

Metro chairperson departs

APPOINTED AS ADVISER FOR THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION, DESPITE REPORTS CLAIMING HE WAS SACKED

By Fady Salah

The chairperson of the Metro authority was moved to another role on Wednesday, reacting to a strike held by Metro workers, but was not "sacked", as earlier reports claimed.

Ahmed Abdel Hady, a spokesperson of the Metro authority, confirmed that Minister of Transportation Mohamed Rashad El-Meteeny had assigned Ali Hussein, chairperson of the Metro authority, to the position of adviser for the technical office of the Ministry of Transportation. Abdel Hady denied media reports claiming Hussein was being investigated for corruption. "The three Metro lines are now working; everything is back to normal now," he added.

This came after Metro workers held a strike on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, demanding Hussein be removed from his post and investigated for corruption.

The Ministry of Transportation did not initially respond to the strikers'

demands. However, on Wednesday morning, as the strike caused severe congestion across Cairo, the ministry removed Hussein from his position as chairperson of the Metro authority.

Adel Zakaria, board member of the Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services, claimed that Refaat Arafat, chairperson of the independent Metro workers' syndicate in Shubra El-Khema, Bahaa Motawee and Ibrahim El-Sayed, members of the executive body of the syndicate, were summoned for investigations on charges of disrupting work.

Zakaria said the three were at a meeting with presidential adviser Yehia Hamed on Tuesday night, when they received a call from a security official, summoning them for investigations at the prosecution office.

Zakaria added that Hamed talked to the security official, introduced himself, and asked him to postpone the investigation date. The date is still undecided. "The investigation is pending. We don't know when they are going to be investigated yet, but they could receive a call



Metro trains stand idle as a strike by transport workers halted travel on the network

today or tomorrow," he said.

"The workers will strike again, if anyone breaches their liberty," he said.

Mohamed Ibrahim Aly, a law student and frequent Metro user, expressed his support for the strike, saying the striking workers have legitimate grievances that will not be resolved without taking such action.

"The strike might have caused disrupted our interests, but shouldn't we ask ourselves about the interests of those workers? Shouldn't we hold the government accountable for not responding to their demands from the first place?"

Another Metro user, Phoebe Saad, said strikes are now the only method for pushing the government to respond to legitimate demands.

In contrast, Sayed Taha, said those striking at such a critical time are attempting to hinder the state's control over its institutions. "Those pressuring the government because they work in crucial positions are traitors, they should be tried for treason," he said.

Saber verdict due on 28 November

Defence lawyers argue prosecution evidence is faulty

By Ahmed Aboul Enein

Alber Saber's defence lawyers told a judge all evidence against their client was invalid and demanded he be acquitted of all charges as his trial resumed Wednesday.

Al-Marg Misdemeanour Court set 28 November for the verdict session for the trial of Saber, a political activist accused of "contempt of religion" and spreading ideas that could lead to sectarian strife.

Saber was initially arrested after a mob gathered outside his building and threatened to break into his house.

His mother, Kariman Meseeha, called the police for protection but instead they arrested Saber, in what appeared to be complicity with the mob.

He was accused of spreading the film *Innocence of Muslims* through his Facebook account but this accusation was later proven false. The charges were later changed to spreading extremist views through social media. Saber had posted a video critical of religion in general last year.

Ahmed Ezzat, a member of Saber's defence team and a lawyer with the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression argued in court that most of the evidence presented by the prosecution was inadmissible.

The prosecution is accusing Saber of "contempt of the Islamic and Christian religions, insulting the divine being, making fun of religious



Alber Saber arrives for a trial hearing (File photo)

practices and prophets" and has demanded the court deliver the strictest penalty; five years imprisonment according to Article 98(w) of the penal code.

In a 37-page memo presented to the judge, Ezzat argued that confessions were forcibly extracted from Saber under physical and mental duress.

Saber was attacked in Al-Marg police station following his initial arrest. Inmates cut his throat with a razor blade after police officer Mina Shenuoda told them Saber had insulted religion.

The defence team asked for his official medical record from the forensics department at the last court session in October to prove he had been assaulted in prison. The forensic

report stated that a sharp object had cut Saber's neck.

Ezzat demanded physical evidence, like Saber's laptop and CDs, be discounted as they were taken from his house without a search warrant or any resident's approval.

Police seized the objects from Saber's house on 16 September. Saber was arrested on 13 September and Meseeha, his mother, was forced to leave the following day after being threatened with burning both her house and the nearby church.

Saber is a political activist who participated in the 25 January Revolution and was the coordinator of street action and protests for the National Association for Change led by Mohamed El-Baradei, which Saber was a founding member of in 2010.

Human rights NGOs barred and boycotted EU discussions

Ministry of Foreign Affairs blamed for intervening

By Luiz Sanchez

The government is practicing an exclusionist policy when it comes to dealing with human rights organisations, a joint statement by 21 different organisations and movements has declared. The statement was issued as a result of exclusion from joint talks between the government and European Union which were meant to take place on Tuesday. Originally, the signatories had been invited by the EU delegation to participate.

According to the statement, the invitation to participate in the talks was withdrawn on Tuesday, just hours before talks were set to commence. The signatories accused the Foreign Ministry of withdrawing the "invitation extended to organisations they did not wish to see in attendance," although European, international "and other more 'acceptable' Egyptian rights groups," did not have their invitation revoked.

Under former President Hosni Mubarak and the intermediate period of military rule following the revolution, human rights groups were often sidelined from important political and social decision making. The statement said they had expected to have a greater degree of involvement once a civilian president was elected, in order for the government to benefit

from their experience. "However, the human rights policies adopted by the current president and government have been disappointing."

During President Mohamed Morsy's first 100 days in office, a number of rights groups prepared reports for the government that offered recommendations, according to the statement, but "no response was received." The decision to exclude the groups shows the "political will needed to strengthen human rights and involve human rights groups in decision-making discussions is sorely lacking."

Yasmin Hosam, a lawyer from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), said there were no obvious reasons given to the EIPR for withdrawing the invitation. "There is no place for discussion between us and [the government]," she said, adding that the real battle will begin after the constitution is finished.

"We would like to be able to have a conference where we can express our opinions and see their point of view as well," Hosam added. She worries that women and children will not be adequately protected in the constitution and wants their rights to be guaranteed in accordance with international laws.

The signatories urged President Morsy to "abandon the policy of exclusion aimed at human rights

groups," and conduct serious discussions in order to benefit from their perspective on the state of public and private liberties. The signatories also urged Morsy to reject the "repressive laws proposed by the Ministry of Interior and the cabinet bill on labour unions, as only the president possesses the legislative authority needed to issue or reject such laws until a new parliament is elected."

Malek Adly, a lawyer at the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, said his organisation was invited to participate but decided instead to boycott the discussion.

Adly said the reason for this decision was because the government is not interested in genuine dialogue. "They want to have us in the discussion so people can see through the media how democratic the government is," he said, calling the session "comical".

"We are boycotting until the government shows they have a clear plan and genuine interest to have a real cooperation with human rights organisations."

The deputy director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Ziad Abdel Tawab, said from the perspective of his organisation, the government has no tolerance for constructive criticism that national human rights NGOs can provide.

Syria at centre of Saudi talks

Meeting takes place amid regional strife, domestic anger and diplomatic pressure

By Connor Molloy

The foreign minister of Saudi Arabia with President Mohamed Morsy on Tuesday in Cairo. Presidential spokesperson, Yasser Aly, said that the two discussed bilateral relations and the "efforts of the Quartet to resolve the issue of Syria."

The Quartet is an approach to Syria proposed by Morsy that would see regional powers Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia work together to resolve the country's civil war. However, it has seen little progress. The Quartet was part of Tuesday's discussions and Saudi Arabia was recently notably absent from a meeting of the Quartet's foreign ministers.

Walid Kazziha is a professor of political science at the American University of Cairo, with a focus on Egypt and the Gulf region. He said there are two major issues that were likely discussed in the meeting between Morsy and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal.

"One is Egypt's need for Saudi investments, as well as grants and loans from

Saudi Arabia, which is the economic side. The other has to do more with the region, the situation in Syria, the two countries seem to see eye-to-eye in regards to the Syrian regime."

Egypt is heavily involved economically with Saudi Arabia, with remittances of Egyptian workers playing a significant role in GDP. The Saudi crown has also bestowed over \$1 billion in aid and loans to Morsy's Egypt, a source of revenue that is made even more important in light of the recent inability of US President Barack Obama to get scheduled aid money through the American Congress. Saudi Arabia was the destination of Morsy's first trip abroad after assuming the presidency.

"The Saudis are a bit alienated by the rapport between Egypt and Hamas," said Kazziha. "There is no doubt that that stable relationship with [former president Hosni] Mubarak has been shaken."

Morsy has made an effort to reassure the Saudi royalty that they have an ally in him. Tuesday's meeting was another step in what appears to be a successful campaign to do so, said Kazziha.

"As far as the Muslim Brothers are concerned, they would like to re-establish the relationship, but there will be outstanding problems still," added Kazziha. "Some of these problems may have to do with the Egyptian stance toward Hamas." The Palestinian issue has been thrust into the forefront of Arab politics recently because Mahmoud Abbas, a rival of Hamas, has been on a regional tour to shore up support for his UN bid for non-state member status.

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Non-Islamists suspend Constituent Assembly membership

Continued from page 1

The makeshift alliance eventually decided on temporarily suspending their membership and assigned Wafid Party chairman, El-Badawi, to inform President Mohamed Morsy of the situation and present him with their demands in a meeting scheduled for Wednesday.

A total of 21 Constituent Assembly members signed a statement indicating their participation in the membership suspension. Three members of a technical committee set up to provide advice to the assembly also suspended their membership, citing the assembly's ignoring of their opinions.

Some members are also demanding Morsy form a new Constituent Assembly with more balanced membership. The current assembly has a 60 per cent Islamist majority. Constitutional articles need to be approved by a 67 per cent majority but failing that a second round of voting with 57 per cent majority is enough.

The assembly already had 11 members withdraw at the beginning of its formation in June, bringing the total of 32 members.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is considering joining the movement and

withdrawing its four members but is yet to make a decision, said Naguib Gabrial, lawyer and prominent church member.

The non-Islamists have also called on Al-Azhar to withdraw its five members. If the church and Al-Azhar withdraw their representatives the total of resigned members would rise to 41, leaving the assembly without the 67 per cent majority needed to pass constitutional articles in first round voting.

Other members of the assembly asked El-Gheriany to put on hold the non-Islamists' statement and give them a chance to change their minds.

In a statement read by Civilisation Party Chairman Abdel Moniem El-Sawy in the Wednesday meeting, they said those who withdrew provided no concrete criticism of constitutional articles and appeared to be withdrawing for political reasons.

That statement was signed by El-Sawy, legal affairs minister Mohamed Mahsoub, Essam Sultan and others.

The non-Islamists are demanding the cancellation of the results of the previous two meetings where the assembly finalised the first section of the proposed constitution, the removal and replacement of members who have been absent for more than

the allowed number of meetings, and having the meetings run in a more democratic fashion.

They also demanded the deadline for a final draft be extended for three months.

Former Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa and political science professor Soaad Kamel met with assembly Chairman Hossam El-Gheriany and presented him with the demands after the meeting.

They informed El-Gheriany they would completely withdraw if their demands were not met by Sunday.

Kamel decided to withdraw completely regardless, not wishing to wait until Sunday. Signatories to the statement included Moussa, El-Badawi, Nasar, Ayman Nour, as well as assembly spokesperson Wahid Abdel Meguid.

The Constituent Assembly is currently facing a court case that could lead to its dissolution. The case was referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court by the administrative court, which provided it with time to complete the draft and submit it to referendum, rendering the case moot.

If the demand to extend its work for three months is met, the possibility of dissolution will come back to haunt the assembly.

Pope Tawadros II: "If they implement Shari'a, we have many responses and ideas"



Pope elect Tawadros is presented with a banner by well-wishers

By Ethar Shalaby and Basil El Dabb

About 120 km northwest of Cairo in St. Bishoy Monastery, hundreds of Copts queue impatiently, waiting to receive the blessing of the newly-selected Pope Tawadros II. The large dining hall in front of his office suddenly fills with laughter and ululations as a white-gold official papal outfit is carried in to the waiting pope-elect.

On simple chairs placed in the open garden of the monastery, the Daily News Egypt meets with Egypt's new Coptic pope to explore his plans for the church. The patriarch of the largest Christian community in the region comments on Christian divorce, marriage and inheritance. He responds diplomatically to questions on Morsy, his cabinet and party.

Pope Tawadros, what do you think are the most pressing issues for the Coptic community that you plan to tackle?

First, I would like to welcome you to St. Bishoy Monastery. I believe there are no pressing issues, since we have a [stable] church. After only a single week; six days exactly, following the death of His Holiness, [the late Pope Shenouda III]; the acting head of the church (Qammat), Bishop Pachomius, took charge. He continued along the same [stable] line. Procedures were followed smoothly until the election and enthronement of the new pope. While there is nothing that could be described as urgent, there exist some administrative arrangements, and other arrangements with respect to the secretariat.

One of the most crucial issues for Christians in Egypt is the Unified Law on Houses of Worship, and church construction law, which restricts the construction and maintenance of churches. Will the church, under your leadership, intervene in such matters?

This matter belongs to the state and not the church. This particular issue has caused several crises over the years. The problem of constructing churches comes up so often, as it's a matter of the right to freedom of worship; one of the primary rights afforded by the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights. It will be extremely dangerous if Copts are not granted their right to freedom of worship in Egypt. The problem [Copts face when building churches] occurs, time and time again, and is not met with a decisive and powerful response by the state. We have been hearing about the Law on Houses of Worship, and about the regulation of church construction. However, until this day we have seen nothing [from the government].

Some personal affairs, such as marriage and divorce, have been controversial topics in Coptic society. How would you comment on this?

First, marriage should be built upon modern and rational concepts. Secondly, there are two important terms: *talaq* and *tatlil*. These are legal terms. *Talaq*, or divorce in Christianity, can only be enforced in case of adultery, either by action or thought. When such happens, the sinful party is denied the church's permission to remarry. The other party

is free to remarry. The church does not grant the sinful party permission to remarry since he has not been faithful in the first marriage. He was enjoying a correct marital life, and proved to be dishonest; how come then would he be entrusted with another marriage? Someone, and forgive my figurative sense, works in a bank and steals, can we still employ him in the bank?

Regarding *tatlil*, it is an entirely different matter. It is a case where a marriage was erroneously initiated without our knowledge. Reasons might be physical or psychological illness, or several other things. In such an event, both parties file a complaint with the church, namely the Clerical Council. The complaint is then studied, in the case that the plaintiffs are right they acquire an annulment. Imagine we built a three-storey building, before discovering that the foundations are unsuitable, what can we do? Do we allow people to move in?

Many Copts, especially women, complain their right to inheritance is subject to Islamic Shari'a. What's your view on this?

In this issue Islamic Shari'a is enforced, meaning that the male receives twice the female's share [of inheritance]. Most Christian families apply these rules in accordance with the Shari'a law, through the courts. [But they manage to] amicably settle their inheritance matters [among themselves]. In the end it is the Islamic inheritance law that is being applied.

Your papacy comes at a time when there are many more Copts living abroad than when your predecessor was enthroned. With regards to expatriate Copts, do you intend to conduct visits abroad? Many more Copts have emigrated since the revolution.

And you don't know why?

Are you referring to their fear of the Muslim Brothers?

[Laughs] I didn't say it, it was you!

But what is your opinion?

Naturally, when a certain society frightens and expels its offspring, mankind, the most precious thing on Egyptian soil; such a society is losing [out].

Will the church work on calling on the recent emigrants to return?

I first want to tell you something. Why do we call them "expatriate Copts" rather than "Christians" or "Egyptians"? At the start, they are Egyptians who decided to emigrate. Had they been Muslim or Copts, they are first and last, Egyptians. Egyptians present in any country in the world, are considered a continuum of Egypt. In other words, Egypt is represented in European society through Egyptians, and is also represented in American society through Egyptians. There are Copts, yes. We consider a church to be a popular embassy of Egypt. An embassy that serves Egypt, and that regulates the life of Egyptian expats. Of course in due time I will be visiting our churches as part of my duties.

You are known as being one of the disciples of Bishop Pachomius, and one of the closest people to Pope Shenouda III. Will you con-

tinue on the same path, or direct the course of the Egyptian church in a different direction?

The path adopted by Pope Shenouda III was a moderate one. The same was true for the path followed by Bishop Pachomius. I am generally leaning towards being moderate. Extremism towards either the right or the left is not acceptable. We as Egyptians, have the Nile river crossing the middle of our land, we were all taught this in geography. This Nile river flowing in the middle teaches us to be moderate.

What do you expect of the relationship between the Egyptian church and the presidency under Muslim Brotherhood rule?

Our hearts are open to anyone. My heart is open to everyone, and this is true for my fathers and brothers among the bishops and priests. We do not close our doors or hearts in the face of any human being.

What is the expected relationship between your institution and the Muslim Brotherhood?

Relations full of respect, love, compassion, and peace. Two days ago we had a visit from the representatives of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Wadi Al-Natrun, where the monastery is located. They asked me what I would wish for from the FJP. I replied that I request two things from the FJP; freedom and justice, only.

Have you taken any decisions with regards to amending the patriarchal elections law?

Yes, and this is the first decision I made. It is true that I have not yet practised my regular work, and have not yet



Young children receive the blessing of the new patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Hassan Ibrahim

travelled to Cairo, but this was my first decision. We have formed a committee comprising members of the electoral organising committee. The number of the committee was 18, half of whom are bishops and priests, the other half consists of legal experts and consultants. I requested the committee to prepare a draft of a new patriarchal elections law, to be presented to a church discussion panel, prior to being presented to the responsible authorities.

Is increasing the number of candidates among the suggested amendments?

The amendments include increasing the number of candidates, the expansion of the definition of diocese, which are geographical domains assigned to every bishop.

The amendments also mention our churches abroad. I want to tell you that when the law was brought in, in 1957, the number of bishops was thirteen. Today, the number of bishops is almost 100. If, among the thirteen bishops in the old law, we take nine to repre-

sent the committee, how many will we choose from the current hundred? These are parts of the amendments.

Many Islamists have been calling for the complete implementation of Islamic Shari'a. What will be the church's response if this actually happens?

Naturally, Shari'a is a religious matter, isn't it? It is applied on man in his relationship with God. It is not then a social order that can be implemented on any person. If this happens [implementation of Shari'a law], we have many responses and many ideas. I expect the society to respect everyone belonging to it; Egyptians, Muslims and Christians. If my Muslim brother would hurt my feelings, being his brother sharing the same homeland, what else is left? This is the responsibility of the Muslim majority of Egypt.

How do you comment on the draft constitution? And do you foresee that the constitution will be issued in its current form?

The constitution should remain under the umbrella of citizenship. The common factor that binds us on Egyptian soil is that you are a citizen, and I am a citizen, both holding Egyptian citizenship. You are Muslim, I completely respect you, and I am Christian, you completely respect me. You have your own worshipping methods and personal or family traditions, this is totally respected. It cannot happen that I focus on a marginal section [of society] and take it as a general case. The draft constitution discussed numerous matters. Some are on the side of the extreme right, while others are maintaining the extreme left. Meanwhile, the moderate voice is gradually diminishing.

What would be your solution be to the current polarised political climate?

The solution lies in being clear with ourselves. The truth is that the formation of the Constituent Assembly is the solution. The current formation does not represent all Egyptians justly.

What is your opinion regarding the place of Copts in the Cabinet, in light of the promises made by President Mohamed Morsy?

You are touching on difficult issues. I do not care about how many ministers are Christians or Muslims. What I care about is [having] a cabinet of ministers of an acceptable calibre. I look to the efficiency of the responsible person, whether president, minister, or manager, and not to his religious affiliation.

How do you see the role of the Coptic youth of the church? What about the role of the Maspero Youth Movement and the Coalition of Egyptian Copts?

The youth are like a golden link in a chain. Pope Shenouda had a very nice saying: "youth without church, youth without future."

In the decades preceding the revolution, there was a pressure being exerted on Copts, and there was marginalisation and a compulsion to step away from everything.

Following the revolution, the fear barrier was broken, and the gates of freedom have become wide open before the youth. In the old days, whenever there was a problem, the youth used to demonstrate in the cathedral. Now there are good movements. Some have become accustomed to demonstrating in front of parliament, the Cabinet, and the surrounding streets.

Today's youth, on the global level, demand dialogue, outreach and communication. They cannot accept things as they are. This logic does not work with them anymore. I want to give you a little idea. Previously, people were brought up through the family, the school, the church, and the mosque. Today, upbringing is performed by three elements, the TV, the computer with the internet and all of the social media websites, and third, the mobile phone. Three screens are the ones bringing up our youth. As such, today's youth are facing a great deal of disturbance. They need to be spiritually filled, and to engage in a spiritual relationship with God. They need to fill their hearts as they fill their brains. The church will support the youth spiritually.

Papal enthronement

Pope Tawadros II will be enthroned at Saint Mark's Cathedral on Sunday 18 November in a ceremony that was last carried out on 14 November 1971. Bishop Pachomius, the Metropolitan of Beheira and acting head of the church, will preside over the enthronement ceremony.

Tawadros will enter the cathedral carrying a large ceremonial key, symbolising the pope's new responsibilities and leadership role, and enter with metropolitans, bishops, and all members of the Holy Synod behind him.

During the service, Tawadros will put on his new white tonia, the white vestment worn by deacons and clergy members during liturgical services, and the accompanying golden sedra, depicting the twelve disciples of Jesus, as the Coptic Orthodox Church often refers to its pope as the "thirteenth disciple." He will also wear the papal crown for the first time and sit on the throne in the cathedral.

At the conclusion of the liturgy, the newly enthroned pope will fast for an entire year (Coptic fasting involves adopting a vegan diet), except for the Church's major feasts.

The pope stands as the highest authority within the Coptic Orthodox

Church and is considered the "first among equals" in the Holy Synod, the group responsible for ruling on matters of faith.

The pope stands as the most prominent voice within the church, is responsible for overseeing the ordination of clergy, and supervises the expansion of the church.

Biography of the 118th Pope

Pope Tawadros II was born Wagy Sobhy Bakky Suleiman on 4 November 1952 in Mansoura. His father was an irrigation engineer and his family moved around during his childhood from Mansoura to Sohag and then to Damietta.

He received his bachelors degree in pharmacy in 1975 from Alexandria University and earned a fellowship in world health in England in 1985. Between obtaining his two degrees he began studying at the seminary in 1981, the same year Pope Shenouda III was banished by President Anwar Al-Sadat. Tawadros converted to monasticism in 1988 and was ordained a priest two years later.

He was ordained Bishop Tawadros, General Bishop of Beheira, by Shenouda in 1997. As bishop, he

gained a reputation for his ability

to explain complex theological topics and his work with the youth.

Tawadros has expressed his belief that the church's role should be pastoral and service-oriented, and not that of a political actor. In an interview with Bishop Paul of Tanta, Tawadros stressed the importance of reintegrating large segments of the Coptic youth back into mainstream society after many had isolated themselves within church communities.

Tawadros enjoys a close relationship with acting head of the church Metropolitan Pachomius and both oversee the same diocese of Beheira. Pachomius has drawn overwhelming approval during his tenure as locum tenens. Many think his relationship with Tawadros will have a positive lasting effect on the papacy. "He is a student of [Bishop Pachomius]," said Emad Gad, a political analyst at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies and member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party. "We think that he will be a wise man, he will be moderate, and he will try to work towards an Egyptian agenda. He will try to renew the role of the church and concentrate on the spiritual, not political aspects."

Top Hamas commander killed in Israel strike

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories (AFP) - Senior Hamas military commander Ahmed Al-Jaabari was killed in an Israeli air strike on a car in Gaza City on Wednesday, medics and a Hamas source told AFP.

"The martyr is Ahmed Al-Jaabari and his bodyguard was injured," Ayman Sababni, a doctor at Shifa hospital in Gaza City, told AFP. A Hamas security source also confirmed Jaabari's death, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Israel's Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency and the military also confirmed the operation.

"During a joint operation of the General Security Service (Shin Bet) and the IDF (army) today, Ahmed Jaabari, the senior commander of the military wing of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, was targeted," a statement from the Shin Bet said.

"In the past hour, the IDF targeted Ahmed Jaabari, the head of Hamas's military wing, in the Gaza Strip," the military added in a statement, saying Jaabari "was a senior Hamas operative... directly responsible for executing terror attacks."

"The purpose of this operation was to severely impair the command and control chain of the Hamas leadership, as well as its terrorist infrastructure."

Military spokeswoman Avital Leibovitch said the strike was the start of an operation targeting armed groups in Gaza following multiple rocket attacks on southern Israel.

"The IDF started an operation



Palestinians extinguish fire from the car of Ahmaa Jaabari, head of the military wing of the Hamas movement, the Ezzedin Qassam Brigades, after it was hit by an Israeli air strike in Gaza City

against terror organisations in Gaza due to the ongoing attacks against Israeli civilians," she said on her Twitter account.

The killing of Jaabari sparked furious protests in Gaza City, with hundreds of members of Hamas and its armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, chanting for revenge inside Shifa hospital.

Outside, armed men fired weapons into the air, and mosques throughout the city called prayers to mourn the commander's death.

Palestinian security sources and medics confirmed a total of four air strikes across Gaza during the late afternoon, two in Gaza City, one of which killed Jaabari, one in northern Gaza, and a fourth in the southern city of Khan Yunis.

Update: Israel ready for Gaza ground operations 'if necessary': army

(AFP) - The Israeli military is prepared for a ground operation in Gaza after its targeted killing of senior Hamas commander Ahmed al-Jaabari "if necessary," the army said on Wednesday.

"All options are on the table. If necessary, the IDF is ready to initiate a ground operation in Gaza," the military said on its official Twitter account.

Ansar Dine says not seeking Shari'a across entire Mali

Ouagadougou (AFP) - Ansar Dine, one of the armed Islamist groups occupying northern Mali, said Wednesday it does not want to impose Shari'a law across the entire country, but still wants to keep it in its stronghold of Kidal.

"We are waiving the application of Shari'a law across the entire Malian territory except in our region of Kidal where Shari'a will be applied," Hamada Ag Bibi, a member of the Ansar Dine delegation in Burkina Faso for talks aimed at ending the Mali crisis, told AFP.

Their statement came as African plans to send a military force into northern Mali gather pace.

The entire northern expanse of the country, an area bigger than France, has been under rebel control since shortly after a 22 March army coup that led to a power vacuum across the desert north the rebel quickly filled.



Fighters of the Ansar Dine Islamic group standing in Kidal (File photo)

"We only wish for the application of Shari'a in zones under our control, that's to say Kidal," said Ansar Dine spokesman Mohamed Ag Aharib. "Everything will be done through education and we are going to expand our

argument during negotiations."

Ansar Dine, the main Islamist group in Mali which has links to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has called for dialogue and sent delegates to neighbouring

Burkina Faso and Algeria. The movement currently occupies the sparsely populated Kidal region in the northeast of the country.

Ansar Dine and another AQIM-linked group, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, have imposed a brutal form of Shari'a Islamic law, stoning unmarried couples, amputating thieves' hands and whipping drinkers and smokers.

The measures have provoked international condemnation.

On Tuesday, the African Union endorsed a plan for military intervention in Mali already approved this weekend by leaders from the 15 nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The plan is to send an African force of 3,300 soldiers to retake control of north Mali if negotiations fail.

EU-Arab League ministers announce Cairo Declaration

Ministers welcome the formation of Syrian opposition coalition

By Joel Gulhane

Foreign ministers participating in the EU-Arab League ministerial meetings put together the Cairo Declaration on Tuesday. The declaration is a result of a conference held in at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. In the declaration the ministers welcomed the formation of the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces

The declaration covers a variety of issues that the EU-Arab League ministers agreed to "tackle the common political and economic challenges." Among these challenges are the situation in Syria and the establishment of a "crisis room" to be based in the Arab League headquarters.

The declaration "welcomed the formation of the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces" and called on other opposition groups to join the coalition.

The coalition has been seeking recognition since its formation on Sunday. The six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council recognised the coalition as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people on Monday. On Tuesday the French president, François Hollande announced "France recognises the Syr-



Ministerial meeting of Arab League and European Union at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo

ian National Coalition as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people and as the future government of a democratic Syria," making France the first western country to do so.

In an interview with Reuters, the president of the opposition coalition Ahmed Moaz Al-Khatib made a request for European countries to recognise the coalition as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. He stressed the importance of political recognition adding "this will make the coalition act as a government and hence acquire weapons and this will solve our problems."

The declaration also confirmed support for the efforts of Lakhdar

Brahimi the joint United Nations-Arab League special envoy to Syria. Brahimi's plan is for a diplomatic solution to the conflict and he hopes to propose another resolution to the United Nations security council.

Hollande also announced in the press conference that he will consider the possibility of providing arms for the coalition. British Foreign secretary William Hague announced during his speech at the meeting on Tuesday that Britain will be "increasing [its] support to Syrian opposition groups."

In the past Brahimi has stressed that there is "there is no military solution to the crisis in Syria," and that need

for a diplomatic solution in accordance with the Geneva communiqué agreed upon at the end of June. Britain and France are both party to the Cairo declaration, however their individual announcements imply that they doubt the success of this plan. Hague referred to Russia and China using their veto to block past security council resolutions on Syria and he believes "there is no indication that the outcome now would be different."

The declaration also announced the creation of a crisis room to be based in the Arab League headquarters. The room was inaugurated by Arab League Secretary General Nabil El-Araby and High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union Catherine Ashton.

It is hoped that the room will help to "boost cooperation between the two sides on an institutional level" and coordinate with the already existing Situation Room in the EU. The purpose of the room is to provide the Arab League with "an early warning and response system for political crises and social, economic, environmental and natural disasters and their repercussions on the Arab region through the rapid provision of information and analysis in support of decision-makers at the league and the member states."

POLITICS

Strikes and protests as anger over Jordan fuel hike spreads

By Musa Hattar (AFP)

Amman - Jordan on Wednesday was hit by more protests and strikes as anger mounted against a government increase in fuel prices a day after mobs attacked a police station and surrounded the prime minister's house.

The sudden price hike drew sharp condemnation from the opposition Islamists, who warned of civil disobedience and increased opposition to the government in the run-up to general elections in January, which they are boycotting.

Angry protesters blocked a main road in downtown Amman as police warned they would use force if necessary to open the road.

The Islamists said they plan to demonstrate later Wednesday near the interior ministry, on Gamal Abdel Nasser Circle, where 24 people were arrested on Tuesday night during a demonstration by some 2,000 people.

Education officials said around half of the country's 120,000 public school teachers went on strike Wednesday after a call by their union, affecting at least 2,000 schools countrywide.

"The strike will continue until the government goes back on its unjust and irresponsible decision that seeks to make Jordanians poorer," the teachers' union said in a statement.

Lawyers stopped working in Amman and other trade unions said they were considering similar strike action, while youth groups and some political parties staged demonstrations in the capital and other centres.

Violence erupted on Tuesday night as news spread of the price increases, under which the cost of household gas will rise 53 per cent and petrol around 12 per cent.

The Public Security Directorate said Wednesday that 14 people were wounded, 10 of them policemen, when angry protesters attacked a police station in the northern city of Irbid and government buildings in Salt, west of Amman.

Iraq bombings kill 19 on eve of Muslim new year

Kirkuk, (AFP) - A spate of apparently coordinated attacks across Iraq on the eve of a festival marking the Islamic new year killed 19 people and wounded more than 150 others on Wednesday, officials said.

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The measures have provoked international condemnation.

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EGX continues sideways movement reflecting market uncertainty

By Mohamed Salah Eldin

The stock exchange's main indicator, EGX30, reflected ongoing instability in the market with a shaky day of trading Wednesday. A slight dip started the day, followed by an up-swing that lasted until midday before it closed at 5,668 points, losing 0.38 per cent of its value.

The market has been sensitive to contradictory news reports that reflect global uncertainty, mainly related to the government's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, some pending business deals as well as governmental decisions.

Finance Minister Montaz El-Saeed told Reuters that a preliminary memorandum of understanding will be signed with the IMF mission before the end of their current visit to Cairo.

A final deal is expected to be signed by this time; the minister had earlier stated during the Euro Money conference held in Cairo on the 9 and 10 October that he expected the agreement with the IMF to be finalised two weeks after the visit scheduled for late October. The government's failure to finalise a plan for IMF approval delayed the procedure however.

The Cabinet met Tuesday with President Mohamed Morsy to review the government's development road-map, which was criticised by Al-Borsa newspaper as "very weak" and lacking any original solutions to the most pressing problems.

In other news, the long awaited NSGB acquisition by Qatar National Bank (QNB) has not yet been confirmed. The bank denied in a memo to the stock market authority Monday that a deal was signed concerning the sale of 77.2 per cent of its shares to the Qatari bank for \$2.6 billion.

Ihab Saeed, director of the technical analysis division of Osool ESB securities Brokerage, said that the market has seen very low transaction volumes of late. "There is a sharp decrease in the transacted volumes since the ill-fated decision," Saeed said, referring to the government's stated intention to impose taxes on the stock exchange and initial public offerings (IPOs). "The market witnessed extremely weak transaction volumes subsequent to the decision; EGP 280 million was transacted on the day the decision was announced, and EGP 200 million on the following day, which is the lowest in 7 months."

On the IMF issue, Saeed said there

are rumours confirming the conclusion of an agreement and others which discount it. Commenting on the NSGB deal he said QNB had already proposed buying some Egyptian banks and had completed due diligence, but the sale was not finalised and that the NSGB deal may meet the same fate, despite the bank's confirmation that the negotiations are ongoing and that they are looking for a new bank manager. "As a result, the NSGB stock went up from EGP 40 to EGP 50 and then back," he said.

Saeed expected that the sideways movement will persist until the withdrawal of the "ill-fated decision," confirming that the weakness of the transaction volumes remains the biggest problem.

"What could really influence the market are the taxes on the transactions and profit distribution"

The head of technical analysis at Pioneers Brokerage, Mohamed Youness, confirmed the decrease in transactions. However he said he believed these sideways movements are a prelude to what will be an upwards trend. He attributed the current performance of the market to economic and political variables: "the lack of clear vision, and the confusing governmental decisions lead to a total uncertainty."

Youness also said that striking Metro workers and other protests negatively impact the stock market, as does the uncertainty surrounding the NSGB acquisition and conflicting reports on the IMF agreement.

However he didn't believe IPO taxes would affect the market because they are not issued very often. "What could really influence the market are the taxes on the transactions and profit distribution," he said. The government had disavowed its intention to impose taxes on stock transactions but the taxes on profit distribution are still under debate. "It would be a double taxation, because companies already pay taxes on their profits," he said.

Youness concluded on a positive note, saying "I expect an ascending trend if we succeed in breaking the 5900 points level, this can materialise if the government doesn't surprise us with more bad decisions."

London (AFP) - Europe's main stock markets slid on Wednesday as workers across indebted eurozone nations took part in coordinated general strikes in protest at their governments' deep austerity programmes.

London's benchmark FTSE 100 index dropped 0.62 per cent to 5,750.53 points in afternoon trading as traders reacted to mixed company earnings, falling British unemployment and a downgrade to the Bank of England's growth forecasts for Britain.

Frankfurt's DAX 30 gave up 0.41 per cent to 7,139.45 points and in Paris the CAC 40 dropped 0.28 per cent to 3,420.91 points.

But Madrid gained 0.60 per cent and Milan was flat.

Europe's main markets headed lower "as eurozone concerns continue to hit risk appetite," said Craig Erlam, market analyst at Alpari trading group.

"Strikes against austerity in the southern eurozone states are starting to gather large support, raising concerns about how much more the countries can take."

In foreign exchange deals, the

euro rose to \$1.2736 from \$1.2703 late in New York on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, the European single currency had hit two-month low points against the dollar.

Gold prices dipped to \$1,724.50 an ounce in trading on the London Bullion Market on Wednesday, compared with \$1,726.25 on Tuesday.

Baton-wielding riot police and demonstrators clashed in central Madrid on Wednesday as Spain held a general strike that was part of a Europe-wide anti-austerity protest.

Spain and Portugal held the first coordinated general strike in the Iberian Peninsula, slashing train, bus and metro services, halting factories and cancelling more than 700 flights.

They were backed by temporary walkouts in Italy, the number-three eurozone economy, and Greece, which is fighting to avert default despite agreeing 13.5 billion euros (\$17 billion) in cuts and tax increases.

European markets were suffering losses also on worries about the US economic outlook following last week's re-election of President Barack Obama.

Qandil's plan, high on aspirations low on detail

Continued from page 1

As part of the announcement of his plan, Qandil said on Tuesday that he expects the GDP to grow at a rate of 3.5 per cent in 2012/13. He added that the economy is expected to grow by 4.5 per cent in 2013/14. The Egyptian economy grew at a rate of 2.2 per cent in the financial year that ended on 30 June, 2012.

Ahmed Al-Naggar, senior economic fellow at the Al-Ahram Center for Strategic and Political Studies said 3.5 per cent is overly optimistic, "growth depends on investment, and the current political economic climate will not permit more than 2.5 per cent growth at most." He pointed to IMF reports that recorded Egypt's growth in the first nine months of the calendar year 2012 at 1.5 per cent and a prediction of 3.3 per cent growth in 2013.

He continued that there needs to be stronger political will to ensure national security and get the tourism industry back on track. "Having a concrete plan is different than having the desire," he said.

Morsy's administration has been working to secure a \$4.8 billion loan from the IMF. Acquiring the loan depends on the government's ability to present an economic reform programme. Government and IMF officials have been stating for months that a plan was in the works. An IMF delegation, which left on Wednesday,



Prime Minister Hisham Qandil presented a strategic 10-year reform plan to improve Egypt's economic future (File photo)

was delayed a month to allow the government more time to finalise the plan. As recently as Sunday, an IMF official stated that the organisation was still waiting to receive a completed economic programme.

Social justice plays a central role in the Morsy government's vision. Qandil, who is under fire for continuing the "policies of western dependence" by pursuing the IMF loan, said that the new plan is, "based on an economic and social philosophy that differs from those that prevailed before the revolution." He added that whereas social justice was previously seen as a variable that followed economic growth, the Morsy government's

plan is based on the philosophy that "social justice is the driving force of economic growth" mentioning that a high illiteracy rate does not help business owners.

The released presentation reiterates the Morsy government's commitment to increasing health and education spending. Stating that education receives only 55 per cent of the support that petroleum products receive, while health spending, which is less than 5 per cent of the total budget, receives 11 per cent of the EGP 117 billion allotted to petroleum subsidies.

Despite leaks over the last few weeks suggesting sales and other tax hikes, in addition to restructuring subsidies to

close the budget deficits, the plan simply calls for "steps to reform some sales taxes" in addition to "achieving the goals of improved commodities subsidies, stricter oversight and the implementation of rationing cards."

In regard to the short term period extending through 2013, the plan makes promises with regards to reducing unemployment stating, "the programme aims at providing 700,000 new job opportunities in the coming year" and that "in the agricultural field, 58 thousand jobs will be made available by June 2013" including 4217 jobs in the national initiative for land reclamation.

On the investment front, details from new projects are sparse, but the programme announces efforts to secure EGP 30 billion in new investment in the coming year.

The report warns the looming budget deficit that reached EGP 168 billion at the close of the fiscal year ending on 30 June 2012 will grow to EGP 184 billion during the current fiscal year, but that this outcome is preferable to the EGP 214 billion deficit that the report predicts would result if the government action plan is not implemented.

Overall the programme's structure follows an economic plan released by former prime minister, Kamal Ganzouri, in July. Both plans call for similar periods of incremental period growth and 3-4 per cent growth in the upcoming year.

EU approves €5 billion financial aid package to Egypt

Cairo (AFP) - The European Union has approved a €5.0 billion (\$6.4 billion) financial aid package to Egypt after its economy was battered by a 2011 uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak, the presidency said on Wednesday.

The European Investment Bank will grant Egypt €2.0 billion and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Develop-

ment a further €2.0 billion, while EU countries will come up with €1.0 billion, the presidency said.

An EU official said the aid package's details will be announced later on Wednesday at a press conference.

For his part, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt wrote on Twitter that €600 million would go to Cairo's un-

derground train system.

The presidency's announcement came after President Mohamed Morsi met EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in Cairo.

It is "a strong sign of the EU's support for Egypt's path to development," the presidency said in a statement.

Ashton, who attended a meeting



EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, during her meeting with President Morsi

of EU and Arab foreign ministers on Tuesday, is also participating in the EU-Egypt task force, which aims at bolstering economic relations between Egypt and Europe.

Representatives of around 100 large European companies and members of the European Commission and European MPs are participating in the meetings, which wrap up later on Wednesday.

Egyptian Finance Minister Montaz Saeed said last week that Egypt may reach a loan deal with the International Monetary Fund next month for \$4.5 billion, instead of the \$4.8 that Cairo had hoped for.

Following a visit by IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde in August, officials started working on a proposed plan to support the economy, which has been beset by serious difficulties since the 2011 uprising.

Political instability has badly affected Egypt's major revenue earner, tourism, and has led to a drop in foreign investments, worsened the budget deficit and sparked social conflict.

The central bank's currency reserves plunged, threatening Egypt's ability to import commodities and support the Egyptian pound.

Stock markets drop as Europe strikes

London (AFP) - Europe's main stock markets slid on Wednesday as workers across indebted eurozone nations took part in coordinated general strikes in protest at their governments' deep austerity programmes.

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European markets were suffering losses also on worries about the US economic outlook following last week's re-election of President Barack Obama.

Dealers fear a stand-off in Congress in addressing the fiscal cliff of tax hikes and spending cuts that are due to take effect on January 1 unless a deal is brokered ahead of the new year.

The package, drawn up during fraught spending cap talks last year, could tip the world's biggest economy back into recession.

And in Germany a survey on Tuesday showed investor confidence had worsened in November as the eurozone crisis began to drag on its biggest economy.

However, there was some good news for Greece with the threat of a default this week receding after it raised 4.0 billion euros in short-term bond auctions, which should help plug a financing gap left by the stalled loan.

On Wednesday, shares in RWE, Germany's second biggest power supplier, fell 0.11 per cent to 32.90 euros, despite the company expressing confidence about this year's earnings after posting solid quarterly profits.

In London, Britain's biggest insurer Prudential jumped by 1.21 per cent to 876.00 pence after the

company said its sales rebounded sharply in the third quarter, boosted by growth in Asia.

Asian shares rose Wednesday as a Greek bond sale on Tuesday eased fears of an immediate default.

Sydney gained 0.20 per cent, Seoul rose 0.23 per cent, Hong Kong climbed 1.20 per cent, and Shanghai rose 0.37 per cent.

Tokyo ended flat after electronics giant Panasonic said it may slash another 8,000 jobs and Toyota recalled 2.77 million vehicles over water pump or steering problems.

Analyst-beating quarterly results from Cisco Systems gave US stocks a solid opening boost Wednesday, following a 2.77 million vehicles over water pump or steering problems.

Five minutes into trade, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.27 per cent to 12,790.99 points.

The broad-market S&P 500 added 0.31 per cent to 1,378.74 points, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite gained 0.51 per cent to 2,898.49 points.

Dow component Cisco jumped 7.8 per cent to \$18.16 after its 48 cents earnings per share for its fiscal first quarter beat analyst expectations by two cents.

Barclays Bank Egypt launches the exclusive "Platinum Worldmiles Visa credit card"

Barclays Bank Egypt has launched the new and exclusive Barclays Platinum Worldmiles Visa credit card in Egypt.

The exclusive Worldmiles loyalty programme enables customers to fly anywhere, with any airline, at any time and for free just by spending on their credit card. In addition to this, the first 1,500 new customers will get 20,000 bonus miles to help them on their way. The card enables customers to earn 2 Worldmiles for every EGP 1 spent on the card and the value this delivers is significantly higher than any other card in the market.

Further to this, customers will benefit from exclusive offers, free supplementary cards and SMS alerts, market-leading instalment plans, purchase protection, free for life offer based on spend and much more. Exclusive offers with the card include discounts from partners such as Europcar, Hilton hotels, Bose, Iram jewelry as well as a wide variety of discounts and benefits from Visa worldwide.

Upon the launch of the card, Omar Baig, Consumer Banking Director of Barclays Egypt, stated: "We are extremely excited to introduce the Barclays Platinum Worldmiles credit card for our customers in Egypt. This is a unique card that enables our customers to earn air miles on any airline and is part of our commitment to provide great value products in Egypt."

"Visa is thrilled to be launching the new Barclays Visa Platinum Worldmiles Card in Egypt. The new Barclays Platinum Visa Card provides the ideal added value for frequent travellers, rewarding every purchase made on the card with travel miles. Now not only does your Visa card make it easier to go anywhere, it literally takes you anywhere." Tarek Elhousseini, General Manager for Visa North and Francophone Africa, stated.

Barclays Bank has been in Egypt since 1864 and is committed to delivering exemplary service to its customers with market leading products to meet their needs.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Smells like Nazif

Reading Hesham Qandil's plan for development until 2022 makes you feel that Ahmed Nazif, Mubarak's prime minister currently imprisoned for corruption, was a genius after all. Qandil's plan is basically just an Ikhwanian imitation of the Mubarak-Nazif one. It uses the same language and suggests the same backward thinking.

Qandil's vision of development is literally, "to mobilise the January 25th Revolution's spirit to make Egypt a free, civil, regionally pioneering, globally influential state with an independent economy based on knowledge."

"An economy that invests in the capabilities of the human and the ingenuity of the place. A just society that protects citizenship values and holds to its national identity, cultural heritage and religious, civilised values, where all citizens enjoy human dignity, prosperity, quality life with no distinction. All in an environmental framework that encourages continuous development and effective societal participation."

Such a lovely verse. But what is it actually that makes it different from any other plan? Maybe His Excellency's mention of what he calls the revolutionary spirit, to which neither he nor President Morsy seem to adhere?

This plan is sadly nothing but a rehash of Mubarak's failed plans, with a large portion lifted directly from Nazif's last plan approved and blessed by the ousted president a few months before the revolution.

Such hollow platitudes about simplistic governance values that were never described in actual or effective practical detail can be left unsaid in any country and need not be mentioned in a plan. Maybe they best belong to an inspirational poster to be hung in front of his office in the cabinet building.

Lucky him, he does not have a parliament with which he has to discuss such a disastrous plan. In a true democracy, a prime minister would be politically crucified for such poetic nonsense presented as a plan. For some absurd reason we still live in Mubarak's times.

Shamelessly, the resemblance to Nazif's plan does not stop at the language used; it even copies ideas wholesale. Courageously, Qandil has copied details from a plan introduced by a prime minister and president who were ousted by a revolution that broke out for the very reasons that His Excellency is now reintroducing to us, in the same language.

For example, the part of the plan that talks about privatising what is left of the public sector was suggested by



MAHER HAMOUD

Nazif and approved by Mubarak right before the revolution, which froze the plan for the obvious reasons that the people were totally against it.

It was a plan called "legalised privatisation", where at least 20 per cent of state-owned companies would be offered for sale in the stock market. Investors (companies or individuals) would be allowed to buy quotas that varied depending on the financial needs of the company.

It was when Nazif proposed it, Qandil's proposal is a typical example of pandering to the IMF. The plan is actually a perfect match with the current government's suspicious and opaque goal of convincing the IMF to grant a US\$4.8 billion loan to fix the public financial system. How pathetically more obvious could a plan be?

Ironically, Qandil's plan follows the same strategy of previous born-to-fail ones. Not just hollow in language and details, or hypocritically seeking the blessings of international players. It actually predicts its own failure within the body of the plan itself. It mentions a long list of obstacles against implementation that go beyond the concept of challenges. The plan makes it look like deadlock.

Corruption, unemployment, big budget deficit, income disparity, illiteracy, poor public services, food security and more are all among what Qandil calls "challenges". A well-worn trick that has always been played to justify failure in advance. At some point the government will say that they are sorry but it was very difficult for them. But let's make another plan!

Obviously, neither Qandil nor Morsy are in touch with the Egyptian street. They are detached from the frustrations and aspirations of the people who started a revolution that brought both of them to power. Power that seems to be quickly slipping out of their hands. Maybe if that happened they might realise that a non-revolutionary ten-year plan is just wishful thinking.

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are found in the provisions of the four Sunni schools of law. Further disagreements take place over women's rights and civil liberties, with Salafis believing that gender equality should not be stipulated unless it is emphasised that this equality should not violate God's law.

Those supporting a strong hegemonic state insist on giving considerable powers to the army, perhaps because they hope that the army will check the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood, in turn, clings to these articles as part of the deal that deposed Field Marshal Tantawi and returned the military as the background of the political landscape. Regarding the powers of the president, specifically his or her right to appoint the prime minister without a majority in Parliament or in the event of a dissolved parliament; there is evidence that the Brotherhood is ready to back down while they hold the presidency but this will be beneficial to whatever party holds the post in the future. Remarkably, the Salafis are not interested in these issues and thus do not discuss any of the provisions on the system of governance. Instead they consider the whole affair to be matter of little importance.

In my estimation, socio-economic

COMMENTARY

Disclaimer: Commentaries published by Daily News Egypt do not reflect the position of the paper, but the independent opinions of their authors.

The battle against female genital mutilation

The first time female genital mutilation (FGM) was discussed openly in Egypt was in 1994. This was during the UN-coordinated International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. The two week conference brought together world leaders, government officials, rights campaigners, and representatives of civil society and the media from 179 countries to discuss developmental challenges, linking these with human rights issues, especially women's issues.

It was the first time that I had ever heard terms like women's empowerment, reproductive health and sustainable development. It was also the first time I had heard about FGM. Nor did I know before then that it was practically universal in Egypt. Ninety six per cent of Egyptian women aged 15 to 49 were found to have been circumcised, according to a 2005 UNICEF report.

FGM was a taboo subject and it was at the ICPD that the silence on the practice was broken for the first time. A CNN reporter had travelled to Upper Egypt and filmed a young girl being cut. CNN aired the story a day before the opening of the conference and it sent shockwaves across Egypt and the rest of the world.

Young girls across the country were being subjected to the brutal practice, which left them scarred emotionally and physically for the rest of their lives. The CNN story embarrassed the Egyptian government which until then had turned a blind eye to the practice. The CNN reporter who broke the story was accused of "tarnishing the image of the country" and barred from reporting in Egypt.

The ICPD was ground-breaking, bringing such issues as reproductive health, domestic violence and FGM under scrutiny for the first time. Egypt was the first Arab country to ratify the Convention on Eliminating all forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981 (albeit with reservations), and the government had to show that it was serious about pledges it made to protect and promote women's rights - including curbing violence against women. It took several more years however, before the government - under immense pressure from the international community - reluctantly began taking small steps to eliminate the practice of FGM. In 2003, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood - a government body that had been established in 1988 to

plan, monitor and coordinate efforts to promote the wellbeing of children - launched the Free Villages project. The initiative which was supported by UN agencies, the European Commission and donors, aimed at changing families' attitudes towards FGM by raising awareness about the harmful effects of the brutal practice. Volunteers and community leaders went from door to door urging village families to abandon the practice. By the end of the first phase of the project (after a two year period) thousands of families in no fewer than 60 villages had signed public declarations saying "No to FGM."

Two years later, the number of villages declaring themselves "FGM-free" had doubled to 120.

Ninety six per cent of Egyptian women aged 15 to 49 were found to have been circumcised, according to a 2005 UNICEF report

I remember going to Benban, a tiny hamlet 30km from Aswan, to cover the very first village declaration to stop FGM. I was surprised to find that the mood was festive as mothers and daughters - dressed in their best attire - flocked to the large tent where the ceremony was taking place. They clapped and cheered as religious clerics, village doctors and community leaders addressed the crowd, speaking out against FGM and advising mothers not to circumcise their girls. Some of the mothers who had earlier attended awareness sessions or had heard the anti-FGM public service messages on TV also shared their knowledge with the audience. What surprised me most was that the women and girls were here, openly talking about the practice that not so long ago, had been a hush hush matter.

I still remember clearly the faces of the teenage girls - bright and innocent. They formed a circle round me and recounted their stories. Many of them had been traumatised by the experience and told me it would continue to haunt them for the rest of their lives. Some told me that they felt "relieved and empowered" knowing that they could now escape the terrible ordeal inflicted

on some of their older friends. "There's nothing in the Qur'an that says we ought to be circumcised," a 13 year old girl shyly whispered.

"I was circumcised at the age of 11. The experience continues to haunt me. I bled so much I almost died," recalled a 15 year-old village girl. Then, smiling broadly, she added, "but if I have daughters, I shall never put them through what I've been through."

Her companion, a dark girl who was veiled winced as if in pain as she remembered her own FGM experience. "Three women held me down as the midwife performed the surgery. They were all our neighbours. I still find it hard to forgive them," she said.

However, a father of three girls told me that despite what he had heard at the ceremony that day, he remained unconvinced. "Of course I shall have my daughters circumcised. These are our habits and traditions."

FGM is a centuries old practise in Egypt and is believed to protect a girl's chastity and thus, the family honour. Most Christian families have now abandoned the practice after church clerics advised families against it. Muslim clerics however have not categorically rejected FGM and often refer to a hadith by Prophet Muhammad. Many of them are unaware that the practice is neither popular nor common in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Yemen which are also majority Muslim countries.

When I asked Dr Sabbath El-Sakkary, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, about her views on FGM, she said "only a doctor can decide whether or not a girl is in need of the surgery."

I was terribly disappointed at her answer. After all, doctors in Upper Egypt perform circumcision for EGP100 per surgery. In times of economic hardship, they may be tempted to do several surgeries a day. In the villages, midwives earn a livelihood performing FGM. One midwife in Luxor told me in 2007 she does no less than three or four a day. In the absence of legislation to curb the practice, Egypt's girls will continue to suffer humiliation and physical pain. It is a huge disappointment to hear the calls of the Salafis to bring back FGM. I had hoped that Egypt would build on the small progress made in the last nine years. If the Salafi calls are heeded, we would instead be making a backward slide to the old days when the violent practice was used as a means to break girls into submission.

Shahira Amin is an award-winning freelance journalist and former deputy head of Nile TV. She quit her job at the height of last year's uprising in Tahrir Square in protest at state TV's biased coverage of the revolution. Amin is also a longtime contributor to CNN International.



SHAHIRA AMIN

was being discussed in classrooms and was frequently debated on TV.

In recent months, ultra conservative Salafis have called for the decriminalisation of FGM. They call it Suzanne Mubarak's law and say the former first lady imposed western values on society. The Salafis also demand lowering the marriage age for girls to nine or 10.

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With whom do the Muslim Brotherhood align: the Salafis or democratic forces?

The Constituent Assembly must finalise the constitution before 12 December. Despite this, it appears the different parties now insist on their respective positions more than ever. The disagreements are primarily between three parties: the Salafis, behind whom the jihadis and Takfiris have aligned; the Muslim Brotherhood who attract the support some Salafis; and democratic forces whose ranks are composed of liberals, Nasrists, leftists and social democrats.

These disagreements generally lie on three points of contention: the system of governance; socio-economic rights; and the identity of the state.

On the first point of contention, the disagreements revolve around the respective powers of the armed forces and the president and the independence of the judiciary. As for economic and social rights, the relevant texts are unbalanced and unclear. Some of these rights are clearly stipulated, while others are vaguely phrased. The third point of contention relates to the right of Al-Azhar religious scholars to interpret Shari'a. Other disagreements surround an updated interpretation of the second article of the constitution, which argues that the principles of Islamic Shari'a

rights will not be a significant source of disagreement. The Salafis are not interested in this matter, while the Muslim Brotherhood is willing to accept any wording of these rights - no matter how radical - to please social-democratic and leftist groups. Ultimately, the wording of the general constitutional principles will not entail specific social commitments from the state. Thus, I believe that the different political forces will reach an agreement on socio-economic rights.

In my estimation, the provisions regarding liberties and the identity of the state are the principle obstacles to reaching an agreement. I believe that as the deadline for the Constituent Assembly nears, the parties will face two basic choices.

In the first scenario, the different parties reach an agreement and enter a period of stability in which a constitution codifies and manages political conflict.

Alternatively, the principle powers may split over the constitution, inevitably leading to a constitution acknowledged by some citizens and rejected by others. The danger here is that those who reject the constitution will unite to form a single movement rather than remaining isolated, individual parts of different movements.

Practically, this means that society could reach a level of polarisation that, if continued, may lead to even more divisions.

All the principle parties, the Islamists, the felou, and democratic groups, have exerted every effort to push for the best constitution from their respective perspectives. However, all rational members of these groups are aware that negotiation must come to an end and that the end of this negotiation is imminent not only because the time allotted to the Constituent Assembly is ending but also because the public has begun to lose patience. There is considerable public pressure demanding that the elites end their bickering and reach an agreement that guarantees stability.

Some critics of the Muslim Brotherhood think that the group is uninterested in drafting a constitution or holding new parliamentary elections based on the premise that it does not believe in democracy or the transfer of power. I refrain from reading the intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood and delving into whether or not the Muslim Brotherhood believes in democracy. I can say that the Muslim Brotherhood is forced to finish a draft constitution and hold parliamentary elections because the IMF has stipulated

that an elected Egyptian Parliament must agree to the loan to be issued to Egypt. Likewise, a number of international agencies and foreign governments also await the existence of a stable democratic regime before any economic assistance is offered to Egypt. As the Muslim Brotherhood bears the responsibility of running the country, it recognises this assistance is needed, not to achieve prosperity or improve economic performance but rather to forestall increased impoverishment and economic decadence.

Once again, therefore, we face two choices: agreement or division. All the parties have presented their power, announced their demands, and negotiated all ways and means. Those who are rational and cognisant of the political game will now attempt to take the negotiations to their inevitable, painful ending offering mutual concessions and reaching what is minimally acceptable to the different parties. However, it is worth remembering here that those who are rational in the political arena are few, due to the lack of experienced political leaders - especially within the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. And so, we ought to impress here that the Brotherhood,

who in the final analysis are more reliable than the Salafis, face two choices: either align with the democratic forces to build the framework of an agreement able to attract some Salafis and repel the others, or attempt to align with the Salafis and exclude all of the democratic forces from the framework of the agreement.

Nobody can predict the position or performance of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, perhaps we will be able to return to the discussion of this subject in another conversation after some days have passed and offer an answer to question to the title of this column.

Farid Zahran is a publisher and writer. He is the co-founder of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party.



FARID ZAHAN



TOURISM

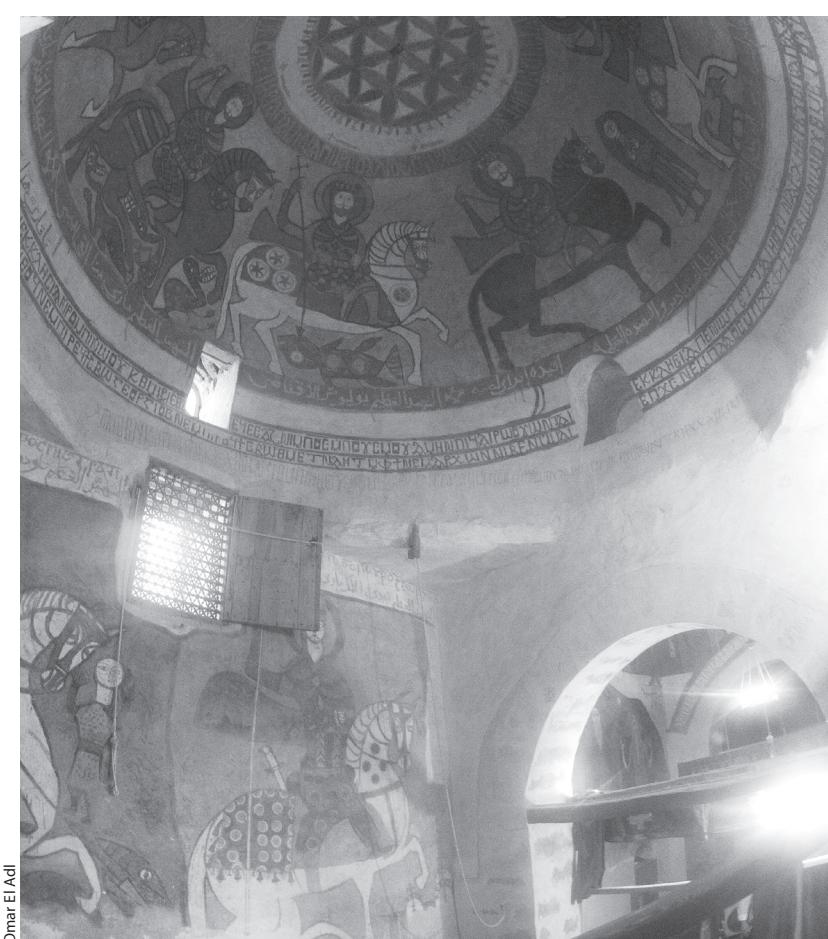
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2012 DAILY NEWS EGYPT 7

www.thedailynewsegypt.com

Between El Gouna and Sokhna, a fourth century piece of the holy land



The ancient protective fortress



Interior of the oldest church

By Omar El Adl

Just half an hour away from the monstrosity that is Port Sokhna, you will find the serene monastery of St. Paul, touted as the oldest monastery in Egypt, and consequently, the world. Though the monastery shares the distinction with nearby St. Anthony's, the title will be of no consequence to you as you drive up to the entrance. The 15-minute drive into the heart of the mountains from the coastline is breathtaking and almost worth the trip on its own. Driving inside, a silence that can only be explained by the desert engulfs you. Cell phone service becomes nonexistent and handmade crosses can be seen on every hilltop around you, however remote or high. After a sharp left, the monastery suddenly appears out of nowhere, carved into the mountains.

The monastery complex is very sophisticated and the place has evolved vastly since its original churches were built. The original structure was founded in the fourth century CE. We were first introduced to the place where the monks receive important guests, a large hall with luxurious furnishings and towering paintings adorning every corner. We were received by some of the high priests and their families, who offered us tea every chance they could. Next to it was the guest house equipped with kitchen, bathrooms and several seating areas.

Naturally the air around the monastery is crisp and clean, nothing like the exhaust fumes Cairenes breath everyday. The real journey began when we started to explore the complex on the other side of the guest house and the guest hall, which required a short drive. This is where buses were bringing in scores of visitors, mostly Coptic teenagers from the surrounding area.



Visitors to the monastery rest next to a church

The souvenir shop has all the information you might need on the monastery and its numerous churches, in print or digital formats, and there is a library ready to answer any theological questions you may have.

From the inside, you can spot remnants of a sixth century fortress surrounding the older parts of the monastery, to protect against potential attack. Today the surrounding area is filled with resorts everywhere you look, with El Gouna and Ain Sokhna in either direction on the coast. Visitors will be in no shortage of rest stops to stock up at before spending a day inside the monastery. Not that we needed to, because the friendly and hospitable monks of the monastery insisted we lunch with them.

The monks are the main reason the monastery feels friendly and inviting. The image most Egyptians have of monks is that they are deeply religious and perhaps even fanatical, choosing to live in the remote Egyptian desert, shunning all contact with people to attain the most profound contact with God. The monks we encountered, however, were more sociable and nicer than many city dwellers we know. There was no shortage of jokes, particularly inside jokes, between the monks when we visited. At one point we inserted a camera, with permission from the monk who was showing us around, through a church window to take a photo of monks singing Coptic hymns. We felt the camera being tugged and it disappeared. A monk later a monk's smiling face appearing instead, asking us, "well what do we have here then?"

We recommend arranging something with the monastery before arrival. But remember that although the monastery is open to everyone, it is less of a tourist attraction than a place of worship and communal living, and perhaps this is where its charm lies.

The monastery receives anyone regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender, and at no charge. This means that you can arrive at any time and if the monastery has lodgings available, they will put you up and feed you for a certain period of time, usually a few days unless otherwise agreed upon. Monastic life is self-sufficient in most ways; in addition to the lodgings, library and churches, the monastery is equipped with a doctor, an information office, a bakery and a women's guesthouse.

The churches range from the simple and unadorned to the ornate and even garish, depending on when they were built. Many rooms in the monastery have their own stories, such as one where threads were spun in olden times on an ancient wooden loom. Picturesque narrow alleyways beg to be explored with paths dotted with rubbish bins and shining from constant maintenance. Vegetation is kept green with water from the nearby mountain which supplies the monastery, and we were shown a room that houses the wells. Following the source of the well water, the stream travelled through an alleyway that turned out to be a tunnel reaching all the way into the mountain itself. Invited to try, we drank straight from the source. The water tasted somewhat sweet, but fresh and clean.

The monastery sports many signs of modernity that often compliment but also contradict its overall essence. Do not be surprised to see electrics and computers, in the library only, where until only a few decades ago the monks were cut off from the world. The monks praise the late Pope Shenouda III for this and credit him with many of the renovations that have made the place what it is today. You can find the odd truck here and there, parked next to a centuries old church, bringing building supplies.

The simplicity of monastery life still prevails though, despite these superficial signs of modernity. The visitors come to pray and reflect and the desert's unchanging silence provides a grandeur that helps the monastery retain its essence. St. Paul's makes you feel very small, almost insignificant, knowing that there were people who many centuries ago carved this breathtaking structure into a mountain. It humbles you to know that this is where an almost completely detached society still exists in an ageless fashion and with its own everyday reality. A place where human life continues, and has continued for centuries, in a set way, independent of our visit, our observations and even our existence.

Preserving the past by recreating it

Tutankhamen's tomb facsimile arrives in Egypt

By Adel Heine

Ninety years ago Howard Carter made a discovery that has enthralled the world for close to a century. The historical find was of course the tomb of Tutankhamen, one of the only pharaonic tombs to have been found with all its treasures intact. As Carter and his associates slowly unearthed the doors to the tomb and entered the chambers, people the world over marvelled at the astounding amounts of treasure that was found buried with the boy pharaoh.

Ever since then the treasures of Tutankhamen have drawn visitors to different museums that display part of the collection. A painstakingly made collection of replicas has been touring the world the past few years, giving those that do not have the opportunity to visit the Egyptian museum the chance to feast their eyes on the jewellery and artefacts, and of course the massive iconic golden mask that shows every detail of Tutankhamen's face.

While some object to replicas and dismiss them as fakes, others believe that by creating perfect replicas fragile monuments can be preserved while still offering the public a chance to marvel at the wonders of yesteryear. The latter theory lies at the heart of a project that created an exact replica of the tomb of Tutankhamen, which arrived in Cairo this week.

The Spanish Factum Arte workshop worked closely with the Society of Friends of the Royal Tombs of Egypt (based in Switzerland) and the Supreme Council of Antiquities to develop the technology and practical implementation to create an exact copy of the famous tomb, which is under considerable threat of damage from the vast amount of visitors it attracts. The facsimile is a gift from the Factum Foundation, the Society of Friends of the Royal Tombs of Egypt and the University of Basel to the Egyptian people.

The millennia old tombs in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor were designed

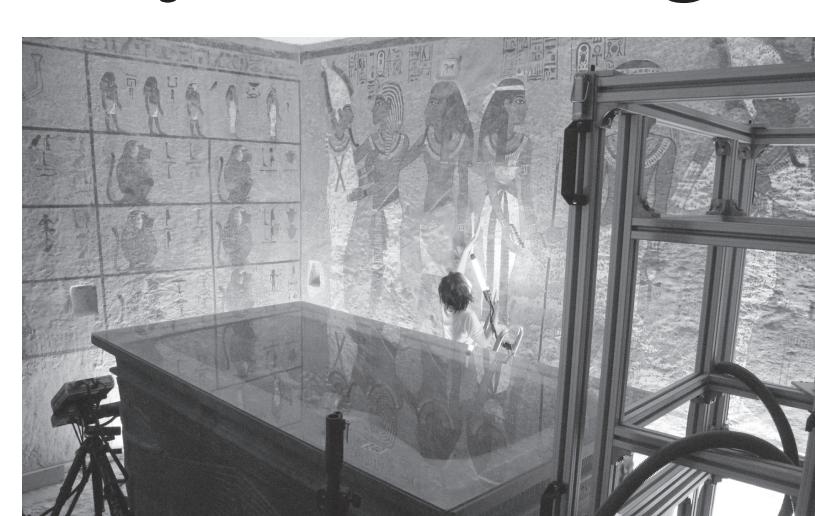
to withstand time but not thousands of visitors. A visit to the tombs is awe inspiring, as you gaze upon the drawings made in vibrant colours on the walls of tombs, buried deep beneath the desert floor, it is hard to imagine that they were drawn 3,000 years ago.

Unfortunately, the decorated plaster on the walls is not resistant to the dust the visitors bring into the tombs, or the humidity they create with every breath. Several tombs have been closed to the public to avoid any further damage while others are open on a rotation basis, in a bid to strike a balance between preserving the past and sharing it with the tourists that have never lost their fascination with the world of the pharaohs.

In 1988 the Supreme Council of Antiquities, working closely with the Society of Friends of the Royal Tombs of Egypt, embarked on a policy to create exact copies of some of the major tombs in the Valley of the Kings, to open to the public an alternative and new approach to sustainable tourism. Three tombs were identified for recreation and three years ago the Factum Arte workshop commenced the highly advanced data collection that would be the foundation of an exact reproduction of the tomb of Tutankhamen.

It is a unique project and never has an archaeological site of significance of this size been reproduced so exactly. Special software was developed and light and laser scanning techniques were used to create digital data of every single detail of the tomb, the sarcophagus, its lid and the missing piece of the south wall that was removed by Carter in order to empty the tomb of its treasures.

The construction of the facsimile involved the development of every possible shade of colour used in the tomb decorations, designing a huge flatbed printer, and an enormous amount of man-hours; from start to finish the project took over three years to complete and earlier this week the tomb was presented to Egypt, during the EU Task Force conference about Tourism and Flexible Investment.



The colours of the drawings are matched perfectly

After the conference the tomb was set to go to a site chosen by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 2010, near the entrance of the Valley of the Kings and close to Howard Carter's house. This week the current minister of Antiquities indicated that it may be preferable to install it in a major tourism resort like Hurghada or Sharm El Sheikh to attract tourists who may want to follow up exploring the tomb with a visit to Luxor.

"It is not a bad idea to display the replica as a large advertisement for the timeless sites in Luxor, but of course the preference of the people that helped fund and build the painstakingly made tomb is for the originally planned site close to the Valley of the Kings," Nigel Hetherington, archaeologist and consultant to the project said. "However, the final decision will be made by the minister of Antiquities."

It is not the first time that so called conservation archaeology has included the construction of replicas, famous examples include prehistoric cave paintings in western Europe and Veronese's The Wedding at Cana painting, an exact copy of which has been installed in the very place it was designed to be displayed. "When the replica of the cave was placed close to the real site people wondered if visitors would pay it a visit when the original one was



Detail of the finished facsimile



Innovative techniques are used to record the data



Every shade of each colour is recorded

Alicia Guitao/Factum Arte

Alicia Guitao/Factum Arte

Gregoire Dupont/Factum Arte



ART & CULTURE

Art should make a statement and Culture is what surrounds us.

EVENTS

MUSIC

Salalem

Salalem are an Egyptian contemporary band of indie pop that is clearly a cut above the rest of what the scene has to offer. Their humorous lyrics are filled with the kind of social commentary you can nod your head to, not cringe. Minimum charge at After Eight is EGP 100. *After Eight*
6 Kasr El Nil Street
Downtown, Cairo
Tel: 010 0339 8000
15 November 9pm

FILM

Matrimonio a Parigi

Matrimonio a Parigi is a comedy about a wedding in Paris and the crossing of two families. This film is unlikely to be available anywhere else so this is your chance to enjoy it. Attendance is free.

Italian Cultural Centre
3, El Sheik El Morsafi Street
Zamalek, Cairo
Tel: (02) 2735 5423
15 November 7pm

EXHIBITIONS

PhotoCairo 5

Part of an impressive line-up of events that cover seven different venues in Cairo and span everything from screenings to symposiums, this exhibition at Townhouse is about the response art provokes in people and its effect. Attendance is free and the exhibition is bilingual in Arabic and English. *The Townhouse Gallery Factory Space*
Hussein El Me'mar Pasha Street
Downtown, Cairo
Tel: (02) 2576 8086
15 November 12pm

The Papyrus village



Soaked papyrus is flattened before being lined up in sheets

By Abdel-Rahman Sherief

Five years ago, tourists in Egypt could not find the papyrus sold at bazaars and by vendors at archaeological sites in Giza or Luxor like they can today.

The ancient craft of papyrus making had become extinct, until, in the 1970s it was resurrected by the Egyptian artist Anas Mustafa. He started growing papyrus in his home village Qaramos, in the Sharqiya governorate and when, later on, papyrus growing proved to be profitable, the whole village followed his example and became the centre of papyrus production in Egypt.

Mustafa taught his fellow villagers not only how to grow papyrus, he also shared with them the knowledge of how to transform the plants into the ancient paper. Initially he trained 200 villagers who, when they found how commercially viable growing the crop is, taught the rest of the village.

Papyrus cultivation takes only two or three months. "It is very simple," said Mohamed Zoghy, papyrus farmer and trader. "The plants do not need any special chemicals or fertilisers; all it takes is water. Besides the ease of cultivation, papyrus is also not a seasonal crop; it can be grown year round."

Every house in Qaramos is a papyrus workshop and most of the village inhabitants are engaged in the business. Zoghy said that 90 per cent of the village's agricultural land is planted with

the crop and even the surrounding villages have abandoned other crops and have started to grow it too.

Zoghy inherited his profession from his father and grandfather and the whole household takes part in the papyrus production cycle, including his wife and sons. Together the family can produce up to 1,000 sheets per week.

Production in Qaramos follows the same procedures that were invented by the ancient Egyptians thousands of years ago. After the papyrus is harvested the stems are cut in pieces, peeled and left in a barrel with caustic soda for four or five hours to soften. Then the wet papyrus is flattened with the same primitive tools used since pharaonic times, and pasted together to form a sheet. These sheets are then wrapped in rags, pressed in an iron press and finally placed on cardboard squares and left in the sun to dry.

Once the papyrus sheets are dry they move on to the print shops. There are six print shops in Qaramos, and Wagdy, one print shop owner, said he had been working in papyrus printing since he was seven years old. The most common printing method in Qaramos is silkscreening. Plain papyrus sheets are stamped with a design and colour when paint is pushed through a screen that holds the design. A papyrus sheet can go through this process three or four times before all the colours are completed in the design, since the silk-screen machine in Wagdy's print shop

can only process one colour at a time.

Tourists are the main consumers of papyrus and "designs vary according to tourists' demands," said Wagdy. Wagdy sells his finished papyrus sheets to bazaars in Aswan, Hurghada, Khan El-Khalili in Cairo and many other places. He said that the designs popular in Luxor and Aswan differ from the ones that sell well in Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheikh; in Luxor pharaonic designs depicting the Luxor Temple or Tutankhamen's mask are in high demand, while in Hurghada designs depicting landscapes are more popular.

Wagdy's print shop can produce 5,000 sheets a week, he buys the plain sheets from farmers for a pound but by the time he sells them to souvenir shops, his mark-up is four or five times that.

Both Zoghy and Wagdy agreed that Tourism has great influence on the papyrus business. "A tour bus crash in Sinai can affect the whole papyrus production chain," said Zoghy.

During the 25 January Revolution tourism activity in Egypt practically came to a stop and papyrus prices dropped. Only 20 per cent of the harvest was sold and farmers burned the rest.

The villagers of Qaramos can only hope that the security situation and political stability will improve and that tourism will recover so that their papyrus business can thrive and flourish as before.

The wrath of righteous scissors

Last Friday I passed Tahrir not long after prayer time. Small groups of men, dressed in clean *galabeyas* and many sporting long beards were talking animatedly and smiling as they made their way to the square to protest. They looked more as if they were on a daytrip with their friends rather than on their way to voice support for the strict implementation of Shari'a law in the constitution.

There were groups of women too, covered from head to toe in flowing black and brown garments. It was impossible to tell if they were chattering amiably among themselves, but their determined step, together with their choice of dress, gave an impression of purpose; as much as the men were ambling along the women were striding towards their goal.

It seems the women are unleashed and are taking matters into their own hands. A few weeks ago there was the absurdity of the fully veiled teacher who cut the hair of two of her pupils and only last week we could feast our eyes on a graphic representation on how modest dress directly relates to being nice to the higher being.

A few days ago there seems to have been a merger of these two stories, when two fully veiled women decided it was time to teach one of their lesser enlightened sisters a much-needed lesson. While travelling in the Metro they forcefully grabbed a fellow passenger who was wearing her hair right out in the open. After they cut off the offending hair, modesty above all of course, they brutally pushed the woman off the train, causing her to fall and break her arm.

The Egypt that I have come to know has impressed and humbled me many times by the unexpected, wholehearted kindness that passing strangers have shown me. From a helping hand when I stumbled on the street to offers of carrying heavy bags, many people have shown me a courtesy that is hard to find on the streets where I am from.

Times have changed, or so it seems, and intolerance and smallness of spirit are on the rise. One of the most innately personal things, a religious belief, has become a yardstick used for judgment. Respect is turning into reckoning, understanding into denial and the wrath of the righteous will come to find you and your hair.

Hiding behind layers of religion and clothes, these brave anti-freedom fighters are setting the world to rights with their scissors. Modesty in its purest form.



ADEL HEINE

rest of the family had left the house. As they discussed their kids, their husbands, the price of food and the general gossip in their community one must have made a remark that got the unseemly ball rolling. Whatever it was must have been inspiring because before you could say cut they were positioned in the Metro, scissors in hand, ready to attack an innocent traveller who was minding her own business.

It also makes me wonder what it was like in that Metro carriage. The trains are seldom empty so it is safe to assume that there were quite a few other women around. Was there a conversation before the eager hairdressers swooped down on their victim? Some proper yelling and shoving that preceded the unwarranted attack? Did the rest of the passengers sit quietly and watched how a fellow female was humiliated and abused? Was there anyone who stood up and helped the woman after she broke her arm?

The Egypt that I have come to know has impressed and humbled me many times by the unexpected, wholehearted kindness that passing strangers have shown me. From a helping hand when I stumbled on the street to offers of carrying heavy bags, many people have shown me a courtesy that is hard to find on the streets where I am from.

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Hiding behind layers of religion and clothes, these brave anti-freedom fighters are setting the world to rights with their scissors. Modesty in its purest form.

Weather



Thursday, November 15

Alexandria	24°C / 15°C
Aswan	28°C / 21°C
Cairo	26°C / 17°C
Hurghada	25°C / 18°C
Luxor	28°C / 18°C
Sharm El-Sheikh	31°C / 20°C
Suez	22°C / 13°C

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