

**BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**

**Fertile Crescent**

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**Summary:****Egypt**

**Political front:** State security detained nine members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Daqahleya as they were campaigning for a parliamentary run-off election. They were campaigning for Muslim Brotherhood member Hussein El-Sabea, who ran in the 2005 parliamentary elections raking 36,000 votes in the first round.

A travel ban was imposed on newly elected Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mohamed Badae's, almost two weeks after he was appointed, according to the group's lawyer. Barring Brotherhood MPs who enjoy parliamentary immunity such as MP Mohamed Saad El Katatney and MP Saad El Hussein, members of the newly-elected Guidance Office were also placed on the travel ban list. This is a violation of the law, the ban was imposed by the Minister of Interior but it is only the Prosecutor General who is authorized to issue such bans.

Ismail Haniyeh, head of the Hamas government in Gaza, called newly-appointed Muslim Brotherhood (MB) General Guide Mohamed Badie to pledge the Palestinian resistance group's support. In an official statement, Haniyeh wished Badie "all the best," calling for the MB's continued support for Hamas and the besieged people of the Gaza Strip.

Former IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei unequivocally stated that he does not want to become president of Egypt in an interview with Foreign Policy Magazine. "I don't want to be president of Egypt," he said. "I have a lot of plans other than being president of Egypt ... However ... a lot of people are saying that they want me to be engaged in domestic politics — they want me to run for president of Egypt." ElBaradei added, "What I've said is that I would not even consider running for president unless there is the proper framework for a free and fair election — and that is still the major question mark in Egypt.

**Geo strategic front:** Both President Hosni Mubarak and Interior Minister Habib El-Adly defended Egypt's decision to build an underground wall on the border with Gaza. Mubarak was speaking on the occasion of Police Day. The reinforcements on our eastern border are a matter of Egyptian sovereignty.

Reacting to President Hosni Mubarak's statements on Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, lawyer Naguib Gobrael says that he "refuses" to accept that Egyptian Copts in diaspora "are spreading misinformation" about the issue. Mubarak said, that there have been "continued attempts" to disrupt national unity in Egypt and provoke sectarian strife in the country. "There exist extremists on both sides, and there are individuals who try to exploit Egypt's ordinary people.

**Social front:** Flash floods and rains that decimated 1,246 homes in Aswan have finally subsided, governor said. At least 15 people were killed in the floods that occurred last week, mainly in Aswan and Sinai but also in Qena and the Red Sea, while thousands of homes were completely or partially destroyed especially in the first three days when the rains were at their worst. EGYPT'S First Lady Mrs Suzanne Mubarak ordered compensation of LE80,000 (around \$14,747) to be paid to each family, whose home was destroyed by the flash floods in Aswan in Upper Egypt two weeks ago. The Government has agreed to pay a compensation of LE25,000 to each one of these families, but Mrs

Mubarak ordered to increase it by LE55,000 during a meeting with community leaders and Government officials in Aswan.

An official report presented to Electricity Minister Hassan Younis revealed that heavy rains in the southern city of Aswan in recent days had temporarily disrupted the Aswan High Dam's power station, with 81 high-tension cable towers collapsing as a result of strong winds causing damage estimated at more than LE70 million.

**Human rights:** Egypt is among a host of countries including the US that is still involved in secret detentions of terrorism suspects around the world, according to a UN report. The report, due to be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in March, stated that these countries had been continuing the practice of secret detentions which is illegal under the Geneva Conventions even during states of emergency and armed conflict for the past nine years, Reuters reported. Alongside Egypt and the US, the report names Russia, China, Algeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, India and Iran as the other countries still involved in secret detentions. The report surmised that the objective of secret detentions was to cover up torture and human rights abuses carried out against the terror suspects, and “continues to be used in the name of countering terrorism around the world.” The report also indicated that the US was still heavily involved in these practices, which included kidnapping suspects before locking them up in undisclosed locations.

The Foreign Relations Committee of the People's Assembly (PA) rejected the statement issued by the European Parliament (EP) Members of the committee argued that Europe was not in a position to pass judgment due to violations against freedom of belief in its own backyard. House speaker Ahmed Fathi Sorour, who chaired the meeting, said that the statement from the EP was completely rejected. The EP had adopted a text last Thursday that expressed concern over recent acts of violence against Christians in both Malaysia and Egypt.

An International report issued by the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Human Rights gave Egypt a “red” in the classification of the status of non-governmental human rights organizations in the countries of the northern and southern Mediterranean in 2009, a report which is expected to be reviewed by EU countries at the end of this month. It comes within the framework of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which was conducted by the Union with a number of Arab governments, including the Egyptian government. The report, which was announced, at the headquarters of the Cairo Center for Human Rights Studies, employed three colors for the classification of the status of human rights, including: green, orange and red as an indicator of the government's respect for freedom of assembly and association, through the registry and intervention in the affairs of human rights associations, and the possibility of access to foreign funding, and other variables in the 11 Arab countries south of the Mediterranean, including the occupied territories and Israel. The red color represents the highest restrictions imposed on such indicators. In Egypt, the report said that the same period witnessed a state of “silence” took the closed-door meetings held by the Ministry of Social Solidarity on the amendment of the NGO law No. 84 of 2002, in which the ministry had ignored requests made by non-governmental organizations to participate in these meetings and exchange of views on the amendments of the NGOs law within the framework of “freedom of organization.”

Cairo said they will not send Egyptian women to work as housemaids in the Kingdom, a senior Egyptian official visiting the capital said. "We will not send our women as

housemaids due to social and cultural concerns," said, the Egyptian labor minister, following talks with Abdul Wahid Al-Humaid, deputy minister of labor.

An Egyptian court ordered a stay of a ban on the full face veil, or niqab, in female schools affiliated with the Islamic Al-Azhar University. The administrative court's decision came a week after it ruled, on grounds of constitutional liberties, against a ban by the education ministry on women wearing the niqab in university residences and examination halls. The court's ruling came in response to a complaint by a student in a high school affiliated with the prestigious Sunni university.

## **Lebanon**

**Political front:** Lebanon's Cabinet on Friday approved the adoption of a women's quota for the municipal elections. After the rejection of a proposal by Interior and Municipalities Minister calling for a women's quota of 30 percent, Cabinet agreed women should form a minimum of 20 percent of all candidates on ballot lists for the elections, which are slated for June.

**Geo strategic front:** Israel has no intention of attacking Lebanon, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yeste, after Minister without Portfolio Yossi Peled (Likud) warned of a confrontation on Israel's northern border. "The State of Israel is not looking for any kind of confrontation with Lebanon," Netanyahu said in a statement released by his office, adding, "Israel seeks peace with all of its neighbors."

Senior European diplomats in Lebanon said the country's leaders, including Prime Minister Saad Hariri and President Michel Suleiman, told visiting U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell that they were concerned Israel might attack. Well-informed Lebanese sources confirmed to Asharq Al-Awsat that French President Nicolas Sarkozy informed Lebanese officials that France has vowed to try to prevent Israel from bombarding Lebanon's basic infrastructure "but no more than that." Sarkozy stressed to Lebanese officials that it was imperative to "control the internal situation in Lebanon and prevent any provocations."

### **Social front: Human rights report:**

Lebanon "missed" several opportunities to promote human rights in 2009, a watchdog group said. Releasing its 20th annual study, "World Report 2010," Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that although Lebanon enjoyed its most peaceful and prosperous year in recent times, the stability didn't bring with it expected reforms in women, refugee and prison rights. "The year 2009 was one of missed opportunities ... in the region," said Sarah Leah Whitson, HRW Middle East director. *After free and peaceful parliamentary elections in June 2009, it took five months for a Cabinet to be formed, meaning much needed reforms were left in the air, HRW said.* "Conditions in prisons and detention facilities remain poor, with overcrowding and lack of proper medical care a perennial problem," the report said, noting that *while Lebanese prisons had a capacity for 3,653 detainees, 5,324 people were currently behind bars. HRW women's rights researcher for the Middle East and North Africa region, said Lebanese women still faced considerable discrimination in legislation and political participation.* Women were subject to unfair personal status laws and penal laws relating to violence in the family, and continued to be deprived of their right to grant nationality grants. *HRW called on the Lebanese authorities to grant women nationality grants regardless of the nationality of their husbands, protect migrant domestic workers in the country's labor law, and give*

*greater employment and ownership rights to Palestinian refugees.* The organization also called upon the Lebanese to publish the results.

### **Palestine**

Agencies- Dr. Mahmoud Zahhar, a political leader of the Hamas movement, stated that they would sign the Egyptian document for internal Palestinian unity should the Egyptian leadership provide guarantees to ensure a successful agreement. Zahhar said that Hamas does not want to sign on unclear issues, and that Egypt should provide clarifications so that all aspects are durable to ensure a lasting unity deal.

### **Iraq**

**Political front:** A prominent sheik and U.S. ally is weighing whether to urge fellow Sunnis to boycott upcoming elections in protest of the government's ballot purge of hundreds of candidates suspected of links to Saddam Hussein's regime. Such a call by Ahmed Abu Risha risks derailing Obama administration hopes that the March 7 parliamentary elections will bring stronger reconciliation between Iraq's majority Shiites and minority Sunnis who want to reclaim more political power. It would also set back the clock on Iraqi politics, using the same protest tactic that Sunnis used in 2005 parliament voting that left them with only a few lawmakers and a weakened voice in key debates.

In his first State of the Union address, U.S. President Barack Obama has told the American people that eight years of war in Afghanistan and nearly seven years of war in Iraq are coming to an end. But he devoted most of his annual address to Congress to detailing how he plans to strengthen the struggling U.S. economy and put unemployed Americans back to work.

## **Detailed News**

### **Egypt**

#### **Political front:**

#### **NINE MB MEMBERS ARRESTED IN DAQAHLEYA**

Daily News Egypt: January 25, 2010: State security detained nine members of the Muslim Brotherhood early Monday in Daqahleya as they were campaigning for a parliamentary run-off election. The nine members are Abdul Mohsen Qamhawi, Saad Mahmoud, Gamal Bayoumy, Gamal Aleshry, Mohamed Shaaban, Bakr Fares, Ahmed Mohamed Waley, Mohamed Yusuf and Gamal Aboul Nasr. Some of the detainees are former MPs. *They were campaigning for Muslim Brotherhood member Hussein El-Sabea, who ran in the 2005 parliamentary elections raking 36,000 votes in the first round.* However, a week before a run-off vote to secure the requisite 50 percent plus one majority, the National Democratic Party's candidates filed a complaint and the elections were canceled in his constituency. Recently, Minister of Interior Habib El-Adly announced that elections to fill this seat are to be held on Feb.10 and the re-run on Feb 17. The group believes that the arrests are related to a campaign rally that was held on Jan. 13, in which members were "promoting and advocating victory for Gaza," as stated on their official website Ikwaneb. Although officially banned, the Muslim Brotherhood enjoys a substantive *parliamentary presence after winning a record 88 seats in the 2005* elections, almost fifth of the seats in the People's Assembly. Hussein Ibrahim, head of the MB parliamentary bloc, said, "The PA elections in November 2010 are a priority in the coming period to assert our political presence; we are subjected to many pressures,

whether it internally due to the Guidance Office elections, or externally because of the arrest of our members. “We have to get through these tough times to prepare for the PA elections to win an even greater victory — greater than the previous one [in the 2005 elections],” he added. *Talaat Shinnawy, head of the Brotherhood’s Administrative Office in Daqahleya, confirmed that the group will still vie for this seat in People’s Assembly.* The government crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood has intensified with the arrest of many of its members, which has affected their political activity, according to expert on Islamic movements Diaa Rashwan from Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. In addition, the recent election of new Guidance Office members, the appointment of a new Supreme Guide, Mohamed Badea, and a new secretary general, Mahmoud Hussein, has led analysts to believe that the group is moving towards more conservatism. This could lure the group away from political activism and instead focus on religious and social work, Rashwan explained.

### **Akef: MB strategy the same despite leadership change**

Choosing Mahmoud Hussein as Supreme Guide instead of Mahmoud Ezzat will not alter the Muslim Brotherhood’s strategy, said Mohamed Mahdi Akef, former supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood’s strategy is well-defined and seeks to achieve preset objectives, said Akef, adding that the overall strategy of the group does not change just because the leader changes. Meanwhile, informed sources said Mahmoud Ezzat is a likely candidate for the position of the first deputy supreme guide, although the decision will not be announced before the meeting of the Guidance Bureau on Wednesday. Sources also suggested that Rashad Bayoumi, a current member of the Guidance Bureau, will not reject a position if he is offered one.

### **Hamas pledges support for new MB leader**

Ismail Haniyeh, head of the Hamas government in Gaza, called newly-appointed Muslim Brotherhood (MB) General Guide Mohamed Badie Thursday to pledge the Palestinian resistance group's support. In an official statement, Haniyeh wished Badie "all the best," calling for the MB's continued support for Hamas and the besieged people of the Gaza Strip. Haniyeh also called Mahdi Akef, Badie's predecessor, thanking him for the support given to Hamas during the latter's term as MB general guide. According to leading MB member Essam el-Erian, the Palestinian question remains a "strategic concern" for the group. "Our relations with Palestine date back to the 1936 Al-Qassam revolution, before the formation of any Palestinian factions," said el-Erian. "In the days of [former Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat, we used to roll out the red carpet when he would visit our general guide in Cairo." In a related development, Badie--in his first official act as general guide--appointed Guidance Bureau member Mahmoud Hussein as group secretary-general, replacing Mahmoud Ezzat. Mubarak gives directives to government, NDP to assist torrential rains victims President Hosni Mubarak has given directives to the government and the National Democratic Party to mitigate the effects of torrential rains which plagued some parts of Egyptian governorates. he President stressed the importance of adopting a full- dressed plan to mitigate the effects of flash rains including the establishment of new dams and spillways costing L.E. 549 million. Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif will preside over a meeting on Saturday 23/1/2010 of the higher ministerial committee for crisis management to discuss the effects of the torrential rains and a plan to

move houses built in the course of torrential rains spillways and to rebuild the demolished houses. President Mubarak had ordered increasing the value of compensations from L.E. 15,000 to L.E. 25,000. Safwat Al-Sheirf, the Secretary General of the National Democratic Party said the party plays a big role in supporting the afflicted families. He said President Mubarak gave directives under which the NDP units and youths would intensify efforts to provide aid for the affected citizens.

### **TRAVEL BAN IMPOSED ON BROTHERHOOD OFFICIALS**

Daily News Egypt: January 28, 2010: A travel ban was imposed on newly elected Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mohamed Badea's, almost two weeks after he was appointed, according to the group's lawyer. Barring Brotherhood MPs who enjoy parliamentary immunity such as MP Mohamed Saad El Katatney and MP Saad El Hussein, members of the newly-elected Guidance Office were also placed on the travel ban list. "This is a violation of the law; the ban was imposed by the Minister of Interior but it is only the Prosecutor General who is authorized to issue such bans," said Abdel Moneim Abdel Maqsood, the group's lawyer. On the same day, in what the Muslim Brotherhood described as an "unprecedented move," State Security closed 612 cases that were initiated against nearly 10,000 members of the banned group over the past 20 years. The cases were not referred to court after the prosecution completed its interrogations. Other cases that were referred to a military court were not closed, however. Abdel Maqsood explained that the decision is attributed to the Egyptian Judicial System, meanwhile strongly denying that the group has struck a deal with the government. On the other hand, Badea' has continued appointing new officials, including Gomaa Amin Abdul Aziz, Rashad Al-Bayoumy and former Secretary General Mahmoud Ezzat as his deputies. Khayrat Al-Shater, who is currently serving a prison sentence, will also maintain his position as deputy. Although Badea' is the official spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, he appointed Mohamed Morsi, El Katatney and Essam El-Erian as his auxiliary spokesmen. The government crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood has intensified with the arrest of many of its members; which has taken its toll on their political presence in a year of parliamentary elections. In 2005, fielding candidates as independents, the group won 88 seats, nearly one fifth of the seats in parliament. Expert on Islamic movements, Diah Rashwan, from Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, doesn't expect the Muslim Brotherhood to have a strong participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections, whether it's the People's Assembly or the Shoura Council. This is due to the fact that the current leadership is not really "politically enthusiastic" and this could lure the group away from political activism to focus on religious and social work instead. "The biggest challenge for the Muslim Brotherhood in the coming period is to change the perception that the current leadership is conservative by becoming more involved in the public sphere as he is now focusing only on the internal politics of the group," Rashwan explained.

### **I DON'T WANT TO BE PRESIDENT OF EGYPT, SAYS ELBARADEI**

Daily News Egypt: January 27, 2010: Former IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei unequivocally stated that he does not want to become president of Egypt in an interview with Foreign Policy Magazine published Tuesday. "I don't want to be president of Egypt," he said. "I have a lot of plans other than being president of Egypt ... However ...

a lot of people are saying that they want me to be engaged in domestic politics — they want me to run for president of Egypt.” ElBaradei added, “What I’ve said is that I would not even consider running for president unless there is the proper framework for a free and fair election — and that is still the major question mark in Egypt. I don’t believe the conditions are in place for free and fair elections.” ElBaradei had previously spoken on the need for a new constitution for Egypt, and not just regarding the current prerequisites for presidential candidates as laid out by the constitutional amendments of 2007.

“The constitution is written in a way that I cannot run unless I join an existing party, which, to me, is not how a democratic system works,” he said. “I would like to be, at this time, an agent to push Egypt towards a more democratic and transparent regime, with all of its implications for the rest of the Arab world.” *Article 76 of the Egyptian constitution stipulates that a candidate must have been on the governing council of his political party for at least one year prior to elections, and that the party must have been in existence for at least five years. Additionally, any presidential hopeful must secure a total of 250* endorsements from both legislative houses — the People’s Assembly and Shoura Council — and local councils to become an official candidate. Members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) however, hold a majority in both houses. When ElBaradei first spoke of his potential candidacy, he faced a maelstrom of criticism in the local state-run press, something he said backfired in the end. The former IAEA chief was also asked his opinions about the relationship with Hamas, the Egyptian position vis-a-vis Gaza and the building of an underground wall on the border with the Strip. “You have to distinguish between national security and humanitarian assistance,” he said. “But if this [border area] has been used for smuggling drugs, weapons or extremists, then Egypt has the right to make sure it protects its security. But what Egypt can also do is use the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt to allow Gaza to have humanitarian assistance.” ElBaradei added, “For example, one idea I have is to create a free zone in the Egyptian part of Rafah. I don’t see why we can’t have a free zone there where people from Gaza go and buy their own basic needs. So there is a difference between protecting national security, which no one questions, and providing humanitarian assistance.”

## **EGYPT PROSECUTOR CALLS FOR DEATH PENALTY IN HEZBOLLAH TRIAL**

Agence France-Presse: January 27, 2010: The prosecution in a trial of 26 alleged Hezbollah members charged with planning attacks in Egypt demanded the death sentence on Tuesday, a judicial source said. The prosecutor made the request during a hearing at the emergency state security court trying the high-profile case, which has damaged relations between Egypt and the powerful Lebanese Shia militant group. He called for “the harshest sentence against the defendants,” the judicial source said. The trial will resume on February 20. The men are accused of plotting attacks against ships in the Suez Canal and tourist sites, and of spying, along with other charges. Most of the group, which includes five Palestinian suspects and one Sudanese, were rounded up between late 2008 and January 2009. Four of the defendants, among them the alleged Lebanese ringleader Mohammed Qublan, are being tried in absentia after they fled the country. The defendants had said in a hand-written letter obtained by AFP that they never planned attacks in Egypt but sought to help the Islamist Hamas rulers of Gaza, who have close ties with Hezbollah. Abdel Moneim Abdel Maqsud, one of the defense lawyers, said he

believed the court would not sentence the men to death if they were convicted because they did not commit any violence. At a previous hearing, Lebanese suspect Mohammed Mansur told AFP during a court break that he and the other defendants were tortured. Police have denied the accusation. Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah had admitted after the arrests were publicized in April that he sent Mansur, identified by his code name Sami Shihab, to Egypt to support Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip. He said the cell comprised no more than 10 people and denied they planned attacks in the country. The trial reignited a war of words between Egypt, Hezbollah and its Iranian backers. Egypt, which has no formal diplomatic ties with Shia Iran, accuses Tehran of backing the plot. Iran and Hezbollah say Egypt contrived the case against the men. Egypt had responded angrily to a speech by Nasrallah calling on Egyptians to protest, and army officers to resign, over the government's refusal to permanently open its crossing with Gaza during a war between Israel and Hamas last winter.

### **Geo strategic front:**

#### **EGYPT SAYS TO BACK YEMEN AT LONDON CONFERENCE**

AFP: January 24, 2010: Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh held talks Saturday with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, who stressed his country's support for Yemen at an upcoming London conference. "We will provide all political support for Yemen at this meeting," Aboul Gheit said at a news conference in Sanaa, where he and Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman met with Saleh. Egypt and the rest of the Arab states "will stand with Yemen in this meeting" and back any mechanism agreed upon to provide it "political, economic and security support," he added. The London conference on extremism in Yemen starts on Wednesday, and will be attended by representatives from 21 countries. It was called by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown days after it emerged a Nigerian accused of trying to blow up a US airliner on Christmas Day could have been trained by the Yemen-based Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. – AFP

#### **MUBARAK AND ADLY DEFEND GAZA WALL ON POLICE DAY**

Daily News Egypt: January 25, 2010: Both President Hosni Mubarak and Interior Minister Habib El-Adly defended Egypt's decision to build an underground wall on the border with Gaza Sunday. Mubarak was speaking on the occasion of Police Day, the first time it is declared a national holiday. El-Adly also spoke Sunday night on the terrestrial television show "Hadith El-Medina" (Talk of the Town). "The reinforcements on our eastern border are a matter of Egyptian sovereignty. We do not accept debate on this issue with anyone. It is the right of the Egyptian state, and even its duty, its responsibility. It is the right of every state to control and protect its borders," he continued. "What we do not accept, and will not accept, is that we take our borders lightly, or that our territory is violated or that our soldiers or installations are targeted." Islamist group Hamas responded to Mubarak's comments Monday, its Gaza spokesman Mosheer El-Masry telling reporters, "The underground wall does not serve the interests of any of the Arabs; the only benefactors are the Israeli occupiers because it will kill the last lifeline of the people of Gaza after two and half years of the siege." For his part El-Adly said, "Who said it's a

wall? It is underground. It is not a wall but a number of steel shields underground to block the tunnels that have proliferated over wide areas on the border inside Egyptian territory.” Egypt had begun construction of this underground barrier at the turn of the year, but did not officially admit to the plans until it was pressured to do so by the press, where it was the object of severe criticism perceived as blocking the only lifeline for the blighted Gaza strip. Three members of the Tagammu Party in North Sinai were released late Sunday night after having been detained for over 24 hours due to their opposition to the building of the underground barrier. In his speech, Mubarak also said that the region had become unstable, with a wider array of groups intent on disrupting social order in the Middle East. “We live in a difficult region and a world fraught with tension,” he added, “witnessing an expansion of instability across the world from Afghanistan to Pakistan and in Iran and Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan. “Widening circle of Salafi ideology with groups falsely declaring people as infidels to terrorize innocent people and disturb the social stability of the nation.” Therefore, security forces would “continue fiercely confronting the terrorism and extremism ... for the security of the nation and citizens,” he said. Mubarak also spoke of the recent shootings at a Church in Nagaa Hammadi, where six Christians and one Muslim were killed on Jan. 6 after the Coptic Christmas Mass. He chastised both Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church for the lack of an enlightened religious dialogue in Egypt, and added he would not go easy on those who threatened the “unity” of Egyptians. “The brutal attack on the Copts on Christmas Eve urges us all, Muslims and Christians, to take a serious and honest stand with ourselves,” Mubarak said.

#### **ANALYSTS COMMENT ON COPTIC-MUSLIM REFERENCES IN MUBARAK’S POLICE DAY SPEECH**

Daily News Egypt: January 26, 2010: Reacting to President Hosni Mubarak’s statements on Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, lawyer Naguib Gobrael says that he “refuses” to accept that Egyptian Copts in diaspora “are spreading misinformation” about the issue. Mubarak said Sunday during his speech, given on the occasion of national Police Day, that there have been “continued attempts” to disrupt national unity in Egypt and provoke sectarian strife in the country. “There exist extremists on both sides, and there are individuals who try to exploit Egypt’s ordinary people. We must resist these efforts with all our powers,” Mubarak is quoted as saying by the official state news agency, MENA. His comments were viewed as directed at the Coptic community in the Diaspora, particularly north America, who are vocal about what they regard as the persecution of Egypt’s Christian minority. Hundreds of Copts marched through New York City to the United Nations building last week in protest at the Nagaa Hammadi killings, when six Copts and a Muslim were shot dead outside a church on Eastern Christmas Eve. “We refuse to accept that the Egyptian Copts are spreading false ideas among the public outside of Egypt, because those Copts are Egyptians and part of the nation,” Gobrael told Daily News Egypt. “What pushes them to protest in front of the United Nations headquarters is their feeling of obligation towards the Copts in Egypt,” Gobrael added. “They are outside of Egypt, they can say whatever they want. If I say that they aren't good, then they criticize me, if I say that they are, then the government is not happy and I could go to jail for it. So why don't you ask President Mubarak about what he has to say?” Coptic thinker and writer Milad Hanna said. Both Gobrael and Emad Gad, an analyst at the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, identified positive

aspects in Mubarak's speech. "It is important to put this statement [about religious relations in Egypt] in the context of the whole speech. Mubarak spoke positively about the situation. He defined himself as an Egyptian President for all Egyptians — compare this with Sadat who called himself a Muslim leader," Gad said. "This is new and important. Mubarak tried to make some kind of balance — he put blame on both the Muslims and the Copts abroad," Gad continued. Gobrael said that while "what the president said in his speech is very good, the problem is that it's not enough. "The government has to create relations between itself and its people." Gad suggested the reforms necessary in Egyptian society which are of most importance to the country's Copts. He said that there must be "an end to the Islamization of everything in Egypt" and also called for a unified law on places of worship. Christians say that they face great difficulties in securing official permission to build or even repair churches. "Educational curricula must change; especially at the primary and preparatory levels — they Islamize everything in school books," Gad continued, adding that "Civil law must be applied." – With additional reporting by Rabab Elmonofi.

### **LEBANESE PM ON FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO EGYPT**

AFP: January 27, 2010: Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri heads to Cairo on Wednesday on his first official visit for talks with top officials, including President Hosni Mubarak, his office said. Hariri will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ali Shami, Economy Minister Mohammed Safadi, Information Minister Tarek Mitri and other officials, a statement said. He will also be accompanied for the first time by his wife Lara, who lives in Saudi Arabia with the couple's three children. Hariri's visit comes after trips to France and Turkey earlier this month and after his landmark December trip to former arch-foe Syria, which he had accused in the past of the 2005 assassination of his father, ex-premier Rafiq Hariri. The visit also comes a day after an Egyptian prosecutor demanded the death sentence for 26 alleged militants of Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah. The group, which include Lebanese, Palestinians and Sudanese, is accused of plotting attacks against ships in the Suez Canal and tourist sites, of spying, and other crimes. The defendants say they never planned the attacks but sought to help the Islamist Hamas rulers of Gaza, who have close ties with Hezbollah. The trial has reignited a war of words between Egypt, Hezbollah and its Iranian backers. Egypt, which has no formal diplomatic ties with Shiite Iran, accuses Tehran of backing the plot. –AFP

### **Egypt, Qatar disagree over US peacekeeping**

21 January 2010 in Egypt, Media, News- Egypt criticized what it termed a Qatari campaign to distort its efforts to relaunch peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel. Cairo has been the leading intermediary between the Palestinians and Israelis in recent years, although no peace deal has yet been achieved. The Egyptian-Qatari crisis was sparked by what an Egyptian official described as a "Qatari media fuss" over comments made by Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit's, when he said he had no idea that Qatar had demanded that the US offer guarantees for the revival of the Palestinian-

Israeli peace talks. “The reason for our astonishment is that the Qatari reaction towards statements attributed to the (Egyptian) foreign minister was not relayed as diplomatic norms dictate through diplomatic channels,” an official source at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said this week. “The Egyptian side would have been happy if the Qatari officials had asked for clarification on the issue without making up an unjustifiable media fuss, which contradicts the requirements of the Arab action,” added the source in a statement carried by semi-official newspapers. Qatar has said that Arab nations, including Egypt, were notified of a Qatari letter presented to the American administration for guarantees and that Doha had sent a copy of the letter to the Arab League. Egyptian-Qatari ties have been in trouble over recent years with Cairo accusing Doha of constantly casting doubts over its regional role. In March 2009, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak snubbed an annual Arab summit conference held in Qatar. Egypt’s official media has openly criticized Al Jazeera for allegedly distorting Egypt’s name. The Qatari-based news organization has come under much fire recently over its coverage of the North African nation. “It is regrettable that as part of the same campaign some Qatari writers have jumped on the bandwagon to distort Egypt’s stance over the issue of (US) guarantees by unfairly implying that Egypt has renounced the idea or sought to put pressure on the Palestinians to stop demanding these guarantees,” said an Egyptian source quoted by GulfNews. “This is a sheer lie. The idea of demanding internationally supported US guarantees is a basic component of the Egyptian efforts exerted for the resumption of (Palestinian-Israeli) negotiations on a sound basis,” the source added.

### **Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood condemns sectarian clashes in Nigeria**

Jan 23, 2010, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood condemned Saturday the sectarian clashes between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria that left hundreds killed. 'We ask the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the African Union to intervene to stop such massacres of innocent people ... and investigate the causes behind these clashes,' the group's leader, Mohamed Badei said in a statement. Christians and Muslims fought for days earlier in the week in Nigeria, burning and looting homes, churches and mosques and forcing thousands to flee. 'We want to remind the Nigerian people of the Muslim and Christian religious values that call for tolerance, coexistence and solidarity to confront the dangers facing Nigeria as poverty, unemployment and oppression,' Badei added. New York-based Human Rights Watch, citing local civil society leaders, said the violence was carried out by sectarian mobs armed with guns, bows and arrows, and machetes.

### **Economic front:**

#### **EGYPT SAYS DOHA TRADE DEAL UNLIKELY THIS YEAR**

Reuters: January 28, 2010: World trade talks are unlikely to be completed this year because the economic slowdown has raised Western fears about the impact of trade liberalization, Egypt's Trade Minister said on Wednesday. The G20 has called for an

outline deal in the talks — launched in Doha in 2001 with the goal of helping poor countries prosper through trade — to be reached by the end of the year. "To complete Doha in 2010, I'm not very optimistic. I don't think it will happen," Rachid Mohamed Rachid said. "We have to get to a starting point before mid-year, and the window is closing." "It's obvious that with unemployment in the United States and Europe, it is going to be tougher to have discussions on free trade," he told Reuters at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos. The Doha talks have been stalled over US demands that major emerging economies like China, Brazil and India open up their markets more in exchange for cuts in farm subsidies and agricultural and industrial tariffs that the United States is being asked to make. Rachid said Pascal Lamy, the director-general of the World Trade Organization, hoped by the end of March to set a timetable for completing the talks.

**Lessons of Copenhagen?** Brazil's foreign minister said that Doha negotiators should learn from last month's Copenhagen climate summit. Although the minimal, non-binding accord at Copenhagen disappointed nearly all participants, the talks did avoid a complete breakdown. "We did have a basic accord among a large number of countries because there was political courage and because the leaders involved themselves directly," Celso Amorim told reporters in Geneva. He suggested Lamy should select half a dozen key issues in the Doha negotiations for leaders to resolve during a summit of the Group of 20 rich and emerging nations. "I still think it's possible to do a deal if there's enough political courage," Amorim said. Asked whether that would be in 2010, he replied: "Political courage can come any time." —Additional reporting by Jonathan Lynn in Geneva

### **Social front:**

#### **FLOODS DESTROYED 1,246 HOMES, SAYS ASWAN GOVERNOR**

Daily News Egypt: January 25, 2010: Flash floods and rains that decimated 1,246 homes in Aswan have finally subsided, governor Mustapha Al-Sayed said Sunday. At least 15 people were killed in the floods that occurred last week, mainly in Aswan and Sinai but also in Qena and the Red Sea, while thousands of homes were completely or partially destroyed especially in the first three days when the rains were at their worst. The flooding and the amount of damage incurred has angered the victims, who have severely criticized the government for its response which they deemed to be too slow and ineffective. Around 1,000 residents of El-Tor in Sinai protested the government's reaction to the crisis Wednesday. They used trucks to block the main roads and threw stones at police, who used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd. Two policemen were injured in the clashes. The cabinet will convene next Wednesday to organize the relief efforts from the devastation caused by the floods as well as begin doling out the compensation packages for those who lost their homes. The head of the Atomic Energy Authority Mohamed El-Qolali said Sunday that all radiation-monitoring centers in Egypt were not affected by the floods, including the stations in Aswan and Sinai. He added that the stations were built on high altitudes and were not damaged, though the station in Al-Arish was shut down for two hours due to the disruption of the phone lines.

#### **Higher compensation for flood victims**

Wednesday, January 27, 2010- EGYPT'S First Lady Mrs Suzanne Mubarak ordered compensation of LE80,000 (around \$14,747) to be paid to each family, whose home was destroyed by the flash floods in Aswan in Upper Egypt two weeks ago. The Government has agreed to pay a compensation of LE25,000 to each one of these families, but Mrs Mubarak ordered to increase it by LE55,000 during a meeting with community leaders and Government officials in Aswan. Mrs Mubarak called on business owners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to help each family that lost its house build and equip a new one for it, the local media reported. ***According to Government reports, some 441 homes were damaged in the two Aswan villages*** of el-Shadida and Abul Rish Bahri forcing thousands to stay in make-shift camps, schools and youth centres. Aswan, an arid region, is unused to heavy rains which cause flash floods that can destroy homes and carry off livestock. She told the meeting that President Hosni Mubarak, who is concerned with the magnitude of the families' losses, determined to send sufficient aid immediately after the floods. She also advised against the building of traditional mud brick homes in the two damaged villages. El-Shadida and Abul Rish Bahri ***should be re-built as the first planned villages to provide the families with modern homes and utilities***, Mrs Mubarak said, adding that they should have sufficient infrastructure to ensure future economic growth and sustainability for their residents. She recommended that each re-built village should have a maximum of 400 homes.

### **Egyptian Bedouins protest lacking government aid in severe floods**

2010-01-21 Egyptian Bedouins protesting insufficient government support in the face of severe flooding temporarily blocked a highway, the Al Masry Al Youm daily reported Thursday. Around 500 Bedouins from the Ras Sudr region on the west coast of the Sinai Peninsula on Wednesday blocked the highway between Ras Sudr and the city of Sharm el-Sheikh. Protesters said police used tear gas and fired shots to disperse the protest and reopen the highway, Al Masry Al Youm reported. The Ras Sudr region is among Egypt's regions hit hard by torrential rains and flooding that began on Sunday. Extreme weather has destroyed houses and infrastructure in the city of Aswan on the Nile, as well as along the Sinai Peninsula. Thirteen people have died in the flooding. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has ordered compensation for those who lost their homes and allocated land for rebuilding. The Bedouins say government assistance has been insufficient. Five of Egypt's ports, including the main Mediterranean port in Alexandria, are closed due to the flooding.

### **Deadly showers continue in Sinai and Aswan**

Heavy rain showers hit the town of Abu Zneima in South Sinai early on Friday. In the meantime, rain and floods continued in Aswan resulting in the death of a woman, after her house collapsed. In total, four people have died from the showers in Aswan and 1150 buildings have been destroyed. Experts from the Government Fund for the Development of Informal Areas have warned residents and government officials about the impact of torrential rains, said Ali el-Faramawi, director of the fund. The governors in the disaster-prone areas were informed of the possibility last June. A state of heightened emergency has been declared in Marsa Matrouh and several residents from North Sinai have filed reports listing damages to their property. These residents accused former Governor Ahmed Abdel Hamid and Governor Mohamed Abdel Fadil Shousha of negligence.

Meanwhile, an aid shipment being transported to victims in Aswan was seized by a group of unknown assailants. To assess the damage, the Human Rights Committee of the People's Assembly, led by Edward Ghali, is visiting the damaged areas in Aswan to prepare a detailed report on the impact of the rains and the government procedures.

Relief efforts in Aswan and Sinai continue, while a state of emergency was declared in Marsa Matrouh in anticipation of further rain. The Governor of South Sinai Mohamed Abdel Fadil Shousha said he would dispense LE1 million in compensation to the victims in Abu Sweira and set up a committee to assess damages. He also encouraged the Bedouins to help in the relief efforts.

### **Rains disrupt High Dam power station**

An official report presented to Electricity Minister Hassan Younis revealed that heavy rains in the southern city of Aswan in recent days had temporarily disrupted the Aswan High Dam's power station, with 81 high-tension cable towers collapsing as a result of strong winds causing damage estimated at more than LE70 million. Meanwhile, in North Sinai, the Olympic Village in the city of Arish was hit by equally severe torrents, causing the collapse of a sports complex and the main entrance gate. The village, which cost LE90 million to build, had been initially opposed by the local council and the irrigation ministry. Nevertheless, the former governor had insisted on building it in its current location. The city of Arish was completely flooded, forcing residents to literally swim from one place to another. According to Arish resident Mohamed el-Haddad, more than 45 houses and 60 shops had been swept away by torrents of rainwater. "No rescue teams have come to rescue us," he said. "We're completely on our own here." A high-ranking official at the irrigation ministry, meanwhile, blamed former provincial governors for allowing the construction of sports facilities and shopping malls in the valleys, which are usually subject to flooding during heavy rainfall.

### **Human rights:**

#### **EGYPT STILL INVOLVED IN SECRET DETENTIONS, SAYS UN REPORT**

Daily News Egypt: January 28, 2010: Egypt is among a host of countries including the US that is still involved in secret detentions of terrorism suspects around the world, according to a UN report. The report, due to be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in March, stated that these countries had been continuing the practice of secret detentions — which is illegal under the Geneva Conventions even during states of emergency and armed conflict — for the past nine years, Reuters reported. Alongside Egypt and the US, the report names Russia, China, Algeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, India and Iran as the other countries still involved in secret detentions. Four UN investigators spent a year working on the report. The report surmised that the objective of secret detentions was to cover up torture and human rights abuses carried out against the terror suspects, and “continues to be used in the name of countering terrorism around the world.” The report also indicated that the US was still heavily involved in these practices, which included kidnapping suspects before locking them up in undisclosed locations. According to the UN report, "The secret detention policy took many forms. The CIA established its own secret detention facilities to interrogate so-called 'High Value Detainees'. It asked partners with poor human rights records to secretly detain and interrogate persons on its behalf." This process, known as extraordinary rendition, meant that terror suspects were

held in countries such as Jordan, Pakistan, Syria and Egypt again. A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report published in 2005 tackled specifically the role of Egypt in rendition of terror suspects and how those rendered suspects were tortured and generally mistreated, and in some cases made to disappear, as in the government would not even admit to having them in custody. "Torture, although it is strictly forbidden under Egyptian law and the international human rights treaties Egypt has signed, has been a widespread and persistent phenomenon in the country, particularly during interrogation of security suspects," said the HRW report. Journalist and blogger Hossam El-Hamalawy who was involved in the drafting of the HRW report, told Daily News Egypt, "These renditions will continue while there is the political will and support for it by the Americans and what we are seeing from the Obama administration is that there is no difference in its counterterrorism measures from its predecessors." "Aid to Arab dictatorships still continues, there is escalation in the war on Afghanistan and the same tough rhetoric is coming from Obama regarding terrorism," he added, "[so it will continue] in the current atmosphere where even CIA operatives indicted for torture are given immunity." The UN report said that "the CIA appears to generally have been involved in the capture and transfer of prisoners, as well as in providing questions for those held in foreign prisons. Equally, little is known about the amount of detainees who have been held at the request of other states such as the United Kingdom and Canada." El-Hamalawy said, "Regarding any operation between Arab security services, the CIA will at least be notified if it is not directly supervising the operation. So whether the Americans are directly involved or not, the renditions are happening."

### **Euro-Med: Egypt has highest level of human rights restrictions**

17 January 2010 in Egypt, Europe, News: An International report issued by the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Human Rights gave Egypt a "red" in the classification of the status of non-governmental human rights organizations in the countries of the northern and southern Mediterranean in 2009, a report which is expected to be reviewed by EU countries at the end of this month. It comes within the framework of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which was conducted by the Union with a number of Arab governments, including the Egyptian government. The report, which was announced on Wednesday, at the headquarters of the Cairo Center for Human Rights Studies, employed three colors for the classification of the status of human rights, including: green, orange and red as an indicator of the government's respect for freedom of assembly and association, through the registry and intervention in the affairs of human rights associations, and the possibility of access to foreign funding, and other variables in the 11 Arab countries south of the Mediterranean, including the occupied territories and Israel. ***The red color represents the highest restrictions imposed on such indicators.*** The report emphasized that since the issued Euro-Mediterranean Network for Human Rights in its report last December on assembly and association, there has been only "very little improvement" for the status in Egypt and in some cases there is no improvement at all in the Euro-Mediterranean countries in the region, noting that in some cases the opposite happened. The continued deterioration of the ability of individuals to exercise the right to freedom of assembly and association, the report said.

***The report pointed out that,*** at the level of national legislation, the countries of East and South Mediterranean continue "restrictions" on the capacity of human rights activists to

engage in associations concerned with human rights and minority rights, or in groups suspected of involvement in opposition movements. In Egypt, the report said that the same period witnessed a state of “silence” took the closed-door meetings held by the Ministry of Social Solidarity on the amendment of the NGO law No. 84 of 2002, in which the ministry had ignored requests made by non-governmental organizations to participate in these meetings and exchange of views on the amendments of the NGOs law within the framework of “freedom of organization.” The report pointed out that the information leaked to the media in addition to comments received by Dr. Abdul Aziz Hijazi, head of the General Federation of Associations and Organizations, indicating that the proposed amendments , would impose further restrictions on the activities of non-governmental organizations, in exchange for expanding the powers of the General Union of the associations and civil society institutions . It would impose further restrictions on funding non-governmental organizations, the report called for an end to the state of emergency declared in Egypt since 1981, working in accordance with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in a parallel context.

### **PA REJECTS EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT STATEMENT ON EGYPT’S RELIGIOUS MINORITIES**

Daily News Egypt: January 26, 2010: The Foreign Relations Committee of the People’s Assembly (PA) rejected the statement issued by the European Parliament (EP) regarding the Nagaa Hammadi killings when it convened late on Monday. Members of the committee argued that Europe was not in a position to pass judgment due to violations against freedom of belief in its own backyard. House speaker Ahmed Fathi Sorour, who chaired the meeting, said that the statement from the EP was completely rejected. The EP had adopted a text last Thursday that expressed concern over recent acts of violence against Christians in both Malaysia and Egypt. The text called on “the Egyptian government to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of Coptic Christians and of members of other religious minorities in the country,” as well as guaranteeing that “Coptic Christians and members of other religious communities and minorities enjoy the full range of human rights and fundamental freedoms — including the right to choose and change their religion freely — and to prevent any discrimination against them.” Additionally, the EP acknowledged that “Europe, like other parts of the world, is not exempt from cases of violation of that freedom, and experiences individual crimes committed against members of minorities on the basis of their beliefs.” The adopted text also stressed that the Parliament “deplores incidents of religiously-motivated violence on European soil, including the murder of Marwa Al-Sherbini, and expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims.”Egypt had previously insisted that the Nagaa Hammadi affair — in which six Copts and one Muslim were killed in a shooting outside a church on the eve of Coptic Christmas — was a purely internal matter and criticized certain members of the EP for attempting to push a resolution on the incident. Egypt’s remarks about the incident came as a delegation from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom paid a visit to Egypt ahead of launching its annual report. Egypt is on the commission’s watch list. The delegation met with head of Al-Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawy and Minister of Religious Endowments Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq as well as rights activists involved in cases of freedom of expression. Pope Shenouda III had refused to meet with the delegation claiming that these were internal matters in which

there should be no foreign interference. Al-Masry Al-Youm reported that other members of Al-Azhar were against meeting with the American delegation, again citing foreign meddling in domestic affairs. Margaret White, US embassy spokesperson, had told Daily News Egypt last Sunday that three commissioners from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent body whose members are appointed by the US Congress and President, are currently visiting Egypt.

### **US LAWMAKERS PRESS EGYPT ON COPTIC CHRISTIANS**

Daily News Egypt: January 22, 2010: A group of US lawmakers urged President Hosni Mubarak in a letter released Wednesday to "properly" prosecute gunmen behind the recent slayings of six Coptic Christians. The attack was "indicative of a systematic pattern of violence" and an example of "alarming" incidents of religious intolerance in Egypt, the 16 US senators and representatives wrote in the message, which they sent on Tuesday. "As members of the US Congress, we see the protection of the Coptic Christian community as a 'shared interest' and strongly urge you to reverse Egypt's trend of failing to properly investigate and prosecute incidents of violence against Coptic Christians," the lawmakers said. On Jan. 6, the eve of the Coptic Orthodox Christmas, three gunmen raked worshippers emerging from mass in Nagaa Hammadi with bullets, the deadliest attack since 2000 when 20 Copts were killed in sectarian clashes. Three Muslims were arrested two days after the attack and charged with premeditated murder. They will stand trial before an emergency security court next month. Copts, who account for nearly 10 percent of Egypt's population of 80 million, are the Middle East's largest Christian community but complain of routine harassment and systematic discrimination and marginalization. The US lawmakers, led by Senator Sam Brownback and Representative Frank Wolf, both Republicans, noted in the letter that the United States is a generous donor to Egypt, one of its stalwart allies in the Middle East. "We urge you to better protect the Coptic Christian community by properly investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of violence against Coptic Christians, providing compensation for victims of violence, and ensuring the protection and preservation of Coptic places of worship," they said.

### **Egypt's mufti says Koran ringtones inappropriate**

(Reuters) – Using Koranic verses and the call to prayer as mobile phone ringtones is inappropriate and violates the sanctity of the word of God, Egypt's highest religious legal authority, Mufti Ali Gomaa, said. Verses from the Koran have become popular as ringtones in Egypt, and websites and television channels advertise them for downloading. "Putting the Holy Koran or the call to prayer as a mobile phone ringtone trivializes the sanctity of the verses, which are for prayer, invocation and recitation and not to be taken out of their legitimate use," state news agency MENA quoted Gomaa as saying. When answering a cellphone, the user interrupts the holy words of God, which could confuse their meaning and misdirect the listener, Gomaa said. Muslims can use religious songs suitable to the length of the ringtone, but the sanctity of the Koran should be respected, he added.

### **Egyptian minister: We will not send women to work as housemaids in Saudi Arabia**

17/01/2010(MENAFN - Arab News) Cairo will not send Egyptian women to work as housemaids in the Kingdom, a senior Egyptian official visiting the capital said on Saturday. "We will not send our women as housemaids due to social and cultural concerns," said Aisha Abdel-Hadi, the Egyptian labor minister, following talks with Abdul Wahid Al-Humaid, deputy minister of labor, on Saturday. Abdel-Hadi, who is heading a labor delegation, discussed a wide-range of issues relating to the Egyptian labor force in the Kingdom. Dispelling rumors, Abdel-Hadi said Cairo does not have any plans to deploy Egyptian maids to the Kingdom in the future. Touching on the talks between the two ministers held on Saturday, Abdel-Hadi said the two parties resolved several issues related to Egyptian workers. "The problems were not related to a specific profession. Various sectors had different forms of problems," she said. She also pointed out that the number of labor complaints from her community in the Kingdom is minimal when compared to the large Egyptian population in Saudi Arabia. "Most of the complaints are due to misunderstandings and miscommunication between employers and employees," she said. She added that Egyptians are no strangers to the Kingdom since they speak the same language, follow the same religion and cherish Islamic culture. "This cultural affinity between the peoples of the two countries help each other resolve differences on their own," she said. Despite a decrease in the foreign remittances made by overseas Egyptian workers, the minister said that her country has withstood the global financial crisis that struck several countries in the region. Al-Humaid said the Kingdom and Egypt maintain excellent bilateral relations from time immemorial. "It's no exaggeration to say that the labor relations between the two countries are healthy, smooth and function without any major problem," he said, adding that the Kingdom is happy with the Egyptian labor force working in the Kingdom. There are one million Egyptian workers in the Kingdom, the fourth largest expatriate community in Saudi Arabia. In 2008, the Saudi Embassy in Cairo issued the second largest number of Saudi entry visas.

### **EGYPT COURT ORDERS STAY OF AL-AZHAR'S BAN ON NIQAB**

AFP: January 28, 2010: An Egyptian court ordered on Wednesday a stay of a ban on the full face veil, or niqab, in female schools affiliated with the Islamic Al-Azhar University. The administrative court's decision came a week after it ruled, on grounds of constitutional liberties, against a ban by the education ministry on women wearing the niqab in university residences and examination halls. The court's ruling came in response to a complaint by a student in a high school affiliated with the prestigious Sunni university. A lawyer for Al-Azhar told the court there was no formal decision by Al-Azhar to ban the niqab. Abdel Mutti Bayumi, a member of Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy, said Al-Azhar head Mohammed Tantawi "did not issue a decision absolutely banning the niqab but he only banned it in all-female classes taught by women." He said that, in light of the court's decision, the council might decide to revisit the ban at a meeting tomorrow. The administrative court had overturned the education ministry's ban after a petition by dozens of students banned from residences and sitting their exams. The government and Al-Azhar have shown signs of concern over the trend of the niqab, which is associated in Egypt with the ultra-conservative Salafi school of thought practiced mostly in Saudi Arabia. Most Muslim Egyptian women cover their hair. The niqab is thought to be gaining ground, partly as a result of the growing influence of satellite television stations that air Salafi preaching. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal

Rights (EIPR) had condemned in a statement earlier this month the administrative court's ruling on Jan. 3 to uphold the decision banning students who wear the niqab from sitting for exams in public universities. The EIPR said the ban's declared objective of preventing cheating during exams could be achieved through less drastic measures. Female students wearing the niqab told the court they were willing to uncover their faces and be subjected to body searches at the beginning of each exam. "State universities could have employed a wide variety of precautionary measures to ensure order during exams, as they had done in previous years," said EIPR's executive director Hossam Bahgat. "Choosing the most excessive measure is a continuation of a policy which clearly penalizes students who wear the niqab for their beliefs." –AFP

### **3G: EXPLORING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCE IN EGYPTIAN WOMEN'S LIVES**

Special to Daily News Egypt: January 29, 2010: Since liberalization reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, Egypt has registered a remarkable economic growth rate. According to data compiled by the British economist Angus Maddison, Egypt's GDP grew by 61 percent between 1990 and 2006. Since 1950 the GDP per capita has increased by 370 percent despite the significant growth of population that accompanied it. However, domestic and foreign analysts often point to widespread poverty and stagnation among the majority of the population. The growing economic and lifestyle gap between rich and poor has become the representative image of this trend. What remains hidden to the eye of an observer passing by rural areas or Cairo's shantytowns is the story of the people who live there — often presented in media and research in percentages and numbers. The female voice in such communities, especially, tends to be forgotten or ignored. To correct this information gap and to give a platform of expression to women, Pathways for Women's Empowerment has launched the 3G Project, a multimedia portrayal of generational change among women in Egypt. Working with a collective of professional photographers called Documentography, PWE has recorded the stories of Egyptian women of all walks of life. The project consists of photo and video portraits of women representing three different generations of one family. Women talk about diverse aspects of their lives: childhood, teenage, marriage, education, etc. Following the lives of a grandmother, a mother and a daughter gives a unique perspective on the socioeconomic and cultural changes that have taken place over the past few decades in women's lives. "Of course, women have many more rights [now] than before. They have financial rights and legal rights in marriage," says Hanem, her granddaughter. Hanem has a high school diploma in commerce, but her mother, Fathya, never went to school. "I regretted not studying when I got older after seeing other people who studied. We were not able to afford education," she says. All three generations of women in this family point out that all their lives they have stood beside their husbands in the family's struggle for economic survival, whether in the fields or in the neighborhood market. While in rural areas women's contribution to the family's income was inevitable, the urban middle class saw a different fate. "When I compare the way my mother lived about 50 years ago and the way of life of my daughter today, I am really astonished by the differences," says Galal Amin in his book "Whatever Happened to the Egyptians" published in 2000. He describes how his mother spent most of her life in the kitchen; his sister enjoyed more financial independence but remained at home; and his daughter opted for a full time job while studying for a higher educational

degree. “A woman’s essential functions have been... radically changed,” Amin concludes. The ultimate goal of both Amin’s book and the 3G Project is to address the stereotypes about the presence or absence of change in people’s lives, those which statistics cannot reveal. Researchers involved in the 3G Project were surprised by some of the results. Women were asked to choose an object of great importance in their lives to be photographed. Despite researchers’ expectations to see a lot of Qurans chosen, none of the women did so. “Often in rural settings or poor settings women were choosing radios. It is [their] window to the outside world,” says photographer Gui Alandry from Documentography. Other favorite objects were wedding photos; which represented key moment in these women’s lives. That moment has also changed over the generations. “My marriage celebration was different from my mother’s,” says Hanem. “When my mother married, there was no white wedding dress but I [wore] one. My mother did not have a wedding party but I had one.” Wedding dresses and radios might seem mundane, but they demonstrate significant changes brought about by the advent of communication technology and cheaper consumer goods. The output of this project will be an interactive website which will allow visitors to compare the stories of the three generations of women on the background of video illustrations of their lifestyles and surroundings. As the project expands to other countries, cross-country comparison will also be available. The website’s is due to be launched in March.

#### **PIG-CULL INDUCED STREET RUBBISH: A ‘NATIONAL SCANDAL’**

January 26, 2010: The Egyptian government’s decision to cull all of the country’s 300,000 pigs in May 2009 is increasingly being viewed by experts and officials as a gross mistake as piles of organic waste the pigs once ate accumulate in Cairo’s streets, posing serious health hazards. The month-long cull was ostensibly to stem the spread of H1N1 influenza, but the government later said it was simply a general health measure. The cull hit the livelihoods of 70,000 former pig farmers and unofficial rubbish collectors and their families in the Cairo area, according to local NGO Association for the Protection of the Environment. During a recent stormy session of parliament, Cairo Governor Abdel Azim Wazeer called the decision to cull the pigs a “mistake” and legislator Hamdy El-Sayyed, chairman of the Doctors’ Syndicate, called it a “national scandal.” “The decision to kill the pigs was wrong and hasty,” Fathi Shabana, an Egyptian medical expert, told IRIN. “There could’ve been better alternatives. The pigs could’ve been moved from their farms in the cities to the desert.” Shabana warned that some of Cairo’s rubbish-filled streets could become breeding grounds for diseases such as typhoid and cholera. Areas of central Cairo, Giza and Daqahleya on the capital’s periphery are the most affected by the pig cull. ***Zabaleen lose out*** In Cairo, the livelihoods of unofficial rubbish collectors — known as zabaleen to Egyptians — and pig farmers were very much intertwined as the former collected organic waste from the capital’s streets and sold it to farmers to feed their pigs. With the pigs gone, the zabaleen have lost a major source of income and have no incentive to collect the waste from the streets, they say. Ayad, in his early 70s, used to own around 50,000 pigs which used to “consume thousands of tons of organic waste every day,” he said.

**Waste disposal, recycling problems** Cairo, which accounts for 55 percent of the country’s waste, produces 25,000 tons of waste a day, environment ministry officials say. Organic waste makes up almost 70 percent of Cairo’s rubbish, while plastic, paper and

glass items make up the remaining 30 percent, according to Ahmed Nasar, deputy chairman of the capital's cleaning authority. Compounding the problem are ongoing contractual disputes between the government and the foreign companies it has been commissioning to collect rubbish from the capital's streets for years, according to Mohamed Abdel Raziq, an official from the cleaning authority. These companies had stopped working pending the renegotiation of contracts, he said. Members of the ruling National Democratic Party say Egypt needs an initial LE 2.5 billion (\$460 million) to tackle its garbage problem. They say more recycling factories must be built to add to the existing 160, which can only process about a quarter of the nation's rubbish, according to the environment ministry. Despite the cull, H1N1 has claimed the lives of 248 Egyptians to date and more than 15,500 people have contracted it, according to the Health Ministry. According to a Jan. 22 World Health Organization update on H1N1, "Egypt is now reporting a declining trend after increases in respiratory diseases activity throughout December 2009, suggesting a recent peak in activity during early January 2010." –IRIN

## **Lebanon**

### **Political front:**

#### **Cabinet to discuss electoral reforms in Friday session**

Daily Star staff- Friday, January 29, 2010: Cabinet is scheduled to convene on Friday to discuss potential reforms to the municipal electoral law and a heated debate is expected to arise over key reforms suggested by the Interior Ministry. While the Future Movement rejects the division of Beirut into three districts, most parties have refrained from declaring their position on the adoption of proportional representation and the direct election of mayors by the people. Also, Christian parties have tied lowering the voting age to 18 to the adoption of an executive procedure guaranteeing expatriates the right to vote abroad, as well as passing a law allowing people from Lebanese origins the right to retrieve their nationality. Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) official MP Wael Abu Faour said on Wednesday that reform proposals should be discussed on the basis of consensus and in accordance with the national pact in order to preserve domestic power balance. "Lebanon's political regime is leading the country to suicide since many reforms should be implemented but only in accordance with the national pact and domestic power balance," Abu Faour said following talks with Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir. Abu Faour discussed with the patriarch at the latter's residence in Bkirki his party's stance regarding the abolition of political sectarianism and lowering the voting age to 18. "The issue of lowering the voting age is not a demand but rather a right since Lebanese individuals who are aged 18 are held accountable before the law," Abu Faour said, adding that "the amendment will be passed but later, based on domestic consensus." Asked whether the PSP would participate in the commemoration of the sixth anniversary of the February 14 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Abu Faour confirmed his party's participation but did not disclose any information regarding PSP leader and Chouf MP Walid Jumblatt's attendance. "We will participate definitely in the occasion since the memory [of former Premier Rafik Hariri] concerns us, but how we will participate is still to be discussed," Abu Faour said. The assassination of Hariri in an explosion in Beirut on February 14, 2005, prompted a wave of anti-Syrian

demonstrations in Beirut, culminating in a massive protest on March 14. Many blamed Hariri's killing on Syria, though Damascus denies involvement. Leaders of the protest movement, who are now known as the March 14 Forces, backed the passage of Security Council Resolution 1559, which called for the withdrawal of foreign armies from Lebanon. Jumblatt, who supported 1559, publicly accused Syria of involvement in the killing. But after the June 2009 parliamentary elections, Jumblatt announced his withdrawal from the March 14 alliance, saying that it had been driven by necessity, and declared that he was moving to a centrist position. The PSP leader has lately undertaken several steps to bridge the gap with Syria's allies in Lebanon. Jumblatt's reconciliation with opposition parties are believed to lay the foundations ahead of his visit to Damascus. – The Daily Star

### **20 percent women's quota in polls 'not enough'**

Daily Star staff- Tuesday, February 02, 2010: Following years of lobbying by civil-society organizations, Lebanon's Cabinet on Friday approved the adoption of a women's quota for the municipal elections. After the rejection of a proposal by Interior and Municipalities Minister Ziyad Baroud calling for a women's quota of 30 percent, Cabinet agreed women should form a minimum of 20 percent of all candidates on ballot lists for the elections, which are slated for June. The decision to implement a women's quota comes shortly after the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Lebanon signed in 1996. But as Lebanese women still remain hugely under-represented in politics and other decision-making positions, Beirut has only paid lip service to the idea of gender equality. Lebanon remains a firmly patriarchal society whose politics is dominated by feudal affiliations and political dynasties. During Lebanon's parliamentary elections in June last year, only 12 out of 587 candidates were women, and only four of those women – Bahia Hariri, Gilberte Zouein, Nayla Tueni and Strida Geagea – were elected to the 128-member Parliament. Only two women – Raya Haffar Hassan and Mona Ofeish – were selected for Cabinet posts. Since Lebanese women were granted suffrage in 1953, there have never been more than six women parliamentarians at the same time. Civil society activists say the paltry figures should be a cause of great embarrassment for a country that likes to brand itself as having the most open society in the Arab world. But while a quota will help bring in more unfamiliar female faces into decision-making positions, many say it should be complemented by other efforts to promote women in politics. “The quota is a short-term solution to help move women into decision-making and leadership role but it's not a long-term solution to women's political participation,” says Nadya Khalife, women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. More needs to be done on a grass roots level to help women move into decision-making roles, she adds. “What we need is to equip women at the local level first, help them acquire the skills needed to run efficient campaigns among other skills to then prepare them to take on leadership positions at the national level.” For Nada Hachoui, who plans to run as a candidate in the Beirut municipality, the quota is both a blessing and a curse. “They are finally taking women into consideration,” she tells The Daily Star. “But it's only 20 percent.” Nadine Moawad of Nasawiya, a collective of feminists in Beirut, agrees that while a quota is an “important” step toward gender equality, the figure approved by Cabinet was too low. “Women make up over 50 percent of the country's population, so why should they only

have a quota of 20 percent?” But while women constitute a demographic majority in Lebanon, their voting patterns appear to be no different to that of their male counterparts. A study on the participation of Lebanese women during the 2009 elections published last month by the Lebanese Council of Women (LCW) found that while more women than men voted in the elections, more than two-thirds did not vote for women candidates. Khalife blames the sidelining of women leaders on Lebanon’s sectarian political system. “It makes it very difficult for women to enter [politics],” she says. “Plus, women have not been brought up to take up leadership skills and to pursue a career in politics because this area of work is still pretty much seen as a man’s world.” In this regard, a quota will help push more women into politics. “Quotas are technical mechanisms which have been proven the world over to work,” says Lina Abou-Habib, executive director of Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action. She is nevertheless quick to add her disappointment over the 20 percent allocation. “This is way below the agreed standard we should have reached in 2005 in accordance with the Beijing Platform,” which calls for the implementation of a 30-percent quota by 2005. “It’s too soon to celebrate,” she believes. Help in building the capacities, capabilities and credibility of women leaders is just as important as a quota, the women agree. “We need women who are effective and who know what to do, not just how to be a pretty face,” Hachoui says.

### **Geo strategic front:**

#### **Lebanese PM on first official visit to Egypt**

January 27, 2010- Lebanonwire- Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri heads to Cairo on Wednesday on his first official visit for talks with top officials, including President Hosni Mubarak, his office said. Hariri will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ali Shami, Economy Minister Mohammed Safadi, Information Minister Tarek Mitri and other officials, a statement said. He will also be accompanied for the first time by his wife Lara, who lives in Saudi Arabia with the couple's three children. Hariri's visit comes after trips to France and Turkey earlier this month and after his landmark December trip to former arch-foe Syria, which he had accused in the past of the 2005 assassination of his father, ex-premier Rafiq Hariri. The visit also comes a day after an Egyptian prosecutor demanded the death sentence for 26 alleged militants of Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah. The group, which include Lebanese, Palestinians and Sudanese, is accused of plotting attacks against ships in the Suez Canal and tourist sites, of spying, and other crimes. The defendants say they never planned the attacks but sought to help the Islamist Hamas rulers of Gaza, who have close ties with Hezbollah. The trial has reignited a war of words between Egypt, Hezbollah and its Iranian backers. Egypt, which has no formal diplomatic ties with Shiite Iran, accuses Tehran of backing the plot. –AFP

#### **Hariri: France concerned with just peace for Lebanon and the Middle East**

January 23, 2010- Lebanonwire: Prime Minister Saad Hariri stressed on Friday Lebanon’s commitment to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701 while slamming Israeli violations following talks with French President Nicholas Sarkozy in Paris. “As a Lebanese state we are implementing what was mentioned in the resolution since in the past weeks, the Lebanese state in cooperation with the United Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) discovered some explosives, which prove that the state is assuming

its responsibilities,” Hariri said. The prime minister added that Sarkozy was “honest and clear with regard to taking sides with Lebanon.” “However, the problem is Israel, which does not commit to Resolution 1701 and violates at in every step,” Hariri added. “[Sarkozy] is concerned with a just peace for Lebanon, Syria, Palestinian and the Arab region,” Hariri added as he voiced support for a Middle East peace conference to be held in France. Asked whether Paris provided him with any guarantee to enable Lebanon to face future challenges and threats, Hariri stressed his host’s determination to push forward in setting up a peace conference. “They [French officials] know that keeping the situation in the region unchanged is unacceptable and several step should be taken, steps that France would undertake to guarantee peace,” the premier added. Tackling French support for Lebanon, Hariri said Sarkozy expressed his willingness to assist the Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces at all levels, whether this involves transferring either light or heavy military equipment. On another note, Hariri said France would continue to play a pivotal role concerning Lebanese-Syrian bilateral ties, a role that facilitated the establishment of embassies in both countries last year. “Our concern is that the [Lebanese-Syrian] relationship benefits both states and their peoples,” Hariri added. Earlier Friday, Hariri told an audience at the headquarters of the French Business Association that he looked for French-Lebanese cooperation on economic and social levels rather than only diplomatic and political channels. Hariri added that he was determined to modernize infrastructure, telecommunication, energy, transportation and environment sectors, which are part of the Cabinet’s top priority. The Lebanese premier also called on businessmen to invest in Lebanon while stressing that the cabinet would guarantee the private sector an encouraging environment to secure continuous growth. For her part, head of the French Business Association Laurence Barizo stressed the importance of trade between Lebanon and France as well as the importance of economic growth in preserving peace and promoting ties between both countries’ people. “What attracted our attention is Lebanon’s capability to face the latest financial crisis since the country proved resilient due to the strength of its financial sector without which there is no room for financial growth,” Barizo said. Barizo also stressed the need for cooperation when it comes to the implementation of reforms in the telecommunication and energy sectors, while highlighting France’s advances in water management and alternative energy sectors. -Daily Star

### **No escalation on Lebanon border: Israeli commander**

January 24, 2010- Lebanonwire- A top Israeli military commander on Sunday denied that there were rising tensions with the armed Hezbollah group along the Lebanon border a day after an Israeli minister warned of a new war. Reports of another imminent round of fighting represent a “virtual escalation” with no basis in reality, Major General Gadi Eizenkot of the northern command told Israeli media at a conference in Tel Aviv. Israel and Hezbollah fought to a bloody stalemate in the summer of 2006, with 1,200 Lebanese, most of them civilians, and more than 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers, killed in the war. “(Hezbollah) hasn’t executed an attack since the Second Lebanon War,” Eizenkot said. “But Hezbollah is getting stronger and we are preparing for all options in order to be able to act effectively.” His remarks came the day after Yossi Peled, a minister without portfolio, said Israel was heading toward a “new confrontation” with the group. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to dispel tensions following Peled’s remarks by

issuing a statement stressing that “Israel does not wish at all to have a confrontation with Lebanon.” The Jewish state seeks “peace with Lebanon and with all its neighbours,” the statement added. Eizenkot said that despite the calm the Lebanese Shiite militia had doubled its arsenal of rockets since the war and warned that the Israeli response to any attack would be “disproportionate.” Hezbollah is part of a new coalition government formed in November by US- and Saudi-backed Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri. The group is also the only faction still armed after Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war. –AFP

### **Netanyahu says Israel has no intention to attack Lebanon**

January 24, 2010- Lebanonwire, Haaretz Israel has no intention of attacking Lebanon, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday, after Minister without Portfolio Yossi Peled (Likud) warned of a confrontation on Israel's northern border. "The State of Israel is not looking for any kind of confrontation with Lebanon," Netanyahu said in a statement released by his office, adding, "Israel seeks peace with all of its neighbors." In an appearance in Be'er Sheva yesterday morning, Peled said, "We cannot sleep peacefully" due to the situation on the northern border, adding, "We are going to have another round in the north, but I don't know when." Peled stated that in the event of a confrontation, Israel would hold Lebanon and Syria responsible and not just Hezbollah.

Senior European diplomats in Lebanon said the country's leaders, including Prime Minister Saad Hariri and President Michel Suleiman, told visiting U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell that they were concerned Israel might attack. They cited an increase in Israeli overflights and Israel Defense Forces exercises on the Lebanese border as potential evidence of Israel's intentions. Hariri conveyed a similar message to French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner on a recent visit to Paris. At a news conference after his meeting with Hariri, Kouchner said the real threat to Lebanon is not Israel but Hezbollah. The London-based Arabic daily Al-Hayat reported that Sarkozy warned Hariri that Israel would not "sit idly by" in the face of the Iranian nuclear program. The paper reported that in an appearance before international diplomats, the French president said that the United Nations should impose tougher sanctions on Iran and that the European Union should step up the pressure to push the Iranian leadership into serious negotiations on the matter. Another Arabic London-based daily, Al-Sharq al-Awsat, reported yesterday that Sarkozy had told senior Lebanese officials that France urging Israel to spare Lebanon's infrastructure in a future attack, but was also calling on the Lebanese to avoid action that would provoke an Israeli assault.

### **Israeli minister warns of new war with Hezbollah**

January 23, 2010- Lebanonwire – Israel is heading toward a new war with Lebanon's Shiite movement Hezbollah, a cabinet minister warned Saturday in remarks carried by military radio and the popular Ynet news website. "We are heading toward a new confrontation in the north but I don't know when it will happen, just as we did not know when the second Lebanon war would erupt," said Yossi Peled, a minister without portfolio and a reserve army general. He was referring to the devastating war Israel fought with Hezbollah in 2006, which killed more than 1,200 Lebanese, most of them civilians, and more than 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers. Hezbollah is part of a new coalition government formed in November by US- and Saudi-backed Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri. The group is also the only faction still armed after Lebanon's 1975-1990

civil war. "Although Hezbollah is part of the Lebanese government, the latter has no influence on it," Peled said, adding the Jewish state will hold Hezbollah and its ally Syria responsible for any attack on Israel. Israeli officials have repeatedly warned in recent weeks that any attack by Hezbollah would be met with a strong response. Last week Defence Minister Ehud Barak warned Lebanon and Hezbollah against any attempt to undermine the "calm" prevailing at the border between the two countries. –AFP

### **France vows to prevent Israeli strike on Lebanon's infrastructure**

January 23, 2010- Lebanonwire -Asharq Al-Awsat - Well-informed Lebanese sources confirmed to Asharq Al-Awsat that French President Nicolas Sarkozy informed Lebanese officials that France has vowed to try to prevent Israel from bombarding Lebanon's basic infrastructure "but no more than that." Sarkozy stressed to Lebanese officials that it was imperative to "control the internal situation in Lebanon and prevent any provocations." A parliament member from the Future bloc, which is headed by Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al Hariri, revealed to Asharq Al-Awsat that al Hariri, through his international and Arab ties, was trying to form a safety net to prevent an Israeli attack. The Lebanese MP highlighted that Hezbollah should not provide Israel with any pretexts for launching an assault on Lebanon. He also referred to the efforts exerted by Saudi Arabia and other countries towards the US administration to pressure Israel not to attack Lebanon. Future MP Okab Saqr told Asharq Al-Awsat that the endeavours of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al Hariri aim to strengthen the Lebanese internal state. Following his meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al Hariri said that Lebanon supports the French initiative to hold a peace conference in Paris. He added that both he and the French President are tackling the "challenges" the region is currently facing. He quoted the French President as saying that he is willing to take concrete steps in this regard. Concerning Lebanon's demands to provide arms to its military, al Hariri quoted Sarkozy as saying that France is willing to assist Lebanon in all fields, alluding to Lebanon's right to obtain the weapons it needs.

### **Hezbollah hits back at Kouchner attack**

January 23, 2010- Lebanonwire - The Lebanese Shiite movement, Hezbollah, hit back at French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner Saturday, over his recent comments condemning the group and linking it to Iran. "Israel is our friend, and if there was a threat to Lebanon, it will only come from a military adventure carried out by Hezbollah in the best interest of Iran," Kouchner reportedly told the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri during a visit to Paris on Friday. "Kouchner's statement carried clear echoes for the Israeli voice and a full denial for France's history and its legacy in resisting aggression and occupation," said a statement by Hezbollah. "This stance is an attempt to acquit Israel and to cover up its relentless violations of Lebanese sovereignty, the thing which represents a shield for its occupation and an encouragement for it to pursue its aggressions," Hezbollah said. The statement refers to daily Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, in breach of UN Security Council resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon. The UN Security Council has listed 388 Israeli airspace violations on behalf of Israel against Lebanon, in its report last June. Last week, Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister, warned Hezbollah to "avoid entering in conflict with us." Israel has said that it will hold the Lebanese responsible for any violations by Hezbollah of United

Nations Security Council resolution 1701. Barak reiterated that should Hezbollah carry out any attacks, Israel would retaliate against not just Hezbollah, but Lebanon and anyone else who helps Hezbollah. –DPA

### **Spain takes command of UN force in Lebanon**

January 28, 2010- Lebanonwire – Spain took over from Italy at the head of a 12,000-strong United Nations peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon that was set up in 1978 to monitor the country's border with Israel. Spanish General Alberto Asarta Cuevas took over command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon from Italian General Claudio Graziano at a ceremony at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqura near Lebanon's southern border. In his farewell speech, Graziano, who served as UNIFIL chief since February 2007, said both Israel and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah had "mostly upheld" their commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Asarta, 58, is the force's 12th commander. Prior to his Lebanon posting, he served as the advisor to the Spanish army's chief of staff. Present at the ceremony were Spanish Defence Minister Carme Chacon, Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr and a number of other officials. UNIFIL was established during Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war under UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426 and beefed up in 2006, under Resolution 1701. The latest resolution lead to a ceasefire ending the devastating month-long war between Israel and Hezbollah, and the expanded force has been deployed to monitor the border and keep the peace in southern Lebanon, largely a Hezbollah-controlled zone. UNIFIL currently counts 12,000 troops from 29 countries. Italy has the largest contingent with 2,500 soldiers, while Spain contributes 1,070 soldiers. Since UNIFIL's founding, 275 of its soldiers have died in service. The last major attack targeted a Spanish contingent in June 2007, killing three Spaniards and three Colombians on patrol. Spain is set to hold the rotating presidency of the European Union during the first half of 2010, and political analysts say Madrid is keen to take control of UNIFIL in order to raise its Middle East profile. In October, Israel asked Italy to try to remain at the head of the force for at least another six months rather than handing over to Spain as planned, a senior Israeli official told AFP at the time. Israel and Spain denied any disagreement, but Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak canceled a visit to Madrid that month for what Spain said were "agenda reasons." –AFP

**Economic front:**

**Social front:**

**Jet crash:**

### **Ethiopian Airlines defends pilot after fatal crash**

January 28, 2010 Lebanon wire- Ethiopian Airlines defended Wednesday the pilot of one of its jets which crashed off Lebanon's coast, as Lebanese authorities said he may not have followed orders from the control tower. Company spokesperson Wogayehu Tefere told AFP the pilot, whose name has not been released, was senior, "with a lot of experience" and had been "working for the company for 20 years." "He had been a co-pilot on this aircraft before and he flew this route on a regular basis as well as other routes." Wogayehu said it was "too early to say" regarding the information from Lebanese authorities on the crash, in which all 90 passengers are feared dead. The Boeing

plunged flaming into the Mediterranean shortly after takeoff from Beirut on Monday. "We have to wait for the investigation to be completed," she said. Wogayehu added that "a memorial ceremony will be organised when the search operations are over. That should be the case in 72 hours," and the bodies will be repatriated to their countries. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi also renewed his support for the national airline company, in a statement from the Ethiopian information agency, transmitted to AFP Wednesday. "The government will provide the necessary support for Ethiopian Airlines to allow the national company to continue to be a source of pride not only for Ethiopia but also for Africa", Meles said. Ethiopian Airlines, which was established in 1946 and operates an all-Boeing fleet, is considered one of Africa's best carriers. Meles assured the Ethiopian government, which sent a ministerial delegation to Lebanon on Tuesday, would "make every efforts to shed light on the circumstances of this accident." "The government has avoided sending out speculative information until the black boxes from the aircraft have been recovered," Meles said, stressing that the search to recover the remains of the victims continues. The search teams have made progress in their efforts to localise the wreck of the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737-800, a spokesperson from the Lebanese army told AFP Wednesday, but are still searching for the black boxes. –AFP

### **Hezbollah denies link to jet crash**

January 28, 2010- Lebanonwire-- The Lebanese Hezbollah said claims that it was linked to the explosion of an Ethiopian passenger jet over the Mediterranean Sea were groundless. Ethiopian Airlines Flight 409 exploded shortly after takeoff in stormy weather Jan. 25. All 90 passengers on board are presumed dead. Initial accounts suggested poor weather conditions complicated by pilot error were to blame for the accident. Lebanese President Michel Suleiman said there was no evidence to suggest the accident was the result of terrorism. Several media outlets, however, have published reports that suggest Hezbollah may be tied to the explosion. Lebanon's al-Liwaa newspaper said members of Hezbollah had missed the flight, adding the high-profile presence of the Shiite resistance at the funeral for one of the victims suggested the group was linked to the crashed airliner. Other media reports raised speculation the crash happened because of "sabotage," while others questioned whether rockets were involved. Hezbollah in a statement published on its al-Manar news agency denied the allegations in al-Liwaa. "What the daily said about a high-ranking delegation of Hezbollah supposed to be on the plane is not true and has no actual basis," the statement read. –DPA

### **Black boxes found three days after Lebanon plane crash**

January 28, 2010- Lebanonwire- Relatives of the passengers of the Ethiopian Airlines plane that crashed in the sea arrive at Beirut airport, Lebanon. A search team has found the black boxes from an Ethiopian aircraft that crashed off the Lebanese coast with 90 people on board, all presumed dead, a military spokesman says. "The boxes were found approximately 10 kilometres west of the airport, 1,300 metres below the surface of the sea," the spokesman said on condition of anonymity. "We have not yet reached them, however. "We will now evaluate how to access them," he added late on Wednesday. Ethiopian Airlines Flight 409, bound for Addis Ababa, crashed into the Mediterranean minutes after takeoff from Beirut at 2.37am local time during a raging thunderstorm on Monday. All passengers and crew of the Boeing 737-800 are feared dead, but only 14

bodies and some body parts have been recovered so far. An international search operation since Monday had combed a 35-square-kilometre area around the crash site just south of Beirut. Officials have cautioned against blaming the pilot without sufficient evidence and pinned their hopes on the black boxes to answer the question of what had happened on flight ET 409. Lebanese Transport Minister Ghazi Aridi has said the pilot, who had 20 years of experience and was familiar with the Boeing 737-800, acknowledged instructions from the Beirut airport control tower to avoid the storm. But the plane took a turn the other way and flew into the weather, he said. Ethiopian Airlines spokesperson Wogayehu Tefere said the pilot was senior, "with a lot of experience" and had been "working for the company for 20 years". There were conflicting reports as to whether the jet exploded while still airborne or after it had hit the water, and officials have said there will be no answers until the data from the black boxes is retrieved and analysed. Experts have also been saying that extreme turbulence or wind shear may have caused the pilot to lose control of the plane. The US National Transportation Safety Board and the French body for civil aviation security Bureau D'Enquetes et D'Analyses (BEA) have sent experts to join a team investigating the tragedy. The search operation has been led by Lebanese navy troops, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) as well as US navy destroyer the USS Ramage and a civilian boat from Cyprus with sonar equipment. Five Ethiopians and six Lebanese have been identified among the 14 bodies at the state hospital, including those of two toddlers, Lebanese Health Minister Mohammed Jawad Khalifeh said on Wednesday. Khalifeh said authorities in Addis Ababa were sending DNA samples from families of the Ethiopian passengers to assist in identifying the victims. Ethiopian Airlines suffered two other deadly accidents over the past 25 years, one of which was a hijacking which ended in a crash when the plane ran out of fuel.

### **Human rights report:**

#### **Lebanon missed opportunities to promote human rights - HRW**

Daily Star staff- Wednesday, January 27, 2010: Lebanon "missed" several opportunities to promote human rights in 2009, a watchdog group said Tuesday. Releasing its 20th annual study, "World Report 2010," Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that although Lebanon enjoyed its most peaceful and prosperous year in recent times, the stability didn't bring with it expected reforms in women, refugee and prison rights. The 612-page report details major human right developments in over 90 states around the world.

"The year 2009 was one of missed opportunities ... in the region," said Sarah Leah Whitson, HRW Middle East director. "*Middle East governments should publicly set out their human rights agenda for 2010 and expect to be measured against their achievements,*" she added. *After free and peaceful parliamentary elections in June 2009, it took five months for a Cabinet to be formed, meaning much needed reforms were left in the air, HRW said.* "Conditions in prisons and detention facilities remain poor, with overcrowding and lack of proper medical care a perennial problem," the report said, noting that *while Lebanese prisons had a capacity for 3,653 detainees, 5,324 people were currently behind bars.* It added pre-trial and arbitrary detention was commonplace: according to an Internal Security Forces report issued in August 2009, some 65 percent of all detainees are awaiting trial. Foreigners who have completed their sentences but await release or deportation count for another 13 percent. Though Lebanon

maintained a de-facto moratorium on the death penalty, Lebanese judges were still vocal in demanding capital punishment for members of Islamist groups or those convicted of spying for Israel, and a number of death sentences were passed in 2009, HRW said. A law calling for the abolition of the death penalty drafted by the Justice Ministry is “still pending.” Nadya Khalife, a *HRW women’s rights researcher for the Middle East and North Africa region*, said *Lebanese women still faced considerable discrimination in legislation and political participation*. Women were subject to unfair personal status laws and penal laws relating to violence in the family, and continued to be deprived of their right to grant nationality grants. “The nationality law must be inclusive,” Khalife told The Daily Star. “We’d want an equal law that treats all Lebanese women the same, regardless of who they’re married to,” she added, referring to the possibility of excluding Palestinians from any amended nationality law. Women’s participation in Lebanon’s political life also continued to be inadequate, Khalife said. Out of 587 candidates in June’s elections, only 12 were women, and only four of those women were elected to the 128-member Parliament. A further two were appointed to Cabinet. “What we want to do as women, I feel, is to bring in women leaders who care about the issues that people care about ... and have a way to bring about change,” Khalife said. She added that there were “a number of minor issues that Lebanon could work on” to improve the perception and role of women in society, such as eradicating a law giving lenient sentences to men who commit “honor” crimes. “Having that particular article in the penal code is just absolutely unacceptable and doesn’t speak much for women’s equality in Lebanon,” Khalife said. Some 400,000 Palestinian and 50,000 Iraqi refugees also continue to live in “appalling social and economic conditions,” said the HRW report. As Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Iraqi refugees do not enjoy special protection and authorities “generally treat the vast majority of them as illegal immigrants subject to arrest,” HRW said. Palestinians continued to face serious limitations on their liberty and severe restrictions on property and work rights. The report added that a plan from the Interior Ministry to issue temporary identification papers to Palestinians without legal documentation was stopped after the issuance of 750 cards. The ministry said in October 2009 that it would resume the process, “but at this writing no new cards have been issued,” the report said. Some 200,000 domestic migrant workers are also vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as they are excluded from Lebanon’s labor laws. *HRW called on the Lebanese authorities to grant women nationality grants regardless of the nationality of their husbands, protect migrant domestic workers in the country’s labor law, and give greater employment and ownership rights to Palestinian refugees*. The organization also called upon the Lebanese to publish the results of the Interior Ministry. “It is time for a more vigorous governmental defense of human-rights activists and institutions throughout the world,” said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. “That requires standing up more firmly for the people and principles under attack, even when the attacker is an ally.”

### **Lebanon’s foreign domestic workers fight back**

January 28, 2010- Lebanonwire - Abused, humiliated and deprived of the most basic rights, foreign maids in Lebanon are starting to fight back against their employers in court and, in rare cases, they are winning. Nanda, from Sri Lanka is one of the few to break the silence. The 22-year-old arrived in Beirut in 2009 to work as a housekeeper,

hoping to help support her eight-year-old daughter and soldier husband back home with her meagre monthly salary of 180 dollars (127 euros). Instead she found herself trapped in an abusive household with no way out. Nanda's employer confiscated her passport and forced her to work seven days a week, although her contract stipulated eight-hour workdays and a recent decree adopted by the Lebanese government that calls for domestic workers to be given one day off a week. Nanda was particularly shocked when her employer's six- and 12-year old children took to beating her when she did not cater to their whims. "I did not understand Arabic and now I know I was often being treated as a 'sharmouta'," the Arabic word for whore, Nanda said, fighting back tears. "For my first two months in Lebanon, my boss gave me one slice of bread a day to eat because she said I was too fat, and sometimes leftovers. I was always hungry," she told AFP, sitting in a shelter at Caritas Lebanon, a charity group that offers refuge to victims of domestic abuse. But today, Nanda has joined a growing number of foreign workers who are filing lawsuits against their employers in a bid to improve their lot. "We hope that justice will find her," said Dima Haddad, a social worker at Caritas which is giving Nanda legal assistance. Haddad said she especially hopes Nanda will repeat the success of 29-year-old Filipina Jonaline Malibagu, whose employer was sentenced in December to 15 days in prison by a Lebanese court for abuse and ordered to pay 7,200 dollars (4,950 euros) in damages. Many of the estimated 200,000 foreign domestic workers in Lebanon hail from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Ethiopia. The Philippines, Ethiopia and Madagascar now ban their citizens from travelling to Lebanon due to the tiny Mediterranean country's poor labour rights record. *Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Tuesday that Middle Eastern governments were failing to improve their human rights records, including for the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers.* The HRW World Report 2010 highlighted the poor treatment of workers in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Jordan, where they face "exploitation and abuse by employers, including excessive work hours, non-payment of wages and restrictions on their liberty." But there are signs, albeit small, that the Lebanese state and society are waking up to the problem. In January 2005, Lebanon's immigration authorities agreed to grant Caritas the right to house abused workers and provide them with medical and legal counsel. And last year the government issued a decree that requires employers to abide by a set of rules including paying workers their salary in full at the end of each month and giving them one day off a week. But advocacy groups say few employers respect these conditions. Houry said widespread abuse, and sometimes rape, has caused an alarming number of suicides. HRW estimates that one domestic worker commits suicide in Lebanon every week on average. "When you're cornered, suicide becomes a real option," said Nanda. -AFP

### **Mulim cleric abducted in Lebanese Biqaa region**

January 28, 2010 Lebanonwire - Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his Egyptian counterpart, Ahmed Nazif, on Wednesday held a series of talks in Cairo aimed at boosting economic and energy ties. Egyptian Foreign Ministry sources said the talks were likely to produce a series of memorandums of understanding to be announced when Hariri meets Egyptian President Hosny Mubarak on Thursday. Cairo's official MENA news agency noted the presence of Egyptian Petroleum Minister Samih Fahmi, and said the talks had included discussion of increased Egyptian investment in Lebanese energy projects. Lebanon's power grid strains to keep up with the country's demand. Beirut is

subject to frequent blackouts. A pipeline linking Egypt's natural gas refineries with the Lebanese city of Tripoli came online in October, with supplies being used at a nearby power plant. Following one-on-one talks between the two prime ministers, the Lebanese foreign, economy and information ministers met with the Egyptian ministers of economy, information, international cooperation and manpower, MENA reported. Hariri arrived in Cairo on Tuesday, for the latest stop in a tour that last week took him to France and Turkey. He also arrived hours after an Egyptian State Security Prosecutor asked for the death penalty in the case of 26 men, including Lebanese and Palestinian nationals, accused of plotting attacks in Egypt on behalf of the Lebanese Shiite party Hezbollah. Hezbollah and Hariri are traditional political rivals, but now govern together as part of an 'all-party' government. In Beirut on Wednesday, Ahmed Fatfat, a member of Hariri's parliamentary bloc, told Lebanon's New TV that he did not know whether Hariri would play a mediating role in the Egyptian court case. 'The important thing is that they have a fair trial,' Fatfat said. –DPA

### **Group raps Lebanon, Jordan for mistreating Palestinians**

The governments of Jordan and Lebanon failed to adequately protect the rights of Palestinians, a new report by the group Human Rights Watch charged. Some governments in the Middle East suppressed efforts to promote human rights and failed to take measures to protect the rights of migrant workers in 2009, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday. *The group said in its annual report released in Beirut countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia missed opportunities on women's rights while human rights activists in Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen paid a heavy price for their activities.* Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen failed to tackle frequent incidents of torture. It accused Yemen of committing violations in the civil war in the north and the social unrest in the south. Lebanon disregarded the plight of some of 200,000 registered Palestinian refugees living in 12 Palestinian camps, it said. "The year 2009 was one of the missed opportunities for women and migrants in the region," Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said. "For human rights defenders, their small space for maneuvering shrank even further." The rights group urged Saudi Arabia to release long-term detainees or try them in fair proceedings, dismantle the system of male legal guardianship over women and to stop discriminating against its Shi'ite citizens. Human Rights Watch called on Jordan to stop stripping those of Palestinian origin of their Jordanian nationality. The group said Arab countries responded weakly to calls to curb violence against women. Perpetrators of "honor killing" in Jordan and Syria still benefit from legal provisions that mitigate their punishments. It said domestic abuse went largely unpunished in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Women in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia cannot confer their nationality either on foreign spouses or their children. It called on Lebanon to amend its citizenship law to ensure all Lebanese women, regardless of the nationality of their husbands, can pass on citizenship to their children and husbands. Hundreds of thousands of women from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and the Philippines work as maids in Arab states, many of which exclude domestic workers from protection in their labor laws. The rights group said some governments adopted some measures to reduce the abuse but did not enforce them. It said migrant domestic workers faced exploitation and abuse by employers, including excessive work hours, non-payment of wages and restrictions on their liberty. The group said Syria must form a commission

to address the human rights grievances of the Kurdish minority which it said is subject to systematic discrimination, including the arbitrary denial of citizenship to an estimated 300,000 born in Syria. "Middle Eastern governments need to recognize that the rights of minorities, refugees and stateless persons need greater protections," Whitson said. – Reuters

## **Palestine**

### **Political front:**

### **Security front**

#### **Hamas says top commander killed by Israel in Dubai**

Saturday 30 January 2010 (Asharq Al-Awsat and Agencies) - The Palestinian Islamist group Hamas accused Israel on Friday of assassinating one of its top military commanders in a Dubai hotel, and the Dubai police chief said he could not rule out the involvement of Mossad. Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, an Israeli target since engineering the capture of Israeli soldiers in the 1980s during a Palestinian uprising, was killed on Jan. 20, a Hamas official told Reuters in the Syrian capital Damascus. Dubai police stated that most of the suspects had European passports and left the country after the killing. Police chief Dhahi Khalfan Tamim told Asharq Al-Awsat "the police have the names and pictures [of the suspects]," and that "we have contacted their countries and we will contact everyone involved in the matter." Whilst Hamas stated that Mabhouh traveled to Dubai on official work, Khalfan said that "we do not know what Mabhouh's duty was [in Dubai] and he did not visit [Dubai] in an official capacity." Dubai police had earlier said that a "criminal gang" had been following the victim's movements before his arrival in the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates does not have a peace treaty with Israel but has hosted Israeli officials and does business with Israeli companies. There was no immediate comment from Israel. Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal made an impassioned speech to thousands of mourners at Mabhouh's funeral on Friday at the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk outside Damascus. A green Hamas flag covered the body as it was lowered into the grave. Meshaal described Mabhouh as a "great man" who fought the Israelis for 30 years. "I say to you Zionists, do not rejoice. You killed him but his sons will fight you," he said. "God already took our leaders and loved ones, but resistance goes on. Palestine is a blessed land. It will not remain patient." Mabhouh's death lengthens Hamas's list of what it describes as "martyrs", and is a setback for the group in its fight against the Jewish state. Israel has killed dozens of leaders and military figures in Hamas, founded two decades ago as a religious resistance movement against Israeli occupation. "I cannot reveal the circumstances (of the killing)," said Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas's politburo. Rishq said Mabhouh, 50, was an important member of the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam brigades, Hamas's military wing. He said the brigades "will respond (against Israel) in the appropriate time and place", but added that Hamas would not let the killing derail efforts to arrange a prisoner exchange with Israel, which has run into difficulties. Mabhouh, who was born in the Gaza Strip but had lived in Syria since 1989, was killed a day after he arrived in Dubai, Rishq said. A Hamas source in Gaza said Mabhouh was an active commander "until the moment of his assassination". He did not elaborate. Another Palestinian source said Mabhouh was found dead in his hotel room in Dubai. He had

barricaded the door of his room with chairs, a standard precaution by a man who believed Israeli intelligence had been after him for 20 years. "It seems that an autopsy was ordered and found traces of poison in his body. Mabhouh was also ill. Hamas controls the information on this," the source said. "He was one of their main military guys, although not a crucial figure," the source added. Mabhouh's brother Fayek told Reuters in Gaza his brother was killed "by strangulation after receiving an electric shock" and that two people were involved in the killing. Syria and Iran are the main backers of Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. Rishq, who lives in exile in Damascus along with several of Hamas's main figures, said Mabhouh engineered the capture of two Israeli soldiers during the Palestinian uprising in the 1980s. The soldiers were later killed. Mabhouh was imprisoned several times by Israeli forces, who also razed his home in Gaza, Rishq added. The United States, which has started a rapprochement with Damascus, wants Syrian authorities to help neutralise Hamas as an armed force. Syria, which is seeking peace with Israel, resisted U.S. pressure several years ago to expel the Hamas leadership.

### **P.A Security Forces Arrest 14 Hamas Members In The West Bank**

Wednesday January 27, 2010 - IMEMC & Agencies - Palestinian Security Forces arrested 14 members of the Hamas political party in the West Bank this Wednesday at dawn. A press release issued by Hamas, provides names and details of those arrested. In Qalqilia, to the north of the West Bank, Mustafa Bader was apprehended. He has been repeatedly arrested by Palestinian security forces along with spending time in Israeli prison. Nael Nofal, Sa'id Jeidy, Abdul-Halim Al Basha and Freij Daoud were also detained in Qalqilia. They face arrest just one day after release from a Palestinian detention center. In Allar near Qalqilia, security forces arrested Ahmad Taqatqa, Abada Taqatqa, Khalid Abdullah and Mujahid Shadid. In the district of Ramallah, security forces arrested Moath Ziad Mashal, a journalist from Silwad village. Mashal has been arrested three times by the Israeli military, spending a combined total of five years in Israeli prisons. He has also been arrested once by Palestinian security forces despite his involvement with the Silwad local council. In Hebron, security forces arrested Sheikh Mahmoud Al Hour, member of the Surif village council and Sheikh Mahmoud Al Asafra. Al Asafra serves as the Imam of Al Rahman Mosque in Beit Kahil. Near the city of Jenin, security forces arrested Mohammad Fares Abu Obeid from Al Yamoun village. The statement issued by Hamas also alleged that Fateh security forces still hold Hamas party members in detention, despite a Palestinian court order demanding their immediate release.

### **Netanyahu To Release Hundreds of Palestinian Detainees**

Friday January 29, 2010 - IMEMC & Agencies

The Israeli paper Haaretz reported on Friday that Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, made a decision to release hundreds of Palestinian detainees belonging to the Fatah political party. This proposition Netanyahu agreed to was crafted by US middle east peace envoy, George Mitchell. It is said the detainees slated for release are not sentenced to long term imprisonment. Israeli sources in Jerusalem also reported Mitchell's plan to hold indirect Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, similar to the negotiations between Israel and Syria that took place through the third party Turkey. Netanyahu is

said to have agreed to Mitchell's proposal but Palestinian president Abbas has not responded.

### **Geo strategic front:**

#### **Ehud Barak Meets With Egyptian Officials**

Thursday January 28, 2010 - IMEMC News & Agencies- Israel's Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, met with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and senior Egyptian officials this past Wednesday in Egypt. Barak also met with his Egyptian counterpart, Mohammad Tantawi and Egyptian intelligence minister, Omar Suleiman. Israeli Ynet News reported that the meeting focused on stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and efforts to release the captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. Israeli officials accompanying Barak reported the meetings to be positive and productive. Barak directed Egyptian officials to pressure Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, into resuming peace talks. The Palestinian Authority firmly states that negotiations will not resume until Israeli settlement construction ceases.

#### **Hamis Would Sign Reconciliation Document Should Egypt Provide Guarantees**

Thursday January 28, 2010 - IMEMC News & Agencies- Dr. Mahmoud Zahhar, a political leader of the Hamas movement, stated that they would sign the Egyptian document for internal Palestinian unity should the Egyptian leadership provide guarantees to ensure a successful agreement. Zahhar said that Hamas does not want to sign on unclear issues, and that Egypt should provide clarifications so that all aspects are durable to ensure a lasting unity deal. He added that Hamas believes that the transitional period should be used to achieve all needed arrangements and reconciliation measures to guarantee national interests and unity. "We are determined to achieve unity, we want to make sure the Egyptian document is clear for all of us", Zahhar said, "We demanded Egypt to provide guarantees to implementing all reached deals". Zahhar also insists that Egypt invite Hamas leaders for talks on the measures to guarantee the future unity deal is solid and flawless. He also called for the end of "smear campaigns" that aim to create conflict between Hamas and Egypt, and that his movement is determined to uncover all events that led to the fatal shooting of an Egyptian border guard officer, near the southern Gaza Strip border. "Our relation with Egypt is strategic, Egypt maintained the name of Palestine and its identity" the Hamas leader said, "Cairo preserved the issue of the refugees, gave them education, Egypt faces the same challenges we face". Zahhar added that there are "some parties that [are] trying to harm the relation with Egypt", and that most of the national and Islamic Palestinian leaders studied and graduated in Egyptian colleges, and the colleges in the Arabic Gulf. He further stated that Hamas believes in Egypt's central role in the region, and that the movement does not accuse it of being complicit in Gaza siege. "We appreciate the role of any human being who provides bread and medicine to Gaza and its residents", Zahhar concluded.

#### **President Abbas Meets With Chancellor of Germany**

Monday February 01, 2010 - IMEMC News & Agencies- On Monday, the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, met the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, in the German capital city of Berlin. The two leaders discussed the latest updates on the peace

process and the German-Palestinian relations. The Palestinian-Israeli peace process has been on stalemate since 2009 as Israeli refuses to halt settlement activity in the West Bank. A condition set forth by the Palestinian Authority and the U. S administration so peace talks could be resumed. Abbas embarked on the tour that took him to Arab and European courtiers earlier last month in an attempt to accumulate pressure on Israeli to reinvigorate the stalled peace talks. Dr. Sa'eb Erekat, head of the Negotiation Department of the PLO, and Nabeel Abu Rudinyah, Abbas' spokesperson, also attended the meeting in Berlin today.

**Economic front:**

**Social front:**

### **Egypt Allows Twelve Aid Trucks Sent by UAE To Gaza**

Thursday January 28, 2010 - IMEMC & Agencies - Omar Hadhoud, the representative of the Palestinian Authority at the Al Oja trade terminal, stated Friday that aid trucks filled with food products donated the by the Red Crescent of the United Arab Emirates were allowed into Gaza. Hadhoud stated that twelve trucks, loaded with 700 Tons, including 500 Tons of Wheat and 200 Tons of sugar, were allowed through after Egypt coordinated their entry with Israel. Al Oja terminal is a trade terminal designated for commercial trade between Israel and Egypt. The Red Crescent were allocated 3 days to use the crossing. The Ma'an News Agency reported that Mustafa Tayeh, in charge of aid relief at the Arab Physicians Union, said that talks are ongoing with Egypt to allow medical aid, estimated value of 15 million USD, into Gaza by next week through the Rafah Terminal. The aid includes medicine and equipment for treating cancer, kidney failure, heart conditions and other serious illnesses. It also includes 10 urgent care vehicles for patients with heart conditions and a special truck for incubation. Tayeh further stated that the APU is negotiating with Egypt to allow the entry of 50 physicians into the coastal region to perform at least 500 surgeries. Furthermore, the physicians are also carrying nearly 250.000 items of clothing, and shoes for the children of the Gaza Strip.

## **Iraq**

**Political front:**

### **Iraqi sheik threatens boycott over ballot purge**

Saturday 30 January 2010- A prominent sheik and U.S. ally is weighing whether to urge fellow Sunnis to boycott upcoming elections in protest of the government's ballot purge of hundreds of candidates suspected of links to Saddam Hussein's regime. Such a call by Ahmed Abu Risha risks derailing Obama administration hopes that the March 7 parliamentary elections will bring stronger reconciliation between Iraq's majority Shiites and minority Sunnis who want to reclaim more political power. It would also set back the clock on Iraqi politics, using the same protest tactic that Sunnis used in 2005 parliament voting that left them with only a few lawmakers and a weakened voice in key debates.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Abu Risha acknowledged that a boycott could throw Iraq into disarray. But the Awakening Council leader said the candidate blacklist

likely will result in a low turnout among voters in Anbar, the mostly Sunni province that covers most of Iraq's western desert. "They will not care about the election, they will ignore it, maybe, if these decisions stand," Abu Risha said in an interview this week at his sprawling compound just outside Ramadi, about 70 miles (115 kilometers) west of Baghdad. "I will make my decision later about encouraging people to go to vote or not," he added. Abu Risha leads the Anbar province Awakening Council, a Sunni tribal militia that joined the U.S.-led fight against insurgents in 2006. Anbar was the birthplace of the uprising against Al Qaeda in Iraq, which is seen as a critical turning point of the war. Iraq's Shiite-led government has banned about 450 candidates with suspected links to Saddam's now-outlawed Baath Party. At stake in the March election is 325 seats and control of Iraq's parliament as the country prepares to stand alone when the U.S. military leaves at the end of 2011. Iraqi officials say many Shiites also are banned from the ballot, but Abu Risha claimed the vast majority are Sunni, reflecting fears that the blacklist is a government attempt to undercut Sunnis, who once controlled Iraq under Saddam and have felt politically marginalized since his ouster in 2003. U.S. officials say no more than 60 percent of the banned candidates are Sunni. Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Sunni Kurd, has asked for a legal ruling on the legitimacy of the panel that is vetting the candidates. Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh dismissed the threatened boycott as "futile." "Many others called for boycotting the previous elections, and this has led to nothing and even losses," al-Dabbagh said. "Boycotting will not help and will not build a national project." Sunni Arabs widely boycotted the last parliamentary election in January 2005 and now only hold about 75 of the current 275 lawmaker seats. Spurred by insurgent threats against voters and calls from hard-line clerics to skip the polls, many Sunnis shunned the election in protest of U.S. and other foreign troops in Iraq. Sunnis make up about one-third of the country, U.S. data show. Retired Army Lt. Col. Nathan Freier, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, called it "critically important" for Iraq's government and security for Sunnis to vote. Further marginalizing Sunnis could trigger violence by one-time insurgents. In turn, he said, that could lead to a counter-punch by Shiite extremists, bringing back the sectarian bloodshed that once gripped Iraq. "The Iraqi government has to come to some accommodation with the Sunnis," said Freier, a former adviser to Gen. Raymond Odierno, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. Nearly 6,600 candidates have been cleared to run in the election. Of the 456 who have been banned, Abu Risha said that seven are members of the Awakening Council he heads. Another 70 are candidates for the Unity Alliance of Iraq political coalition that Abu Risha helps lead along with Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani. The sheik dismissed claims that the ballot purge targets suspected Baathists. "I don't think any followers of Saddam Hussein are still in government or are trying to take power. They are sure they will not take power again because the Baath Party is not legal," Abu Risha said. In a jab at the government, he said Iraqi leaders "believe they have the right to control Iraq and we do not have any right to participate. And when the situation got bad in Iraq, they couldn't even protect themselves. So the American forces protected them." Abu Risha and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki were former allies who planned to form a political coalition last fall until Abu Risha broke off, claiming he was not being treated as an equal partner. On Saturday, authorities said they arrested Hamoud Jumaa al-Mahelawi, an Al Qaeda member who fled in 2006 after Awakening militias took over his town of Qaim, located on the Syrian border in

western Anbar. Iraqi security officials have been interrogating al-Mahelawi since capturing him on Wednesday, said an Iraqi police officer who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. Al-Mahelawi is accused of killing Iraqi security officials by bombing their homes.

### **Geo strategic front:**

#### **U.S. Urges Kurds To Settle Disputes With Baghdad**

January 26, 2010 (Reuters) -- The United States has urged the leaders of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region to settle disputes over boundaries and oil revenues with Baghdad and to support Iraq's March 7 election. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said she would raise the points when she meets Masud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish Regional Government, for talks that aim to prevent Kurdish-Arab tensions destabilizing Iraq. Kurds fear that a nationalist Arab government in Baghdad might try to curtail the virtual independence they have enjoyed since shortly after the 1991 Gulf War once U.S. forces withdraw from Iraq. U.S. President Barack Obama aims to end combat operations in Iraq by August 31, 2010, before a full pullout by the end of 2011. Clinton told State Department officials she would urge Barzani when they met later today to "work toward a peaceful resolution of some of the disputed boundaries, particularly around Kirkuk, [and] to support the elections." While stressing U.S. support for Kurdish security, she said, "We do expect that the Kurdish leadership will take an important role in trying to stabilize Iraq, trying to work with the Sunni and Shia leadership for the betterment of the entire country." She specifically called for settling boundary disputes over Kirkuk and its surrounding province, which produces a fifth of Iraq's oil, and over revenue-sharing from hydrocarbon production. Iraq's central government and semi-autonomous Kurdistan have since 2004 engaged in a long-running dispute over Iraq's vast oil and gas assets and the growing revenue generated by them. The discord threatens to aggravate the political strains that already exist between autonomy-minded Kurds and Shi'ites. "Working out the oil revenue law, for example, is something that is very important to all Iraqis and it will benefit all Iraqis if it can be finalized," Clinton said.

#### **Obama Says War In Iraq Ending**

28.01.2010 -- In his first State of the Union address, U.S. President Barack Obama has told the American people that eight years of war in Afghanistan and nearly seven years of war in Iraq are coming to an end. But he devoted most of his annual address to Congress to detailing how he plans to strengthen the struggling U.S. economy and put unemployed Americans back to work. President Obama ran for the U.S. presidency as an antiwar candidate and in his address late on January 27, he said his administration was successfully winding down the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though his first year in office saw him order 30,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan to help defeat the Taliban insurgency, Obama said he's confident that an end to the fighting is in sight. "In Afghanistan, we're increasing our troops and training Afghan security forces so they can begin to take the lead in July of 2011, and our troops can begin to come home," Obama said. "We will reward good governance, work to reduce corruption, and support the rights of all Afghans, men and women alike." As for the Iraq war -- a war Obama opposed from the start, when he was still a senator in the legislature of the central state of Illinois -

- that, too, is ending, he said. "As we take the fight to Al-Qaeda, we are responsibly leaving Iraq to its people. As a candidate, I promised that I would end this war, and that is what I am doing as president," Obama said. "We will have all of our combat troops out of Iraq by the end of this August. We will support the Iraqi government as they hold elections, and we will continue to partner with the Iraqi people to promote regional peace and prosperity." Obama also highlighted another accomplishment in foreign affairs: the imminent achievement of a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I. On January 26, officials at the Russian Foreign Ministry said negotiators for a START II treaty likely would reach agreement within weeks. On January 27, Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev spoke substantively by telephone about the talks, including signing a new treaty "in the near future," according to official Russian media. Obama pointed to that and a coming meeting of world leaders to secure the world's nuclear materials as two of the major foreign policy successes of his first year in the White House. "To reduce our stockpiles and launchers, while ensuring our deterrent, the United States and Russia are completing negotiations on the farthest-reaching arms control treaty in nearly two decades," Obama said. "And at April's Nuclear Security Summit, we will bring forty-four nations together here in Washington, D.C., behind a clear goal: securing all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in four years, so that they never fall into the hands of terrorists."

### **Economic front:**

#### **Iraq ratifies oil deals with Angola's Sonangol**

Azzaman, January 28, 2010- Iraq has approved two oilfield deals it had initially struck with the Angolan state-owned oil company, Sonangol. Under the deals, Sonangol will develop the Qayara and Najmah oilfields in the Province of Nineveh of which the restive and violent city of Mosul is the capital. Iraqi Sunni insurgents have turned the province into a stronghold for bombings and attacks mainly targeting government and American troops. It is not clear whether the Angolan firm will start development immediately due to mounting insecurity in the areas where the fields are situated despite tempting terms under which the company will be paid between \$5 and \$6 for each barrel produced. Not other foreign firm striking oil development deals with Iraq has won such favorable terms. Oil Ministry officials say they were generous with Sonangol in order to lure it to start work despite insecurity. The two fields combined contain an estimated 1.7 billion barrels of oil, a very low volume in comparison with the estimated reserves of other fields in southern Iraq. The company has said it will invest billions of dollars in both fields and that other oil firms have shown an interest to join in. Once developed the two fields combined are expected to produce 230,000 barrels of oil a day. Mosul is a major oil center in northern Iraq but some of its oilfields like Ainzala are now under the control of Kurdish militias. Sonangol's two fields are outside Kurdish influence. Iraq's proven reserves now stand at 115 billion barrels, below Iran's 137 and Saudi Arabia's 264 billion. But while Iran and Saudi Arabia's data is very recent, Iraq's dates back to the 1970s, before improvements in technology transformed oil development and exploration industry.

#### **Iran To Sell Diesel To Iraq Despite U.S. Sanctions**

January 25, 2010 (Reuters) -- Iran has secured a deal to export about 19,000 barrels per day (bpd) of diesel to Iraq this year, industry sources said today. The deal shows Iran is confident it cannot only sidestep the threat of U.S. sanctions against suppliers of fuel for its own use, it can even act as a trader by selling fuel to its neighbor. The contract would begin in January, sources said, unseasonal for Iranian diesel exports. The Islamic republic's exports typically take place in the period of slower domestic power demand from April through the summer. The deal would run through the rest of the year, the sources added. "We have a long-term contract [with Iraq]...This is over and above our exports during the spring season which stays within the Persian Gulf," a source familiar with the deal said, declining to provide more details. Traders said the deal could be worth anything between \$500 million and \$600 million. Iran cut its diesel consumption sharply last year, when increased domestic natural gas production allowed it to substitute natural gas in power generation and burn less diesel. Iran imported between 600,000 to 900,000 barrels of diesel monthly between September through December in 2009, traders said. In December, Iran purchased around 2 million barrels of diesel from Singapore trader Hin Leong. Tehran had originally not allocated funds for diesel imports in its budget for the year ending March 21, 2010, forecasting it would meet local requirements due to higher gas production. But the OPEC member had to resume imports in September due to disruptions in piped gas supply into the country. **More Natural Gas Expected** In 2010 Iran expects up to 1 billion cubic feet per day (cfd) come online from the third phase of the giant South Pars gas field, being developed by Norway's StatoilHydro. "The country should have some incremental flows from South Pars to feed condensate splitters which may be substituting for diesel [gas oil] in some uses," said Jamie Webster, a senior consultant at PFC Energy. "This may free up some diesel for export." Iran, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, lacks the refining capacity to meet domestic fuel consumption and relies heavily on imports from international markets to plug the gap. Iran was likely to source part of the fuel needed to service the diesel supply contract with Iraq from international markets. "The Iranians are smart. They are going to make some money off this deal," a Middle East based trader said. "They will buy from Hin Leong or other traders looking to offload the oil from storage and then sell that into Iraq and make a bit of money." Imports are a sensitive subject for Iran as they are a potential target for the United States for sanctions aimed at halting Tehran's nuclear program. The diesel Iraq is importing was expected to be used in power stations, traders said. Utilities in Iraq can take diesel with a sulphur content of up to 1 percent, they said. "They can do anything in that range...most of this will go to burn in the power stations, Iraq is not very stringent on the specs they buy," a trader said. Diesel produced from the country's petrochemical plants, also known as heavy ends, could be another source for exports. The fuel will be delivered by trucks and coastal tankers, sources said. Years of war in Iraq has ravaged its ability to produce enough fuels like gasoline and diesel to meet growing domestic requirements forcing it to buy on the international spot market. Traders said it was hard to estimate how much diesel Iraq imports, due to a lack of transparency and because of smuggling.

## **Social front:**

### **Iraq Takes On Channels 'Inciting Violence'**

January 28, 2010 (Reuters) -- The Iraqi government is urging fellow Arab countries to help it crack down on television channels watched across the Arab world that it believes incite violence and sectarianism, an official said. Ali al-Musawi, manager of Iraq's National Media Center, complained that channels based in Arab nations like Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt had broadcast programs instructing viewers on how to assemble bombs or otherwise stirring up violence. He did not name any channels or provide more details. "Satellite channels will be facing two choices: either they can abide by media rules of conduct...or they may be shut down if they continue," Musawi said. The move reflects an increasingly assertive stance from the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in confronting media it deems hostile or irresponsible. The toughened stance is not welcomed by Muaid al-Lami, the head of the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate, who said the government should let the media regulate itself. "Direct government interference can be politicized or tinged by motives unrelated to professional criteria," he said. The syndicate and others have criticised a proposed overhaul of media laws, saying new provisions to protect journalists' rights were weak and would permit government interference. Al-Sharqiya is one television channel that has found itself frequently at odds with the Iraqi government. In 2006, the government shut its office in Baghdad over a report about people who said they were tortured in Iraqi jails. Sharqiya now broadcasts from London and from the capital of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan region. In August, it was fined over \$85,000 for airing what a top security official in Baghdad said was a personal attack. The head of the channel's news department, Ali Wajih, said Sharqiya had been given permission to reopen its office in Baghdad and channel executives were considering it. "Of course, if we can be sure there is an atmosphere of freedom, disputes will be addressed in courts and not through government pressure...we wouldn't hesitate to broadcast from Iraq or anywhere else," he said.

### **Death Toll In Iraq Suicide Blast Climbs To 17**

January 26, 2010 (Reuters) -- A suicide bomber killed at least 17 people and wounded 80 others near an Iraqi Interior Ministry building in central Baghdad today, ministry officials said. Many of those injured or killed in the vehicle-borne explosion at a ministry forensics office in Baghdad's Karrada neighbourhood were police, the ministry official said. The attack came a day after a trio of suicide attacks on well-known Baghdad hotels, two of them hubs for western visitors and journalists, killed at least 36 people.

### **Iraq Executes 'Chemical Ali'**

January 25, 2010- Ali Hassan al-Majid, one of the most notorious members of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's former regime, was executed by hanging today. The announcement was made by Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh. Majid, a cousin of the late Saddam Hussein and former Iraqi commander, had been sentenced to death four times for genocide and crimes against humanity. He earned the name "Chemical Ali" for ordering poisonous-gas attacks in a campaign that killed tens of thousands of Kurds in the 1980s. Majid was the "King of Spades" in the pack of cards of most-wanted Iraqis issued by the U.S. military following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. U.S.-led forces tried unsuccessfully to assassinate him in April that year with an air strike on a villa in southern Iraq. He eluded them, but was captured in August of that year. *Gas Attack* Majid is probably best-known for the 1988 Halabjah attack, when Iraqi jets

sprayed the mostly Kurdish town with mustard gas and the nerve agents Tabun, Sarin, and VX. It is believed that about 5,000 people died, most of them women and children, in what is thought to be the deadliest-ever gas attack carried out against civilians. The gas attack was part of a military campaign against the Kurds code-named "Anfal" that lasted from February to August of 1988. Majid was convicted in June 2007 for his role in that campaign -- the first of four death sentences. In December 2008, he also received a death sentence for his role in the crushing of a 1991 Shi'ite uprising following the 1991 Gulf War. Then in March 2009, Majid was sentenced to death for the 1999 killings of Shi'ite Muslims in the Sadr City district of Baghdad and in the central shrine city of Al-Najaf. And on January 17 this year, Majid was sentenced to death for ordering the Halabjah attack. News of his hanging came after three large explosions rocked central Baghdad today, killing at least 36 people and injuring more than 70. It was not immediately clear whether the attacks were linked to Majid's execution.