

Report# 114
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Fertile Crescent
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Summary

Egypt

Political front: joint meeting of the human rights committee and the national security committee in the People's Assembly escalated into a verbal shouting match between delegates from the NDP and the Muslim Brotherhood. The altercation, which almost became physical, occurred during discussion of 12 information requests submitted by the Brotherhood in which they accused police officers of breaking into houses and violating the sanctity of women. Yehia el-Masiri, a Brotherhood delegate in the People's Assembly, accused a state security investigations officer in Mahalla of stealing gold from a woman while she was being arrested.

Kuwaiti authorities on Saturday deported 17 Egyptian nationals supporting potential Egyptian presidential candidate Mohamed ElBaradei in Kuwait City, an Arabic human rights group in Cairo told Reuters. They were among 33 Egyptians in Kuwait City who belonged to a pro-ElBaradei group on the social networking site Facebook and who were detained by Kuwaiti authorities on Friday, the head of the Arabic Network for Human Rights and Information said.

Sources from Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) have reported that the party will hold its annual one-day conference to announce its election platform before the upcoming parliamentary elections slated for the end of this year. The NDP plans to unveil its program for the upcoming elections without presenting papers or discussing policies as it has done in meetings over the past years. The program will highlight the NDP's achievements at the level of local constituencies and outline a plan of action for the next five years.

Egypt's authorities freed dozens of opposition activists linked to top opposition figure Mohamed ElBaradei a day after their arrest for seeking to stage a demonstration to demand political reforms, officials said. State prosecutor Abdel Majid Mahmud ordered the release of 33 people, including 17 students, earlier, a judicial official said.

Ayman Nour, the disputed leader of Al-Ghad party, announced that he will run for president in the 2011 elections, and will appoint two vice presidents including a Coptic woman. Nour called on incumbent President Hosni Mubarak to step down and retire from the political arena. Nour reiterated his intention to run for president despite it being put

into question due to his conviction and imprisonment for charges of forging his party's official documents, and the legal dispute over his party's legitimacy. He said he will announce a shadow coalition government a few months before the elections.

Geo strategic front:

A senior American official said that Egypt is leading an international working group in the Gulf of Aden and holding direct negotiations with Somali pirates and people of the area to persuade them to intervene and to stop supporting piracy. It comes as Western observers have continued to play down the role of piracy after a turbulent 2008-2009. The statement came in a speech by the Assistant Secretary of State for political-military affairs, Andrew J. Shapiro, to a seminar on law at the American University in Washington.

More than 5,000 Sudanese voters in Egypt head to polls Sunday to cast their votes in the presidential election, a source at the Sudanese Embassy in Cairo said. Sudanese civilians and security forces queue to cast their votes outside classrooms turned into polling stations at the St Francis Christian school in Khartoum on April 11, 2010. Polling stations opened for the three-day vote on schedule in Khartoum but The official said that 5,377 Sudanese people were expected to cast their votes at four polling stations, in Cairo and the coastal city of Alexandria. The electoral process in Egypt was being observed by representatives of the electoral commission as well as Egyptian civil society organizations, the official said.

President Barack Obama's advisers will remove religious terms such as "Islamic extremism" from the central document outlining the US national security strategy and will use the rewritten document to emphasize that the United States does not view Muslim nations through the lens of terror, counterterrorism officials said. The change is a significant shift in the National Security Strategy, a document that previously outlined the Bush Doctrine of preventative war and currently states: "The struggle against militant Islamic radicalism is the great ideological conflict of the early years of the 21st century." The officials described the changes on condition of anonymity because the document still was being written, and the White House would not discuss it. But rewriting the strategy document will be the latest example of Obama putting his stamp on US foreign policy, like his promises to dismantle nuclear weapons and limit the situations in which they can be used.

ECONOMIC: If Egypt's latest period of significant economic reform and growth began in 2004, India's began 10 years earlier, said Kaushik Basu, advisor to India's Minister of Finance. The global economic crisis of 2008 slowed India's growth, but as he pointed out, emerging markets were markedly less affected than developed economies. "The financial crisis brewed in the US and Europe and never went to developing countries; however, it became a recessionary tendency for production in developing countries, and subsequently, output dropped. "In India, the growth rate rose from 2003 onward for five years, [then] dropped in one quarter to 5.8 percent, and stayed at around 6 percent for three-quarters of a year, or slightly below. This was very poor, given its recent performance," he added. The Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) at the Egyptian Cabinet recently invited Basu, also a former Cornell professor, to present a paper on cooperation among emerging economies. "Fiscal deficits went up around the world, some more than they should have," he explained, "Yet the nature of stimuli was different: in the US it was to help the banks considered 'too big to fail'. India was lucky,

whether by design or otherwise, a few years ago it had begun spending huge amounts of money on the poorer segments of the population. These big injections of cash, like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme — which guaranteed jobs and income for poor rural households — meant that the global slowdown had less effect on India's poor." He explained that two years ago, the Indian government had undertaken the controversial decision to give loan waivers to poor farmers, writing off \$15 billion in debts. "It turned out to be a lucky stimulus, because it put more buying power in people's hands," he said, exactly at a moment when they might have otherwise felt pinched by economic slowdown. Subsequently, after nine months of poor growth, India surged back to 7.9 percent GDP growth. India's fiscal year, which ended on March 21, saw growth at 7.2 percent, with projections for fiscal year 2010/11 at 8.5 percent.

Egypt's National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) announced in February that the country's three mobile operators would block service to all anonymous users and made-in-China cell phones which have repetitive serial numbers. NTRA officials said the ban is still in force in April, adding that it is impossible to cut the service from all the unknown mobile phones at the same time as the market may be shocked. The decision of NTRA came as it sees that these phones affect Egyptians' health and they can not be traced because they hold the same serial numbers of the well known international mobile brands. "I have been selling made-in-China mobile phones for two years, none of my customers complained of any healthy problem," said el- Khteib. Made-in-China mobile phones flooded into the Egyptian market six years ago, posing fierce competition to other brands.

Social front: It seems the Islam Online saga is finally drawing to an end, although not necessarily the one hoped for by employees of its Cairo-based office. Reporters for the influential Islamic news website went on strike three weeks ago, protesting the "unethical involvement" and "lack of transparency" displayed by their parent organization's newly-elected board of directors. The Islamic Message Society, based in Qatar, had apparently been pushing the website--previously known for its moderate tone and tolerant views--in a "more conservative direction," according to a former employee of the organization.

Shia clerics are warning that comments made by the new Grand Sheikh of the renowned Sunni Al-Azhar institute in Egypt risk fuelling the divide between the two sects of Islam. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb reportedly said he was against "any attempt to spread the Shia school of thought in any Islamic country, or to spread Shia cells among Sunni youth," the same way he said Iran was fighting attempts to spread Sunni thought among Shias. Al-Tayeb, who was appointed the grand imam of Al-Azhar on March 19, just over a week after the sudden death of his predecessor, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, said Al-Azhar would continue conducting ideological outreach with Shias as a strategy to defuse tensions between the two groups. Ayatollah Hashem Bushehri, a prominent Iranian Shia cleric based in Qom and a member of the influential Assembly of Experts, said Al-Tayeb was "sowing the seeds of strife." Bushehri, who is also a close aide to Iran's spiritual leader Ali Khamanei, accused the head of Al-Azhar of creating a "tense atmosphere" and "providing ammunition to those who only understand the language of fear-mongering and terrorism."

Iraq

Political front:

Iran has urged leaders in neighboring Iraq to form a national unity government that includes Sunni Muslims. Iranian Ambassador Hassan Kazemi Qomi said the Iraqiya coalition, which includes Sunnis and Shi'ites and won the largest share of seats in last month's parliamentary election, would hold discussions in Tehran in the coming days. Iraqi political leaders have been in talks to form a government since the inconclusive election. Shi'ite Iran has in the past advocated a Shi'ite-dominated government. "We support and encourage the participation of all the parties, but this is an internal Iraqi thing. It is only consulting [with Iraqiya], no more," Qomi told a news conference in Baghdad.

As the political horse-trading among Iraq's political factions drags on in the wake of the country's parliamentary elections last month, there has been a growing call for the formation of another so-called national unity government, which would include all of Iraq's political factions. The idea has sparked a debate in Iraq over the merits and deficiencies of unity government, with various factions and political figures lining up on either side of the proposal. Its proponents -- such as former parliament speaker Iyad al-Samara'i -- have argued that "reality requires" the formation of a national unity government, and that failing to do so could "keep marginalizing major factions inside Iraqi society." Likewise, deputy Ammar Tohme of the Iraqi National Alliance told

Geo strategic front

The Iraqi embassy in Washington has received "important antiquities" dating back to early civilizations that flourished in Mesopotamia, the land between two rivers. A spokesman for the Ministry Culture said the relics were passed to Iraq "following extraordinary efforts (the country's Antiquities Department) has exerted." The spokesman, refusing to be named, described the relics "as important and included gold bracelets from the Treasure of Nimrud." Nimrud was one of four capitals of the ancient Assyria Empire.

Social front

The Voice of the New Testament broadcasts mostly religious hymns and Bible readings from the station's office in Basra's National Evangelical Church. Saad Matti Petros, the head of the Minorities Committee on the city council, told RFI that the radio station will promote the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence in society.

Millions of Iraqis exist below the poverty line in a country which floats on oil and earned more than \$60 billion from oil sales last year, said Mahdi Muhsen, the director of the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology. Muhsen said one fourth of Iraq's nearly 30 million people live below the poverty line and that unemployment rates could hit 30% in some provinces. Muhsen made the remarks as his organization gears toward national census scheduled for November 24 this year.

Lebanon

Political front

Political alliances in the upcoming municipal polls were being mapped out over the past few days as the Interior Ministry announced April 4, 2010, as a deadline for presenting candidacies for the Mount Lebanon district. Following Monday's announcement of an agreement between Hizbullah and the Amal Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP) declared their alliance.

Preparations for the upcoming municipal elections after near certainty that the process would be held as scheduled on May 2 based on the current law did not thwart political

parties from exchanging accusations Thursday of hindering the adoption of electoral reforms. On Wednesday, Lebanon's top three officials stressed that the electoral process would kick off on May 2, 2010, in Mount Lebanon district while dismissing the possibility of passing the proposed reforms prior to the legal deadline given time constraints. Over the past few days, political alliances were being mapped as the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Democratic Party declared theirs following the announcement of the Hizbullah and Amal Movement alliance. Speaker Nabih Berri announced Thursday that the Hizbullah-Amal Movement alliance would prepare for the upcoming municipal elections with joint campaign workers while stressing that the alliance was unbreakable.

Two days after Cabinet approved the draft law to protect women from domestic violence, the organization KAFA Enough Violence and Exploitation held a news conference Thursday to explain the results of the approval. It also met with Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar for the same purpose. The news conference was held at the Press Federation office and aimed at clarifying the consequences of approving the draft law and discussing future steps for it to be adopted by Parliament.

Palestine

The Washington Post reported that U.S. President, Barak Obama, is seriously weighing presenting a new plan for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This plan could be presented this Autumn and is said to be based on proposals made by former President, Bill Clinton, in Camp David in 2000. The plan would be considered as a Middle-East Initiative that would link resolving the conflict with Israel, with isolating Iran, and ending the conflict in the region. On March 24, the White House held discussions on presenting a new plan based on agreements and understandings reached by the Palestinians and Israel in Camp David and in Taba in 2000.

Israeli sources reported that Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has decided not to attend the Nuclear Summit in the United States after learning that a number of Muslim Countries would seek to discuss Israel's failure to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Summit was organized and called for by the U.S. President, Barack Obama. Netanyahu's office announced the trip earlier Thursday before the cancelation was decided. The office of Netanyahu said that some countries, referring to Arab and Muslim states, will be using next week's summit as an excuse to slam Israel, and that this conference will not just be a summit to counter "nuclear terror".

News according to a recently-released report, the Israeli government has withheld payment of up to two hundred million dollars meant for the Palestinian Civil Administration over the last sixteen years, instead illegally channeling the money into Israeli state coffers. Under the Oslo Agreement of 1993, the Israeli government agreed to levy certain fees to the Palestinian Civil Authority to provide for the needs of Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But that money was never transferred, and according to the Israeli government's new report, has been illegally channeled into the coffers of the Israeli government in violation of international law.

Detailed news

Egypt

Political front

NDP and Brotherhood spar in parliament

a joint meeting of the human rights committee and the national security committee in the People's Assembly escalated into a verbal shouting match between delegates from the NDP and the Muslim Brotherhood. The altercation, which almost became physical, occurred during discussion of 12 information requests submitted by the Brotherhood in which they accused police officers of breaking into houses and violating the sanctity of women. Yehia el-Masiri, a Brotherhood delegate in the People's Assembly, accused a state security investigations officer in Mahalla of stealing gold from a woman while she was being arrested. He was interrupted by Hazim el-Hadidi, a delegate from the NDP and former state security officer, who responded, "What you are saying is ludicrous. Shame on you for saying this." Similarly, Hamid Rashid, manager of legal affairs for the Interior Ministry also objected to the Brotherhood's accusations, insisting that, "Occupation forces break into houses, whereas the police are a state apparatus that enters houses in the framework of law enforcement, and only when necessary. Whoever has evidence against police officers should present it to the courts." The conflict escalated when Ashraf Badr el-Din, a delegate from the Brotherhood replied to Rashid, insisting, "Whoever dies without judicial review is a martyr. We will implement God's law." Another Brotherhood delegate Badry Amer added, "We demand rapid political intervention to stop these excesses. Some incidents are hard to prove to state prosecution, such as when officers sexually violate the women they are arresting."

The NDP delegate Mohamed Abdel Fatah ended the argument when he yelled, "You are murderers," to the Brotherhood delegates, who then stormed out of the room.

Kuwait deports 17 pro-ElBaradei Egyptians -rights group

Reuters Saturday, April 10, 2010; Kuwaiti authorities on Saturday deported 17 Egyptian nationals supporting potential Egyptian presidential candidate Mohamed ElBaradei in Kuwait City, an Arabic human rights group in Cairo told Reuters. The 17 Egyptians arrived at Cairo airport late on Saturday. They were among 33 Egyptians in Kuwait City who belonged to a pro-ElBaradei group on the social networking site Facebook and who were detained by Kuwaiti authorities on Friday, the head of the Arabic Network for Human Rights and Information said. "There is no legal reason given or proof of indictment of these Egyptian nationals," ANHRI's head Gamal Eid told Reuters. "These Egyptians have lost their livelihood because they wanted to express support to ElBaradei's National Coalition." The online group, which has 378 members so far, had planned to hold its first meeting in public to launch the Kuwaiti branch of the Egyptian National Coalition for Change, a group set up by pro-ElBaradei activists in February and led by ElBaradei. The 67-year-old's return to Egypt has galvanized the country's calcified politics. So far ElBaradei's coalition has gathered some 30,000 signatures in Egypt to lobby the government to change the constitution and to revoke Emergency Law, in place since 1981. "Egyptians in Kuwait formed the Kuwaiti branch of the National Coalition

for Change to support ElBaradei's campaign for reform," Hamdi Qandil, a leading member of the coalition told Reuters. "They were going to meet for the first time on Thursday but were prevented." No one at the Egyptian embassy in Kuwait or at the foreign ministry in Egypt was immediately available to comment. Several ElBaradei Facebook groups have formed outside Egypt and in the Arab world including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar. The Egyptian Facebook group now has over 200,000 members. Kuwaiti officials said Egypt's internal politics should be kept in Egypt and not exercised abroad. "There are no Egyptian elections at the moment ... and it is unacceptable for nationals to take the internal politics of their countries to the host country," Rawodan Al Rawodan, Kuwait's Minister of Cabinet Affairs, told Reuters in Cairo. "These Egyptians are here to work not to form groups," he said. "Kuwait does not interfere into Egypt's internal affairs." Eid from ANHRI said the deportations were politically motivated. "These deportations are the Kuwaiti government's favor to the current Egyptian government," he said. Egypt ranks first in the Arab world and 23 worldwide in terms of the number of Facebook users.

Egypt NDP to announce election platform

Egypt News SUNDAY, 04 APRIL 2010- Sources from Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) have reported that the party will hold its annual one-day conference to announce its election platform before the upcoming parliamentary elections slated for the end of this year. The NDP plans to unveil its program for the upcoming elections without presenting papers or discussing policies as it has done in meetings over the past years. The program will highlight the NDP's achievements at the level of local constituencies and outline a plan of action for the next five years. Sources say that the party's general secretariat office--which includes of Shura Council spokesman Safwat el-Sharif, Chief of Presidential Staff Zakariya Azmi, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Mofid Shehab, Policies Secretariat head Gamal Mubarak, NDP Media Secretary Ali Eddin Helal, and Steel magnate and NDP member Ahmed Ezz--decided in its last meeting that party members should not hold any meetings with People's Assembly candidates in order to avoid rumors that the party is recommending candidates for parliament.

Egypt frees pro-Baradei protesters

– Egypt's authorities freed on Wednesday dozens of opposition activists linked to top opposition figure Mohamed ElBaradei a day after their arrest for seeking to stage a demonstration to demand political reforms, officials said. State prosecutor Abdel Majid Mahmud ordered the release of 33 people, including 17 students, earlier on Wednesday, a judicial official said. A security source said several others were freed late on Tuesday.

According to Egyptian and international non-governmental organisations, including New York-based Human Rights Watch, 91 people were arrested on Tuesday. They are all members of the April 6 opposition group that has rallied to the recently formed National Association for Change of former UN nuclear watchdog chief and prospective presidential candidate ElBaradei. On Tuesday, April 6 tried to organise a protest in Cairo to demand political and constitutional reforms as well as the lifting of emergency laws that have been enforced for nearly three decades. But organisers said police beat up protesters and arrested them as they prevented them from marching to parliament from

Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo. The arrests and violence were condemned by the United States, by Amnesty International and by Human Rights Watch, the latter two also urging Egypt to lift laws on a state of emergency. US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said "we are deeply concerned about the arrests of Egyptians under the emergency law. "The government of Egypt must uphold the rights of all people to express their political views peacefully and to ensure due process."

Egypt's state of emergency restricts some civil liberties. Amnesty's Middle East and North Africa Director Malcolm Smart said "this intimidation of opposition activists and government critics must end immediately." His counterpart at Human Rights Watch, Sarah Leah Whitson, said "armed security officials supposedly in service to the Egyptian people are beating up its young women and men." "The government should ensure that all these incidents of police brutality are fully investigated and announce an end to this thuggery," she added. A young man recounted what happened when security forces broke up the Cairo gathering. "I was arrested, interrogated, handcuffed and body-searched and then I was violently beaten up by a soldier on the orders of a man in civilian clothes," Mohammed, who declined to give his full name, told AFP. "The security forces carried out mass arrests and passersby were held in the same cell as I," he told a news conference organised by the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, a local para-legal association.

The head of the centre, Ahmad Saif, expected the authorities to toughen their crackdown against the opposition in the run-up to the 2011 polls. "We are entering a new era and until the 2011 presidential election we will witness a tougher repression, arbitrary arrests and more curbs of human rights," Saif told reporters. But the interior ministry denied any wrongdoing. It said security forces cracked down on the protesters because April 6 had tried to go ahead with a demonstration despite failing to obtain a permit. "The measures (taken on Tuesday) came after the security services turned down a request by April 6 to hold marches and protests," the ministry said on Wednesday. It also described April 6 as "unlawful," and said 33 protesters were arrested and held overnight for questioning because "10 officers and individuals were wounded" in clashes between the two sides.

April 6 was set up in 2008 to protest against cost-of-living increases. In recent weeks it allied with ElBaradei's new political party, which is campaigning for constitutional reforms ahead of 2011 presidential polls. ElBaradei, 67, has said he is willing to stand against President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 on condition that the election is free and fair and that the constitution is revised to ease candidacy restrictions. The 2005 Nobel Peace Prize winner has emerged as Egypt's highest-profile opposition figure since he retired as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency at the end of last year.

Mubarak, 81, is widely seen as grooming his son Gamal to succeed him.

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD LEADERS DUE FOR RELEASE ON BAIL TODAY

Daily News Egypt April 6, 2010 Sixteen Muslim Brotherhood (MB) detainees are expected to be released today after they posted bail Tuesday at the State Security Prosecution office after a court ruled they should no longer be detained. Among the detainees are Deputy Supreme Guide Mahmoud Ezzat and members of the group's ruling Guidance Office, Essam El-Erian, Abdel-Rahman El-Barr and Mohei Hamed. There are also 12 other detainees from various governorates. El-Erian's son told Daily News Egypt that while he was pleased that a court had ruled for his father's release, there was a concern that State Security may arrest the detainees again after their official release,

something that has happened in the past. In a statement given to the Brotherhood's website, MB lawyer Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Maqsoud said that "despite the verdict, history has revealed that they may be defied and the Interior Ministry may contest the ruling." "It is yet to be seen if authorities will respect the order which called for the release of the men who were unjustly detained simply for calling for their simplest rights as citizens," said the statement.

The North Cairo Criminal Court ordered the release of the detainees on Sunday after State Security had arrested them during dawn raids on their homes in February, 2010. Each detainee was to post LE 5,000 in bail. The detainees were taken as part of an investigation into what was known as the "Qutbi" case, accusing members of the banned but tolerated group of following the edicts of late Islamist thinker Sayed Qutb, a political detainee who was executed in prison during the Nasser era. The MB website wrote off the charges, saying the detainees were "leveled with a host of fabricated accusations by authorities. They concocted charges included the setting up of training camps to stage attacks in Egypt." "The MB has been harshly targeted by the ruling regime and escalations have continued with the impending Shoura and parliamentary elections scheduled to take place early autumn," it continued. MB MP Saad El-Katatny previously told Daily News Egypt, "Security bodies have always tried to pressure the Brotherhood by arresting its members thinking that this will affect its plans. This year there will be important events like the parliamentary elections and next year the presidential elections." "They've tried it many times and it hasn't worked before," he added, "We are exercising our legal and constitutional rights and will continue to do so." Prior to this recent spate of arrests, the Brotherhood had undergone an acrimonious changing of the guard when appointing a new Supreme Guide to replace Mohamed Mahdi Akef and a new Guidance Office, the highest ruling body in the group. Ezzat is seen as the hardliner of the group, and his recent appointment as the Deputy Supreme Guide was seen as a victory for the hardliners against the more reformist members of the group, spearheaded by Abdel-Moneim Aboul-Futouh, who wasn't appointed to the new Guidance Office. El-Erian is the most prominent reformist in the newly-appointed polit-bureau.

EGYPT RELEASES SENIOR MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD MEMBERS

Egyptian police released 16 senior Muslim Brotherhood leaders, including deputy chief Mahmoud Ezzat and Essam El-Erian, who are charged with organizing "terrorist groups," Ezzat said on Thursday. Ezzat and the others were freed on bail on Wednesday after the Cairo Criminal Court ordered their release. "We are glad to see the authorities' swift execution of the court's release order," the group's lawyer Abdel Moneim Abdel Maqsoud told Reuters. They were arrested in February on charges of forming "secret terrorist groups" and planning to overthrow the government. Ezzat denied the charges and said the banned group, which wants an Islamic state achieved through peaceful means, was committed to its political program. "They have forever fabricated cases against us," he told AFP. "Accusations against these members as well as others are false. This is a political case and we hope that the rest of the detained members are released especially as parliamentary elections are coming," senior member Gamal Nassar told Reuters. Although banned, the Brotherhood holds one-fifth of seats in parliament after fielding independent candidates in the 2005 parliamentary elections. It is expected to field fewer candidates in elections later this year because of a police crackdown, but Ezzat said the

group was not fazed by the arrests. "What we do is an obligation. Participation in public life is a duty and we are committed to our program of reform," he said. –Agencies

ELBARADEI IN MANSOURA TO ADVOCATE CHANGE

Daily News Egypt: April 2, 2010 As part of his campaign for political reform, National Coalition for Change leader Mohamed ElBaradei visited the Delta city of El-Mansoura Friday. After performing Friday prayer at a mosque, ElBaradei, together with between 500 and 600 supporters, onlookers and journalists walked through a street in a procession which quickly turned into a demonstration. ElBaradei had begun his visit earlier at the National Institute for Kidney Illnesses where he met the Institute's founder and director, Dr Mohamed Ghoneim. Outside the Institute, members of the Coalition and political opposition figures such as Mohamed Abdel Qoddous and Hassan Nafaa demanded to be let into the Institute but were refused entry by the Institute's security. Only ElBaradei, together with his brother Ali and former Kefaya leader George Ishaq — now a member of the new Coalition — were eventually admitted. Some 30-40 ElBaradei supporters — some wearing signature white T-shirts bearing the former IAEA chief's glasses and moustache — gathered outside the Institute. Another member, journalist Hamdy Qandil, told journalists that the point of the visit was to make contact with El-Mansoura's young people, "because change depends on young people".

Qandil added that his presence was not a definitive indicator that he supported ElBaradei for presidency, "because ElBaradei himself has not announced that he wants to stand for presidency", adding, "I'm with change, and ElBaradei is one of the most important symbols of change". A member named Ashraf Wagdy, a bookstore owner who was last week arrested and detained for 24 hours before being released without charge, explained the circumstances of his arrest, which he described as trumped up. "The police came to the bookstore and took 65 CDs of music by Om Kolthoum, Marcel Khalife and some classical titles, then arrested me," Wagdy said. "We told the public prosecutor that the arrest had nothing to do with the CDs and that it was connected with my involvement with the National Coalition". ElBaradei, who returned to Cairo in February after retiring from his post as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency last month released a statement calling for seven key democratic reforms ahead of the 2010 and 2011 parliamentary and presidential elections. ElBaradei has said that he will not run for the presidency unless Constitutional articles governing who may run are amended — a point which ElBaradei supporter Hisham Abdallah told Daily News Egypt demonstrates that, "he wants change, not the presidency". Abdallah, a pharmaceutical sales manager, described ElBaradei as "the right man for the state we're currently in". "He's a man who can take us forward to the 21st century out of the military rule we've been under for the past 50 years. We're not used to anything except, 'if you take the seat of power you sit on it forever'." Abdallah does not regard the fact that ElBaradei has lived abroad for the past 30 years as undermining his suitability for the presidency of Egypt, explaining that "it's not a weak point at all. It's better because he's the product of genuine democratic values." A National Front member told Daily News Egypt that the original plan had been that ElBaradei would visit Wagdy's bookstore, but the crowd stopped in El-Gomhoreyya Street where ElBaradei sought refuge from the throng in a building while National Coalition members linked arms to form a corridor allowing ElBaradei to get into his

waiting car. "I love ElBaradei," American University in Cairo student Jaida Gamal told Daily News Egypt after ElBaradei had left. "We came here to say that we support him and that we want change." "The Constitution is made for the sake of our president not for our sake. So we want change, we want it for our benefit. He's a tool for change. If he wants to be our president we accept him and we nominate him".

AYMAN NOUR TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT WITH COPTIC VP

Special to Daily News Egypt; April 6, 2010: Ayman Nour, the disputed leader of Al-Ghad party, announced that he will run for president in the 2011 elections, and will appoint two vice presidents including a Coptic woman. Nour called on incumbent President Hosni Mubarak to step down and retire from the political arena. "I call on President Mubarak to retire from his post, to respond to the people's demands, and to change the constitution to one that is appropriate to Egypt's status in the region," he said in a press conference Tuesday morning held at his party's headquarters in Downtown Cairo. Nour reiterated his intention to run for president despite it being put into question due to his conviction and imprisonment for charges of forging his party's official documents, and the legal dispute over his party's legitimacy. He said he will announce a shadow coalition government a few months before the elections. "The names of the cabinet members, with whom I will enter elections, will be a pleasant surprise to all Egyptians," he said. He added that he is prepared to take legal action should he be prevented from running for president. "The law they are using to prevent me from nomination was issued in 1937, and the Supreme Court had previously issued four verdicts describing some articles in this law as unconstitutional. We will announce the specific procedures we plan on taking at the right time," he explained. Nour announced that he will file a lawsuit on Wednesday at the Administrative Court, calling for the cancellation of a decision issued by the interior minister to prevent him from holding a rally in Tahrir Square. He also criticized the intense siege imposed by security forces on his party's Downtown headquarters. Nour distributed a booklet detailing his electoral program among the journalists present. His program includes a number of reform steps, most importantly the cancellation of emergency law and other laws violating civil freedoms; calling for the establishment of an elected body to pen a new constitution; forming a two-year transitional government and reintroducing an election system for appointing officials in top posts, including governors and university deans. "If the political powers agree on one candidate, we will support him no matter who he is," Nour said.

Geo strategic front:

Kuwait deports backers of Egypt reformist: official

Sat Apr 10, – Kuwait deported 17 supporters of leading pro-reform Egyptian activist and former UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei on Saturday, a day after arresting them, a security official said. Seventeen people have been expelled back to their country," the official said. Earlier, a Kuwaiti security official had said "20 to 25 Egyptians were arrested," some at a pro-ElBaradei gathering at a Kuwait City suburb on Friday and others at their homes. The fate of the others arrested was not immediately known, nor was it clear how many were resident in Kuwait. The arrests came after the group posted a notice on the Internet about the gathering, the source said.

All of those detained were "being held Saturday by state security forces and awaiting a political decision about their fates," an official had said earlier in the day. There was no other official comment from Kuwait about the incident, but a foreign ministry official in Cairo said officials there were aware that a group of Egyptians had been arrested in Kuwait. He later clarified that the ministry had heard of the arrests through Egyptian media. An airport source in Cairo said the group's arrival was expected. George Ishak, a Cairo spokesman for ElBaradei's National Association for Change, said 34 Egyptians were arrested, four on Thursday and the rest on Friday. "They were holding a meeting on Friday to form the first association to support ElBaradei, but it appears Kuwait did not have tolerance for it," he told AFP. ElBaradei, 67, has emerged as Egypt's most high profile pro-reform leader after retiring from the International Atomic Energy Agency last year. The Nobel laureate has said he would run for president if constitutional restrictions on independent nominations in next year's presidential elections were changed. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak faces mounting opposition at home after almost three decades of rule and has ruled out amending the constitution. His government has rebuffed foreign calls for reform and dismissed as "unacceptable" a call last week from the US State Department for free elections. The 81-year-old has not said whether he will run again in 2011, but is widely believed to be grooming his son Gamal as his successor.

US: Egypt is leading efforts to persuade the Somalis to give up piracy

11 April 2010 in Africa, Egypt: A senior American official said last Wednesday that Egypt is leading an international working group in the Gulf of Aden and holding direct negotiations with Somali pirates and people of the area to persuade them to intervene and to stop supporting piracy. It comes as Western observers have continued to play down the role of piracy after a turbulent 2008-2009. The statement came in a speech by the Assistant Secretary of State for political-military affairs, Andrew J. Shapiro, to a seminar on law at the American University in Washington. "The Third International Working Group led by Egypt, which is devoted to communication and negotiation on the issues of piracy in Somalia and surrounding areas in order to convince residents that they should not directly engage or even support piracy" is currently underway, Shapiro said. Somalia, a failed state, has lacked an effective central government since 1991, which has led to lawlessness and the take over by warlords. The US State Department said this week that more than 20 countries now participate in the international naval force, which works to secure the navigation in the Gulf of Aden. According to international groups, there are, on any given day, an average of 17 military naval ships patrolling the Gulf of Aden, which is partly related to the traffic channeled through Egypt's Suez Canal. The State Department said in its statement that an international force "is working steadily" and secures now, "about 30,000 cargo ships crossing from this corridor each year, many of which passes through the Suez Canal in Egypt." It should be noted that although the region is witnessing sea patrols, the acts of piracy has made the Horn of Africa one of the most dangerous areas in the world. The region has experienced numerous attacks by pirates, which makes conditions more favorable for fast and small boats used by pirates.

Sandstorm sweeps across Egypt, closing ports

The Associated Press April 11, 2010t - A sandstorm sweeping across parts of Egypt has forced the closure of ports at the mouth of the Suez Canal and a major desert highway through the Sinai Peninsula.

The dust reduced visibility, and winds whipped up 3.5-meter (11-foot) waves on the Red Sea. Maj. Gen. Mamdouh Diraz, head of the Ports Authority, says authorities closed the Tawfik and Ain Sukhna ports at the southern mouth of the Suez Canal. Another port was closed across the Sinai in the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Mediterranean port of El-Arish also had to be shut. A small airport in the northern Sinai was closed. Diraz estimated the winds pushing the dust Sunday were moving at 22 miles (35 kilometers) per hour. Egypt is regularly hit by sandstorms this time of year.

Sudanese in Egypt head to poll

Sunday, April 11, 2010 More than 5,000 Sudanese voters in Egypt head to polls Sunday to cast their votes in the presidential election, a source at the Sudanese Embassy in Cairo said late Saturday. Sudanese civilians and security forces queue to cast their votes outside classrooms turned into polling stations at the St Francis Christian school in Khartoum on April 11, 2010. Polling stations opened for the three-day vote on schedule in Khartoum but e The official said that 5,377 Sudanese people were expected to cast their votes at four polling stations, in Cairo and the coastal city of Alexandria. The electoral process in Egypt was being observed by representatives of the electoral commission as well as Egyptian civil society organizations, the official said. The United Nations had said the Khartoum government was not ready to hold the nationwide April 11-13 balloting for a new president, the first since 1986, because it failed to educate the voters, ensure security and equip voting stations. "Opposition activists have been prevented from carrying out peaceful activities, arrested and tortured. It is clear that elections carried out in this context will be severely compromised." said Osman Hummada, executive director of the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies. Several opposition parties, including The Umma party, one of Sudan's main opposition parties, announced they will boycott the elections, citing fears of rigging.

US urges Egypt to respect rights of protesters

The United States on Wednesday said it was "deeply concerned" about the arrests in Egypt of scores of opposition activists, and urged the Cairo government to respect democratic rights. The statement issued by US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley came as Egypt on Wednesday freed activists linked to top opposition figure Mohamed ElBaradei who had been arrested for planning to stage a demonstration to demand political reforms, officials said. The government, in making the arrests, cited the state of emergency, which restricts some civil liberties. "We are deeply concerned about the arrests of Egyptians under the emergency law," Crowley said. "The government of Egypt must uphold the rights of all people to express their political views peacefully and to ensure due process." State prosecutor Abdel Majid Mahmud on Wednesday ordered the release of 33 people, including 17 students, earlier on Wednesday, a judicial official said. A security source said several others were freed late Tuesday. According to Egyptian and international non-governmental organizations, including New York-based Human Rights Watch, the 91 would-be protesters arrested Tuesday were all members of

the April 6 opposition group that has rallied to the recently formed National Association for Change of former UN nuclear watchdog chief ElBaradei. Members of the group had tried to organize a protest in Cairo to demand political and constitutional reforms as well as the lifting of emergency laws that have been enforced for nearly three decades. Organizers said they were beaten by police and arrested to prevent them from marching to parliament from downtown Cairo.

OBAMA BANS ISLAM, JIHAD FROM US SECURITY STRATEGY

Associated Press April 7, 2010 President Barack Obama's advisers will remove religious terms such as "Islamic extremism" from the central document outlining the US national security strategy and will use the rewritten document to emphasize that the United States does not view Muslim nations through the lens of terror, counterterrorism officials said. The change is a significant shift in the National Security Strategy, a document that previously outlined the Bush Doctrine of preventative war and currently states: "The struggle against militant Islamic radicalism is the great ideological conflict of the early years of the 21st century." The officials described the changes on condition of anonymity because the document still was being written, and the White House would not discuss it. But rewriting the strategy document will be the latest example of Obama putting his stamp on US foreign policy, like his promises to dismantle nuclear weapons and limit the situations in which they can be used. The revisions are part of a larger effort about which the White House talks openly, one that seeks to change not just how the United States talks to Muslim nations, but also what it talks to them about, from health care and science to business startups and education. That shift away from terrorism has been building for a year, since Obama went to Cairo, Egypt, and promised a "new beginning" in the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. The White House believes the previous administration based that relationship entirely on fighting terror and winning the war of ideas. "You take a country where the overwhelming majority are not going to become terrorists, and you go in and say, 'We're building you a hospital so you don't become terrorists.' That doesn't make much sense," said National Security Council staffer Pradeep Ramamurthy. Ramamurthy runs the administration's Global Engagement Directorate, a four-person National Security Council team that Obama launched last May with little fanfare and a vague mission to use diplomacy and outreach "in pursuit of a host of national security objectives." Since then, the division has not only helped change the vocabulary of fighting terror but also has shaped the way the country invests in Muslim businesses, studies global warming, supports scientific research and combats polio. Before diplomats go abroad, they hear from the Ramamurthy or his deputy, Jenny Urizar. When officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration returned from Indonesia, the NSC got a rundown about research opportunities on global warming. Ramamurthy maintains a database of interviews conducted by 50 US embassies worldwide. And business leaders from more than 40 countries head to Washington this month for an "entrepreneurship summit" for Muslim businesses. "Do you want to think about the US as the nation that fights terrorism or the nation you want to do business with?" Ramamurthy said. To deliver that message, Obama's speechwriters have taken inspiration from an unlikely source: former President Ronald Reagan. Visiting communist China in 1984, Reagan spoke to Fudan University in Shanghai about

education, space exploration and scientific research. He discussed freedom and liberty. He never mentioned communism or democracy. "They didn't look up to the US because we hated communism," said Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes, Obama's foreign policy speechwriter. Like Reagan in China, Obama in Cairo made only passing references to terrorism. Instead he focused on cooperation. He announced the United States would team up to fight polio with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a multinational body based in Saudi Arabia. The United States and the OIC had worked together before, but never with that focus. "President Obama saw it as an opportunity to say, 'We work on things far beyond the war on terrorism,'" said World Health Organization spokeswoman Sona Bari. Polio is endemic in three Muslim countries — Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan — but some Muslim leaders have been suspicious of vaccination efforts, which they believed to be part of a CIA sterilization campaign. Last year, the OIC and religious scholars at the International Islamic Fiqh Academy issued a fatwa, or religious decree, that parents should have their children vaccinated. "We're probably entering into a whole new level of engagement between the OIC and the polio program because of the stimulus coming from the US government," said Michael Galway, who works on polio eradication for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Centers for Disease Control also began working more closely with local Islamic leaders in northern Nigeria, a network that had been overlooked for years, said John Fitzsimmons, the deputy director of the CDC's immunization division. Though health officials are reluctant to assign credit to any one action, new polio cases in Nigeria fell from 83 during the first quarter of last year to just one so far this year, Fitzsimmons said. Public opinion polls also showed consistent improvement in US sentiment within the Muslim world last year, although the viewpoints are still overwhelmingly negative, however. Obama did not invent Muslim outreach. President George W. Bush gave the White House its first Quran, hosted its first Iftar dinner to celebrate Ramadan, and loudly stated support for Muslim democracies like Turkey. But the Bush administration struggled with its rhetoric. Muslims criticized him for describing the war against terror as a "crusade" and labeling the invasion of Afghanistan "Operation Infinite Justice" — words that were seen as religious. He regularly identified America's enemy as "Islamic extremists" and "radical jihadists." Karen Hughes, a Bush confidant who served as his top diplomat to the Muslim world in his second term, urged the White House to stop. "I did recommend that, in my judgment, it's unfortunate because of the way it's heard. We ought to avoid the language of religion," Hughes said. "Whenever they hear 'Islamic extremism, Islamic jihad, Islamic fundamentalism,' they perceive it as a sort of an attack on their faith. That's the world view Osama bin Laden wants them to have." Hughes and Juan Zarate, Bush's former deputy national security adviser, said Obama's efforts build on groundwork from Bush's second term, when some of the rhetoric softened. But by then, Zarate said, it was overshadowed by the Guantanamo Bay detention center, the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and a prolonged Iraq war. "In some ways, it didn't matter what the president did or said. People weren't going to be listening to him in the way we wanted them to," Zarate said. "The difference is, President Obama had a fresh start." Obama's foreign policy posture is not without political risk. Even as Obama steps up airstrikes on terrorists abroad, he has proven vulnerable to Republican criticism on security issues at home, such as the failed Christmas Day airline bombing and the announced-then-withdrawn plan to prosecute 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in New York.

Peter Feaver, a Duke University political scientist and former Bush adviser, is skeptical of Obama's engagement effort. It "doesn't appear to have created much in the way of strategic benefit" in the Middle East peace process or in negotiations over Iran's nuclear ambitions, he said. Obama runs the political risk of seeming to adopt politically correct rhetoric abroad while appearing tone deaf on national security issues at home, Feaver said. The White House dismisses such criticism. In June, Obama will travel to Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, and is expected to revisit many of the themes of his Cairo speech. "This is the long-range direction we need to go in," Ramamurthy said.

HRW urges Kuwait to stop deporting ElBaradei supporters

AFP Sunday, April 11, 2010 - Human Rights Watch on Sunday called on Kuwaiti authorities to stop arresting and deporting supporters of leading pro-reform Egyptian activist Mohamed ElBaradei. "Kuwait's state security forces should stop arresting and deporting expatriate supporters" of ElBaradei, the New York-based rights watchdog said in a statement. On Friday Kuwait arrested up to 25 people for organising a small gathering in support of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former chief of the UN atomic agency. At least 17 of them were deported to Egypt the next day. "Kuwait should immediately release all remaining Egyptian detainees and allow those deported to return to their homes in Kuwait," the HRW statement said. Sarah Leah Whitson, HRW's Middle East and North Africa director, warned that Kuwait was "enabling Egypt's repression by harassing ElBaradei supporters." "Kuwaitis should be asking why their security services are harassing Egyptians seeking reform at home, instead of protecting domestic security interests." Kuwaiti Interior Minister Sheikh Jaber Khaled al-Sabah told HRW those arrested and deported broke Kuwait's laws on public gatherings and slander by criticising Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. "They are visitors in Kuwait, and we look at them as visitors in Kuwait. When somebody breaks the law, he has to go back to his country," the minister told HRW. "We don't allow demonstrations in this country." Kuwait's public gatherings law prohibits non-Kuwaitis from participating in processions, demonstrations or public gatherings. Native citizens can organise such rallies without a permit. More than 400,000 Egyptians live and work in the oil-rich Gulf state of Kuwait. ElBaradei has emerged as Egypt's most high-profile pro-reformer after retiring and returning home from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency last year. The 67-year-old has said he would run for president if constitutional restrictions on independent nominations in next year's presidential elections were changed.

Kuwait's deportation of Egyptians slammed

The Egyptian Gazette Sunday, April 11, 2010 Around 15 Egyptian women, flanked by dozens of riot policemen protested a few blocks from the Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo on Sunday over the deportation of around 21 Egyptian supporters of the former chief of the UN nuclear watchdog Mohamed ElBaradei by Kuwaiti authorities. The protestors, led by Gamila Ismail, the wife of opposition dissident Ayman Nour, were prevented from approaching the embassy as they chanted slogans against the Kuwaiti government. "At least 21 Egyptian expatriates have been deported so far," said George Ishaq of the Association of Change Movement, which is urging the former UN nuclear chief to run

for president in 2011. "Around another 20 Egyptians were still being detained in Kuwait said Ishaq," citing colleagues in Kuwait. It is the first time in years that Kuwait has deported groups of expatriate residents for political activity. Human Rights Watch quoted Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Khaled al-Sabah as saying the Egyptians defied a ban on foreigners assembling without permission and engaged in slander by criticising the Egyptian President. "This makes the response of the Kuwaiti authorities even more concerning," said Heba Morayef of HRW. "(They) want to send a strong signal that they won't allow any meetings of this kind." HRW Sunday called on Kuwaiti authorities to stop arresting and deporting supporters of leading pro-reform Egyptian activist Mohamed ElBaradei. "Kuwait's state security forces should stop arresting and deporting expatriate supporters" of ElBaradei, the New York-based rights watchdog said in a statement. ElBaradei has been coy on whether he will run in upcoming elections, but has so far garnered support of prominent opposition figures for his campaign to reform the constitution and expand political participation. Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit said Sunday that his ministry had nothing to do with the deportation of the Egyptians. "We can do nothing since these people violated the laws in Kuwait," Abul Gheit told a Kuwaiti newspaper from Washington to be published tomorrow.

He added that he had no detailed information on the whole matter and that he preferred to get a full idea about what happened before talking about it. According to HRW, three Egyptian citizens were arrested after they attended a meeting in support of ElBaradei on April 8. Others were detained the following day when they gathered outside a supermarket to discuss the arrests. The wife of one of the deported Egyptian residents, Mohamed el-Farghally, told the rights group that her husband did not return after attending a small meeting of ElBaradei supporters at a local cafe. Amira al-Farghally said later that in the evening four men in plain clothes escorted her handcuffed husband home, where they seized T-shirts picturing ElBaradei and Egyptian flags. He was sent back to Egypt.

Economic front:

KAUSHIK BASU COMPARES EGYPT, INDIA ECONOMIES

Daily News Egypt April 5, 2010: If Egypt's latest period of significant economic reform and growth began in 2004, India's began 10 years earlier, said Kaushik Basu, advisor to India's Minister of Finance. The global economic crisis of 2008 slowed India's growth, but as he pointed out, emerging markets were markedly less affected than developed economies. "The financial crisis brewed in the US and Europe and never went to developing countries; however, it became a recessionary tendency for production in developing countries, and subsequently, output dropped. "In India, the growth rate rose from 2003 onward for five years, [then] dropped in one quarter to 5.8 percent, and stayed at around 6 percent for three-quarters of a year, or slightly below. This was very poor, given its recent performance," he added. The Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) at the Egyptian Cabinet recently invited Basu, also a former Cornell professor, to present a paper on cooperation among emerging economies. He spoke with Daily News Egypt prior to meeting with Egyptian Minister of Investment, Mahmoud Mohieldin, about Egypt's similarities to India, and how Egypt could learn from India's ability to achieve economic success while balancing the needs of a large, and largely impoverished

population. Like countries all over the world, including Egypt, the Indian government deployed stimulus packages to jump-start their economy to combat the crisis. “Fiscal deficits went up around the world, some more than they should have,” he explained, “Yet the nature of stimuli was different: in the US it was to help the banks considered ‘too big to fail’. India was lucky, whether by design or otherwise, a few years ago it had begun spending huge amounts of money on the poorer segments of the population. These big injections of cash, like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme — which guaranteed jobs and income for poor rural households — meant that the global slowdown had less effect on India’s poor.” He explained that two years ago, the Indian government had undertaken the controversial decision to give loan waivers to poor farmers, writing off \$15 billion in debts. “It turned out to be a lucky stimulus, because it put more buying power in people’s hands,” he said, exactly at a moment when they might have otherwise felt pinched by economic slowdown. Subsequently, after nine months of poor growth, India surged back to 7.9 percent GDP growth. India’s fiscal year, which ended on March 21, saw growth at 7.2 percent, with projections for fiscal year 2010/11 at 8.5 percent.

Driving growth “India’s fast growth only began in 1994. The main driver was services, IT, software, banking ... India’s service sector has grown faster than any other country’s even China.” He pointed out that growing concern at India’s insufficient manufacturing sector has begun to quiet as the last six months have seen rapid increases in manufacture of heavy capital goods, pharmaceuticals, cars and car parts. “In February we saw 16.7 percent growth in manufacturing,” he stated proudly, though added that “we don’t yet know if this is a fluctuation or the start of a new trend.” Of foreign direct investment (FDI), he sighed, “It’s such a political topic.” He explained the FDI can act as a double-edged sword, because courting investments from large multinational companies can result in exploitation of naïve governments desperate for growth at any cost. He pointed to examples in Latin America where debts incurred by development contracts led the World Bank to essentially take control of the country. In India, however, he believes the country has reached “that critical point” at which legal services have evolved sufficiently to handle large multinationals’ investments safely. He admitted that India had cut a few bad deals, such as with Enron just prior to its collapse in 2001. In terms of Egypt’s situation, he said, “Savings and investment figures could do with a push. One of the factors that helped India grow rapidly was a savings rate of 32.5 percent of national income ... There is 23 percent savings in Egypt. If this were pushed up, it could grow faster. Egypt’s high human capital is comparable to India’s, although Egypt is in fact richer than India, average per capita income is 60 percent higher even now.”

On innovation Yet more than investment, Egypt needs new ideas. The US remains exemplary in this, Basu said, by funding experts and academics to innovate new ways to innovate not just in science but in management. “In India there used to be a total lack of [this]. Now there is a huge amount. The group that invited me to Egypt, the IDSC is exactly that, its function is to generate ideas for the cabinet and government.” He commended India for its early investment in institutes of science and technology, how the city of Bangalore experienced a boom as a result, similarly to how investment in Stanford University led to the tech boom in Silicon Valley. However, he warned that while India invested heavily in higher education in the 1950s and 60s following independence, similar to Egypt under Nasser, and is still reaping the benefits, education has received less support in recent years. “Malaysia and China have been investing heavily in higher

education... I would say to Egyptians, don't ignore this sector," he warned. Of the topic of cooperation between emerging countries, the subject he came to Egypt to discuss, he pointed to the relationship between India and Egypt. "Trade between the two has been growing rapidly, up to \$3.8 billion last year. Egypt has the trade surplus, while India has the investment surplus, although there is investment in both directions; Orascom has invested in India. "Both countries are known to be relatively tolerant big nations with civilizational commonalities and the possibility to grow immensely. In addition, the USA is a crucial trading partner." He suggested that the Egyptian and Indian governments communicate more, that leaders all over the developing world could contribute to global stability by building stronger relationships. Specifically, he advocated the exchange of students, especially in the IT and research fields, to help with cross-fertilization of ideas. Areas of bureaucracy reform and poverty reduction are also common to many developing markets, and to India and Egypt in particular. "Encouraging markets to function is good for growth, but they don't have a natural mechanism for removing poverty. For this, the government must act. It's true everywhere that the market can't pull people in; there needs to be a direct measure for poverty reduction." Although he denied overt rivalry between India and China, he twice cited the prediction from *The Economist* that 2011 would see 8.1 percent growth for China and 8 percent growth for India; he pointed out that estimates are overly conservative, but regardless, growth should be almost equal. "China's growth spurt began in 1978, while India's didn't begin until 1994. One very important difference is that the Chinese government is much more in command of the economy, 40 percent of China's national income comes from government owned industries while in India it's only 14 percent." "Most textbooks will tell you that if the government is so involved in the economy, it won't do well. China contradicts that. However, it carries a certain amount of risk, because if something goes wrong in an overly centralized system, it can backfire rapidly. "I do believe that India's system of multiple sectors and less control is ultimately stable. Yes, there are troubled regions and significant poverty. But it's my hunch that India's on more solid footing than China. Still, the per capita income in China is double India's, wealth is better distributed among people." That emerging economies drive world economic growth he termed an "accepted view," but he acknowledged that such a significant change in the balance of economic power amounted to a paradigm change, a "tectonic shift that could give rise to earthquakes." "More trade flows more through the Straights of Malaka between Malaysia and Singapore, than any other part of the world."

<http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=28914>

Egyptian Inflation Slowed to 12.2% in March (Update2)

April 10 (Bloomberg) -- Egypt's inflation rate declined for a second month in March, giving the central bank more room to keep its benchmark interest rates at a three-year low. Urban inflation, the main rate the central bank monitors, slowed to 12.2 percent from 12.8 percent in February, according to the [Web site](#) of the Cairo-based Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. In the month, prices rose 0.7 percent. "While we expected higher monthly inflation, the magnitude of the monthly change is lower than we expected," said Reham El-Desoki, senior economist at Cairo-based investment bank Beltone Financial. "We had anticipated that the increase in

transportation costs could result in a higher change in prices of food during the month."The central bank, which meets to decide on rates every six weeks, has kept its key overnight deposit rate at 8.25 percent for the past four meetings, citing "subdued" inflationary pressures. It cut rates six times in 2009 to help the economy through the global financial crisis, which reduced investment and damped revenue from tourism and fees from the Suez Canal. The bank's next meeting on rates is on May 6. The cost of food and drinks, which make up more than 45 percent of the consumer price index, rose 1.4 percent in the month and 21.3 percent annually, the agency said. Egypt expects economic growth of 5.2 percent in the fiscal year through June, compared with 4.7 percent in the previous fiscal year, Economic Development Minister Osman Mohamed Osman said on March 25. Growth in the construction industry is expected to accelerate to 13.2 percent in the next fiscal year from 12.5 percent this one, while agriculture is forecast to expand 3.4 percent in both years, the Economic Development Ministry said.

Egyptians angry at banning China phones

Xinhua Sunday, April 11, 2010 Egypt's National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) announced in February that the country's three mobile operators would block service to all anonymous users and made-in-China cell phones which have repetitive serial numbers. NTRA officials said the ban is still in force in April, adding that it is impossible to cut the service from all the unknown mobile phones at the same time as the market may be shocked. The decision of NTRA came as it sees that these phones affect Egyptians' health and they can not be traced because they hold the same serial numbers of the well known international mobile brands. "I have been selling made-in-China mobile phones for two years, none of my customers complained of any healthy problem," said el- Khteib. Made-in-China mobile phones flooded into the Egyptian market six years ago, posing fierce competition to other brands. The number of made-in-China mobile phones is estimated at more than 2 million in Egypt. "I believe that the decision of the Egyptian government to ban these phones is wrong as it affects our business badly," said Abo Seif, who owns a mobile phone shop in the same street. "Before the ban, I sold 100 made-in-China mobile phones every day, but now, I sell just five to 10 per day," Abo Seif complained. Vodafone, one of the mobile service operators in Egypt, announced on Saturday that it had banned more than 59,000 unregistered mobile phones, denying that these phones are made-in- China only and asserting that most of the best mobile phones are made in China. The made-in-China phones are cheap enough to meet the needs of people with limited incomes in the country, its price starts from 150 Egyptian pounds (about \$27). The ratio of poor Egyptians to the country's whole population reached 23.4 per cent in the fiscal year from July 2008 to June 2009, compared to 20 per cent in the previous fiscal year. Meanwhile, the economic growth in Egypt registered 7.4 per cent in the fiscal year from July 2008 to June 2009 against 7.2 percent in the previous fiscal year. "Chinese gadgets have very good features, music player, two cameras, Bluetooth, two SIMs, above all the low price," said Nadia Mustafa, a user of made-in-China mobile phone. "No doubt, made-in-China mobile phones have great advantages," said Mahfouz Helali, who has two Chinese phones. Despite NTRA's decision, some Egyptians are still willing to use made-in-China phones. "Even if these mobile phones were banned, I will buy the latest model at the lowest price," said Ali Ahmed, a made-in-China mobile phone user. "I had been using this phone till the ban is imposed," said Essam Salam, a 29-

year-old journalist, wondering why the Egyptian government had allowed these phones to enter if they would ban them later. The ban affects not only mobile phone businessmen, but also those who sell mobile phone accessories. Their businesses retreated as they count on users of Chinese mobile phones in the first place. "The ban affected our business too, I sell less mobile phone accessories than before," said Alaa Mohamed, the owner of a mobile phone accessories shop. Some other users of made-in-China mobile phones expressed their happiness when they were told that their phones' types will not be banned as they meet the Egyptian quality requirements. "I was so happy when a friend told me that my phone is approved," said Samir Ali, a Chinese phone user.

Social front

The death and reincarnation of Islam Online

Islam On-line workers on strike

It seems the Islam Online saga is finally drawing to an end, although not necessarily the one hoped for by employees of its Cairo-based office. Reporters for the influential Islamic news website went on strike three weeks ago, protesting the "unethical involvement" and "lack of transparency" displayed by their parent organization's newly-elected board of directors. The Islamic Message Society, based in Qatar, had apparently been pushing the website--previously known for its moderate tone and tolerant views--in a "more conservative direction," according to a former employee of the organization. "The board of directors was not honest nor straightforward with us," says Fathi Abu Hatab. "Instead of communicating with us, their attitude was 'we are the owners, we can do anything we want.' They don't seem to realize that being financiers does not grant them the right to make editorial decisions." Apprehensive of the changes being made, employees of the Cairo office turned to Egyptian cleric Sheikh Youssef el-Qaradawi, who helped found the website in 1999 and has since remained a member of the Islamic Message Society's board of directors. Insisting that the website would not be "hijacked," Qaradawi did his best to reassure the reporters. However, the cleric's words did little to calm the website's staff. After several unsuccessful attempts at obtaining any explanation from their board of directors, reporters at the Cairo office were finally visited by representatives of the society--arriving in the form of an "investigation committee." "They [the committee members] obviously had their own agenda," says Abu Hatab of the visit, which suspiciously coincided with Qaradawi's trip to Saudi Arabia for a medical procedure. "We met with the committee; we tried to talk to them and even gave them our notes on everything we wanted to discuss. They acted like they were very interested," Abu Hatab recalls. "But when they left, they didn't even take our notes with them. They left them behind in our office." The final straw came when one newly-elected board member, Ali el-Amadi, flew into Cairo on a weekend, "knowing that there would be much less people in the office," explains Abu Hatab. Accompanied by an IT engineer from London, el-Amadi acquired the Cairo office's administrative passwords and promptly returned to Qatar, using the newly obtained information to restrict reporters from accessing the server. The incident left employees at the Cairo office furious and confused. "[El-Amadi] claims he was acting as an owner," says Abu Hatab. "If so, why sneak around like a thief?" Subsequently, Cairo reporters staged a sit-in, held at their 6th of October city headquarters, which belong to Media International Misr--a Saudi-Qatari

company independent from the Islamic Message Society. For a while, the strike seemed effective, with an emergency meeting of board members in Qatar resulting in the suspension of el-Amadi as well as Ibrahim el-Ansari--the two men widely believed to have instigated the whole controversial process of change. However, the decision did not last and following a series of murky events both el-Amadi and el-Ansari were reinstated. Most debilitating of all, however, was the sudden involvement of the Qatari Ministry of Social Affairs, which decided to remove Sheikh Youssef el-Qaradawi from the board of directors. "It's obvious now that there was a plan to move the whole site to Qatar from the very beginning," says Abu Hatab. "Even Sheikh Qaradawi didn't know about it, and that's why he's claiming now to have been betrayed." The board of directors' objective, explains Abu Hatab, is to distance any non-Qatari funding and contributions. That, and the desire to present a more conservative outlook, as Abu Hatab repeatedly states. "The English section [of the website] has not been updated for a while because of the strike," he says. "But if you were to go onto the Arabic section, which is now being written by newly-employed reporters in Qatar, you'll notice the difference. They've removed several of our older columns and features and even the layout is more conservative," he claims. "In one photograph, they even removed the heads of the women." While it is clear that the Islam Online painstakingly nurtured by the website's Cairo reporters is no more, the controversy is far from over. "El-Ansari has been on Al Jazeera five times in the past week, stating that the issue has been settled and that the Cairo employees have received their settlement pay," Abu Hatab angrily explains. "But they haven't. In the meantime, we can't get on Al Jazeera even once to state the truth, which is that the majority of us still haven't received anything in terms of pay." "Our struggle was based on our jobs, as well as supporting moderate Islam," Abu Hatab sighs. Ultimately, though, despite the disappointment over the changes that essentially forced them out of a job, former employees of Islam Online have not given up on the vision that has been fuelling their work for the past decade. "We're going to start a new project, a new website in the spirit of Islam Online," Abu Hatab explains, claiming to have already received the blessings and promises of support from both Sheikh Qaradawi as well as Media International Misr, enabling employees the opportunity to pick up exactly where they left off--in their own offices. "We will no longer be under the mercy of a single funder," Abu Hatab says. "And it will reach out to the whole world, instead of limiting its scope." The as-yet-unnamed website is set to be launched within the coming two weeks.

Egypt releases anti-Mubarak protesters

Wed Apr 7, 2010 - A senior Egyptian official on Wednesday ordered the release of more than 30 protesters detained for demonstrating against the government of President Hosni Mubarak. Of the 93 people that police arrested for demonstrating in Cairo on Tuesday, 60 were released the same evening, a security source said. On Wednesday, General Prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmoud ordered the rest to be released, his media office said. The 33 released on Wednesday face charges including taking part in an illegal movement and creating a disturbance, the Interior Ministry said in a statement. If convicted, the protesters, mostly young people, could get long jail terms.

The protests on the streets of Cairo this week may signal more political ferment to come ahead of Egypt's parliamentary election late this year and a presidential vote in 2011,

which could challenge or cement the enduring rule of Mubarak, who has led Egypt since 1981. The pro-reform group behind the protest, the Sixth of April Youth, is one of the few grassroots groups actively challenging the government as it seeks constitutional amendments and an end to an emergency law that sanctions indefinite detentions. Rights groups condemned the government forces' response to Tuesday's protests, when riot police beat people with sticks and dragged dozens of others away. "This is only the beginning ... We are in the early stages of witnessing bigger movements urging democracy," said Gamal Eid, head of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. Mubarak's National Democratic Party is expected to win an overwhelming majority in parliament. But human rights groups, which have long complained of manipulation of Egyptian voting, are calling for international oversight of the elections. Mubarak, 81, has not said whether he will run for a sixth presidential term but, if he does not, many Egyptians believe he will try to hand power to his son, Gamal, 46. **SMALL STEPS** Such demonstrations rarely occur in Egypt, the most populous Arab country and an important U.S. ally in the Middle East. Protests are usually quashed by local forces swiftly. On Wednesday, the government said 10 police were injured when protesters threw stones at them. But in a city of nearly 20 million people, the fleeting demonstration of several hundred protesters was a reminder of the delicate steps toward political change in Egypt. "People must go to the street and protest. This is the only way to achieve political reform and change," said Mahmoud El-Khoudairy, a prominent judge who resigned in protest in 2009 over what he called government corruption and interference in judicial rulings. He has joined a number of street protests. "We are 80 million, we can do something," Khoudairy said in a recent interview. Analysts say the government's tough response to these street movements indicates its fear of their influence on the public. Yet there are powerful obstacles to change. Protest movements gained some momentum before 2005 elections, when Western powers pressured Egypt to open to democracy, but the government cracked down once outside scrutiny subsided. Nabil Abdel Fattah, political analyst at the Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic and Political Studies in Cairo, said protesters could only prompt real change if they broadened their support and took on a more traditional political role. "Then, together, they can challenge the current political regime and break the chains now restricting political activity." While most of Egypt's political parties talk about reform, none of them took part in Tuesday's protest. Nor have they backed previous demonstrations from the April 6 movement or Kefaya (Enough), Egypt's only other active protest movement. The Muslim Brotherhood, the country's biggest political opposition group, won a minority stake in parliament in the last polls in 2005, but it has eschewed street protests. Opposition leader Ayman Nour, who came in a distant second in the 2005 presidential race, and about 20 supporters were blocked from reaching central Cairo's Tahrir Square on Tuesday. "The strong presence of security forces on the streets in Cairo simply illustrates the current Egyptian governing mentality," Nour said before the protests.

EGYPT SLAMS US CRITICISM OVER DETAINING PROTESTERS

Associated Press: April 9, 2010 Egypt has dismissed US criticism of its detention of scores of protesters who rallied earlier this week in Cairo demanding constitutional reforms to allow more open elections. Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said in a statement released late Thursday that Egyptian elections are an internal matter. "The

(US) remarks, without clear justification, shifted from talking about the arrests to other internal political Egyptian issue in an unfamiliar pattern which is not accepted by Egypt," said Zaki. He was referring to Washington concerns expressed Wednesday by State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley over the arrests. In his remarks, Crowley called on Egypt to allow its people to determine who will run and win the country's upcoming elections. Tens of protesters were arrested when police beat the demonstrators and violently broke up Tuesday's gathering. The detained were released the following day without any official explanation. Zaki said that "Egyptians don't accept that foreign governments speak on their behalf." The Egyptian government is very sensitive about foreign reports about opposition demands for reforms to allow an open presidential contest in the polling next year. Egypt's leading Al-Ahram newspaper carried Zaki's statement splashed across the front page of its evening edition Friday, under a bold red headline: "Egypt tells America in an urgent message: Stay where you are." Al-Ahram also published Friday interviews with several opposition lawmakers and two university professors, all denouncing what is described as US interference in Egypt's internal affairs. Tuesday's protest was organized by the April 6 Youth Movement and officials had said that the protest was banned and illegal. New York-based Human Rights Watch also voiced its concern over the crackdown and condemned the "lawless brutality" with which police dispersed the demonstrators. Egypt has been under emergency law, which severely restricts civil rights, for 29 years during the rule of President Hosni Mubarak, who will stand for re-election in 2011. The unofficial candidacy of former UN nuclear watchdog chief and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohammed ElBaradei has garnered much national support and media attention worldwide.

AL-AZHAR SHEIKH STIRS ANGER WITH ANTI-SHIA COMMENTS

The Media Line: April 7, 2010: Shia clerics are warning that comments made by the new Grand Sheikh of the renowned Sunni Al-Azhar institute in Egypt risk fuelling the divide between the two sects of Islam. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb reportedly said he was against "any attempt to spread the Shia school of thought in any Islamic country, or to spread Shia cells among Sunni youth," the same way he said Iran was fighting attempts to spread Sunni thought among Shias. Al-Tayeb, who was appointed the grand imam of Al-Azhar on March 19, just over a week after the sudden death of his predecessor, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, said Al-Azhar would continue conducting ideological outreach with Shias as a strategy to defuse tensions between the two groups. Ayatollah Hashem Bushehri, a prominent Iranian Shia cleric based in Qom and a member of the influential Assembly of Experts, said Al-Tayeb was "sowing the seeds of strife." Bushehri, who is also a close aide to Iran's spiritual leader Ali Khamanei, accused the head of Al-Azhar of creating a "tense atmosphere" and "providing ammunition to those who only understand the language of fear-mongering and terrorism." The latest tit-for-tat between the scholars underlines not only the growing tension between the two schools of thought throughout the Muslim world, but also the claims that Al-Azhar, described as the most important center of Sunni Muslim thought, has become overly politicized. Khaled Hroub, from the Center of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge, said these comments illustrate how Al-Azhar has been taken over by the Egyptian government during the past three decades. "Regarding his comments on the Shia expanding into Sunni communities, I think it's a political consideration rather than religious," Hroub told

The Media Line. “Al-Azhar was hijacked by the state in the early 60s and functions as a tool in the hands of the government. If we consider that Al-Tayeb himself is a high-ranking member of the ruling party, you can see further into this issue,” he said. “We can better understand his comments when we view the tacit hostility of Egypt against the Iranian influence and leverage across the region.” Egypt has been at odds with Iran, an Islamic Shia state, for over three decades. Tehran cut diplomatic relations with Cairo following then-president Anwar Sadat’s signing of the Camp David peace agreement with Israel in 1979. Sadat’s welcoming of the fallen Shah of Iran following the collapse of his regime in 1979 thus sharpening the tensions between the two countries. This was compounded when an Iranian street was named after Khalid Al-Islambouli, the man who assassinated Sadat, in 1981. Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear bomb has added fuel to the tensions with Sunni governments, including Egypt, who are concerned about the prospect of Iran becoming a regional nuclear power. This has been one of the issues widening the gap between Sunnis and Shias throughout the region. Shias constitute between 10 and 15 percent of Muslims and are dispersed across the Arab world, with major clusters in the Gulf region. The main bone of contention between Sunnis and Shias is the issue of succession to the Prophet Mohamed, who died in the seventh century. Iran has the highest concentration of Shias, with the vast majority of its 70 million-strong population adhering to this branch of Islam. Around two-thirds of the Muslims in Iraq are Shia, and a large concentration of Shias are in Bahrain (around 70 percent), Oman, the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan and Lebanon. “Back in the 30s, 40s and 50s Al-Azhar was a leading force in the dialogue between Sunni and Shia Muslims,” Hroub explained, “and they even acknowledged Shia as an integral part of the Muslim doctrine and a legitimate school of thought, but now [Al-Tayeb] is going back to square one. I think it’s a political statement. What we’re seeing is a reactionary position.” This is also likely to have a negative impact on Sunni-Shia relations, Hroub explained. “It will intensify the religious conspiracy between the two groups and give justification to radicals on both sides, who will receive these comments wholeheartedly and justify killings.” In interviews with BBC Arabic and the pan-Arab Al-Arabiya this week, Al-Tayeb expressed fears about Shiism encroaching into Sunni communities, saying “I feel there is a plan here, not for outreach but rather to convert Sunni youth to Shiism.” Al-Tayeb, 64, said he would try to confront any political agendas among Shia students studying in Egypt but added that he welcomed Shia students who wished to study at Al-Azhar, because he considered it an opportunity for them to gain knowledge about Sunni thought. This is not the first time Al-Tayeb, who was appointed by presidential decree, has drawn fire since he took office. He has been steadily criticized for being a member of the policies committee of the ruling National Democratic Party. Al-Tayeb insinuated during the interview that he might soon rescind his membership of the NDP if this will serve the interests of Al-Azhar. However, he said he did not see a contradiction between his NDP membership and his position at Al-Azhar. The issue is especially sensitive now, since both legislative and presidential elections are slated to take place in Egypt over the next 18 months. President Hosni Mubarak’s NDP will try to garner as much support as it can in the run-up to the elections. The party fears that the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest and most popular opposition movement, is more likely to gain the Muslim vote.

ELBARADEI NEEDS TO DEVELOP A RIGHTS AGENDA, SAYS ACTIVIST

Daily News Egypt: April 8, 2010: Mohamed ElBaradei, chair of the National Coalition for Change, met with 10 human rights organizations on Tuesday to discuss “the human rights situation in Egypt and its main priorities”, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) said in a statement. CIHRS General Director Bahey Eddin Hassan told Daily News Egypt that the two and a half hour meeting took place as security forces violently broke up a peaceful demonstration in Cairo. “Government repression was inevitably the departure point of discussions,” Hassan said. The former IAEA chief, who is spearheading a movement for political reform ahead of the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, discussed a range of “pressing issues” with the NGOs including the anticipated extension of the state of emergency, the draft law on civil society associations which has been widely condemned as restricting NGO activity, the situation of Egypt’s Copts, and workers’ rights including the recent court decision obliging the government to set a minimum wage, according to Hassan. State-run daily Al-Ahram published on Thursday an attack on ElBaradei by Abdel-Meneim El-A’zaly, deputy head of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, who criticized ElBaradei’s demand that the 50 percent quota of seats given to workers and farmers in the People’s Assembly under the Constitution be abolished. Hassan supported ElBaradei’s demand, describing this Constitution article as a political device. “NGOs don’t believe that this article protects workers. However, our main concern is not this or that article of the Constitution, but that he should develop a rights-based rather than charity discourse when it comes to the disadvantaged in Egypt,” Hassan said. “Injustice in Egypt is everywhere. ElBaradei should adopt the right approach. He needs to develop a human rights agenda — not just respond to events but rather put in place a long-term agenda.” Hassan says that ElBaradei and the NGOs have planned another meeting, and that, “future cooperation depends on how such dialogue between ElBaradei and the NGOs is concluded. We still need more discussions”. CIHRS also says in its statement issued Wednesday that the Forum of Independent Human Rights Organizations will meet Minister of Legal Affairs Mufid Shehab on April 15, 2010 to follow-up on the “latest developments concerning the government’s stance on the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations”. In February Egypt agreed to a list of 119 recommendations at the United Nations Human Rights Council made by other Council member states. Egypt deferred a decision concerning other recommendations until the adoption of the final UPR report in June. Hassan said that security forces’ response to the April 6 demonstration, as well as the anticipated extension of the state of emergency in May demonstrates that, “the government is working in the opposite direction of the UPR recommendations”. Hassan recently met US Ambassador to Egypt Margaret Scobey, who Ministry of Social Solidarity officials last month claimed had approved repressive articles of the draft law on civil society currently before parliament. “Scobey denied approving repressive articles in the draft NGO law, saying that she has not seen a draft and that she would not agree to any law that constrains NGO activity if consulted on it,” Hassan told Daily News Egypt.

Islamists, Gov't face tough polls

Sunday, April 4, 2010 MEMBERS of the banned Muslim Brotherhood group have recently announced that they intend to nominate a number of their members to run in the Shura Council (the Upper House of the Egyptian Parliament) elections that will be held

next June. For more parliamentary seats: In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the banned Muslim Brotherhood group fielded 150 independent candidates, who won a fifth of the seats of the People's Assembly (the Lower House of the Egyptian Parliament). This seems to be a challenge to the Government, which has arrested members of the movement, who are planning to run in the elections. The Government has also broken up public protests in which the Brotherhood members have taken part. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, held two months after the country's first ever multi-candidate presidential election, won by President Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood won a fifth of parliamentary seats. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood ran over 150 independent candidates. This time round, it has been reported that the group has decided not to field candidates in certain constituencies, while Brotherhood sources say that the security services have put pressure on their candidates not to mention the group's name or their slogan. Mohamed Saad el-Katatni, who is responsible for parliamentary affairs in the Brotherhood, says that the outlawed group will compete for only 20 per cent of the seats in the mid-term Shura Council elections. "The Shura Council is a consultative body, which studies draft laws without issuing decisions" that is the task of the People's Assembly," explains el-Katatni, who has called for all opposition parties to participate in the Shura Council polls. He added in press remarks that the Brotherhood hoped that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) allowed the elections to be conducted fairly. Former co-ordinator of the Kifaya (Enough) movement, George Ishaq, says that no one can predict what the Brotherhood might be planning, as it has a special agenda. "It announces part of its agenda but not the rest, which means their position is an ambiguous one," he adds. According to Ishaq, the Brotherhood has the right to contest the elections, but, if there is fraud, none of the opposition parties will gain any seats in the next Shura Council and People's Assembly elections. Ihab el-Kholi, head of the opposition Ghad (Tomorrow) Party, says that the Brotherhood is the only group able to compete with the NDP in the Shura Council polls. He doubts that the forthcoming elections will be transparent.

Iraq Elections

IRAQ ELECTION PROCESS (SUMMARY)

Iraq's general elections, held on March 7, have been heralded as a landmark for the country's emerging democracy, but the system itself is extremely complicated.

According to the electoral law amended in 2009, the seats of the Iraqi parliament have been increased from 275 to 325 seats (In December 2009, after much dispute in parliament, the number of seats was increased to 325 for Iraq's 18 provinces. This translates roughly to 1 seat per 100,000 people.). Around 18.9 million domestic voters and 97,000 expatriates were registered. Female representatives must comprise 25 per cent of the 325 seats in the Iraqi parliament a total of 82 seats.

Elections in Iraq was different from the 2005 elections as 2005 election was based on a closed list system which meant the voter knew the parties included in the list but not the

individual candidates. Such a system paved the way for widespread accusations of corruption and fraud with allegations that some parties relied on family ties and allies to allot seats. In the 2010 election the open list system means voters know the names and identities of candidates in the list they are voting for. The open list system allows the voter to express their preference for a candidate within that list. The number of such individual votes will determine which candidates will win a seat. "Open list" system allows for direct representation and greater transparency. The open-list electoral system was first applied during provincial elections in January 2009.

To win a seat in parliament the candidate or list should win the number of valid votes at least equal to the electoral divider. For example, in a governorate of 10 seats and 10,000 valid votes, a candidate or a list must earn 1,000 votes to get a seat. A party would need 163 seats to form a government, but the proportional representation system makes it unlikely that any single party would achieve that figure and a period of coalition building is expected.

Out of the total 325 seats, 310 are distributed over Iraq's 18 governorates, according to each one's population. Eight seats are reserved for minorities and the remaining seven seats are "compensatory seats". Compensatory seats are awarded to winning lists in proportion to the governorate seats they won in the country as a whole. A winning list's compensatory seats are awarded to the candidates who did not win a seat, but who received the list's highest share of individual votes when compared to candidates running for that list in other governorates.

Iraqi National Alliance

The coalition is the successor to the United Iraqi Alliance (U.I.A.), the Shiite coalition that dominated the 2005 election but fell apart soon after. It is now the main Shiite opposition to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, and includes the powerful Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (I.S.C.I.) and the political followers of the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr, as well as smaller parties. Leading candidates will be a former prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and one of Iraq's two vice presidents, Adel Abdul Mahdi.

This coalition primarily grew out of the United Iraqi Alliance, which held 47 percent of the seats in Parliament in 2005.

KEY LEADERS

Ammar al-Hakim

SHIITE Became leader of the I.S.C.I. (formerly Sciri), one of the two main Shiite parties, when his father died.

Ibrahim al-Jaafari

SHIITE Former prime minister. Left Dawa, one of the two most powerful Shiite parties, to form a new party in 2008.

Moktada al-Sadr

SHIITE Leads an anti-American group with a strong militia. Loose link to the U.I.A.

State of Law Coalition

Led by Prime Minister Maliki, and dominated by his party, Dawa, which broke off from the U.I.A. Largely Shiite, it also includes 40 smaller parties from across Iraq's ethnic and religious spectrum. The group did well in last year's provincial elections by focusing on security and the establishment of effective local governments.

Mr. al-Maliki was one of the leaders of the United Iraqi Alliance, which held 47 percent of the seats in Parliament in 2005.

KEY LEADERS

Nuri Kamal al-Maliki

SHIITE Current prime minister. Left the U.I.A. to recast himself as secular.

Hajim al-Hassani

SUNNI Former speaker of the National Assembly.

Sheik Ali Hatem al-Suleiman

SUNNI A powerful tribal leader in Anbar Province.

Iraqi Unity

Secular alliance between Shiites and Sunnis, particularly in sprawling Anbar Province. Led by the interior minister, Jawad al-Bolani, a Shiite, and Anbar's most prominent tribal leader, Sheik Ahmed Abu Risha. Many of its candidates were disqualified because of pasts or sympathies with Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. The coalition's members considered joining other larger coalitions, but could not agree on terms.

Some of the leaders from this group were part of the Iraqi Consensus Front, which held 16 percent of the seats in Parliament in 2005.

KEY LEADERS

Jawad al-Bolani

SHIITE Interior minister. Part of a coalition that won no seats in 2005.

Sheik Ahmed Abu Risha

SUNNI A leader of the Awakening movement in Anbar Province.

Sheik Ahmed Abdul Ghafur al-Samaraci

SUNNI Leads a party with Shiite and Sunni religious groups.

Iraqiya

A largely secular Sunni and Shiite coalition that has emerged as a potent challenger to the Shiite-led blocs. Led by a former prime minister, Ayad Allawi, a Shiite, and the country's other vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, a Sunni. Two of its other leaders, Saleh al-Mutlaq and Dhafir al-Ani, both members of Parliament, were disqualified from running because of alleged sympathies with the Baath Party.

Members of this group came from two coalitions, the Iraqi List and the Iraqi Consensus Front, which together held a quarter of the seats in Parliament in 2005.

KEY LEADERS

Ayad Allawi

SHIITE Former prime minister with strong links to Western and Arab countries.

Saleh al-Mutlaq

SUNNI Former candidate, now barred from the election.

Tariq al-Hashimi

SUNNI A current vice president. He ran with the Sunni coalition in 2005.

Iraqi Accord

Also known as Tawafiq, it is made up almost entirely of the Iraqi Islamic Party, whose fortunes have waned in recent years. Many of the more secular Sunni leaders joined other alliances, like Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, who jumped to Iraqiya. Its most prominent candidate is the speaker of the current Parliament, Ayad al-Samarrai.

This coalition is a remnant of the Iraqi Accord Front, which held 16 percent of the seats in Parliament in 2005, after many of its members joined other coalitions.

KEY LEADERS

Osama Tikriti

SUNNI Current secretary general and co-leader of the Iraqi Islamic Party.

Ayad al-Samarrai

SUNNI Current speaker of Parliament.

Kurdistan Alliance

The two dominant Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (K.D.P.) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (P.U.K.), have formed a formidable alliance, but face an opposition movement called Gorran, or Change. Expected to form a unified Kurdish bloc in Parliament — in keeping with the old Kurdish saying, "We have no friends but the mountains" — and could be a swing vote in determining the next prime minister.

This group has most of the same players as the Kurdistan Alliance, which held 19 percent of the seats in Parliament in 2005.

KEY LEADERS

Massoud Barzani

KURD President of the Kurdistan region.

Jalal Talabani

KURD Iraq's president and co-leader of the P.U.K.

Gorran

A new reform group opposed to corruption within Kurdish politics, it is expected to win about 5 percent of the vote. Election experts expect it to join the Kurdistan Alliance after the elections.

KEY LEADERS

Nawshirwan Mustafa

KURDCo-founded the P.U.K., but left in 2009 to create a Gorran.

For the first time since 2003, Kurdish parties will not be running as a unified coalition in national elections.

Political front

Iran Urges Formation Of Unity Government In Iraq

April 11, 2010 (Reuters) -- Iran has urged leaders in neighboring Iraq to form a national unity government that includes Sunni Muslims. Iranian Ambassador Hassan Kazemi Qomi said the Iraqiya coalition, which includes Sunnis and Shi'ites and won the largest share of seats in last month's parliamentary election, would hold discussions in Tehran in the coming days. Iraqi political leaders have been in talks to form a government since the inconclusive election. Shi'ite Iran has in the past advocated a Shi'ite-dominated government. "We support and encourage the participation of all the parties, but this is an internal Iraqi thing. It is only consulting [with Iraqiya], no more," Qomi told a news conference in Baghdad. "We are open to all parties." Since the vote, a number of delegations from Shi'ite and Kurdish factions have travelled to Tehran for talks. Iraqiya leader Iyad Allawi, a secular Shi'ite and former prime minister, had criticised opponents for going to Iran after the polls. Asked about Qomi's comments, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill, said: "I think that's up to the Iraqis to decide." Iraqiya finished first in the election with 91 seats, two ahead of the State of Law coalition of Prime Minister Nuri Maliki. Anti-U.S. cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who could play a key role in choosing a prime minister able to command a majority, echoed Qomi's remarks, saying he supported a government that included all Iraqi factions. In a rare interview on Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television, Sadr said Maliki would be an unacceptable choice as prime minister in the new government. An internal referendum in the Sadrist party last week backed former prime minister Ibrahim Jaafari for the post. "This is the will of the people and I have to carry it out," said Sadr, whose followers won about 40 seats as part of the third-placed Iraqi National Alliance. It was not clear when or where the interview was filmed. Sadr, who has been studying theology in Iran for two years, said he did not reject Allawi as a prospective prime minister, but that his voter base was concerned that Allawi was close to supporters of the ousted dictator Saddam Hussein. The inconclusive election promised weeks of potentially divisive talks between political blocs to form a new government. There has been an upsurge in bombings and other attacks since the beginning of the month, in which more than 100 people have been killed.

Iraqis Debate The Reach Of De-Ba'athification Law

April 06, 2010- Officials responsible for Iraq's de-Ba'athification process say not all ministries and state institutions have complied with the measures aimed at purging those with links to the regime of Saddam Hussein and his disbanded Ba'ath Party, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq (RFI) reports. Ali Allami, the executive director of the Accountability and Justice Commission, told RFI on April 3 that the commission "will now take measures against the ministers who did not apply [de-Ba'athification] measures" to its employees, adding that these officials will be referred to the Integrity Commission. But Abdul Halim Ahmad, a spokesman for the Council of Ministers' National Reconciliation Committee, disagrees with such actions by the commission. Ahmad told RFI that de-Ba'athification is meant only to target the "Saddamists" and Ba'athists -- those who committed crimes against the people of Iraq -- not officials blamed for not prosecuting them. Ahmad added that 60,000 people were forced from their positions in state institutions for being former Ba'athists or having connections to Hussein. But he said that 45,000 later returned to their jobs. He said the National Reconciliation Committee is insisting that the files of those returnees not be reopened again unless it is proven that they have renewed their connections with Ba'athist organizations or terrorists. Allami said his commission does have new evidence that sheds light on the status of some officials who are still working or returned to work in government institutions. He said he wants those people to be within the purview of the de-Ba'athification law. But legal expert Tariq Harb told RFI that the Iraqi Constitution says who is to be included in the de-Ba'athification process. "Article 135 of the constitution is very clear," he said. "It says being a former member of the Ba'ath Party does not justify legally prosecuting a person and such people have all the rights of any other Iraqi." After Saddam's fall in 2003, Iraqi security forces and state institutions were purged of members of the Sunni-dominated Ba'ath Party. In January of this year, a panel led by Shi'ite lawmakers banned more than 400 election candidates connected to the Ba'ath Party, causing uproar among many Sunnis.

Another National Unity Government in Baghdad?

April 09, 2010- As the political horse-trading among Iraq's political factions drags on in the wake of the country's parliamentary elections last month, there has been a growing call for the formation of another so-called national unity government, which would include all of Iraq's political factions. The idea has sparked a debate in Iraq over the merits and deficiencies of unity government, with various factions and political figures lining up on either side of the proposal. Its proponents -- such as former parliament speaker Iyad al-Samara'i -- have argued that "reality requires" the formation of a national unity government, and that failing to do so could "keep marginalizing major factions inside Iraqi society." Likewise, deputy Ammar Tohme of the Iraqi National Alliance told RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq that a national unity government is "a national solution, which will prohibit any one coalition from attempting to monopolize power." Even U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill has hinted that he believes a unity government might be the best outcome for Iraq. Opponents of a national unity government, however, have countered that such a formulation would result in continued political deadlock, leaving the next government paralyzed by too many competing factions and unable to govern effectively. Iyad Allawi, whose Al-Iraqiyah coalition won the most seats in the elections last month, declared that a national unity government would be "stagnant, as the current

government has been." Allawi went on to argue that Iraq "needs to have a government that can function and provide...for the security of this country." Other political analysts have argued that a national unity government, while possibly successful in achieving short-term political stability in Iraq, would ultimately prove detrimental to the development of Iraqi democracy. They argue that the absence of a strong, vibrant opposition in this crucial period of Iraq's democracy would leave Iraq unable to develop a lasting tradition of opposition politics. Brookings Institution analyst Kenneth Pollack argues that a national unity government "would represent nothing but a temporary papering over all of the deep divisions among Iraq's political parties, and would simply bring those differences inside the government, inevitably paralyzing it. So while we could have the fiction of unity in the short term, we will have created a completely incapable Iraqi government unable to govern effectively in the months to come." In a recent analysis, Radio Free Iraq's Hashem Ali Mandeel states that the controversy "raises the question of whether the Iraqi political parties understand the concepts embodied in Western democracies, where governance is seen as a means to achieve national goals, and to serve the higher interests of the homeland and its citizens." "In countries which are subject to the rule of dictatorial regimes or are in the early stages of democratic development, governance is often seen as an end in itself, sought by politicians for the purposes of narrow personal and partisan interests," Mandeel explained. "Many Iraqis are increasingly convinced that...political forces are interested in forming an extended government of national unity simply because they want to ensure their own participation in the government." Mandeel's analysis is supported by the fact that many of the political leaders who have come out in favor of a national unity government would likely see significant personal benefit from such an arrangement. The fractured Al-Tawafuq (Accord) Front of Iyad al-Samara'i suffered a crushing defeat at the polls this year, dropping from 44 seats to just six. It is telling that both Allawi's Al-Iraqiyah and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition, which placed first (91 seats) and second (89 seats) respectively, have been cool to the proposal, as they continue to race to see who can form a viable government first.

Where will the new Iraqi government be formed?

Azzaman, April 9, 2010 Who will be the head of the new Iraqi government? This is a simple question which is on the tip of the tongue of every Iraqi today. But its answer is not that clear and simple. The reason is that there is no established and permanent authority or institution in Iraq to go to in order to settle the current divisive issue of who is eligible to form the government. There is no simple answer to whether the winner of the general elections or the bloc with largest number of deputies has the right to form the government. The rounds of negotiation on this sticky issue are apparently more difficult than those which preceded the formation of the government in the aftermath of the 2005 general elections. And the reason for the difficulty is not hard to trace. The latest elections have led to the emergence of a new political force with the means to prevent the division of the country and its people alongside sectarian lines. It is a force in which the majority of Iraqis have put their faith and their fate. Those willing to know about the structure of the new Iraqi government, they should look at the place where negotiations for its formation are taking place. The negotiators are busy exhibiting what they have in their briefs not in Baghdad but in Tehran. They all wait for what the Iranian officials will

tell them about Tehran's views on the new government and the new prime minister. The Arabs have no place and influence in this despite all their commotion and summits. Even the U.S. has no hand to play. The issue of Tehran having the say is no longer a secret and it is nothing that someone should be embarrassed about. It seems that the country's provincial councils have become more powerful, more respectful than our own government. Otherwise, how could one imagine that its ingredients are being prepared and cooked in Tehran and not Baghdad. But the issue is not that easy and simple this time. This is why Tehran is so cautious. It understands that picking a prime for the new government may have very grave consequences. The selection of the wrong person to lead the new Iraqi government will be a mistake for which Tehran will pay, and heavily this time. It will take time for Iran to decide. It is not in a hurry. But indecision could be as dangerous as a rash decision.

Geo strategic front

U.S. returns stolen antiquities to Iraq

Azzaman, April 11, 2010 The Iraqi embassy in Washington has received "important antiquities" dating back to early civilizations that flourished in Mesopotamia, the land between two rivers. A spokesman for the Ministry Culture said the relics were passed to Iraq "following extraordinary efforts (the country's Antiquities Department) has exerted." The spokesman, refusing to be named, described the relics "as important and included gold bracelets from the Treasure of Nimrud." Nimrud was one of four capitals of the ancient Assyria Empire. It is 25 kilometers to the south of present day Mosul, part of which is built on the ruins of ancient Nineveh, the main Assyrian metropolis. The treasure of Nimrud was discovered in the 1980s by Iraqi archaeologist. It was part of a royal cemetery. It is now believed to be one of the most precious finds of the world's ancient history. The spokesman did not say how the gold items landed in the U.S. since the treasure was kept in a secret location of which only a few people were aware at the time of the 2003-U.S. invasion. Previously, Iraqi antiquities officials had said the Nimrud Treasure, of scores of kilos of gold jewelry, was safe.

Economic front

Iraq building \$4.5 billion new port at head of Gulf

Azzaman, April 7, 2010- Transport Minister Amer Abduljabbar has laid the foundation stone of a new major port at the head of the Gulf which is to handle about 100 million tons of cargo a year. The new port will replace the old Faw terminal and will be capable of handling the largest cargo ships in the world, the minister said. Abduljabbar said a consortium of Italian firms had won the contract for the \$4.5 billion port. The minister said on completion the new Faw port will be the world's 10th largest and will be linked by a modern railway system with Turkish and terminals on the Mediterranean. "The port will have 100 platforms," Abduljabbar said. "The port will be 6,700 meters long and 2,190 meters wide. The container area will cover 39,000 square meters," he said. The minister said the multi-billion project will create "hundreds of thousands of new jobs and reinvigorate Iraq's economic and commercial links with the world."

Social front

Christian Radio Station Goes On Air In Iraqi City

April 06, 2010

The Voice of the New Testament broadcasts mostly religious hymns and Bible readings from the station's office in Basra's National Evangelical Church. Saad Matti Petros, the head of the Minorities Committee on the city council, told RFI that the radio station will promote the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence in society. Petros, who is a Christian, said the opening of the radio is "a historic event" as it is the first time Basra has had a Christian radio station. Petros insisted that the radio does not have any missionary purposes. He said the director of the radio station, Father Maher, has also signed a written statement that the broadcasts will not offend the followers of other religions. The deputy head of the Basra city council, Sheikh Ahmad al-Sulayti, welcomed the opening of the radio station. "We consider this a big achievement in the new Iraq," he said. "It proves there is an opening to all the other cultures [in the country]. It also reflects that other cultures have the freedom to express themselves.... We are blessing this good step." He added that the city council gave immediate permission for the radio station. The new Christian radio station will be heard in most of Basra Province. It has not yet broadcasted any news but is expected to do so in the future.

7 million Iraqis exist below poverty line

Azzaman, April 6, 2010 Millions of Iraqis exist below the poverty line in a country which floats on oil and earned more than \$60 billion from oil sales last year, said Mahdi Muhsen, the director of the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology. Muhsen said one fourth of Iraq's nearly 30 million people live below the poverty line and that unemployment rates could hit 30% in some provinces. Muhsen made the remarks as his organization gears toward national census scheduled for November 24 this year. The poverty line for a single adult is 77,000 dinars per month, that is approximately \$60. This means that at least 7 million Iraqis will have to make ends meet on two U.S. dollars a day. Muhsen revealed more alarming figures regarding abject poverty. "Half the population of Iraq live in abject poverty," he said. He said some impoverished provinces, like Muthanna in the south, suffered more than others.

Lebanon

Political front

Mideast conflict 'more explosive' than Iran crisis: Hariri

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is "much more explosive" than the Iranian nuclear crisis, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri said in an interview published Wednesday. The Middle East conflict "is much more explosive, brimming over with 'uranium and extremism', than any other regional issue," he told the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, without elaborating. Hariri, who is expected for a two-day visit in Madrid on Thursday, said Lebanon was in favour of a "Middle East without nuclear weapons" which he said "includes Israel" and not only Iran. Israel has never publicly acknowledged it has nuclear weapons and has maintained a policy of deliberate ambiguity since it inaugurated its Dimona nuclear reactor in the Negev desert in 1965. It shares the US conviction that Iran, its arch-foe, is seeking to obtain nuclear weapons, a claim Tehran denies. As Hariri prepares to make his second visit to Syria since taking

office in November, he also said closer ties with Damascus were key to counter an “Israeli threat”. Syria was the dominant force in Lebanon for nearly three decades until April 2005 when it pulled out its troops under international pressure, two months after Hariri’s father was killed in a massive bomb blast on the Beirut seafront. A United Nations commission of inquiry initially said it had found evidence to implicate Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services in the bombing that killed 22 people, but there are no suspects in custody. ***Damascus has denied any involvement.*** “Stronger ties with Syria mean there is a firmer position toward Israel,” Hariri said. He also accused the media of under-reporting Israeli “atrocities” toward the Palestinians. While paedophile priests in the Roman Catholic Church were given “extensive media coverage” amid “attacks against the Vatican”, “atrocities committed by Israel against Palestinians” go practically unreported, said Hariri, who is a Muslim. For Israel “war is always an option”, he added.
–AFP

Hezbollah's security chief meets STL investigators, agree on mechanism: Report

Sources say agreement was reached on mechanism to hear testimonies

BEIRUT - International investigators from the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) have recently met Hezbollah’s head of security Wafik Safa, sources close to STL investigators told pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat. The sources added that a team of investigators operating under the STL have met Safa last Tuesday, one day before Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah voiced readiness in a televised interview to cooperate with the tribunal. The meeting was rumored to have been held in the General Prosecutor’s office Saeed Mirza in the Justice Palace of Beirut. Mirza was present at the meeting as well. According to the sources, an agreement was reached on a mechanism enabling the investigators to listen to testimonies of individuals among which were Hezbollah members and allies, a process that will start taking place soon but not at the STL’s office headquarters in Monteverde, north of Beirut. The sources added that the investigations team didn’t mind listening to testimonies in any place chosen by Hezbollah. The same procedures were adopted when the STL investigators arrived in Beirut on March 20 and questioned several Hezbollah members in their homes and offices, the same sources said. In an interview with Hezbollah-owned Al-Manar channel Wednesday night, Nasrallah confirmed rumors and media leaks claiming weeks ago that the STL questioned a number of Hezbollah members. But he said his party was not currently in the tribunal’s line of fire. However, Nasrallah doubted the credibility of the STL, saying the resistance would continue to cooperate with investigators but only if the court’s work proved to be on the right track away from politicization attempts. He stressed the investigation committee could regain trust and restore its image by halting media leaks and trying witnesses who committed perjury. Meanwhile, Radhia Ashouri, th spokesperson for STL Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare, responded to Nasrallah’s holding the International Investigative Commission responsible for the media leaks on the probe. “The STL is behaving with maximum professionalism, and the secrecy of investigations is a priority to the committee,” said Ashouri, adding that Bellemare would not deal with investigations through media, and any official announcement would be made by herself or Bellemare. For his part, the UN chief’s spokesperson Farhan Haq refused to comment on Nasrallah’s remarks regarding the STL. Also on Friday, Future Movement MP Ahmad Fatfat called against instigating tensions among the public opinion. “Let’s highlight the positive aspects of Nasrallah’s remarks regarding seeking truth and distancing the STL from

politicization, which are the exact goals March 14 Forces are aiming at,” Fatfat said. He also endorsed Nasrallah’s comments about the defense strategy. “Nasrallah said that Hezbollah’s arms should not be the only topic for discussion under the defense strategy, which means that weapons are an important part of the defense strategy that should be subject to discussion,” Fatfat added. He described all media speculation about the STL as mere media information lacking facts and seeking a scoop. “We started to hear voices discrediting the STL, as if those who speak know anything,” Fatfat said. “No one knows about the work of the STL.” Fatfat considered that the fact that the STL has summoned Hezbollah members who constituted less than 10 percent of all questioned individuals indicated that it was operating based on several probabilities regarding who committed the murder. “Expanding the investigation as such proves the credibility of the STL and that it is not politicized,” Fatfat said. -Daily Star

Lebanese parties mapping political alliances ahead of municipal polls

BEIRUT - Political alliances in the upcoming municipal polls were being mapped out over the past few days as the Interior Ministry announced Tuesday April 4, 2010, as a deadline for presenting candidacies for the Mount Lebanon district. Following Monday’s announcement of an agreement between Hizbullah and the Amal Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP) declared their alliance Tuesday. “It is a new phase and page in relations between both parties, a page that was turned in May 2008 after a joint stance that saved the mountains from a national catastrophe,” PSP Secretary Sharif Fayyad said following a meeting between delegations of both parties. Arslan, Jumblatt’s rival Druze leader, mediated talks between the latter and Hizbullah officials to put an end to the bloody clashes that took place in the Chouf between PSP and Hizbullah fighters. The clashes broke out on May 7, 2008, in Beirut and spread out to the Chouf region following the Cabinet’s decision to dismantle Hizbullah’s telecommunications network. The incident marked the beginning of a shift in Jumblatt’s political stances, drawing him closer to Syria and its allies in Lebanon, a change that was crowned last week with talks with Syrian President Bashar Assad during a visit to Damascus mediated by Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Jumblatt pledged from Damascus support to the resistance in Lebanon and its right to liberate occupied territories. On Tuesday, Arslan also held talks with Assad in Damascus. “We confirm in our meeting today that we will cooperate to face mutual upcoming challenges on the local and regional levels,” Fayyad added. LDP Secretary General Walid Barakat echoed Fayyad’s stances while praising the leaders of both parties and Nasrallah’s role in strengthening national coexistence in the Mountains. “The LDP and PSP are both in one bunker along with the resistance and Syria in facing Israeli threats against Lebanon,” Barakat added. Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry announced that the deadline for individuals to present their candidacies for the municipal elections in the Mount Lebanon district ends on April 4, 2010, while the deadline to withdraw them ends on April 26. Separately, Phalange Party head Amin Gemayel stressed the need to hold the elections within the legal deadline as he called on President Michel Sleiman and Premier Saad Hariri to confirm as soon as possible that the elections would take place on time. Following a meeting with Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir, Gemayel said “postponing the elections was unacceptable,” adding that “his party will pursue its efforts to allow the elections to take place on time.” The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) had

called earlier to postpone the elections to allow time for the adoption of electoral reforms, particularly proportional representation. FPM leader MP Michel Aoun called on Tuesday for the submission of the new electoral amended draft law to Parliament. "We are still committed to our stance and call for a vote over the law proposed by the Cabinet and if it is rejected we will participate in the elections based on the current law," Aoun said. Despite an announced near consensus over the adoption of proportional representation among political parties, controversies emerged among joint parliamentary committee members, tasked with evaluating the draft, prior to its submission to Parliament. "We are not afraid of participating in the elections based on the current law since whoever will win based on the new amended law will also win based on the current law," Aoun said. "The elections will take place and it does not matter if it happens on April 2 or June 2 and the major lie would be to convince people that the process will not take place," he added.

-Daily Star

In Lebanon, all roads lead once again to Damascus

Analysts say Lebanese leaders, who were hostile towards Damascus, are rushing to heal rifts with Syria. *Is the past over?* Five years after Syrian troops withdrew from their country, Lebanese leaders who were once Damascus's staunchest critics are scrambling to heal rifts as Syria breaks out of isolation, analysts say. With nations like the United States and France warming up to Damascus, the Lebanese leaders are rekindling ties with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whom they initially blamed for the 2005 murder of ex-premier Rafiq Hariri. "The Lebanese went too far in their hostility toward Damascus and have realised the international community has since let them down," said Fadia Kiwan, head of political science at Beirut's Saint Joseph University. "The Lebanese are confused," Kiwan said. "Countries like the United States, which mobilised them against Syria in the days of former president George W. Bush, changed course after the election of President Barack Obama." Prime Minister Saad Hariri, son of the slain ex-premier, is readying for his second visit to Syria since taking office in November. He had initially accused Assad of ordering the February 14, 2005 Beirut bombing that killed his father. Once Lebanon's main powerbroker, Syria has consistently denied involvement in the murder but pulled its troops out of Lebanon in April 2005, ending 29 years of military and political dominance over its smaller neighbour. French President Nicolas Sarkozy made a breakthrough with his 2008 visit to Damascus, the first such diplomatic trip by a Western head of state since Hariri's assassination. US officials have also increased their stops in Syria, and Washington recently announced it is planning to send its first ambassador to Damascus since 2005. Influential Druze chief Walid Jumblatt, formerly one of Lebanon's most outspoken critics of Syria, last week visited Assad in Damascus for the first time in years, saying the past was "over." Jumblatt had previously accused Syria of the Hariri murder, branding Assad "the dictator of Damascus... a savage... an Israeli product, a liar... and a criminal." He had also blamed Syria for the 1977 assassination of his father Kamal Jumblatt, but last month said his attack on Assad was "unworthy and unusual, unsuited to the ethics of politics even during a quarrel." Jumblatt began to show signs of an about-face after last June's general election, when he defected from a Western-backed parliamentary majority led by Hariri to reconcile with the rival Hezbollah camp backed by Syria and Iran. Tensions between the two camps led to week-

long battles in May 2008 that left more than 100 dead and brought the country to the brink of civil war.

But as regional and international politics shift, leaders like Hariri and Jumblatt have been forced to soften their stance against their more powerful neighbour. Observers say Hariri is caught in a delicate balancing act and sources close to the premier have said his main backer, Saudi Arabia, has urged him to "bury the hatchet" with Syria. "Hariri for one has unequivocally distanced himself from his allies in the (anti-Syrian) parliamentary majority through his truce with the Syrians," Kiwan said. But many in the Hariri-led camp fear the premier's rapprochement with Damascus is a sign Syria has regained its influence over Lebanon. "Today, Damascus has made it clear that it defeated Washington in the battle for Lebanon," said Ghassan al-Azzi, a Lebanese University political science professor. "Syria still sees Lebanon as its back yard and that view is now reinforced by the fact that Western governments are requesting Damascus help maintain stability in Lebanon" and neighbouring countries like Iraq, Azzi said. Analyst Emile Khoury voiced similar sentiments in a commentary published in the French-language daily L'Orient-Le Jour. "Syria is back on track" in its involvement in Lebanese politics, Khoury wrote. "The days when Syria used the stick in Lebanon are over as neither its army nor its intelligence services are present in Lebanon," he added. "This time around, Damascus is using the carrot. "It is no longer a question of giving the orders in Lebanon, but rather how Syria participates in the Lebanese government: by proxy (through its ally Hezbollah) or by negotiation" with Hariri or Jumblatt, he wrote. –AFP

Rival parties in blame game over shelved reforms

Daily Star staff Friday, April 09, 2010: Preparations for the upcoming municipal elections after near certainty that the process would be held as scheduled on May 2 based on the current law did not thwart political parties from exchanging accusations Thursday of hindering the adoption of electoral reforms. On Wednesday, Lebanon's top three officials stressed that the electoral process would kick off on May 2, 2010, in Mount Lebanon district while dismissing the possibility of passing the proposed reforms prior to the legal deadline given time constraints. Over the past few days, political alliances were being mapped as the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Democratic Party declared theirs Tuesday following the announcement of the Hizbullah and Amal Movement alliance Monday. Speaker Nabih Berri announced Thursday that the Hizbullah-Amal Movement alliance would prepare for the upcoming municipal elections with joint campaign workers while stressing that the alliance was unbreakable. "This alliance will work to guarantee the participation of families and allies in municipality councils," the speaker said following a meeting of the Amal Movement-Hizbullah campaign workers. "The alliance's electoral lists would reflect the current mix of political, familial and national forces represented by the Development and Liberation parliamentary bloc," he added. The speaker also urged campaign workers to encourage women to participate effectively in the electoral process and present their candidacies regardless of the suggested female quota in order to promote the role of women in decision making in local councils. Berri also highlighted the need to carry out the process in an atmosphere "of transparency and trust." Separately, debate emerged among members of joint parliamentary committees tasked with evaluating the amended electoral

draft law as Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) MPs accused their colleagues of bringing down suggested reforms. FPM MPs demanded during a meeting of the joint committees that the electoral draft law be submitted to Parliament for vote to be either passed or rejected, a request that was denied by head of committees Deputy Speaker Farid Makari. Makari stressed that the request contradicted constitutional norms because the committees had not yet concluded their discussions on the law while adding that “referring the draft law to Parliament was the speaker’s prerogatives rather than the committees.” FPM MP Nabil Nicholas told reporters at Parliament that his colleagues proposed to members of the committees to vote over the suggested reforms but their request was denied. “It is unacceptable to mock the Lebanese people and promise them reforms,” Nicholas said, adding that “when the Cabinet suggested the reforms, the FPM had several objections but agreed to them as a big step forward but [certain parties] rejected such a step as if corruption still governed the country’s foundations.” However, Nicholas added that the FPM would participate in the elections despite the failure to adopt the reforms. Meanwhile, Sidon MP Bahia Hariri said Thursday the Future Movement would not nominate any candidates for the municipal elections to allow Sidon families an opportunity to participate in the city’s council. Following meetings with public figures of the city, Hariri highlighted the importance of allowing the future municipality council to work for the people’s interests away from political tensions and divisions. “I am a voter like you but this does not mean we are not concerned with the polls; in fact we represent the largest number of voters ... we should discuss who to choose to capably serve the city,” Hariri said.

KAFA scrutinizes Cabinet's domestic-violence draft law

The Daily Star Friday, April 09, 2010 Two days after Cabinet approved the draft law to protect women from domestic violence, the organization KAFA Enough Violence and Exploitation held a news conference Thursday to explain the results of the approval. It also met with Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar for the same purpose. The news conference was held at the Press Federation office and aimed at clarifying the consequences of approving the draft law and discussing future steps for it to be adopted by Parliament.

KAFA director Zoya Rouhana spoke in the name of the National Coalition for Legislating the Protection of Women and said the approval of the draft law was the “dream” of abused women. She then praised the efforts of all those who fought for the draft law to be approved, including the Cabinet which “showed sincerity in committing to the 22nd paragraph of its policy statement and to enhancing women’s role in public life.” However, Rouhana stressed that more efforts were needed to abolish domestic violence. Rouhana mentioned the need for national strategies and various policies on several levels including the educational, cultural and health levels. She then addressed the Parliament and hoped it would adopt the draft law as it adopted international treaties. Rouhana referred to Speaker Nabih Berri’s appointment speech in which he stressed the Parliament’s duty to adopt all legislations that guarantee the full participation of women in public life, their protection from violence, and the amendment of all discriminatory laws in Lebanon. Rouhana commented during the meeting on the controversy raised by the draft law. “This draft law puts an end to problems related to the penal code but not linked to personal status laws,” she said. As for Najjar, he emphasized the priority of the draft law and said that he would follow up on its voting in Parliament. “Approving the

draft law to protect women from domestic violence faced many challenges but the Cabinet fulfilled its duty,” Najjar said. – The Daily Star

Hizbullah, Amal finalize agreement on upcoming municipal polls

Daily Star staff Tuesday, April 06, 2010: Hizbullah and Amal have finalized a comprehensive agreement over the upcoming municipal elections, said a statement issued by Hizbullah’s media relations on Sunday. The statement said that a concluding meeting was held between the Hizbullah secretary general’s political aide Hussein Khalil and that of Amal’s leader Ali Hassan Khalil. “The meeting laid the basis and foundations and stipulated the type of complete coordination between Amal and Hizbullah in this issue across all the Lebanese territories,” it added. Meanwhile, Education and Higher Education Minister Hassan Mneimneh said the municipal polls will be held on time. Mneimneh told Voice of Lebanon radio station “any delay will not exceed one week or 10 days for technical and administrative reasons.” Asked about Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud’s fears of extending the Municipal Councils’ term, Mneimneh attributed this to the intention of some parties to postpone the elections. Baroud said Friday the municipal polls will be held starting May 2 based on the current municipal electoral law while stressing that delaying the polls to introduce reforms was not a constitutionally valid reason. “We have no other option but to implement the law and our commitment does not prevent Parliament from discussing reforms but if the law is not passed before the deadline, I do not have the option to postpone it until reforms are passed,” he added.

Tackling discussions by parliamentary joint committees over the amended draft law, Baroud played down the possibility that committees could conclude their talks before May 2. On Saturday, Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar distinguished between technical postponement or delaying the polls for one or two years. “If postponement was for one month, then this would be acceptable,” Najjar said. Head of the Education and Culture Parliamentary Committee MP Bahia Hariri noted that the Future Movement had no candidates for the municipal elections in Sidon, adding that the Movement would be a voter rather than a candidate. “We look forward for a developmental Municipal Council away from politics, the council should resemble team work and not be represented by the mayor only,” Hariri said. Sidon’s MP made her remarks during discussions she started with Sidon families. Talks centered around the situation in the city and the upcoming municipal elections. Hariri said municipal polls differed from parliamentary ones, stressing that the municipal team should be freed from political chains and operate independently without having rivals “to be able serve the whole city.” Meanwhile, Change and Reform Bloc MP Nabil Nicolas said he will not boycott municipal elections even if “the parliamentary majority insisted on holding the elections without reforming the current law.” Speaking to New TV channel, Nicolas denied that his bloc feared losing in the elections, labeling them as “developmental.” Last month, the Cabinet approved the amended electoral law after a long round of discussions before transferring it to parliamentary committees for evaluation. The reforms include proportional representation in all districts, a 20-percent female quota and pre-printed ballots. The Finance and Budget, Administration and Justice as well as the Defense, Interior and Municipalities parliamentary committees are scheduled to meet Thursday to tackle the amended draft of the municipal electoral law.

Geo strategic front

U.S. delivers weapons and equipment to Lebanese Army

The U.S. government delivered to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) shipments of weapons and ammunition, the U.S. embassy in Lebanon announced Tuesday in a statement. According to the statement, the U.S. government on April 2 delivered to the LAF the first in a series of shipments of weapons and ammunition. It said that this shipment included 1000 M16A4 rifles, 10 missile launchers, 1,583 grenade launchers, and 538 sets of day/ night binoculars and night-vision devices. The statement stressed that this equipment will be supported with training provided by the U.S. government. The U.S. embassy also announced that on the same date a U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Command Surgeon team made up of U.S. military medical experts visited their counterparts at the LAF. It added that the U.S. medical officers were impressed by the dedication and professionalism of their LAF counterparts who are dedicated to providing the best possible care to the Lebanese soldiers and their beneficiaries. Lebanese Defense Minister Elias Murr visited Washington in February to discuss military cooperation, especially U.S. assistance to the LAF to fight terrorism. Earlier, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Michele Sison expressed Washington's willingness to train and equip the LAF. –Xinhua

Israeli Arab jailed for spying on army chief

A young Israeli Arab on Tuesday was sentenced to almost six years in jail for spying on Israel's armed forces chief for Lebanon's Hezbollah militia at the gym where they both worked out. Rawi Fuad Sultani, 23, passed on information on Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi to foreign agents, according to a plea bargain agreement between the state and Sultani. "There is no doubt the indictment represents a serious case of contact with a Hezbollah agent and transferring information to the enemy," said a court in the city of Petah Tikva, near Tel Aviv. The court agreed to a relatively lenient jail term of 68 months for an espionage conviction, noting Sultani had not initiated the contact with the Hezbollah agents. The agreement, however, dropped charges of conspiracy to commit a crime. The initial indictment had accused Sultani of plotting to assassinate Ashkenazi to avenge the killing of a Hezbollah military commander, Imad Mugnieh. Mugnieh was killed in a February 2008 car bombing in Damascus, a strike widely blamed on Israel. Sultani is said to have admitted to meeting a Hezbollah activist in Morocco one year ago and before that in December 2008, when he flew to Poland and met another Hezbollah member to pass on information he had collected on Ashkenazi. However, Sultani's father, who was also his defence lawyer, said the case was blown out of proportion because it involved an Arab. "If the case was as serious as it has been made out to be, we could have expected a lot harsher punishment," said Fuad Sultani. "He is paying too harsh a price because the treatment he received from the security establishment and the media was not proportional," the father told reporters. A 2006 war between Israel and the Iranian-backed Shiite group Hezbollah killed more than 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and more than 160 Israelis, most of them soldiers. Over the past 12 months, Beirut has launched a crackdown on espionage rings, arresting dozens of suspected Israeli spies. At the end of March, four people were charged with passing on information about Lebanon's army and Hezbollah. –AFP

Lebanon as a model for Iraq

As post-election horse-trading looms, we might look to Lebanon to understand the potential direction for politics in the new Iraq

Following the Iraqi elections earlier this month, the foreign secretary David Miliband announced that "the Iraqi people, voting in their millions, have made clear they want an effective, accountable and inclusive government". Yet initial analysis of the elections has been confined to the over-simplistic dichotomy of failure (Fawaz Gerges's view) or success (Ranj Alaaldin's view). However, there is another direction that Iraqi politics might take – and for that we should be looking at Beirut in order to understand Baghdad. Lebanon is an example of institutionalised sectarian power sharing, where the current government of "national unity" includes both pro-Syria Hezbollah ministers and anti-Syrian March 14 ministers. Putting all parties under one tent is a laborious process. Following the Iraqi national elections in December 2005 it took 156 days for a government to be formed, and roughly the same amount of time following last year's Lebanese elections. In Lebanon, the elections led to a political merry-go-round where the various key players engaged in endless rounds of meetings between themselves and their respective external patrons. For Lebanon, major questions concerned the balance of power in the country and in particular the assignments of seats within the cabinet itself. In Iraq, despite the constitution denying a sectarian quota system or identity-based institutionalised access to power, Nadim Shehadi of Chatham House is clear that "Iraq is sharing the Lebanese model: power sharing with a local flavour". To speak of Lebanon as a "model" is not to say that this is a positive idea or even a matter of choice. Examining this model is also not a matter of exact political science that seeks a one-size-fits-all framework to force on to Iraq. Instead, the history and the dynamics of Lebanon's political system should act as a touchstone to understanding the fledging body-politic emerging in Iraq. Both Lebanon and Iraq are weak states that have experienced the collapse of central institutions and have a history of internal conflict and the prominent involvement of external powers. Syria and Iran in particular are old hands at operating within Lebanon, a country regularly referred to as "a house of many mansions", or "paradise divided". In Iraq, Syria has used its hosting of the largest expatriate Iraqi community (including former regime elements and tribal connections) to ensure that it has a continued role influencing events. Iran, meanwhile, has had a direct hand in the formation of many of the previously exiled groups that now make up the government. There are numerous complex connections between the Iran and sub-state groups in Iraq. While the Mahdi army has attempted a welfare-and-guns approach to controlling Sadr city similar to that of Hezbollah in the south of Beirut, the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq (SICI) has looked to go further and create a semi-autonomous super-region incorporating all nine provinces of the oil-rich south. Iraq's largest non-state militia is the Kurdish Peshmerga, which – unlike Hezbollah – has been haphazardly incorporated into the Iraqi security forces. Yet a recent Rand report provided a reminder that the Peshmerga are "a capable army by regional standards, and their heavy equipment holdings could grow". The most important comparison with Lebanon, though, is the inability of politicians to deliver. The massive investment in top-heavy institutions of democracy in Iraq, which are connected to a federated and weak state system, has created instant political elites whose original ties and lineage may be tracked back through sectarian/ethnic ties, but whose real interests increasingly lie in their manoeuvrings in the

murky waters of court politics. In a country where 90% of government income is from oil, this has led to the "new Iraq" quickly establishing itself on the bottom rungs of Transparency International's corruption index. The emergence of the Kurdish Goran ("change") movement and the decrease in voter turnout from 76% in 2005 to 62% today are just two symptoms of the increasing dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties. The International Crisis Group's Iraq expert, Joost Hiltermann, has demonstrated how despite huge levels of politicisation around the issue of Kirkuk, where every election "turns into a census and quasi-referendum rolled into one", Iraq's politicians have been unable to make a dent into providing significant services for the city. Hiltermann goes on to remind people that in Kirkuk "there are urgent needs for the creation of modern infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, roads, power plants and a service-based economic system". The key question is therefore how suitable such a political structure is for dealing with the massive issues faced by Iraq today. The huge variety of horse-trading in upcoming coalition building may leave little practical possibility for consistency in a future government, meaning that dealing effectively with issues such as the oil law, national reconciliation and federal powers could be virtually impossible. James Denselow is a writer on Middle East geopolitical and security issues based at Kings College London. He currently writes on Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi politics. He was a contributing author to the book 'An Iraq of its Regions'. Visit his website at jamesdenselow.com

Economic front

Lebanon registers \$714.2 million balance-of-payments surplus

By The Daily Star Wednesday, April 07, 2010 Figures released by the central bank of Lebanon show that the country's cumulative balance of payments, which mirrors net foreign assets in the country, registered a surplus of \$714.2 million in the first two months of 2010, up by 7.5 percent from \$664.4 million in the same period of 2009. The report was published by Bank Audi's Weekly Monitor. The high cumulative surplus registered by the balance of payments over the first two months of the year is due to significant capital inflows that reached \$2.510.2 billion and covered the trade deficit of \$1.796 billion registered during the period. The deficit expanded by 24.3 percent in the first two months of 2010 compared to the same period of last year, driven by a rise in imports which reflects a higher aggregate demand. Capital inflows rose by 19 percent year-on-year, on the back of strong tourism activity and the relatively high confidence in the soundness of the Lebanese financial system. On a monthly basis, the balance of payments saw a surplus of \$758.5 million in February 2010 due to a rise of \$505.6 million in net foreign assets of banks and financial institutions and an increase of \$252.9 million in those of the central bank. As for the cumulative surplus of the first two months of 2010, it is the combined outcome of a rise of \$1.436.9 million in net foreign assets of the central bank of Lebanon, which offset by far the drop of \$722.7 million in net foreign assets of bank and financial institutions. – The Daily Star

Social front

Maronite bishops hail 'improving situation' in Lebanon

Thursday, April 08, 2010: Maronite bishops asked the Lebanese on Wednesday to profit from the country's improvements and to work toward the best interests of their country. The bishops were gathered in Bkirki for their monthly meeting presided over by Maronite

Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir. They tackled local developments and issued a statement in which they asked the Lebanese to unite in “these somewhat improving conditions.” The bishops expressed their joy that Lebanon’s situation was improving despite the violent events that were surrounding it. “Aggression in Lebanon is dissipating thanks to the efforts of security officials,” their statement said. They also expressed their happiness on the occasion of Easter, which was celebrated last Sunday, and said the celebration made the Lebanese forget their troubles and the increasing cost of living. “We hope the Lebanese will put their hatred aside and will work toward the municipal elections coming up,” the statement added. – Maroun Khoury

Palestine

Arab League: IOA earmarked \$15b to convert Jerusalemites into minority

(PIC)-- The Israeli occupation authority (IOA) has earmarked 15 billion dollars to convert the Palestinian Jerusalemites into a minority in their own city, the Arab League Palestine and occupied lands sector said in a report on Sunday. The report said that the IOA plots topped by "Jerusalem 2020" have set the year of 2020 as the date when such plots would complete their target. It noted that the IOA had started in Aisaweh town where it confiscated more than 660 dunums, adding that the plots envisage moving more than 40,000 Jewish settlers into occupied Jerusalem to create a majority of Jews in the holy city. The report said that the population in Jerusalem is estimated at 760,000 with Jews representing 65% and the Arabs 35%, adding that the "Jerusalem 2020" plan aims at slashing the number of Arabs to less than 12% by the year 2020 and increasing the number of Jews to reach 88%, which means evacuating eastern Jerusalem from almost all its indigenous Arab population. Meanwhile, MP Ahmed Abu Halabia, the rapporteur of Quds committee in the Palestinian legislative council, asked the Arab League and the Arab rulers to immediately implement their decision allocating 500 million dollars for Jerusalem to support the steadfastness of its inhabitants. He told a press conference in Gaza on Sunday that the Arab and Islamic countries along with human rights groups should work on providing international protection for the Jerusalemites against the IOA crimes against the holy city, its people, holy shrines, and relics.

Qatar, Algeria Donate More Than \$36 Million To The P.A

Monday April 12, 2010 IMEMC & Agencies Arab League assistant secretary-general for Financial and Administrative Affairs, Yousef Al Yazal, stated that the Arab League received \$36 Million from Algeria and Qatar to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank as part of the implementation of the decisions of the Arab Summit that took place in Libya in March. The Qatar embassy in Cairo stated that Jassem Mubarak Darwish, the acting ambassador in Cairo, handed the check to the Arab League during a meeting with the assistant secretary-general, Ahmad Bin Hally. Bin Hally thanked Qatar for its donation and its ongoing support to the Palestinian people. It remains unclear how the money will make it to the Gaza Strip under the Hamas-led

Palestinian Authority, especially due to the ongoing Israel siege, embargo and the ongoing rift with Fateh.

African Immigrant Dies, 28 Detained, At Egypt-Israel Border

Sunday April 11, 2010 01:54 by Saed Bannoura - IMEMC & Agencies

An African immigrant trying to infiltrate to Israel through the border with Egypt died of a heart attack, while 28 others were detained by the Egyptian Border Police.

Egyptian sources reported that Yousef Jabrity, 28, from Ethiopia, died during interrogation at an Egyptian Military Base in Al Arish. He was detained by the Egyptian Border Police on Thursday. Furthermore, the Egyptian Border Police captured 25 immigrants from Africa while trying to illegally cross into Israel. 6 of them were arrested near border marker 12, south of Kerem Shalom Crossing; four of them are Eritrean, one Sudanese and one Ethiopian. One Ethiopian man was detained near border markers #8, and eighteen others were detained near border markers 40, 41, 45, and 48. They all confessed that they intended to infiltrate into Israeli to seek work. Each of them paid over 1000 US Dollars to the smugglers.

Obama Signs Waiver Allowing PLO Office To Remain In DC

Saturday April 10, 2010 IMEMC & Agencies

United States President, Barack Obama, signed waiver allowing the Palestinian Liberation Office to keep its office opened in Washington DC for additional six months.

The United States passed a law in 1987 preventing the PLO from having an office, but a senate legislation allowed U.S. Presidents to waive the law every six months. Waivers have been regularly issued by consecutive U.S. presidents since then. Obama sent a letter to Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, stating that it is in the best security interests of the United States to issue this waiver. Obama decided that \$800 Million out of the \$83.4 billion supplemental spending bill, should be used to boost the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and to support the Palestinian people, including providing humanitarian aid to t

Netanyahu To Skip US Nuclear Summit

Friday April 09, 2010 - IMEMC & Agencies

Israeli sources reported that Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has decided not to attend the Nuclear Summit in the United States after learning that a number of Muslim Countries would seek to discuss Israel's failure to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Summit was organized and called for by the U.S. President, Barack Obama. Netanyahu's office announced the trip earlier Thursday before the cancellation was decided. The office of Netanyahu said that some countries, referring to Arab and Muslim states, will be using next week's summit as an excuse to slam Israel, and that this conference will not just be a summit to counter "nuclear terror". Dan Meridor, the Israeli Intelligence Affairs Minister, and several Israeli experts, would be attending the conference instead of Netanyahu. The Israeli government claimed that Arab leaders and their allies would use the conference to ask the international community to pressure Israel into officially declaring its nuclear capabilities. Netanyahu is also avoiding a meeting with Obama as the latter demanded him to respond to efforts conducted by U.S. Administration to revive the peace process with the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas. Yet, there was no plan for a Netanyahu-

Obama meeting during the summit, and only nine world leaders are expected to hold meetings with Netanyahu. Israel wants the summit to mainly focus on Iran and on imposing sanctions on the country as Israeli leaders claim that the Iranian nuclear agenda is not meant for peaceful purposes and studies.

Obama Weighs Presenting Plan, Netanyahu Rejects “Imposing” Solutions On Israel

Thursday April 08, 2010 IMEMC & Agencies The Washington Post reported Wednesday that U.S. President, Barak Obama, is seriously weighing presenting a new plan for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This plan could be presented this Autumn and is said to be based on proposals made by former President, Bill Clinton, in Camp David in 2000. The plan would be considered as a Middle-East Initiative that would link resolving the conflict with Israel, with isolating Iran, and ending the conflict in the region. On March 24, the White House held discussions on presenting a new plan based on agreements and understandings reached by the Palestinians and Israel in Camp David and in Taba in 2000.

National Security Advisor, James Jones, participated in the discussions that also included six former security advisors. Obama participated in the meeting one hour after it started, and asked the participants to present their opinions and ideas for peace in the Middle East. Most of them expressed support to a new American plan for Middle East peace. The U.S. administration believes that the conflict cannot be ignored as it escalates with time, and the gaps become wider. It also believes that this conflict is boosting the power of Iran and “other fundamentalists”. Meanwhile, Israeli daily Haaretz, reported that Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, expressed his rejection to any peace settlement that would be imposed on the country. He said that any deal imposed on Israel will not be accepted and the whole issue will fail. Netanyahu rejects any withdrawal from Jerusalem and the Palestinian Plains in the Jordan valley, and demands a permanent Israeli control on the borders, and permanent presence in various parts of the occupied West Bank. He also rejects the evacuation of settlements in the West Bank and is going ahead with his plans to construct and expand settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and occupied West Bank. Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister, Dani Ayalon, told the Israeli Army Radio that it is unlikely that the U.S would try to impose a peace plan, and should it do so “it would become part of the conflict, and not part of the solution”.

Israeli government holding up to two hundred million dollars of Palestinian funds

Wednesday April 07, 2010 IMEMC News According to a recently-released report, the Israeli government has withheld payment of up to two hundred million dollars meant for the Palestinian Civil Administration over the last sixteen years, instead illegally channeling the money into Israeli state coffers. Under the Oslo Agreement of 1993, the Israeli government agreed to levy certain fees to the Palestinian Civil Authority to provide for the needs of Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But that money was never transferred, and according to the Israeli government's new report, has been illegally channeled into the coffers of the Israeli government in violation of international law. The report stated, "Following staff work by an interministerial team composed of representatives of the Finance Ministry, Justice Ministry and Civil Administration, it has been agreed that the ... said fees will be entered into the Civil

Administration's budget. The technical aspects of the affair will be sorted out in the coming weeks." The Israeli deputy attorney general has called for an official state inquiry into the redirection of funds, and an investigation into whether the violation of international law constitutes a need to retroactively compensate the Palestinian Authority for the funds that Israel has illegally seized. But the report did not address the question of Israeli import and export taxes on Palestinian goods, which are collected by the Israeli government and supposed to be then sent to the Palestinian Authority – but since 2006, Israel has withheld these funds and refused to pass them on to the Palestinian Authority as they are legally required to do. The Israeli Finance Ministry voiced opposition to the idea of retroactive compensation due to the violation, and issued a statement saying "It should be noted the question of whether the funds are registered as state income or Civil Administration income is a technical question, because at the end of the day the State of Israel invests in the area amounts considerably larger than the fees it collects." The Finance Ministry may have been referencing the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian land, which is estimated to cost Israel about \$12 billion a year, although the military occupation does not provide any benefit to the Palestinians – on the contrary, the Palestinian people face daily obstacles and humiliations due to the occupation, with no apparent benefit.