

Report#

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Summary

Egypt

Experts in Cairo say they are uncertain about the role that NGOs could play in the election process, with most observers and activists believing that local civil society will be unable to play as prominent a role in parliamentary elections as it did in 2005. "In the last decade Egyptian NGOs have been unable to promote the culture of civic engagement at a grassroots level," said political expert Ayman Abdel-Wahab at a seminar organised last week by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies on civil society's role in the coming parliamentary election.

Egypt's leading democracy advocate defended his alliance with the country's largest but banned Islamist opposition group in an interview broadcast saying that their ideological differences don't preclude sharing goals. The 2005 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Mohamed ElBaradei, has been at the helm of a burgeoning opposition movement in Egypt, calling for legal and constitutional reforms to allow for free and fair elections and put an end the nearly six-decade old military-backed regime in Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak has ruled for the last 29 years. ElBaradei's call for reform earlier this year attracted a wide range of groups, including Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood. The group supported ElBaradei's efforts and collected nearly 90 percent of almost 1 million signatures on a petition calling for reform.

Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, says it will contest upcoming parliamentary elections despite calls for a boycott. The decision highlights the fragmented state of Egypt's opposition parties. Some blocs say they will skip the polls to protest what they say are a lack of guarantees to ensure a fair and transparent vote.

The Democratic Front Party has withdrawn from the Quartet Bloc after other parties decided to participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in

November. The Quartet Bloc comprised of four opposition parties including Al-Wafd, Tagammu and Nasserist parties as well as the Democratic Front, which has now dropped out. "We at Al-Wafd respect every party's decision as long as it is taken by its members and abides by each party's [internal regulations]. At the same time, we would have [preferred that] the Democratic Front Party continue with us — the coalition was not established to take unanimous decisions but to implement the decisions made by the majority of its members," Mohamed Moustafa Shardy, Al-Wafd MP, told Daily News Egypt.

Egypt's main leftist party, Al-Tagammu, announced in a meeting it will compete in the next People's Assembly (PA) elections in November.

In a new article at Middle East Report and Information Project, Barnard College Professor Mona El-Ghobashy explains that recent protests in Egypt are a form social bargaining between the Egyptian population and the government. In a new article at Middle East Report and Information Project, Barnard College Professor Mona El-Ghobashy explains that recent protests in Egypt are a form social bargaining between the Egyptian population and the government: "It is tempting, but misguided, to read the rise of social protest as auguring the downfall of the regime.

President Nasser died three days after drinking coffee made by his successor, hints former aide on al-Jazeera television The daughter of the former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat is going to court to defend her late father against allegations that he murdered Gamal Abdel Nasser, founding father of the modern Egyptian republic.

The UN nuclear watchdog IAEA has approved an Egyptian site to host the country's first nuclear power plant. The site in El Dabaa is about 295 km from Cairo, and corresponds to all international requirements, IAEA experts said on Saturday. Egypt is set to construct four nuclear power reactors by 2025, with the first of them to be put into operation in 2019.

Egypt and Iran have signed an agreement to resume direct flights between their capitals for the first time since the two nations' diplomatic relations fell apart in 1979. The head of the Egyptian Civil Aviation Authority, Sameh al-Hafni, says 28 flights will carry travelers between Cairo and Tehran every week.

Iraq

Geo strategic front

The United States says it is "encouraged" now that Iraqi political leaders seem to be taking steps toward forming a coalition government -- nearly seven months after nationwide elections. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley added that Washington does not have a favorite candidate that it wants to see at the top of the government in Baghdad. "In a parliamentary system where you have multiple blocs that received significant support, but no one bloc is able to form a government on its own, you need to have the kind of political horsetrading that we're beginning to see," Crowley told reporters. "We've been encouraging this for some time."

Economic front

Iraq's oil minister says the country's proven "extractable" oil reserves have risen to over 143 billion barrels. The new figure represents a significant rise on Iraq's previously announced proven oil reserves of 115 billion barrels. Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani said at a news conference that the new figure was reached with the help of international oil companies working at 12 fields in Iraq.

Instability and insecurity have thwarted attempts to reconstruct the Province of Diyala, Governor Abdunnasser al-Mahdawi said. Mahdawi said his efforts to rebuild the war-torn province have not borne fruit due to mounting violence. "The security conditions in the province have been a stumbling block on the path of luring capital," he said in an interview.

Lebanon

Syrian judiciary issued 33 arrest warrants for judges, officers, politicians and journalists of Lebanese, Arab and other nationalities in the case brought by former Lebanese General Security chief Jamil as-Sayyed, according to a statement from Sayyed's office. Sayyed along with 3 other generals was detained from 2005 to 2009 on suspicion of involvement in former PM Rafik Hariri's murder. In April 2009, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) ordered their release without charges due to insufficient evidence. STL prosecutor made it clear at the time they were set free that their release did not mean they are Innocent and that once more evidence is available they could be back in jail. In December 2009, he filed a lawsuit in Damascus against various defendants whom he alleges were involved in a conspiracy of false testimonies against him.

Israel

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, accused that Palestinian side for staling peace talks, and claimed that renewing the construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank should not have any effect on peace talks. Netanyahu stated that Israel held negotiations with the Palestinians for 17 years and at the same time was constructing and expanding settlements, and added that this issue never affected the talks.

Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, stated following meeting with King Abdullah of Jordan, that he will not return to the negotiations table unless Israel halts its settlement activities in the occupied territories. He said that he will continue deliberations and talks with the United States in order to resolve this issue. Abbas added that after U.S. Middle East Peace Envoy, George Mitchell, visited the region and held talk with Israeli and Palestinian officials, it became clear that Israel has no intention to renew the moratorium on settlement activities .

Detailed news

Egypt

Political front

Playing their part

What is the role of non-governmental organisations in the coming parliamentary elections? Mohamed Abdel-Baky attends a seminar on the subject Two months before parliamentary elections and Egyptian civil society needs a wake-up call. Experts in Cairo say they are uncertain about the role that NGOs could play in the election process, with most observers and activists believing that local civil society will be unable to play as prominent a role in parliamentary elections as it did in 2005. "In the last decade Egyptian NGOs have been unable to promote the culture of civic engagement at a grassroots level," said political expert Ayman Abdel-Wahab at a seminar organised last week by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies on civil society's role in the coming

parliamentary election. Abdel-Wahab added that Egypt "does not have a real civil society as it is understood in Western countries" that could help the government in shaping policies and observe its performance. Instead, he said, "we have a group of NGOs dependent on foreign funding and which work under many legal restrictions." Before June's Shura Council elections NGOs were banned from monitoring the poll without first obtaining the permission of the High Election Committee (HEC). The HEC in turn gave authority for granting permissions to the government-affiliated National Council for Human Rights (NCHR). The NCHR allowed access for 1,600 observers and ignored more than 3,200 requests for reasons it has yet to disclose. The move minimised civil organisations' role in the Shura poll and, says Abdel-Wahab, is expected to be repeated in the coming parliamentary elections. Many NGOs lack the funding to monitor the elections and train observers. In 2005 the main donors were the EU and USAID, but sources in Washington have told Al-Ahram Weekly that in order to avoid any confrontation with the Egyptian government USAID would not repeat the exercise this year. The only American funds available for monitoring would be channelled through the Middle East Partnership Initiative, an office within the State Department. Several civil society organisations have announced in the last few months that they plan to monitor the upcoming elections whether they have funding or not. The Civil Coalition for Democratic Reform, known as "Participate", is already training volunteer monitors. The Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies has started the implementation of a project to follow media coverage of the elections over a period of two months and the Egyptian Organisation for Human rights has plans to train 3,000 volunteers. Other experts pointed out that NGOs' performance is generally weak as a result of internal corruption and agendas that are heavily dependent on donors. Amany Qandil, an expert in civil society affairs, believes the role of NGOs is not to lead any change but to keep balance and stability in society after democratic reforms are in place. She added that very few, if any, NGOs have a mission based on core democratic values and most are affiliated to a political group or public figure. While government officials have expressed a negative attitude to international monitoring, the US administration is still trying to convince the Egyptian government to allow international observers to attend polling day. "President Barack Obama has discussed with President Hosni Mubarak the coming parliamentary elections and we hope to see a transparent and fair election," said US State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Tamara Wittes on a visit to Cairo last week.

Egypt's refusal of international monitoring is based on the argument that it violates sovereignty, a position with which political pundit El-Sayed Yassin takes issue. It is the right, he says, of national and international NGOs to make sure that the election process is fair and democratic, especially given how notions of national sovereignty have changed in recent years.

Is Gamal Mubarak the best hope for Egyptian democracy?

Egypt's opposition forces and Western advocates of democracy promotion all seem to agree on one thing: Gamal Mubarak should not be allowed to succeed his father Hosni Mubarak as President of Egypt. Cries of "la lil tawrith" (no to inheritance [of power]) dominate street protests carried out by the storied opposition group Kifaya, whose very name -- Egyptian Arabic for "enough" -- is as much a repudiation of the Mubarak family

as it is of authoritarianism, corruption, or any of the country's myriad other ills. Egypt, they say, is not a plantation to be bequeathed from father to son, and the Mubaraks' scheme to render Egypt a monarcho-republic or gumlukiyya (in the inimitable portmanteaus of Roger Owen and Saad Eddin Ibrahim, respectively) is an evil to be resisted by all right-thinking, democracy-loving people. But is it? Compared to some democratic ideal, the prospect of Gamal Mubarak's inheriting his father's seat is of course repellent. But true democracy is not on the table in Egypt. Instead of the democratic dream, the reality is that we are faced only with unappetizing options: an inherited transition, a sixth Mubarak term, a handover to some stony-faced apparatchik-like intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, or a military coup. And when comparing these eminently uninspiring alternative futures, it is hard not to conclude that Gamal Mubarak is the best bet if you care about Egypt's long term democratic prospects. A few short months ago, this was not the case. Muhammad ElBaradei, the Nobel Laureate and former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, had captured imaginations with his calls for political reform and an end to emergency law. But he has so far been a disappointment. Already we read of dissension in his ranks over how little time he has spent inside Egypt since announcing his "campaign" for change. His online petition seems to be inching toward his declared target of a million signatures (with a major assist from the Muslim Brotherhood), but it's hard to think of countries that have democratized by petition. ElBaradei is now calling for an opposition boycott of the November, 2010 parliamentary elections, but it's not clear what this will achieve either. After all, every Egyptian opposition party (save the leftist Tagammu) boycotted the 1990 parliamentary contests, and yet the ship of state sailed on undisturbed. (And at this particularly sensitive time, the NDP might even welcome the prospect of a quiet election free of the usual opposition headaches.) If a democratic revolution is unlikely, so too is a military coup. The armed forces are loyal to Mubarak (if not to his son) and conservative enough not to risk reaping the kind of whirlwind that an overthrow of the existing order would entail. (Unless, of course, they were provoked by the prospect of losing all their prerogatives, which is why calls to reduce U.S. aid to Egypt -- most of which goes to the military -- are a bad idea right now). Similarly, it's doubtful that the elder Mubarak would hand power to Omar Suleiman. A recent "mystery campaign" in favor of the intelligence chief was swiftly snuffed out by the regime, and in any case, if Mubarak wanted Suleiman to succeed him, he would have appointed him vice president long ago. Thus, we are really left with two choices: Gamal or his father. Should Mubarak, 82-years old and ailing, find the strength to run for a sixth time, he would almost certainly win another six-year term. But biology would just as certainly intervene to ensure that he did not complete it. Unlike Nasser or Sadat, each of whom had appointed a vice president who could (and did) take the helm in the event of the leader's demise, Mubarak has left this position vacant. When he does go the way of all flesh, the decision of who would replace him would likely be made by a shadowy conclave of generals, ruling party notables, and big businessmen. It's possible that these men, gathered in some smoke-filled room, would settle on the younger Mr. Mubarak, but improbable. The desire to ensure stability, in addition to resentment of Gamal and his nouveau riche cronies among the military and the old guard of the NDP, would likely mean that the burden of rule would fall on broader, more martial shoulders, such as those of Omar Suleiman. Emergency law would become further entrenched -- because the death of the leader is an emergency situation, naturally -- and Egyptians

would settle in for another long stretch of thinly-disguised military rule. Gamal Mubarak, on the other hand, would represent a departure from this depressingly familiar routine. If he were to run and win in 2011, he would be the first leader in Egypt's modern history never to have worn a military uniform, never to have been what Samuel Huntington called a "specialist in the application of violence." (Sufi Abu Talib, a legal academic and the speaker of the People's Assembly from 1978 to 1983, was acting president for a week after Sadat's 1981 assassination, but his job was to keep the seat warm for Mubarak.) Of course, the fact that Gamal is a civilian would not necessarily make him gentler than his predecessors (or than someone like Omar Suleiman) or less willing to visit the implements of coercion upon his opponents. But it might make him less able to do so, since he would lack the kind of blind loyalty the armed forces deliver to one of their own. Moreover, there is something to be said for the purely symbolic value of elevating to Egypt's highest office someone who does not emerge from what the Egyptian analyst Dia' Rashwan extolled as the "solid and strong heart in the apparatus of the state" -- if only because it helps to establish the principle of civilian authority in a country hitherto bereft of it. Also in the symbolic vein: the younger Mubarak would not only be Egypt's first civilian president, he would also be its first to come to power through a "competitive" election. No one is under any illusions that this election would be anything close to free and fair. But it would be an election nonetheless, one in which multiple candidates would stand against the president. It is true that Egypt has had one form of elections or another since 1866, but only since 2005 have Egyptians been able to vote in multi-candidate presidential contests. The younger Mubarak would be bound to continue the tradition in a way that a military leader, less dependent on claims to democratic legitimacy, might not. And this is important, because presidential elections -- even if flawed -- cannot but help to change the language and grammar of politics. They force the regime to concede (in rhetoric if not in reality) the possibility that some other individual or party might be more fit to rule. The subjection of the za'im to the indignities of the ballot box invites people to imagine a future without him, to realize that his writ is fundamentally revocable and transferable (again, in theory if not in practice). But if the value of a Gamal Mubarak presidency lay purely in images and symbols, it would not be worth very much, especially since a large segment of the Egyptian population would see Mr. Mubarak's elevation as symbolic not of civilian supremacy or the legitimacy of democracy, but of nepotism and patriarchy and personalism -- a bitter regression to human history's dynastic mean. Symbols, however, are not all that commend the younger Mr. Mubarak to us. More than any other option on the table, a Gamal Mubarak presidency contains within it the potential for future opposition breakthroughs. Yes, the election that will bring Mr. Mubarak to power will be manipulated, but it will not be the last election he will ever have to face. Every six years will bring another one. And although those elections will likely be rigged too, each will nonetheless bear a kernel of uncertainty. Surprises at the ballot box, while rare, can happen. And sometimes election rigging itself -- as we saw in the Philippines in 1986, Georgia in 2003, and the Ukraine in 2005 -- can generate an opportunity for the opposition to unify, mobilize the citizenry, and force a regime to abdicate or reform. Of course, we should be under no illusions as to the ability of Egypt's democratic opposition to pose a genuine electoral challenge to Gamal now or in the near future. As the disorganization around Mr. ElBaradei has demonstrated to us, the forces of democracy in Egypt have a long way to go before they can pull off an Egyptian version

of the Ukraine's Orange Revolution. But under a civilian Gamal Mubarak presidency, each election will offer a new chance for it to chip away at the regime's armor. And there are intriguing possibilities on the horizon. The Wafd Party, for years Exhibit A in the case for dismissing Egyptian opposition parties as ineffectual jokes, has been given new life by a new leader -- the media and pharmaceuticals tycoon El-Sayed El-Badawi. The new Wafd president has his own TV network and just purchased a controlling interest in one of Egypt's most vibrant opposition newspapers. El-Badawi is the type of person who in the past flocked to the ruling party for the benefits that it offered. The fact that a man of his heft has now seen fit to take a leading role in the opposition suggests a shift in expectations away from NDP dominance to something potentially more open. El-Badawi might not be a challenger in 2011, but he -- or someone like him -- very well could be six years hence. The point of this is that Gamal Mubarak's elevation could be a welcome thing, not because he would be a great leader, an economic reformer, or a genuine democrat -- although I suppose we cannot rule out any of those things -- but because it's more likely than the alternatives to keep open the possibility of an opposition success and a democratic future. Many Egyptians are fond of quoting a verse from the Quran when things go wrong: "It may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not." We might do well to remember that now. Tarek Masoud is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. This article is based in part on remarks at a POMEPS panel at GWU.

ElBaradei defends tie with Muslim Brotherhood

Egypt's leading democracy advocate defended his alliance with the country's largest but banned Islamist opposition group in an interview broadcast Friday — saying that their ideological differences don't preclude sharing goals. The 2005 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Mohamed ElBaradei, has been at the helm of a burgeoning opposition movement in Egypt, calling for legal and constitutional reforms to allow for free and fair elections and put an end to the nearly six-decade old military-backed regime in Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak has ruled for the last 29 years. ElBaradei's call for reform earlier this year attracted a wide range of groups, including Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood. The group supported ElBaradei's efforts and collected nearly 90 percent of almost 1 million signatures on a petition calling for reform.

However, critics have said an alliance with the Islamist group may cost ElBaradei his liberal-leaning supporters. "I am in tune with every Egyptian who believes Egypt needs political and economic reform," ElBaradei said in the interview with the pan-Arab Al-Jazeera satellite television. "The Brotherhood and I were honest with one another that we have total ideological and intellectual disagreement but we agree that we are part of this people and we want a democratic Egypt." He said the group is not seeking to establish a religious state. ElBaradei, the former chief of the UN nuclear agency, returned to Egypt in February to a hero's welcome. ElBaradei said he will pursue his calls for reform through peaceful means, and may even call for civil disobedience. Apart from his petition for reform, he has urged a boycott of the November parliamentary elections, saying they will be rigged. ElBaradei told Al-Jazeera that taking part in the elections will be supporting a "phony democracy." The Brotherhood and other opposition parties will take

part in the elections. The 82-year-old Islamist group is the largest opposition bloc in parliament, with a fifth of the seats. Banned since 1954, it has been tolerated to various degrees by the government, and fields independent candidates in elections. ElBaradei said Mubarak's military-backed regime is on the verge of collapse because of rising dissatisfaction, repression and poverty. He said his calls for reform aim to prevent a "revolution of the hungry." In the interview, ElBaradei said he hopes for a transitional period to allow for the writing of a new constitution, based on equality and civil rights.

Muslim Brotherhood to contest elections

Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, says it will contest upcoming parliamentary elections despite calls for a boycott. The decision highlights the fragmented state of Egypt's opposition parties. Some blocs say they will skip the polls to protest what they say are a lack of guarantees to ensure a fair and transparent vote. Lawmaker Saad El-Kattatni, who leads the Brotherhood's parliamentary caucus, said Thursday the group will field candidates in the November elections. Abdel-Rahman Al-Bar, known as the Brotherhood's spiritual adviser, also urged supporters to vote. The Brotherhood won 88 seats in Egypt's current 454-seat parliament. Its candidates run as independents because the group is officially banned by the government.

Democratic Front pulls out of Quartet Bloc over PA elections

Daily News Egypt October 1, 2010, The Democratic Front Party has withdrawn from the Quartet Bloc after other parties decided to participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in November. The Quartet Bloc comprised of four opposition parties including Al-Wafd, Tagammu and Nasserist parties as well as the Democratic Front, which has now dropped out. "We at Al-Wafd respect every party's decision as long as it is taken by its members and abides by each party's [internal regulations]. At the same time, we would have [preferred that] the Democratic Front Party continue with us — the coalition was not established to take unanimous decisions but to implement the decisions made by the majority of its members," Mohamed Moustafa Shardy, Al-Wafd MP, told Daily News Egypt. "How can we ask people to respect democracy and the decisions made based on the majority of votes when Osama Harb [head of the Democratic Front] refuses to do so," Shardy added. Head of the Democratic Front Party Osama Al-Ghazali Harb told Daily News Egypt, "Every party is free to make its own decisions. The party decided to withdraw from the [bloc] because we disagreed on entering the parliamentary elections. We did not attempt to impose our decision on them but it was natural to withdraw after we couldn't agree on such a vital point." He added, "The coming parliamentary elections are the most important elections and have an essential role in choosing the next president — that's why they should represent people's will and choice. "Unfortunately, the Egyptian government always manipulates the elections; and it presented no guarantees for transparent or fair elections to opposition groups. It will dominate the elections as always and leave the crumbs for the opposition parties who have decided to participate and they will be forced to accept it." Leaders from Al-Wafd and Tagammu agreed that the Democratic Front's pulling out of the quartet would have no effect on the bloc's decision. "No single party can impose its decision or point of view on the rest of the parties in the bloc," Rifaat Al-Saeid, head of Tagammu Party, told Daily News Egypt. Tagammu has not yet decided whether it will

join Al-Wafd and the Nasserist Party in the coming People's Assembly elections. "We [Al-Tagammu Party] will decide our position on boycotting or entering the parliamentary elections on Saturday," he added. Prominent member of Tagammu, Fathia El-Assal, told Daily News Egypt: "In my opinion, we are a democratic party, which means we have to enter any political elections, otherwise we would be merely a civil society group." However, she added, "that does not mean we approve of the current state of the country — corruption, bribes and the emergency law. But of course I will abide by the decision of the majority of the party tomorrow whether it is to enter the elections or boycott them," she added. Al-Saeid and El-Assal did not clarify whether they would be forced to withdraw from the Quartet Bloc as well if Tagammu's General Assembly decides to boycott elections on Saturday, describing it as "a premature decision."

Egypt's main leftist party will compete in upcoming parliamentary elections
Egypt's main leftist party, Al-Tagammu, announced in a meeting Saturday it will compete in the next People's Assembly (PA) elections in November.

October 4, 2010- Egypt's main leftist party, Al-Tagammu, announced in a meeting Saturday it will compete in the next People's Assembly (PA) elections in November. "Al-Tagammu founding member and prominent columnist Fathia El-Assal said Sunday "elections are the best opportunity for [political parties] to interact with the public ... in a state where democracy is absent." Al-Tagammu announced it will nominate 74 candidates, including nine women, to compete for the 508 seats of the Lower-House of the Parliament in most constituencies nationwide. The Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's main opposition group, has earlier announced it will participate in the upcoming elections, and will expose vote-rigging by the ruling regime to the Egyptian public and the whole world. Al-Wafd party, has also announced its participation in the upcoming elections. During a press conference following Saturday's meeting, Refaat El-Saeid, head of Al-Tagammu, stressed that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) must abide by the guarantees that the opposition parties had demanded to ensure the integrity of the elections. El-Saeid further called on the Supreme Press Council to provide all candidates, whether NDP or opposition, with equal opportunities in the media, especially the state-run TV, magazines and newspapers, to campaign. On the other hand, several other opposition parties chose to boycott the upcoming elections in absence of clear commitments by the governments to ensure safeguards against vote-rigging and election fraud, among them are Al-Ghad opposition party, which was the first to boycott the elections earlier last month, and the newly formed National Association for Change (NAC) headed by the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Mohamed ElBaradei.

ElBaradei: Differences with MB don't preclude sharing goals

In an interview with Al-Jazeera, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and a leading democracy advocate defended his alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in an interview broadcast Friday — saying that their ideological differences don't preclude sharing goals. In an interview with Al-Jazeera, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and a leading democracy advocate defended his alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in an interview broadcast Friday — saying that their ideological differences don't preclude sharing goals. The MB has strongly supported

ElBaradei's calls for legal and constitutional reforms to allow for free and fair elections and put an end the nearly six-decade old of President Hosni Mubarak. The group collected nearly 90 percent of almost 1 million signatures on a petition calling for reform. "I am in tune with every Egyptian who believes Egypt needs political and economic reform," ElBaradei said in the interview with the pan-Arab Al-Jazeera satellite television. "The Brotherhood and I were honest with one another that we have total ideological and intellectual disagreement but we agree that we are part of this people and we want a democratic Egypt." He said the group is not seeking to establish a religious state. The MB has previously declared it supports democratic civilian governance based on Islamic reference, and does not seek to form theological state. ElBaradei said he will pursue his calls for reform through peaceful means, and may even call for civil disobedience. In the interview, ElBaradei said he hopes for a transitional period to allow for the writing of a new constitution, based on equality and civil rights. Apart from his petition for reform, he has urged a boycott of the November parliamentary elections, saying they will be rigged. ElBaradei told Al-Jazeera that taking part in the elections will be supporting a "phony democracy." He called on MB and other opposition parties, which announced their participation in the elections, to reconsider their decisions and boycott elections.

Egypt ; Civil Society Still Under Siege – State Security Refuses to Declare “One Homeland for Development and Freedoms” Association

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information denounced today the continued police interference and limitation of the citizens' rights to organize and form associations as a part of freedom of expression. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information denounced today the continued police interference and limitation of the citizens' rights to organize and form associations as a part of freedom of expression in contrary to the constitution and the international treaties that Egypt has signed. The ministry of social solidarity refused , a few days ago, register and declare ” One Homeland for Development and Freedoms” association despite of submitting all necessary documents three months ago due to the refusal of state security department to form the association. This violation comes in a series of continued wide range restriction policies embraced by the Egyptian government against rights activists and independents organizations specifically with the forthcoming public and presidential elections, in an attempt to control the civil society in Egypt. Although there is no article in the associations bill that stipulates security consent to license civil associations , yet the ministry of social solidarity gave full control to state security disregarding the law such that state security became the competent body that controls civil society affairs such as licensing , accepting memberships , accepting or refusing funding and interfering in associations activities. In this context, the police refusal to register and declare “One Homeland for Development and Freedoms” association is an element in a long chain of coarse interferences and restrictions against the civil society organizations especially independent ones. The Association for Human Rights Legal Assistance ,AHRLA, is facing severe restrictions that may lead to terminating its activities as well as the New Woman Foundation. The Arabic Network and Hisham Mubarak Law Center are facing criminal trial on a fabricated case driven by state security. The Arabic Network asserts its principle stance of refusing the police interference of state security in Egyptian independent associations and organizations affairs. State Security has to stop continued harassments of human

rights defenders ,has to allow registering and declaring of civil society organizations like One Homeland for Development and Freedoms and should not encroach on citizens' right to express and organize.

Egypt: ElBaradei Works to Motivate Diaspora

A new article in the Carnegie Endowment's Arab Reform Bulletin by Omar Ashour describes how Mohamed ElBaradei has mobilized the Egyptian diaspora. cTraditionally, Egyptians living abroad have been largely apolitical. "Most Egyptian expats have been more concerned about building economic fortunes and retaining the ability to go back home without fear of government reprisals," Ashour writes. Through a series conferences in the U.S. and Europe, ElBaradei and his National Assembly for Change have "convinced many Egyptian expatriates that the welfare of the country and the interests of the regime are two very different matters."

Egypt's new political dawn

The emergence of Mohamed ElBaradei as a political player has led Egyptians to dream of a more democratic society. An understated cartoon by Amr Okasha published in the online version of the opposition newspaper al-Dustour, aptly expressed the pessimism that many people have about the upcoming parliamentary elections. Okasha's cartoon shows the distinctive dome of the Maglis al-Sha'b – the Peoples' Assembly. A smirking general standing in front of it. The caption says "Businessman's Assembly (formerly People's Assembly)." As the cartoon implies, no doubt seats in the parliament can be bought (as of course is also the case in the American Congress). But more importantly, whatever the percentage of opposition candidates allowed to take parliamentary seats by the ruling National Democratic Party, the neoliberal businessmen's agenda will remain untouched. Privatisation of public services will continue, inevitably pricing many out of "markets" for services they had formerly received from the state. Society will be more sharply polarised between the few who benefit spectacularly from free market fundamentalism and the many who are increasingly impoverished by it. An effective minister of parliament can bring some public or private money to his or her district, but nobody has the slightest expectation that parliamentary elections will create momentum towards democracy. The protection of powerful economic interests at the expense of democracy is business as usual in the logic of a neoliberal regime.

Possibility of transition But this does not mean that interest in Egypt's November 2011 parliamentary election is low. The election itself is not the real story. It is rather the possibility of a transition from the Mubarak era to something else that has powerfully caught the public's imagination. In this wider context, interest in politics is intense. Jaded intellectuals who would otherwise consider this sort of politics a bit vulgar argue vociferously about the fortunes of ElBaradei and the intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). One sees such unfamiliar sights as men standing in the street having heated discussions about the latest headline in an opposition paper. An unfamiliar excitement is in the air. The most important aspect of the parliamentary election is not how many seats are won on election day by opposition parties (or how many the NDP decides to let in the door). It is the decisions made by the major players to either participate in the NDP's rigged game, or to boycott the elections altogether.

The players The major players are not political parties. One is Mohamed ElBaradei, the retired head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. He is admired as a native son who reached the highest levels of international diplomacy, and stood up to the Americans on the issue of nuclear weapons inspections in Iraq. ElBaradei has skillfully built a network of local advisors, and until recently has blunted any accusations that he is out of touch with Egypt after a career spent abroad. The NDP is alleged to have begun an offensive against ElBaradei's character by anonymously publishing photos on Facebook of his daughter in a bikini and the family swilling alcohol. ElBaradei is thought to have presidential aspirations, though he has never said so unambiguously. He has, however, formed a non-partisan "National Association for Change" which aims to reform the constitution, most crucially an article that effectively prohibits independent candidates for running in presidential elections. Whether or not ElBaradei ever becomes president, he is immensely important as a symbol of alternatives to the continuation of the current regime. Ayman Nur of the Ghad (tomorrow) party played something of the same role in the 2005 election, and he was able to ride the momentum of the Kefaya movement (kefaya means "enough," i.e. of rule by Mubarak, his son Gamal who is being groomed to succeed his father in the presidency, and the NDP). But Nur was a former MP himself, and too much of a political insider to inspire the same hopes as ElBaradei. When Nur was incarcerated after the 2005 election on blatantly trumped up corruption charges there was no popular uprising in his defence.

Untouched but in touch By contrast, ElBaradei is seen as both a genuine outsider untouched by the rampant corruption of the Mubarak era and, thus far, as genuinely in touch with the political frustrations of average Egyptians. It might not be as easy for the state to push ElBaradei off the political stage as it was to neutralize Ayman Nur. ElBaradei has already declared publicly that individuals and political parties should boycott the parliamentary election. This, he believes, will strip the NDP of all legitimacy and force a turn to true democracy. The country now awaits the decision on boycott of the other important non-party participant in the elections, namely the Muslim Brotherhood. The MB has not been allowed to form a political party (though some of its adherents spin this as a tacit arrangement whereby the MB stays formally out of politics in exchange for the government ceding "the people" to it). However MB candidates ran as independents in the 2005 election, and currently occupy 20% of the seats in parliament. It would cause a political earthquake if they joined the boycott, but it is unlikely that they will do so. Nor is it likely that secular opposition parties such as the liberal Wafd or the socialist Tagammu' parties will stay on the sidelines.

Hereditary succession? Hovering over the entire parliamentary election process is the spectre of taurith – of Hosni Mubarak's son Gamal Mubarak inheriting the presidency. Gamal Mubarak has no natural constituency. He would be the first post-independence president to have attended a private university (the American University in Cairo) rather than a state institution. He never had to work his way up through the vast political patronage system of the Egyptian state, and he has never held a meaningful ministerial post. No doubt there are sincere Gamal Mubarak supporters somewhere, and a somewhat larger number of Egyptian citizens who support him as "the devil we know." However it would be fair to say that most of the country loathes the prospect of a Gamal Mubarak presidency. Hence the real issue in this election is not how many seats opposition parties

might win, but how the political players position themselves through the election for the upcoming challenge of ElBaradei.

Dreaming of real democracy

It is still unclear whether the elder Mubarak is ready to retire. The presidential election is scheduled for 2012, and it is not inconceivable that Hosni Mubarak will announce that he is game for another term in office. However even if he does defer the expected attempt to handoff to Gamal, ElBaradei's constitutional challenge will not disappear, and it ultimately implies a rejection of the endlessly extended "State of Emergency" law that has been in place since Anwar al-Sadat's assassination in 1981. It is the State of Emergency that underpins the Mubarak regime and the rule of the NDP. Hence one might be able to posit a scenario in which the state is left with no choice but to throw the political system – both the parliament and the presidency – open to true competition. The emergency law would be abolished, state torture and police brutality would be curbed, and corruption would be tamed. However one can just as easily see this scenario leading full circle back to Amr Okasha's cartoon. Would a freely elected government follow the businessmen's neoliberal agenda? If not, would the businessmen and the army allow it to stay in power? Probably not. It is almost impossible to imagine the NDP allowing enough MB candidates into parliament to govern, but if the unthinkable happened, how would the United States react? Brutal sanctions imposed on the democratically elected Islamist government in Gaza perhaps give a hint as to how the US would deal with a Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt. A similar policy applied to Egypt would cause immense suffering, but the US has shown itself capable of such actions. If Gaza is not enough of a warning, one recalls the time when former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was asked to comment on allegations that American-led sanctions against Iraq had caused the deaths of up to half a million children, she did not dispute either the claim or the numbers. Instead she replied that, "we think the price is worth it." Hopefully no such price will ever be levied on the Egyptian public for daring to dream of real democracy, but it cannot be denied that the coming cycle of elections will be both exhilarating and perilous. Dr. Walter Armbrust is Hourani Fellow and University Lecturer in Modern Middle East Studies at Oxford University. He is the author of *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Egypt: What Will Victory Cost NDP?

In a new article at Middle East Report and Information Project, Barnard College Professor Mona El-Ghobashy explains that recent protests in Egypt are a form social bargaining between the Egyptian population and the government. In a new article at Middle East Report and Information Project, Barnard College Professor Mona El-Ghobashy explains that recent protests in Egypt are a form social bargaining between the Egyptian population and the government: "It is tempting, but misguided, to read the rise of social protest as auguring the downfall of the regime. The upsurge of popular mobilization is not a revolutionary trend, but a systemic change in how citizens defend their interests in the absence of formal mechanisms of representation." El-Ghobashy notes that following the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2005, the National

Democratic Party (NDP) “began a systematic restructuring of the political arena, changing the constitution and electoral laws, weakening the Muslim Brothers and strengthening the NDP’s party organization.” NDP will inevitably win a significant victory in November, El-Ghobashy says. The real question is “how the government maintains its dominance and at what cost.”

Hereditary succession?

Hovering over the entire parliamentary election process is the spectre of taurith – of Hosni Mubarak’s son Gamal Mubarak inheriting the presidency. Gamal Mubarak has no natural constituency. He would be the first post-independence president to have attended a private university (the American University in Cairo) rather than a state institution. He never had to work his way up through the vast political patronage system of the Egyptian state, and he has never held a meaningful ministerial post.

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Sadat's daughter to sue over claims he poisoned Nasser

President Nasser died three days after drinking coffee made by his successor, hints former aide on al-Jazeera television The daughter of the former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat is going to court to defend her late father against allegations that he murdered Gamal Abdel Nasser, founding father of the modern Egyptian republic. Sadat, most famous for his controversial peace deal with Israel at Camp David, took over the presidency after Nasser's unexpected death in 1970 from a heart attack that some doctors attributed to poisoning. Last week, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, a veteran Egyptian journalist and former Sadat aide, used his show on [al-Jazeera](#) television to give an account of Nasser's final days, which included several hints that the second president's death might not have been natural. In what the Egyptian press have dubbed a "40-year bombshell", Heikal recalled an incident at a Cairo hotel where Nasser was meeting the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. According to Heikal the two leaders had a heated argument, after which Nasser looked so nervous that Sadat, who was vice-president at the time, offered to fetch him a cup of coffee. Heikal alleges that Sadat ordered the president's private cook out of the kitchen and made the coffee himself, which Nasser drank. Three days later Nasser collapsed and died, bringing several million mourners out on to the streets of Cairo and leading one best-selling Arab newspaper to declare that "one hundred million people – the Arabs – are now orphans." Sadat's family have responded angrily to what they see as an attempt to link Sadat, who was later assassinated by radical Islamists, to his predecessor's death. One daughter took to the airwaves to dismiss the claim as false, while another has filed an official complaint with the Egyptian prosecutor-general, accusing Heikal of libel and slander. "What Heikal said has inflicted tremendous damage on me and my family and hurt our feelings deeply," wrote Ruqaya Sadat in her submission to the courts. The family have argued that Heikal's account

cannot be true – because Sadat was incapable of making a cup of coffee on his own. On the same TV show Heikal, one of the oldest and most high-profile public commentators in the [Middle East](#), went on to say that he thought it "unlikely" Sadat had poisoned Nasser's coffee, but that qualification has failed to quell the storm. Many observers believe that the commentator's on-air statements, which included the line, "there's no proof [that Nasser was murdered], but a lot of speculations," were deliberately designed to cast suspicion on Sadat. "This is a brawl between celebrity and senility," said Hisham Kassem, a prominent Egyptian publisher. "Heikal has had nothing to say over the past four decades and his TV show has become increasingly insignificant, so he's trying to drum up some publicity. "Ruqaya Sadat wants to sue practically anyone who mentions her father outside the context of a god. The fact that so much has been made of this story is a sad reflection on the state of the Egyptian press."

Geo strategic front

Jewish Boat to Gaza boarded by Israeli forces and taken toward Ashdod port

The Irene, a boat carrying nine passengers and aid for Gaza's population has been taken over by the Israeli navy and denied access to Gaza. The boat is flying a British flag and its passengers include citizens of the US, the UK, Germany and Israel. Two journalists are also on board. Last contact with the boat's captain, Glyn Secker, was at 0937 GMT, when their path had been cut off by a Destroyer. Recent reports from other news sources indicated that the boat has been surrounded and boarded. At this point they were less than 20 miles from Gaza's shore. Since then all phones went dead. The occupied Gaza Strip's territorial waters end 12 nautical miles from shore, but the Israeli blockade is enforced at 20 miles from shore. Israeli attorney Smadar Ben Natan who is representing the passengers has asked to see her clients immediately. Local group Physicians for Human Rights-Israel has asked for permission to send an independent doctor to visit the passengers immediately, after hearing from organizers that at least one passenger suffers from serious chronic health problems and is in need of medical care. Speaking from London, a member of the organizing group, Richard Kuper of Jews for Justice for Palestinians, has condemned the Israeli army's apparent action and said that this boat and its fate are a symbol of the chances for peace in the region. The way it is being treated by Israeli authorities indicates that they have no real intentions of reaching peace, he said. He called for worldwide support for the boat and its message of protest against the siege of Gaza and the occupation.

IAEA approves site for Egypt's first nuclear plant

The UN nuclear watchdog IAEA has approved an Egyptian site to host the country's first nuclear power plant. The site in El Dabaa is about 295 km from Cairo, and corresponds to all international requirements, IAEA experts said on Saturday. Egypt is set to construct four nuclear power reactors by 2025, with the first of them to be put into operation in 2019. The north African state's nuclear programme was originally suspended after the Chernobyl disaster in the former Soviet Union in 1986. Egypt is expected to announce the tender for the construction of the nuclear power plant by the end of the year. Russia is ready to offer its vast experience, its high—technology solutions and financial assistance to the project. In March 2008, during Egyptian president's visit to Moscow, both countries signed an agreement on cooperation in the civilian nuclear sector. The

document stipulates Russia's right to participate in tenders to build nuclear power facilities in Egypt. In 2009, the Egyptian authorities officially invited Russia to participate in a tender to build Egypt's first nuclear power plant. Egypt, which possesses large reserves of uranium ore, has two experimental nuclear reactors, one constructed in 1958 by the Soviet Union and the other bought from Argentina.

Egypt and Iran to resume direct flights

Egypt and Iran have signed an agreement to resume direct flights between their capitals for the first time since the two nations' diplomatic relations fell apart in 1979. The head of the Egyptian Civil Aviation Authority, Sameh al-Hafni, says 28 flights will carry travelers between Cairo and Tehran every week. There was no explanation of what led to the deal, and an Egyptian government spokesman could not be reached for comment. Iran severed ties with Egypt after it signed a peace deal with Israel in 1979 and provided asylum to Iran's deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Under the agreement announced Sunday, a privately owned company called Egyptian Mission will regulate and organize the weekly trips to Iran.

Economic front

Egypt could become the top outsourcing destination worldwide, says expert

Worldwide demand for outsourcing is tilting towards Egypt as Europe now spends more on outsourcing than North America. According to Denise D'Elia, a Vodafone representative, outsourcing as an industry was valued at \$13 billion last year. Egypt has the third-largest talent pool in the EMEA region. This is largely due to the country's rich pool of young talent — 50 percent of the population is under 25. Although this is a positive development, for Egypt to play a major outsourcing role worldwide, it needs to build its capacity in several areas, D'Elia said. Moreover, a provider must ensure that it is a reliable supplier and provides certification. Reducing “churn” — an industry term for lowering the rate of customer loss — is also critical. D'Elia also highlighted the importance of education, which in Egypt is an area with promise. Indeed, the representative indicated that Egypt pumps out 330,000 university graduates per year — the third largest in the region — which will provide a steady flow of job seekers to the sector. She noted that firms such as Vodafone, which have substantial outsourcing operations in the country, seek young graduates with specializations in engineering, commerce, and industry. As it so happens, Egypt currently has a significant number of students whose studies focus on these three areas. Furthermore, as an outsourcing center for Europe, D'Elia emphasized the importance for Egypt to maintain the population's strong European language skills. She said that it is the only country in the world that boasts an aptitude in various European languages — including some less widely-known languages, such as Polish — which thereby give Egypt a competitive edge. A key area that must remain a focus is controlling cost, she said. According to D'Elia, firms are looking for increased revenue per customer, and this is an area where off-shoring can play a role. However, in terms of cost, Egypt performs well in relation to other outsourcing destinations; Egypt even performs well in comparison to India and the Philippines, which are currently the two top choices for outsourcing worldwide. D'Elia stated that cost in Egypt is competitive from both a personnel and non-personnel perspective (which includes infrastructure), according to data gathered by ITIDA and

various consultancy firms. She highlighted the efforts taken by the government to drive the sector, noting reforms in the areas of taxation and customs simplification. In addition, the financial sector has gradually become more privatized, and legislative and institutional frameworks fostered through “one-stop shops” have been established. Many of these legislative and institutional frameworks have even been implemented within 72 hours, which is quite faster than in previous years. In terms of infrastructure, strides have also been made. Smart Village was initially established to serve as a concentration of businesses specializing in information technology, yet due to its strong success it quickly became a headquarters for a variety of multi-national corporations. Following its example, the new IT Maadi Park will be ready for operation in 2012. It is slated to house approximately 300,000 employees in over 40 buildings. Last year, Egypt was ranked 13th in the field of global service delivery, according to an AT Kearny survey. Thanks to governmental efforts and the positive market dynamics already inherent to Egypt, the country was ranked sixth this year. “Many countries would like to be in that position,” D’Elia said.

Egypt government will protect TMG investors- minister Send us your feedback about Arab Finance

Egypt will protect investors exposed to a dispute over the sale of state land to real estate company Talaat Moustafa Group (TMG) (TMGH), the country's finance minister said on Monday. Shares in TMG, Egypt's biggest listed developer, tumbled last week after a court upheld a ruling that a housing ministry body broke the law by selling land for the company's landmark project without an auction. The case has rattled investors, concerned that other land deals in the real estate sector could be challenged. Analysts say the ruling could slow TMG's home sales and increase its cancellations. "The government will preserve the rights of all the shareholders and buyers," Finance Minister Youssef Boutros-Ghaali said at an event in Cairo. "The Attorney General has confirmed there was no fraud. It is an issue that will be fixed. It will be done within the next few days," he said. Executives and legal experts said the government was likely to adjust the Madinaty deal's terms without affecting customers who hold contracts there. Housing Minister Ahmed el-Maghrabi said one of the possible solutions was pushing forward new legislation in the next parliamentary session to resolve legal ambiguity over government land sales. A parliamentary election is due in November. President Hosni Mubarak also stepped in on Sunday, ordering that an impartial and independent legal advisory committee be put in place to "resolve the Madinaty case", the state news agency reported. The debate revolves around a 1998 rule saying state property sales must be by auction, analysts say. Until 2006, the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), a housing ministry body, had sold land directly under a law that preceded the 1998 rule.

Social front

Mother of Christian twins seeks Azhar fatwa

Kamelia Lotfy Gaballah, a mother of two 16-year-old twins — Andrew and Mario — whose father converted to Islam, requested that the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar issue her a fatwa that would prevent her children from forcibly converting to Islam. Such a fatwa would eventually enable the twins to be registered as Christians on their national ID

cards. Gaballah presented a note to the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayyeb which asks him to issue a fatwa indicating that Sharia gives the right to children who have reached the age of 15 to choose which religion they believe and follow. This fatwa is meant to support a different one that Gaballah previously managed to obtain from the Egyptian House of Jurisprudence, through which she won custody of her children in April 2009 after their Muslim-convert father claimed custody was his. Gaballah told Daily News Egypt that she is supposed to meet with the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar soon, according to promises given by Al Azhar officials. Gaballah also confirmed that she met with many members of the Jurisprudence Committee of Al Azhar who have showed understanding in her case. "The meeting was positive," Gaballah said. "I was assured that Sharia is clear about this, because it is the kids' right at the age of 15 to choose their own religion regardless of the parents' religions." The case of Andrew and Mario raised controversy among human rights activists and religious scholars during the five-year custody battle. The twins' secondary school stopped them both from attending religion classes due to an intervention made by the Minister of Education. The school had insisted that the twins must attend Islam classes rather than Christian classes since most of their documents identify the twins as Muslim. Gaballah said that her kids know nothing about Islam, as they were born and raised as Christians. Gaballah filed another lawsuit before the Administrative Court to change her twins' religion on their birth certificates, but the court refused to proceed with the lawsuit last March. Later Gaballah appealed to the Higher Administrative Court, but the date for the hearing has not yet been scheduled. The twins turned 16 last June and thus need to obtain their national ID cards. When a national ID card is issued, the religion listed on the ID is taken directly from the individual's birth certificate. As a result, Gaballah was advised to get a fatwa from Al Azhar for her two children. "I just want to change their religion in the official papers to end their suffering, especially since they cannot take thanaweyya amma exams without their national ID cards," Gaballah said. According to Gaballah, the Department of Civil State Organization asked her to present either a court ruling that allows her children's religions to be changed, or some other official document that proves the twins are Christian. Without either of this documentation, they would be unable to issue the twins' national ID cards with their religion listed as Christian. Gaballah's lawyer Alaa Fetyan told Daily News Egypt that they are merely trying to get the fatwa so that they may present it to the Department of Civil State Organization and get the twins' IDs issued. "If we manage to get this fatwa, it will be presented to the Higher Administrative Court who will then ask the twins about their religion and the lawsuit will end," Fetyan said.

Iraq

Geo strategic front

U.S. Encouraged By Iraqi Moves Toward New Government

The United States says it is "encouraged" now that Iraqi political leaders seem to be taking steps toward forming a coalition government -- nearly seven months after nationwide elections. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley added that Washington does not have a favorite candidate that it wants to see at the top of the government in Baghdad. "In a parliamentary system where you have multiple blocs that received significant support, but no one bloc is able to form a government on its own, you need to have the kind of political horsetrading that we're beginning to see," Crowley told

reporters. "We've been encouraging this for some time." The U.S. spokesman's comments came after the main Shi'ite parliament bloc, the National Alliance, on October 1 announced its backing for incumbent Nuri al-Maliki to remain as prime minister. The decision by the National Alliance, which joins Maliki's State of Law bloc and the Iran-friendly Iraqi National Alliance (INA), marked a breakthrough in talks among the country's Shi'ite political factions. The faction led by radical anti-American cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr, which forms a key part of the INA, provided crucial support to al-Maliki after months of demanding that he be replaced in the new government. Maliki had angered the Sadrists by sending government troops to crush Sadr's Mahdi Army militia in 2008. "The National Alliance held a meeting today, Friday, and discussed the nomination of its candidate for the post of prime minister," said Sadr bloc spokesman Nassar al-Rubaie at a press conference in Baghdad. "After consultation between the political blocs [of the National Alliance], they agreed to nominate Nuri al-Maliki for this post." The spokesman did not explain the bloc's sudden shift in support. The Shi'ite alliance, if it holds together, will still be a handful of seats short of a governing majority in the 325-seat parliament, meaning a deal with other blocs will be needed. Al-Maliki is expected to hold talks with Kurdish leaders, whose support would give him the majority he needs. They are expected to back the incumbent prime minister. However, those discussions, as well as distribution of government posts among the various factions that are backing Maliki, could take weeks or longer.

Lingering Shi'ite Dissent But while the decision signaled an end to one political deadlock, it did not signal an end to all infighting among the country's Shi'ite political groups. According to a website run by supporters of Shi'ite politician Ammar al-Hakim, his Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq party -- which is part of the National Alliance -- did not approve of al-Maliki. "The New York Times" reports that the party's leaders boycotted today's nominating session. They and other parties could still throw their support behind incumbent Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, who is al-Maliki's rival for the prime minister post in the new government. Abdul-Mahdi has the backing of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, whose cross-sectarian Iraqiya bloc won the most seats in the spring's parliamentary elections, though still not an outright majority. It was heavily supported by Iraq's minority Sunnis. Despite the lingering disagreement within the National Alliance, the Sadrist spokesman said that discussions among the various groups that won seats in the March 7 vote would continue until a new government is formed. "The National Alliance will continue its talks with the different political powers to reach a national consensus to form a government of national unity. [The Alliance] asked its negotiating team to open a dialogue with the other winning political groups to form a government of national unity," he said.

Economic front

Iraq Announces Oil Reserves Of Over 143 Billion Barrels

Iraq's oil minister says the country's proven "extractable" oil reserves have risen to over 143 billion barrels. The new figure represents a significant rise on Iraq's previously announced proven oil reserves of 115 billion barrels. Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani said at a news conference that the new figure was reached with the help of international oil companies working at 12 fields in Iraq. He said that most of the oil reserves, 71 percent, were concentrated in the south of the country, 20 percent in the north, and 9

percent in the center. Iraq's Oil Ministry has been carrying out surveys to update its oil reserves data, which had not been revised in years. Iraq depends on oil exports for 95 percent of government revenue.

Iraq's restive Province of Diyala not safe enough for investment

Instability and insecurity have thwarted attempts to reconstruct the Province of Diyala, Governor Abdunnasser al-Mahdawi said. Mahdawi said his efforts to rebuild the war-torn province have not borne fruit due to mounting violence. "The security conditions in the province have been a stumbling block on the path of luring capital," he said in an interview. He said his province, northeast of Baghdad and bordering Iran, was still struggling to start an urgently needed housing project for the construction of 43,000 housing units. The province, of which Baaquba is the capital, is still one of the major remaining strongholds of al-Qaeda and groups resisting U.S. troops and the government. With a population of nearly 1.3 million, the housing project is still on top of Mahdawi's priorities. But the upsurge in violence has even driven local contractors away. The province finds it extremely hard to implement urgent municipal projects. A large portion of funds allocated by the central government for public utilities projects remains unspent.

U.S. to export 1,000 dogs to Iraq

The Interior Ministry says it is negotiating the import of 1,000 police dogs from the United States. "The ministry will sign a contract (with the U.S.) for the purchase of 1,000 police dogs to help police in their searches for explosives," said Brigadier Salah Abdulsultan. Abdulsultan said Iraq currently has 32 police dogs which are used at six checkpoints in Baghdad. He said the idea was for each checkpoint to have its own dogs. "The experience has shown that police dogs have great ability to discover explosives," he said. Abdulsultan said more dogs might be needed and for purposes other than manning the checkpoints in Baghdad. "We want to use police dogs in other areas such as helping police uncover human corpses and narcotics," Abdulsultan said. He declined to reveal the value of the contract and the U.S. party with which the negotiations are taking place for the supply of the dogs.

The U.S. and others are required to explain their latest combat operation in Falluja

The U.S. army attack on three houses in Falluja in the early morning of September 15 requires an explanation from various parties. The U.S. is required to explain the reason it deployed helicopter gunships in attacking a civilian target inside an Iraqi city after the withdrawal of its combat troops. The troops staying behind were supposed to be only engaged in training and offering of advice. Any party representing the Iraqi government also needs to explain a number of issues, namely the reason why the members of the attacking force were clad in black, which is not the color of the Iraqi military uniform. True, the Iraqi force is something like a 'death squad' but still the government needs to say why its members were wearing black uniforms on this particular mission. The government should clarify whether it had prior information of the attack or not. If it did, it is under obligation to explain why children women and civilians were killed in an operation whose declared target was the capture of a former army officer. The

government is under obligation to tell the Iraqi people the kind of preparations it has in place in the aftermath of the U.S. combat troops withdrawal. Who would believe that the attempt to capture one person requires airborne troops and helicopter gunships – all deployed against residential houses where women and children live. The Sahwa (Sunni militiamen) and police in Falluja also should be asked to provide their version of the story. There should be some legal measure for bringing people, like the former army officer, for questioning on the basis of which an accusation could have been issued. This particular person, once found guilty, could have been tried. There was no need to execute families among them children under the pretext of targeting the same person.

Social front

Iraq's 'Al-Qaeda Widows' Seek Help, Rehabilitation

Scores of Iraqi women forced into marriages with Al-Qaeda fighters following the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 are seeking government help to rebuild their lives and provide for their children, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq (RFI) reports. Iman Abbas, head of a nongovernmental organization in the Diyala Province northwest of Baghdad that provides legal aid to women victims of violence, told RFI on September 29 that dozens of women have turned to her center for help after their foreign husbands were either killed or fled Iraq. Abbas said the children of such marriages are regarded as illegitimate and are thus deprived of all rights. She estimated that there are 50-60 children from such forced marriages who will not be able to receive education or state medical care. Abbas said there is also a social stigma associated with the circumstances of kids' conception. She said the mothers of these children are appealing to the government to grant their children citizenship rights under the 2006 citizenship law that provides for such rights if the mother is an Iraqi citizen. Diyala police spokesman Ghalid Attia told RFI that a program has been launched involving sociologists, psychologists, the Red Crescent, and other humanitarian organizations to rehabilitate members of this outcast group. Attia said these children are vulnerable to all kinds of risks, including delinquency and joining the insurgency as a reaction to being rejected by society. He underlined that the first step is to clarify the number of victims of these forced marriages and review their living conditions to determine precisely what help they need. Deputy Interior Minister Ahmad al-Khafaji told RFI that the government does not hold those children or their mothers responsible for the misdeeds of their fathers. He added that while there is no central plan to help them, the government is committed to ensuring their basic human rights. Dr. Qassim Hussein, chairman of the Iraqi Psychological Association, told RFI that due to unforgiving social attitudes, a bleak future awaits these women and their offspring. Hussein stressed the need for tolerance and understanding, saying that innocent children should not have to suffer due to wrongdoing by their fathers.

Lebanon

Syrian judiciary issued 33 arrest warrants for Lebanese, others

On Sunday the Syrian judiciary issued 33 arrest warrants for judges, officers, politicians and journalists of Lebanese, Arab and other nationalities in the case brought by former Lebanese General Security chief Jamil as-Sayyed, according to a statement from Sayyed's office. Sayyed along with 3 other generals was detained from 2005 to 2009 on

suspicion of involvement in former PM Rafik Hariri's murder. In April 2009, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) ordered their release without charges due to insufficient evidence. STL prosecutor made it clear at the time they were set free that their release did not mean they are Innocent and that once more evidence is available they could be back in jail. In December 2009, he filed a lawsuit in Damascus against various defendants whom he alleges were involved in a conspiracy of false testimonies against him. Detlev Mehlis, former head of the U.N. commission investigating former PM Rafik Hariri's murder, and his aide Gerhard Lehmann are among the 33 people named by the Syrian warrants, Sayyed's press office noted. On September 25, the Lebanese daily Ad Diyar reported that the Syrian judiciary was waiting for the appropriate time to send the warrants to its Lebanese counterpart. "If the Lebanese judiciary does not comply with the Syrian demand, then Syria will take the appropriate measures to have Interpol issue arrest warrants for those individuals," the newspaper added. "The game is bigger than (Premier) Saad Hariri. It is related to international schemes, starting from the new Middle East, which used Rafik Hariri's blood to strike Syria," Sayyed said in remarks published Sunday by the Syrian daily al-Watan. "But today, after failure of the plot, they moved to accuse the Resistance seeking a new scheme based on creating a Sunni-Shiite strife to divert attention from the struggle against the Israeli enemy and transfer this conflict to one between Arabs and Muslims themselves instead of having Israel as their common enemy. " Sayyed said "some" surrounding Hariri from Lebanon and "a large portion" from outside the country convinced the prime minister that Syria and its allies in Lebanon are the ones who killed his father. "This is why he (Hariri) allowed, contributed to, turned a blind eye and supported a political, media, judicial and security structure of his advisers who chose Syrian false witnesses picked from Lebanese prisons, and provided them with temptations, particularly Zuhair Siddiq, Hussam Hussam and others, to accuse Syria and the four Lebanese officers (Sayyed one of them)," said the former detainee. "But soon after our release and the fall of the hypothesis that Syria is behind the killing, they shifted their accusation within a month from Syria to Hezbollah, and this is no coincidence, of course, where police intelligence under Col. Wissam al-Hasan began arresting Israeli spy networks immediately after the release of the four generals in April 2009." Sayyed said the Government of national unity agreed to finance the Special Tribunal for Lebanon "because we thought we were paying for justice and truth, not for an international tribunal looking for politics." "But we found out four years later that the international law used the money to hit Syria and a portion of Lebanese through the false witnesses," he said. Describing MP Walid Jumblatt as "unstable," Sayyed said he has no faith in the Progressive Socialist Party chief. "I don't believe everything Walid Jumblatt says, whether he is with us or against us, because he changes his positions from one moment to another," Sayyed said. **Primary false witness** March 14 MP Okab Sakr told Akhbar al-Yawn news agency on September 23 that Sayyed is "the primary false witness" in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. "Hezbollah must start penalizing the primary false witness, which is now known and uncovered," Sakr said. Sakr's remarks came after he accused Sayyed of fabricating the story published by German magazine Der Spiegel last year about the alleged involvement of Hezbollah in former PM Rafik Hariri's assassination. "What was published by the German Der Spiegel was fabricated by Jamil Sayyed," Sakr said during a press conference. The other , so called false witnesses , Zuhair Siddiq, Hussam Hussam were Syrian intelligence officers.

While Siddiq is living in Australia , Hussam is living in Syria and many Lebanese leaders have urged the Syrian government to try him. According to Ya Libnan legal advisers there is no such a thing as a false witness before indictments are made . Only the courts during the trial can determine whether a witness is for real or false. At this stage no body knows who will be indicted, despite the fact that Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has revealed that some members of the party will be indicted. Such information is not coming from STL ...such information is most probably assumptions or extrapolations coming from Hezbollah members that were interrogated by the Investigators. The trials will start after the indictments are made . There are 12 judges , 4 of them are Lebanese . Many Lebanese legal experts believe that the issue of false witnesses is being used by Hezbollah and its allies to undermine and discredit the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Lebanon MP: Funding STL is a must

March 14 MP Riad Rahhal told ANB television on Thursday that financing the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) is mandatory, adding that if Lebanon does not finance it, other countries will. Rahhal also called on March 8 to let the STL do its job. March 14 MPs withdrew from the September 16 evening session of the Parliamentary Budget and Finance Commission to prevent it from reaching a quorum when March 8 MPs called for voting on a 2010 state budget clause pertaining to Lebanon's funding of the STL. "Hezbollah will use its position in government to try to block Lebanon's funding for the U.N. court investigating the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri", the group's spokesman said Wednesday. Tension escalated in Lebanon after reports said that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) will soon issue its indictment into the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Last July, Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said that the tribunal is "an Israeli project" that will indict Hezbollah members. Nasrallah accused Israel of being behind Hariri's assassination but refused to provide the evidence to STL to prove his case. Some March 8 coalition politicians have been calling for the abolition of the tribunal, while Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun and former head of General Security Jamil as-Sayyed publicly attacked the government. "We are convinced Hezbollah killed Lebanon's former PM Rafik Hariri and the international investigation (committee) has the evidence to prove that," al-Akhbar newspaper on Friday quoted an "authoritative security source" close to Premier Saad Hariri as saying.

Ahmadinejad views south Lebanon as Iran's border with Israel, report

Iran's ambassador Ghazanfar Roknabadi has reportedly said Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon is aimed at strengthening the Lebanese unity and consensus on the Resistance. Roknabadi said he backs the (controversial) equation of "army-Resistance-people." and said we should also add the 'Government ' to it. Roknabadi remarks which were published Thursday by An-Nahar newspaper contradict the call on Wednesday by former minister Wiam Wahab (a close ally of the Iranian backed Hezbollah) urging the ministers of Hezbollah and its allies to resign from the cabinet and to overthrow the government as soon as possible . Roknabadi said Tehran stands side-by-side with Lebanon ... because Lebanon has the right to resist Israel, which is the source of all calamities in the region." "Our positions are clear and direct,"

Roknabadi stressed. “We paid dearly for our positions and we are willing to pay more because we are convinced that national interest is part of justice and when global justice prevails national interests are secured.” **conflicting reports** There are conflicting reports over Ahmadinejad’s planned visit. While the Iranian officials and their Hezbollah led allies have been talking about the visit Syrian President Bashar Assad has reportedly asked his Iranian counterpart to postpone his visit to Lebanon as “this is not the right time.”Kuwaiti newspaper al-Anbaa quoted diplomatic sources as saying that Ahmadinejad’s scheduled visit to Lebanon around mid-October was brought up during the recent summit with Assad in Damascus. The sources said Assad asked Ahmadinejad why he wanted to visit Lebanon .The Iranian President has reportedly told Assad that the visit was “significant due to the strategic importance of the southern Lebanon .” Ahmadinejad has also reportedly told Assad, according to the sources, that he viewed the entire area of southern Lebanon as Iran’s border with Israel. At this point, the sources said, Assad advised that Ahmadinejad’s visit should not take place at this time. Assad, however, also hoped in the event Ahmadinejad went ahead of his visit to tone down his statements during his visit since Lebanon’s security was very important to Syria’s security interests. Al-Anbaa said that Ahmadinejad promised Assad at the end of their meeting to “seriously consider” the Syrian president’s recommendations. **To throw stones** In a related development the London-based al-Quds al-Arabi reported that Ahmadinejad intends to throw stones toward Israel from southern Lebanon. The paper said that the measure is a “symbolic gesture” during Ahmadinejad’s upcoming visit to Lebanon where he is expected to take part in a massive celebration in the border town of Bint Jbeil. The daily said Ahmadinejad will also inaugurate Fatima border crossing garden from where he will throw stones toward Israel in a move that reflects Iran’s hostility toward Israel.

Hezbollah Hezbollah receives substantial amounts of financial, training, weapons, explosives, political, diplomatic, and organizational aid from Iran . Hezbollah was established in Lebanon in 1982 by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. In its founding statement, Hezbollah declared itself committed to the “creation of an Islamic republic in Lebanon.” Tehran then sent hundreds of clerics and Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon to preach Iranian theology and draft recruits.

IMF: Lebanon needs to implement reforms in water, electricity, telecom *‘The main message to the government is action action, action’* International Monetary Fund (IMF) representative in Lebanon Eric Mottu urged the Lebanese government on Monday to start with the implementation of reforms in the water, telecom, electricity and transportation sectors to preserve the high growth rates reached in the past few years. “There have been many plans to address these structural issues and now they should be put into effect,” he said. “So the main message to the Lebanese government today is action, action, action.” Mottu said that growth will be negatively affected if the government does not deal properly with the reforms needed in the country’s dynamic sectors. Mottu’s remarks came during the Lebanon Business and Investment Summit 2010 organized by the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) and the American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce. The conference, which was held at the Movenpick Hotel in Beirut, aimed at discussing the investment opportunities in Lebanon in the few coming years. Mottu said that Lebanon’s

performance during the global financial crisis had been remarkable. “The growth rate has been very high due to the political stability and the increase in capital inflows while inflation has remained under control,” he said. However, he cautioned, the debt was still one of the highest but the debt to GDP ratio was decreasing. Lebanon’s gross public debt will fall to 131.16 percent of gross domestic product in 2010 from an earlier projection of 147.47 percent, figures from the Finance Ministry showed earlier this month. The figures projected the debt-to-GDP ratio falling to 129.24 percent in 2011. Public debt for 2010 was projected at \$51.4 billion, down from an earlier projection of \$55 billion. Mottu said Lebanon was facing many challenges including those related to macroeconomic management. “The government needs to remain prudent when it comes to macroeconomic management by keeping a tight budget in order to avoid jeopardizing the positive economic situation,” he said. He noted that the monetary policy of the Central Bank needed to continue balancing the accumulation of reserves. “It also needs to control the high cost of these reserves.” For his part, of Economy and Trade Minister Mohammad Safadi spoke about the measures adopted by the ministry to improve the economic situation in Lebanon and increase its resilience to the financial crisis. Among the steps taken by the ministry was the adoption of the 2005 consumer protection law which protects consumers’ rights by ensuring the safety and quality of goods and services. “The implementation of this law is being significantly enhanced by the appointment of almost 200 new consumer protection inspectors at the Economy and Trade Ministry,” he said. Moreover, industrial and agricultural producers can now act against unfair imports after Parliament ratified the law for the Protection of National Production, which is also known as the Trade Remedies Law, he said. “The implementation of this law has created an inter-ministerial investigative authority which is already receiving and studying petitions for protection. This authority can recommend specific action against any harm, or a threat of harm, that it may find.” Safadi added that the ministry had reduced the bureaucratic steps necessary to register intellectual property from seven to three, and it had also shortened the time for such a process from 40 to 15 days. Safadi said Lebanon had benefitted a lot from these measures. “Lebanon has weathered through the global financial crisis with near-complete resilience to any major consequence. At the same time, the economy’s growth rate is forecasted to reach over 6 percent by the end of this year,” he said. “With this, Lebanon can now be counted as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.” He added that Lebanon registered in 2009 the highest level of foreign direct investment flows into the Middle East, when taken as a percentage of GDP. However, he emphasized Lebanon’s needs to undertake immediate reforms in sectors such as electricity, water, communications, and transport. “These needs can easily be translated into lucrative opportunities, which carry the added advantage of being backed by international investment insurance schemes,” he said. “Examples of an international significance are the Tripoli Special Economic Zone and railway project. These will be based in an area that is strategically located to serve as a regional trade and business hub. The area will connect Lebanon with Syria, Jordan, Turkey, through both Tripoli’s sea port and future railway.” Other speakers included IDAL chairman Nabil Itani, Chargee d’Affaires at the European Commission Cecile Abadi, managing partner of El-Khoury and Partners Ziad El-Khoury, and chairman of Better Business Group Fadi Saab.

Israel

Netanyahu Accuses the Palestinians Of Stalling Peace Talks

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, accused on Friday that Palestinian side for stalling peace talks, and claimed that renewing the construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank should not have any effect on peace talks. Netanyahu stated that Israel held negotiations with the Palestinians for 17 years and at the same time was constructing and expanding settlements, and added that this issue never affected the talks. The Israeli Prime Minister further stated that a “restrained” settlement construction in the West Bank will not affect the peace process, and called on the international community to pressure the Palestinian Authority in resuming talks with his government. Netanyahu’s statements and stances come amidst extensive intervention from the United States and the European Union. Over the past several days, European Union High Representative, Catherine Ashton, repeatedly urged Netanyahu not to resume settlement activities in the occupied territories. Similar appeals were made by the United States in order to avoid further obstruction in peace talks with the Palestinians. Netanyahu claimed that his government is trying to find a solution to the issue; he added that the recently expired 10-month freeze was not easy, and that he now expects the Palestinian Authority “to be more flexible”. Netanyahu and his coalition partners, mainly from the far right, believe that Israel has the right to build Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, including in occupied East Jerusalem. Settlements in the occupied territories violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and the International Law as they clearly state that an occupying power cannot move all or part of its population into territories it occupies.

Netanyahu: “Lieberman’s UN Speech Does Not Represent Israel’s Official Stance”

Following a controversial speech at the UN General Assembly by Israeli Foreign, Avigdor Lieberman, in which he said peace could take decades, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, issued a statement rejecting the speech, stating that it was not coordinated. Lieberman said that peace is unlikely in the current stage, and the Land for Peace principle should be dropped during final status talks with the Palestinians. A statement by the office of Netanyahu said that the speech of Lieberman does not represent Israel’s official stance regarding the peace process, and that the speech was not coordinated with Netanyahu, the person who runs the talks on the Israeli side. The statement added that different segments of any peace deal will only be determined on the negotiations table. Israeli Defense Minister, Ehud Barak of the Labor Party, also stated that Lieberman's words do not represent Israel’s official stance, and added that the Labor party believes in the necessity of negotiations in order to achieve peace. In his UN speech, Tuesday in New York, Lieberman said that the solution should not be land swap but should instead be based on “demography”. He said that one of the issue that create the conflict is “constant contact between peoples of two nations and two different languages”. Lieberman also demanded the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and added that the issue of the refugees and Jerusalem are obstructing the talks. He stated that, “through its agents”, Iran can foil any peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians and with Lebanon. His statement led Palestinian delegates attending the meeting to walk out while the Palestinian permanent observer at the UN, Riyad Mansour,

told Reuters that Lieberman is “totally isolated from reality”. Israeli PM, Netanyahu, was fast in rejecting the statements of Lieberman and said that he hopes that his upcoming Paris meeting with Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, next month will be positive. Netanyahu also phoned French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, and U.S. Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, informing them that he is interested in productive talks with Abbas in order to achieve a peace deal within a year. U.S. Middle East Envoy, George Mitchell, will be holding meetings on Wednesday with Israeli officials and intends to hold a meeting on Thursday with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. On his side, Abbas said that negotiations with Israel cannot be held while it resumes its settlement activities in the occupied West Bank and in occupied East Jerusalem.

Islamic Jihad Calls For Unity

As Muslims around the world prepare to celebrate the Eid ul-Fitr Feast, the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine issued a statement calling on the Palestinian people, and their factions, to use this occasion as step towards comprehensive unity among in order to boost their struggle and steadfastness. The Islamic Jihad said that this feast is a great opportunity for ending all sorts of internal rifts and conflicts, and for restoring unity between all factions and segments of the society. It said that unity is needed to counter the ongoing Israeli aggression and ongoing violations carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people, their lands and their holy sites. The movement added that the Palestinians must be alert and aware of all attempts to keep them divided as such divisions only serve the interests of the Israeli occupation.

Abbas: “No Talks Under Settlement Construction”

Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, stated following a Sunday meeting with King Abdullah of Jordan, that he will not return to the negotiations table unless Israel halts its settlement activities in the occupied territories. He said that he will continue deliberations and talks with the United States in order to resolve this issue. Abbas added that after U.S. Middle East Peace Envoy, George Mitchell, visited the region and held talk with Israeli and Palestinian officials, it became clear that Israel has no intention to renew the moratorium on settlement activities . “This is a real obstacle to peace talks”, Abbas said, “We cannot continue the talks with Israel under these conditions, we have to coordinate our next move with the Arab countries”. Meanwhile, king Abdullah of Jordan, said that Amman will continue to support the Palestinians and will push for the two-state solution. He called on Israel to stop all of its unilateral activities that affect the future of peace talks. He also called on the United States to act on dissolving all obstacles that obstruct peace talks, especially Israel’s settlement activities, and added that more tension in the Middle East pushes the region into more conflicts and wars. Abbas and Abdullah agreed to continue their talks and consultations, and said that they will continue their coordination with other Arab countries and the International Community. Yasser Abed-Rabbu, secretary of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Chief Palestinian negotiator, Dr. Saeb Erekat, presidency spokesperson Nabil Abu Rodeina, and Palestinian ambassador to Jordan, Ata Khairy, attended the meeting. On the Jordanian side, head of the Jordanian Royal Court, Nasser Al Lawzy, the king’s advisor, Ayman Al Safady, and Jordan’s Foreign Minister, Nasser Jouda, accompanied king Abdullah during the meeting.

Zahhar: “Negotiations Will Fail Again”

Member of the Political Bureau of the Hamas movement, Mahmoud Zahhar, stated that negotiations with Israel will fail and that negotiations are meant to eliminate the resistance and serve the Israeli interest. Zahhar stated that all factions must support the resistance and added that resistance is the safe line that protects the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. He warned that such talks with Israel are meant to undermine the resistance and its role countering Israel and its aggression. “Late president, Yasser Arafat, realized that negotiations without resistance will not have a positive outcome”, Zahhar said, “He knew resistance will be serve Palestinian negotiators during their talks with Israel”. The Hamas leader further stated that the Arab Peace Initiative must not provide any legitimacy to the talks with Israel “as such talks do not serve the national interest of the Palestinian people”. The Arab League decided to postpone its October 4th meeting in order to give the United States a chance to eliminate all obstacles that are obstructing peace talks. The League recently declared that Israel must halt its settlement activities if it wants peace talks to be held without obstacles or interruptions.