dinnieh MP Ahmad Fatfat, from the Future Movement, proposed the formation of a ministerial committee embracing the energy, finance, economy, justice and environment ministers, to be headed by Premier Saad Hariri. But Bassil expressed his rejection of the proposal, stressing that “such a committee cannot be allowed to make decisions with prerogatives surpassing that of the energy minister or that of the Cabinet.” Beirut MP Mohammad Qabbani, Fatfat’s colleague in the Future Movement bloc, said his party rejected the idea of the energy minister acting as a “mailbox” for a ministerial committee, but also rejected a proposal which would see the minister governing the oil sector independently, “given its major importance.” Fellow Future Movement member Chouf MP Mohammad Hajjar said on Friday that if lawmakers failed to reach consensus over the draft law during the general assembly meeting, the draft proposal would be subject to a majority vote. The debate between the parliamentary majority and opposition MPs only came to an end after Berri intervened following a tense debate among MPs. Previous discussions on the definition of the fund was concluded after attendees agreed to change the designation of

“independent fund” to “sovereign fund,” and that the fund’s management be granted immunity, similar to the Central Bank’s. Qabbani said following Thursday’s meeting that the draft law would be submitted to Parliament as is, and that parliamentary committees would let Berri study the proposal and offer proposals on how to reach a settlement on the disputed clauses. Qabbani added that the parliamentary committees hadn’t decided upon the definition of the trial phase of production, and agreed by consensus to strike the article.

### **Draft employment legislation seeks to stem brain drain**

A draft law seeking to plug Lebanon’s brain drain and protect the working rights of foreigners and Palestinians was unveiled on Tuesday. Labor-rights lawyer Adeeb Elias Zakhour put forward the proposal in order to stem the tide of qualified Lebanese leaving in their thousands each year due to a chronic lack of employment opportunities. In addition, the law will seek to provide former prisoners with a working quota in certain sectors. “There are a lot of workers in Lebanon and there needed to be a study. I thought it was important to put a project forward which would let us see the problems faced by migrant workers, Palestinians and Lebanese workers,” Zakhour told The Daily Star following the draft law announcement. “Every year we have decisions on migrant-workers’ rights but many people don’t respect the decision. Many workers come here every year and we have to organize things to suit the work force and the market,” he added. Currently, provisions set by the Labor Ministry state that foreigners – legally defined as any “person who is not a Lebanese national” – can occupy a given employment sector up to a ceiling of 30 percent. The draft law stated that “this can increase after further studies are conducted.” Palestinians in Lebanon lack finite legal status when it comes to employment and are banned from operating in all but the most menial jobs. The draft law sought to encourage more companies to hire Palestinian workers by recommending that half of all work-permit-application fees be subsidized by a dedicated Arab fund. “[The fund] is created to support the government when needed, to cover the expense of work permits for Palestinian workers,” the draft law read. The draft law would not, however, seek to open all employment avenues up to migrant and Palestinian workers. “Foreigners and Palestinians are subject to laws and decisions issued by the Labor Ministry, which prohibits foreign workers from exercising certain professions,” it stated. Several mechanisms were proposed by Zakhour to safeguard working opportunities for Lebanese, seeking to avert the outflow of talented individuals which some studies measure to be at a rate of 20,000 a year. The law states that “a foreign worker cannot replace a Lebanese worker every time a job opportunity is available in the same sector. A Lebanese worker cannot be dismissed or have a contract broken in order to replace him with a foreign worker in determined sectors.” Zakhour said that preferential treatment was required to motivate native employees to take home-grown jobs. “The Labor Ministry should take every decision to protect Lebanese workers to make sure they are treated in a special way,” he said. “Many Lebanese leave and do jobs abroad similar to those that migrant workers are doing in Lebanon. If you don’t find a way to work here, of course you will leave.” The draft law would also give superior pay levels to Lebanese workers than those given to foreign or migrant employees. “Daily or monthly wages in each sector is determined; a Lebanese worker in each sector is given one-and-a-half times the wage of a foreign worker, provided this is not below the

minimum wage. Increasing wages for Lebanese workers are applied in both private and public sectors,” it said. In order to make employers give migrant and Palestinian workers a chance, several recommendations were offered in the law, including free bus travel to workplaces and communications-network development. “The government will create a communications network and provide buses for free, or for a symbolic fee, to facilitate workers arriving to the city and its suburbs and then going back to their regions,” it said. “The government will also work on creating job opportunities in the places of residence of these workers and it will encourage workers and their families to stay in rural areas away from the capital.” Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the draft law is the advice that 5 percent of all work allocated to foreigners and Palestinians should go to former prisoners. Zakhour defended the provision, arguing that it would help reduce unemployment in certain undersubscribed sectors. “We will spare them several problems because otherwise prisoners would not be able to find work and would commit the same crimes again. This offers protection for them and from them,” he added. – Additional reporting by Carol Rizk

## **Social front**

### **Parliament debates giving Palestinian refugees rights**

Mohammad al-Amin spends his days doing little more than playing billiards and smoking cigarettes in this sprawling Palestinian refugee camp, where gunmen roam narrow alleyways dotted with tin-roofed, cement-block homes. The 25-year-old studied dental-lab technology but works at a small, grubby coffee shop in the camp, making \$100 a month. He dreams of working with a respected doctor in Lebanese society and being welcomed like any other foreigner, without being looked down on. “Sometimes I feel like a pressurized bottle that’s about to explode,” said Amin, who was born in Ain al-Hilweh years after his family fled what is now Israel. “Why should three-quarters of the Palestinian people here be selling coffee on the street?” The approximately 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, many of them born here, are barred by law from any but the most menial professions and are denied many basic rights. Now Parliament is debating a new law that would allow Palestinians to work in any profession and own property, as well as give them social security benefits. The bill, due for a vote on August 17, is the most serious effort yet by Lebanon to transform its policies toward the refugees. But the proposal faces stiff resistance because it has implications beyond expanding the refugees’ civil rights. Lebanon’s population of 4 million is divided between 18 sects, including Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians and Druze, and every community is highly sensitive to anything that could tip the balance of power in a country with a grim history of sectarian strife. Christians and Shiites are particularly worried about any possible permanent settling of the refugees, who are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. So Palestinians in the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp are deeply skeptical there will be any change. “They are not fooling us,” said a woman pushing her handicapped mother on a wheelchair to a nearby clinic run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Her mother, 80-year-old Jamileh Salameh, lost her right leg in an Israeli air raid on Ain al-Hilweh in 1987. “Nobody cares about us, they will talk and talk but nothing will happen,” she said. The Palestinians in Lebanon are isolated in their camps to a higher degree than in any other Arab country. Some 4.7 million Palestinian refugees –

who fled or were driven from their homes during the 1948 and 1967 Israeli-Arab wars – and their descendants are scattered across the Middle East, in the occupied West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, according to UN figures. Their fate is one of the most emotionally charged issues in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Palestinian negotiators have demanded at least partial repatriation, but Israel has refused, saying an influx of refugees would dilute its Jewish majority and threaten the existence of the state. Unlike in neighboring Arab countries such as Syria and Jordan where Palestinians enjoy more rights, the refugees in Lebanon live mostly on UN agencies' handouts and payments from the rival Palestinian factions. Those who do work are either employed by UNRWA or as laborers at menial jobs such as construction. Beyond the legal restrictions on them, they also face deep prejudice from many Lebanese. The bitterness dates back to 1970, when the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat moved his base here after being expelled from Jordan in a bloody crackdown because his forces tried to form a government to rival Jordan's. Many Lebanese have not forgiven Arafat's fighters for attacking Israel repeatedly from southern Lebanon, giving Israel a pretext to attack villages and twice invade. The refugee camps – Ain al-Hilweh in particular – are notorious for their lawlessness. Lebanese troops patrol their perimeters but have no jurisdiction inside, part of an informal agreement with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) since the early 1970s. Factions of Palestinian fighters police the camps, but clashes and assassinations are common. The Palestinian leadership does not want refugees to gain citizenship, fearing it could deny them their right to ever return home. But it does support giving them civil rights. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt proposed the rights bill in June, and it has triggered a heated debate. Some lawmakers insisted Palestinians should not be granted any “privileges” as long as they do not answer to the state's authority. Others argued that letting Palestinians work and receive social security would strain the economy. “They [Palestinian refugees] are not entitled to any rights according to Lebanese laws – only some facilities that we can give them,” said Christian leader Michel Aoun. Lawmaker Sami Gemayel of the right-wing Christian Phalange Party accused UN agencies of trying to pawn off responsibility for the Palestinians onto Lebanon. If that happens, he warned, “we will move step by step toward naturalization” of Palestinians. Parliament has split largely on sectarian lines over the bill, with Christians opposed and Muslims supporting. The result may be a compromise that grants broader work rights but keeps other restrictions like the ban on owning property. Fathi Abu al-Ardat, a senior official with the main Fatah faction of the PLO in Lebanon, warns that disillusionment and frustration push young Palestinians toward radicalism. “Fanaticism and extremism thrive on misery and poverty,” he said. “We should let them live a free, dignified life with the opportunity to work and move freely.” Amin, speaking in the coffee shop where he works, agrees. “We have education and talents,” he said. “Given the chance, we can contribute a lot to Lebanese society.”

### **Alcohol industry urged to issue driving warnings**

Road accidents in Mount Lebanon have claimed the lives of three people, two of them teenagers. On the Ras al-Metn road, a horrific one-car accident overnight on Thursday caused the death of two teenagers and injured a third, the National News Agency (NNA) said. Jad Masri, 16, Hussam Khatib, 18, and his brother Jawad were inside a Mercedes, when the driver lost control of the car, the NNA said, without identifying the driver. The

vehicle hit a tree and tipped over, killing Masri and Hussam Khatib and injuring Jawad Khatib. Investigations later showed that the accident was caused by speeding. Jad Masri was the son of the mayor of the Baabda village of Salima. Another fatal accident occurred on the Sahel Alma road, in Kesrouan, when a driver of a BMW lost control of his vehicle. The car overturned and collided with three parked cars on the side of the road. The driver was identified as Omar Fouad Arawi and was transferred to the Saydet Lebnan Hospital, where he died on Friday morning. Separately, Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud issued a directive on Friday, urging the alcohol industry to include safety warnings against driving under the influence on all their products and advertisements. Baroud asked advertisement companies and unions, the alcohol industry and alcohol importers to include the following message on all their products and commercials: “The Interior Ministry warns of the dangers of driving under the influence.” Also, Metn MP Nabil Nicolas thanked Public Works and Transportation Minister Ghazi Aridi on Friday for launching maintenance and paving works on the Antelias-Bikfaya-Dhour al-Choueir highway, one of several roads in the country known as a “road of death.” Nicolas, accompanied by a delegation of North Metn mayors and mukhtars, visited Aridi to request that road works be accelerated, since it’s a particularly dangerous stretch of road. The highway is “a danger to public safety,” according to Nicolas. The MP asked for safe intersections on the road, in keeping with a promise by Nabil Jisr, the president of the Council for Development and Reconstruction. – The Daily Star

### **Lebanese TV stations drop series deemed offensive to Christians**

Two local television stations have dropped an Iranian-produced series on the life of Jesus Christ, after a storm of complaints that the material was offensive to Christians. General Security denied that it had issued an order to stop the series, entitled “The Christ,” which was being broadcast on NBN and Hizbullah’s Al-Manar Television. It said the two stations made the decision voluntarily, following the commotion. “The Directorate of General Security confirms that no such decision was declared. Rather, General Security had made a series of efforts with the management of both NBN and Al-Manar, religious authorities, and concerned politicians, in order to reach a conciliatory decision to stop broadcasting the series, as an initiative taken by the management of both networks.” On Friday, Maronite Bishop Beshara Rai called for a news conference at the Catholic Media Center in Jal al-Dib, which saw members of the public gather to voice their objections to the series. The news conference, which was scheduled to begin at 12 noon, was postponed for about an hour to allow Information Minister Tarek Mitri to take part. Rai met with Beirut MP Nadim Gemayel as well as with a select number of reporters who managed to squeeze their way into the bishop’s office. The Media Center was overflowing with members of the media and disconcerted members of the public. As television networks interviewed those who attended, news that the stations would drop the series spread, and the atmosphere grew more heated, despite their decision. Arguments broke out between Christian followers of different sects, as to which group had been more vociferous in “defending Jesus.” For his part, Gemayel said “the whole of Lebanon is witnessing our being here today. We will not agree to such a thing, and we will not leave this place before we get what we came here for. This intrusion upon Christianity and our religion threatens national peace, and we are more than capable of taking this to the streets.” Gemayel blamed General Security and the interior minister for

allowing the broadcasting of the show. After Gemayel's appearance, the crowd expressed their gratitude, saying that he was the only Christian MP in Parliament to champion their cause. Mitri briefly met with Rai in his office, before they were escorted to a room overflowing with people in order to begin the news conference. With news of the series' cancellation having been confirmed, Rai said: "We thank all the believers and fellow reporters for coming, especially those from NBN and Al-Manar." Rai had earlier elaborated on the main reasons for the objections to the series. Based on the Islamic view of the life of Jesus Christ, the show maintains that Judas was crucified in Christ's place, refers to Christ as the "servant of God" instead of the son of God, and fails to acknowledge the Resurrection. Rai said that "by canceling the show, [Al-Manar and NBN] have given up large sums of money, and that is more important than any apology." The commotion presented a field day for politicians to comment on the controversy. Labor Minister Butros Harb said the Media Center had sounded a "warning bell" about the "insult to Christians" posed by the series, thanking the stations for their voluntary decision to pull it. Harb also questioned the role of the authorities in allowing the series to air in the first place. Meanwhile, an independent grouping of Ftouh-Kesrouan activists criticized the district's MPs for not acting to head off the broadcast, blaming them for being linked to Hizbullah. The group was referring to the MPs' membership in the Change and Reform bloc led by MP Michel Aoun which is allied with Hizbullah. Meanwhile, Metn MP Nabil Nicolas, a member of Aoun's parliamentary bloc, said the controversy had been blown out of proportion and unfortunately had taken on a sectarian tone, adding that the show had been reviewed by state and religious authorities, "and no objections were raised."

### **Lebanon tries to retain Arabic in polyglot culture**

Maya Sabti's children were born and raised in Lebanon but they speak only broken Arabic and cringe when presented with an Arabic book to read. "I try to get them interested, but I don't blame them that they're not," said Sabti, whose children are 8 and 10. "Mobile phones, Facebook, movies — all that's important to them is in English." In Lebanon, where everyday conversations have long been sprinkled with French and English, many fear the new generation is losing its connection to the country's official language: Arabic. The issue has raised enough concern for some civil groups to take action. "Young people are increasingly moving away from Arabic, and this is a major source of concern for us," says Suzanne Talhouk, 33, a Lebanese poet who heads "Feil Amer," an organization launched last year to promote Arabic. "The absence of a common language between individuals of the same country means losing the common identity and cause," Talhouk said. In a nod both to its members' sense of urgency and the ir language fixation, the group's name is the Arabic grammatical term for an imperative verb. Arabic is believed to be spoken as a first language by more than 280 million people, mostly in the Middle East and North Africa. The classical, written form of the language is shared by all Arabic-speaking countries but spoken dialects differ among countries — and fluency in speaking doesn't necessarily mean fluency in reading and writing. While Arabic is the official language of Lebanon, a tiny Arab country of 4 million on the Mediterranean, many Lebanese pride themselves on being fluent in French — a legacy of French colonial rule — and English. Conversations often include a mix of all three, so much so that "Hi kifak, ca va?" — with the English "hi" and the Arabic and French

phrases for “how are you?” — has become a typical greeting, even appearing on T-shirts and mugs sold in souvenir shops. Most schools in Lebanon teach three languages from an early age, and many parents send their children to French- or American-curriculum schools where Arabic comes second or third. It has become very common for young people, particularly when using Facebook and text messages, to write Arabic using Latin characters. Even politicians are not immune. Last year, Prime Minister Saad Hariri, 40, stumbled through a speech in Parliament, having obvious difficulty with the classical Arabic — raising laughter from lawmakers and from the many who watched video of the address posted on YouTube. The concerns are not unique to Lebanon. Neighboring Syria requires that at least 60 percent of the space on signs for shops, restaurants and cafes should be in Arabic. But Lebanon is a special case because of its more open society, said Mounira Al-Nahed, assistant secretary general of the Beirut-based Arab Thought Foundation. Lebanon’s sectarian and ethnic diversity have always made it open to foreign influences. Moreover, it has a huge diaspora with an estimated 8 million people of Lebanese descent living in countries as distant as Brazil and Australia — many of whom come regularly to Lebanon for visits and often don’t speak much Arabic. Al-Nahed blames parents in part for speaking to their children in French or English at home, thinking they will pick up Arabic anyway. But this has had the adverse effect, making Arabic come at a distant third. “It has reached a stage where you see young people in Lebanon feel it’s a shame to speak Arabic. This is not the case in the Gulf or other Arab countries,” she said. Al-Nahed also blames teaching techniques that often do not encourage children to speak Arabic and make the language seem dull and complex to learn. Talhouk and her group have been lobbying to change that. Her group visited Lebanese universities in an effort to gauge attitudes toward Arabic. Dozens of students were asked to recite the Arabic alphabet. Most of them were unable to go beyond the first five letters. “Not only do they not know their Arabic ABCs, but they also wondered why they should bother learning it and how it would help them,” Talhouk said. In an attempt to draw attention to the problem, her group recently organized an all-day Arabic language festival entitled “We Are Our Language” in Beirut. The festival included a book exhibition, music and literature readings, as well as posters urging, “Do not kill your language” and “Teach your son to speak Arabic.” Sabti, a housewife who brought her children to the festival, hoped it would help change their perspective. “We need more activities like this. I hope this helps young people know we have a beautiful language that we should protect.” But for Youssef Dakhil, a student in his 20s, the problem is all about the lack of a Lebanese national identity. “Unfortunately, we like everything that’s imported, including foreign languages,” he said.

### **Lebanon TV stations scrap controversial Jesus show**

Two Shiite Muslim television stations in Lebanon canceled a controversial program about Jesus on Friday, saying they do not want to stir up sectarian conflict in the country. The 17-episode program, which was produced in Iran, describes Jesus from an Islamic point of view. Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet and a teacher, but not the son of God. The debate has particular resonance in Lebanon, an Arab nation of 4 million people with a grim history of sectarian strife. The country's population is divided into 18 sects, including Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians and Druse. Al-Manar, a television station run by Lebanon's powerful militant group, Hezbollah, and the National Broadcasting



Network, NBN, started airing the program this week at the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Christian priests and politicians quickly protested, saying the topic might endanger national coexistence. The program does not show respect to "Jesus, the church and Christianity," Catholic Maronite Archbishop Bechara el-Rai told reporters Friday. Shortly before el-Rai's news conference, Al-Manar and NBN issued a statement saying the program "shows the great personality of God's prophet Jesus, the son of Mary, peace be upon him." But, the statement said, the stations decided to stop airing the program in respect to other Lebanese sects. Information Minister Tarek Mitri said that even though he is against censorship, he agreed with the cancelation because of Lebanon's religious diversity. "There is a special case in Lebanon which is considered a country of dialogue and a country where Christians and Muslims meet," Mitri said. After Lebanon gained independence from French rule in 1943, Christians dominated the country. Muslim demands for reform helped trigger the 1975-90 civil war. A 1989 agreement ended the civil war and the two sides have since shared power. *The political system reflects Lebanon's sectarian makeup.* The presidency goes to a Maronite Catholic, the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and a Shiite Muslim must be the parliament speaker. The Cabinet and the parliament's 128 seats are divided equally between Christians and Muslims.

### **Red Cross unveils new human-rights legal database**

A new legal database designed to protect the rights of civilians in times of internal and external conflict will go online by the end of the week, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced Monday. The database will clearly illustrate instances of customary law, which form the very foundations of international law and are derived from well-established custom but supersedes state treaties and can exist independently of national law. Lebanon, because of its experience with intermittent periods of internal disorder, will feature in the database as a legal reference point for the detailed formulation of what is prohibited under customary law. Various stakeholders in the country have also used the preliminary version of the database, first established in 2005, as an authority on what constitutes human-rights violations. It has in turn been used to pressure governments and armed forces which violate these rules. At some 8,000 pages, the newer version will be almost twice the size of the previous list and will feature a far more comprehensive list of rights and grievances. These are also expected to be more accessible to government authorities, the armed forces, national legislators, the judiciary and law practitioners, as well as academics and civil-rights groups. "The new database is a significant step toward ensuring that the rules of customary international humanitarian law and the practice underlying them are easily accessible," said Jean-Marie Henckaerts, ICRC's head of project for customary law. "Customary law therefore provides men, women and children caught up in such conflicts with essential protection. Respect for customary law reduces the human cost of conflict." The formalization of the database could help lead to more convictions or investigations in various tribunals and criminal courts and could have implications for the treatment of refugees and non-combatants during conflict. "Under custom law, parties to the conflict should make the distinction at all times between civilians and combatants, and the targeting should be against the combatants and it is not accepted that civilians be targeted," said Samar al-Kadi, head of

communications at the Lebanese branch of ICRC. “Respect and implementation of international human laws (IHL), including the customary rules, are primarily the responsibility and obligation of state signatories of the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols.” The wider dissemination and implementation of the database could also give the international community more bite in its investigations of war crimes and human-rights violations and make it harder for states that violate international custom to get away with abuses. Historically custom law has formed the basis for laws against genocide, the abolition of slavery and the prohibition of wars of aggression. It has also been used as an argument to support the concept of nonrefoulement, which generically prohibits the forced return of refugees to areas of ongoing conflict. “The ICRC will continue to remind state parties of their obligations under IHL and keep on raising awareness and disseminating the law,” said Kadi. “It is definitely the responsibility of the international community to respect and make [others] respect IHL.” The application and consideration of international custom into all legal rulings is enshrined in the UN Charter which classifies it “as evidence of a general practice accepted as law.”