

Foreign minister to participate in OIC meeting on Mali

AMR WILL STRESS EGYPT'S SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT IN MALI

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Kamel Amr travelled to Jeddah on Sunday afternoon ahead of a ministerial group meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the situation in Mali to be held on Monday.

Ministry spokesperson Amr Roshy said in a statement published on Sunday that the formation of the ministerial group to follow the situation in Mali is a result of the Islamic Summit that was held in Cairo in February. Roshy said the group includes 15 member states and Egypt was keen to be included in the group "confirming its interest in African is-

sues and its commitment to support African peace and security".

The meeting in Jeddah will address the issues raised in the Declaration on Mali that the OIC announced in February. One of the main topics to be discussed is "the establishment of a special fund on a voluntary basis to support development in Mali", said Roshy.

This meeting comes at a time when a series of regional and international meetings are being held on the situation in Mali, according to the ministry statement. Amr will also participate in an international donor conference in Brussels on Wednesday, which aims to "mobilise interna-

tional and regional support for the development process in Mali".

Roshy asserted that Amr would take this opportunity to reiterate Egypt's "support for the unity of Mali and its sovereign and territorial integrity". He added that Amr would also highlight that Egypt has provided humanitarian aid for displaced Malians, "as well as Egyptian programs to build the capacity of national cadres in a number of areas in order to build state institutions and enable it to fulfil its development process".

Conflict broke out in Mali in January 2012 between the government and Islamist rebels who seized the north of the country. In March 2012

the Malian military staged a coup d'état, which was condemned by the international community. Following negotiations, Dioncounda Traoré assumed the presidency and pledged to fight the rebels in order to regain control of the country.

In response to Traoré's request for military assistance, France launched Opération Serval in January 2013 in order to help combat the rebels.

Both the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and President Mohamed Morsi spoke out against French intervention in January, stressing the need for a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

Airport denies detaining Emad Gad

The Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP) issued a statement on Saturday saying that Vice-Chairman Emad Gad was stopped by airport security at Cairo International Airport and taken to Homeland Security.

Gad was returning from Beirut after attending a conference on "building a modern state in the context of the Arab movement". He and writer Amina Shafik were stopped upon their arrival in Egypt, according to the ESDP statement.

Gad was allegedly taken to the Homeland Security office inside the airport because he had a similar name to a suspected criminal, according to the statement.

Gad and Shafik were detained for half an hour, according to Mohamed Arif, secretary of the public action committee of ESDP. Arif called the incident an attempt to terrorise the opposition.

Ahmed Saleh, the airport's public relations director, told Daily News Egypt that "the incident never occurred".

He added that it only took Gad about four minutes to go through the passport checking process and that he was not taken to Homeland Security.

White House official visits Cairo

Obama's Middle East coordinator visits Cairo for high level meetings

By Joel Gurley

White House coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf Region Philip Gordon arrived in Cairo on Saturday for a series of meetings.

David Linfield, Acting Press Attaché at the US Embassy in Cairo, said that Gordon's visit is scheduled to last for "a few days" and he will meet with government officials,



White House coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf Region Philip Gordon is in Cairo to hold top level meetings

civil society representatives, political parties, and business leaders.

Linfield said Gordon's visit will "focus on overall US-Egypt relations and will reiterate US support for Egypt's democratic transition".

Gordon met with Secretary General of the Arab League Nabil El-Araby on Sunday morning. The pair discussed developments of the situation in Syria, the Palestinian issue, and the latest developments in the region, reported state-owned news agency MENA.

This is Gordon's first visit to Egypt since he assumed his role at the White House in March.

Irrigation minister: Egypt not opposed to Renaissance Dam

By Luiz Sanchez

Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Bahaa ElDin said on Saturday that Egypt does not oppose the establishment of development projects or dams along the Nile River as long as it does not affect water distribution between countries.

Bahaa ElDin's statement, made during an interview on a state TV channel, was in relation to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which many fear will alter the balance of water to downstream countries such as Egypt and Sudan. The minister said Ethiopia has the right to pursue such projects as long as it does not alter Egypt's water shares.

According to the state-run news agency MENA, the Ethiopian prime minister has promised the state will not allow the dam to affect Egypt's share of the water, stressing that the dam serves only to generate electricity.

During his interview Bahaa ElDin also mentioned the international committee tasked with investigating the potential effects of the dam, saying if the committee concluded the dam would have an adverse effect on Egypt then discussions with Ethiopia to find an alternative would be needed.

If no agreement can be reached between Egypt and Ethiopia, MENA reported Bahaa ElDin saying, then Egypt would turn to international rules and laws to settle the matter. However the minister stressed ties between the two nations were strong and Ethiopia would be flexible if needed.

The dam is a contentious issue be-

tween Egypt and Ethiopia. In order to deal with the issue surrounding the dam's effects on downstream nations, an international panel of experts (IPOE) was established to investigate the impact of the dam.

The IPOE consists of ten experts from Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and members of the international community. It is expected to complete the report this month, and Egypt has said it will base future dialogue surrounding the dam on IPOE findings.

Egypt has previously refused to sign the Entebbe Agreement, which would see a redistribution of Nile water. The redistribution would potentially have a negative effect on Egypt's share of the water; 55.5 billion cubic metres annually from an estimated total 84 billion cubic metre output.

Reports last year surrounding a potential military strike on the dam by Egypt were vehemently denied by Egyptian authorities. The allegations were initially made in a Sudanese newspaper citing WikiLeaks documents alleging that Sudan had agreed to allow Egypt to construct an airbase from where Egypt would be able to launch an airstrike on the dam if needed.

On Saturday Minister of Defence Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi refused to resort to military force to solve any water disputes Egypt may have with neighbouring countries. His statement was made in a military camp in Dahshour where, according to state-owned Al-Ahram, he told the press that Egypt would look for a peaceful solution to the Ethiopian issue.

"We want to live and [Ethiopians] want to live," Al-Sisi said.

Fatah, Hamas hold reconciliation talks in Cairo

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Mahmoud Al-Zahar, a founding member and leading figure in Hamas, said in an interview with Al-Aqsa TV on Saturday that the delegation would focus on reconciliation and elections to resolve key crises between Fatah and Hamas. He blamed the Palestinian Authority for disrupting the reconciliation process, saying they are tied to the United States position which rejects reconciliation between the two factions.

Ghazi Hammad, the Hamas foreign affairs spokesperson, told Daily News Egypt the time has come for Fatah and

Hamas to make a decision regarding the implementation of the Doha agreement and the Cairo agreements.

"We have to focus on national interests, not US calculations," Hammad said. "The US is not interested in a successful reconciliation and they have tried to influence Abbas' government to stall negotiations."

Hammad stressed reconciliation is the most important factor for Hamas at the moment. "Restoring national unity will give Palestinians more strength and support," he said. "We have to face American pressure on the Palestinian Authority and we have

to prove we can achieve an agreement despite what the US wants."

In order to achieve reconciliation, Hammad says there are no preconditions. "We want to begin implementing the agreement and do not need more conditions for it to happen."

"Now is the time for Fatah and Hamas to make a decision and to go for elections," Hammad said. "People are really upset and frustrated because we have met many times in Cairo and Doha but nothing has been done on the ground. I hope this time we are more practical in order to achieve results."

BCHR rejects arrest of alleged bomb plotters

Three people arrested for allegedly planning to carry out 'terrorist attacks' in Cairo and Alexandria



Minister of Interior Mohamed Ibrahim had said that the suspects were planning to bomb an embassy in Cairo

By Hend Kortam

Bara'a Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) released a statement on Saturday condemning the recent arrest of three people accused of plotting terrorist attacks, stating that the materials found with the alleged plotters were not explosives.

Three people were arrested for allegedly planning to carry out terrorist attacks on three vital institutions in the capital and Alexandria.

Ahmed Zakaria, a BCHR lawyer, attended the interrogations of three

suspects, Mohamed Saleh and Mohamed Bayoumi from Alexandria, and Amr Mohamed from Cairo. The prosecution ordered the detention of Saleh and Bayoumi for 15 days and placed Mohamed under house arrest for 15 days.

Zakaria said the materials found in Bayoumi's possession are organic fertilisers that are not explosive and can be found in any home with a garden. According to Minister of Interior Mohamed Ibrahim, a bag containing 10kg of aluminum nitrate was found in the suspect's possession.

Zakaria described the case against Bayoumi as full of fabrications.

In a press conference on Saturday, Ibrahim said the police had apprehended suspects who were planning to attack an embassy in Cairo. He refused to name the embassy.

He described the suspects as a terrorist group and said that although they are ideologically linked to Al-Qaeda, they are not a part of the group's organisational structure. Ibrahim added that there was evidence that the suspects had been in contact with two Al-Qaeda leaders.

Electricity company workers on strike

Workers demand equal rights and healthcare

By Nourhan Dakrouy

Workers from electricity companies from around the country went on strike on Sunday at the Cabinet building.

Workers Media Coordinator at the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECSR) Dalia Moussa said that the workers have been treated unequally and have complained of increasing corruption in the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.

"Those who work in the holding company have more privileges than those who work in the subsidy com-

panies," Moussa said. She said that school grants for workers' children are deducted from their bonuses although the grants are provided by the government.

She added that this is the first time that workers from all over Egypt have come together on strike.

According to ECSR, the workers are demanding workers from the holding company and the subsidy companies be given the same rights, healthcare be provided for them and their families, school grants be given to the workers' children, and all syndicates be treated equally.

Ahmed Moheb, secretary general

of the Electricity and Energy Workers Union, said that the council demanded the formation of a delegation of workers to negotiate with the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.

The workers refused to form the delegation because they have previously met with the ministry and only received empty promises from officials, according to Wael Aql, president of the Workers Union.

"We are going to hold out for a concrete timetable setting out when our demands will be addressed," Moheb said.

He added that if this timetable is not issued soon, workers will go on an open-ended strike.

6 April Democratic Front begin sit-in for detained member

YOUTH GROUP HOLDS A SIT-IN AT PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IN SOLIDARITY WITH DETAINEES

By Joel Gulhane

The 6 April Democratic Front began a sit-in, on Sunday, in front of the presidential palace in solidarity with two men who are in prison awaiting questioning, scheduled for Monday.

The two men are Abdelrahman "Mano" Mohsen and Youseff "Joseph El-Ostura" Ali, who were both arrested in dawn raids on their homes on 19 April. Mohsen is a formal member of the front while Ali is closely associated with the group. The two men are accused of being members of the Black Bloc group.

The front met in front of Saray Al-Qobba metro station on Sunday afternoon, having announced in a statement that they would erect a mock prison cell "which symbolises complete solidarity with the detainees".

The front's statement said the Free Front for Political Change and members of the newly formed "Hanharhom" (We Will Free Them) campaign would also take part in the sit-in.

Mustafa Al-Hagary, spokesperson for the front, confirmed that the sit-in would be held outside the presidential palace. He added that it is not

only for Mohsen and Ali, but also for all detainees.

The statement from the group said the demonstration would "demand their (the detainees') release and denounce violations of the Ministry of Interior, the prosecutor general and the selective arrests by the Muslim Brotherhood regime and [President Mohamed] Morsi".

The front has been actively calling for the release of detained activists over the last month. In April they demonstrated outside the New Cairo Court in the Fifth Settlement in solidarity with detained politi-

cal activists. Also in April, members of the front circulated around central Cairo in order to raise awareness for their cause. Last Friday the group also marched to the Giza security directorate.

The 6 April Youth Movement, a separate group of the same origin, demonstrated outside the High Court building on Saturday and also called for the release of detained activists, including Mohsen and Ali.

The front intends to remain outside the presidential palace until after Mohsen and Ali are interrogated on Monday, said Al-Hagary.

Residents of Al-Duweiba threaten escalation of protests

Cairo neighbourhood residents accuse Cairo governor of 'stalling'

Residents of the Al-Duweiba neighbourhood threatened to escalate their protests against the Cairo governorate if it continues to "disregard their demands".

They publicly refused the "stalling" of the governor of Cairo in a press conference, on Sunday, and said they were unable to pay the accumulated bills demanded by the governorate authorities.

The residents demonstrated outside the state media building in Maspero demanding they be allowed to acquire the apartments they are living in.

Al-Duweiba was struck by a rock-slide from the Moqattam hill in 2008,

displacing the residents. The government provided them with five-year contracts in other housing units, but now the tenants fear they will be evicted when their contracts expire.

They stated their interest in buying the housing units they have been renting from the government, but the latter said that they would be required to pay the aggregate costs for utilities that they have used over the past five years. According to the group of neighbourhood families, some residents owe as much as EGP 5,000.

The residents submitted proposals for long-term payment plans, but these were turned down.

Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya demands removal from US terror list

Building and Development Party call on US to release spiritual leader and remove parent group from terror list



Khaled Al-Sharif, spokesman of the Building and Development Party, at the press conference

The Building and Development Party, the political wing of Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya, called on the United States government to release its spiritual leader Omar Abdel Rahman from prison and to remove the group from the Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTO) list.

In a press conference held on Sunday, Khaled Al-Sharif, spokesman for the party, asserted that the Building and Development Party does not oppose the West. He also demanded that the Abdel Rahman be released and that Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya be removed from the FTO list.

Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya was placed on the US FTO list in 1997 fol-

lowing years of armed insurgency against the Egyptian government. The group has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in the 1990s. In 2003 the leaders of Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya renounced violence, which prompted the release of many of the group's imprisoned members.

Despite this, the group has remained on the FTO list and was also included on a 2005 update of the European Union list of terror organisations.

Abdel Rahman, also known as 'the blind sheikh', is currently serving a life sentence in the US in connection to the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing in New York.

Al-Sisi: The army does not interfere in political affairs

Commander of the Armed Forces says the way for Egypt to move forward is through the ballot box

By Basil El-Dabh

The Egyptian military will not take to the streets, said Commander of the Armed Forces Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi on Saturday.

The defence minister said in front of troops and public figures at military training exercises that the army was not the solution to the current political issues the country faces, and that it would not resort to policing the streets.

"No one is going to remove anyone," Al-Sisi said in regards to the possibility of the military forcefully removing President Mohamed Morsi. The defence minister went on to say the military was not the "solution" to certain problems. He also stated that it was better for the country to decide its future through ballot boxes and stressed the importance of consensus among civilians in political matters.

He also said that if the army answers some people's call to police the streets, then "we would not be able to speak of Egypt progressing for the next 30 or 40 years".

Al-Sisi's comments came at a time when political polarisation continues to mount along with security concerns.



Minister of Defense and Commander of the Armed Forces Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi said the Egyptian military will not be taking to the streets

The defence minister referred to the state of the army as "strong and capable".

The Alliance of Revolutionary Forces criticised the commander's statements, saying his comments insinuated that he was in favour of holding parliamentary elections despite the opposition's right to boycott those elections until there are safeguards insuring they are free and fair.

"Parliamentary elections under the

rule of the Muslim Brotherhood are an invitation to submit to a regime that has lost its legitimacy completely," the group said in a statement.

The statement also rejected calls for the army to intervene directly in the political situation. "Revolutionary forces have never bet on an institution for the liberation of the country and to achieve the objectives of the revolution," it added.

Al-Sisi has previously distanced the army from demands to return to governance. In January he warned that intense political differences could lead to "the collapse of the state and threaten the future of upcoming generations".

The army called for national dialogue in December following President Morsi's November constitutional declaration, but postponed the call indefinitely.

Lawyers file corruption lawsuit against judges

By Luiz Sanchez

A lawsuit has been filed by several lawyers, including Ragia Omran, against several judges on charges of corruption during the 2005 parliamentary election. According to a document sent from Shayfeencom, the election monitoring group, 22 people, including judges, stand accused of rigging the

2005 parliamentary election.

The lawsuit is being filed by the Al-Akl Al-Arabi Centre for Law and Freedoms and Human Rights and other lawyers who have collaborated on gathering the evidence.

Ahmed Hafez, the executive director at Shayfeencom, said the lawsuit was first filed in 2005 but was summarily dismissed. The new lawsuit

was filed last week to the minister of justice and the lawyers have yet to receive a response from the ministry.

"The importance of this lawsuit is that it informs whoever is monitoring future elections that fraud and election rigging are not acceptable," Hafez said.

According to the statement, the lawyers have called on Prosecutor

General Talaat Abdallah to give his testimony and to submit any papers he may have acquired when he was Secretary General of the fact-finding commission tasked with investigating allegations of fraud in 2005. Minister of Justice Ahmed Mekki was also called to testify in his previous capacity as chairman of the fact-finding committee.

Minors arrested near Interior Ministry

For attempting to bring down makeshift walls erected by ministry

By Rana Muhammad Taha

Nineteen people were arrested in the vicinity of the Ministry of Interior, on Saturday, for allegedly attempting to bring down the walls erected by the ministry.

The Ministry of Interior built walls surrounding Tahrir Square starting November 2012 to prevent protesters from reaching the ministry's headquarters.

The arrests took place near Al-Sheikh Rihan Street, where the ministry is located; 16 of the detained are minors, "their ages not exceeding 16 years," said Lawyer Fady Wagdy.

An investigation was conducted into the 19 detainees at Qasr Al-Nil prosecution on Sunday. They were accused of attacking security

forces, rioting, possession of weapons and destroying public property, Wagdy explained.

"Most of the detainees denied the charges," he added. "They said they were randomly arrested near Tahrir Square. They claimed to have nothing to do with bringing down the walls."

Building walls closing down the routes between Tahrir Square and the Ministry of Interior is a phenomenon which has proliferated since 2011.

In November 2011, deadly clashes on Mohamed Mahmoud Street lasted for five days between protesters and security forces, amid claims they were attempting to raid the ministry.

Clashes stopped when a wall was erected to block Mohamed Mahmoud Street's entrance to Tahrir square.

Black and white taxi-drivers march to presidential palace



Drivers of the black and white taxi marched from the October War Panorama to the presidential palace on Sunday demanding to meet President Mohamed Morsi. Their escalation comes after their demands

to the Ministry of Finance were not met. Demands included the continuation of a government project that offered taxi drivers the chance to replace the black and white taxi with newer car models.

Jerusalem clerics slam 'brutal' police acts at Easter

AFP - The heads of Jerusalem's Orthodox churches on Sunday spoke out against the "brutal treatment" meted out by Israeli police to both priests and pilgrims during an ancient Easter ritual in the Old City.

The incident occurred during the centuries-old sacred Holy Fire rite which takes place the day before Easter in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, with police allegedly hitting a priest and several Egyptian diplomats.

It sparked a diplomatic incident with Cairo which promptly summoned the Israeli ambassador to protest, with Israel's deputy foreign minister confirming he had apologised.

"We, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, watched with sorrowful hearts the horrific scenes of the brutal treatment of our clergy, people, and pilgrims in the Old City of Jerusalem during Holy Saturday," said a statement from the Orthodox

patriarchs and church leaders.

"A day of joy and celebration was turned to great sorrow and pain for some of our faithful because they were ill-treated by some Israeli policemen who were present around the gates of the Old City and passages that lead to the Holy Sepulchre."

Footage posted on the Internet showed police manhandling a Coptic priest, with one officer locking the priest's head in his arm. Police said they had opened an investigation.

Although the church leaders acknowledged the need for police to keep order among the thousands of pilgrims and visitors who flock to the annual ceremony, they accused police of "indiscriminately and brutally" beating people.

"It is not acceptable that under pretext of security and order, our clergy and people are indiscriminately and brutally beaten, and prevented from entering their churches, monasteries and convents."

The statement called on the Israeli police and the interior ministry "to seriously consider our complaints, to hold responsibility and to condemn all acts of violence against our faithful and the clergy who were ill-treated by the police."

Among the signatories were Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III and Latin Patriarch Fuad Twal, as well as the leaders of all the other Orthodox churches in Jerusalem.

Nine arrested over deadly Turkey bombings

AFP - Turkey on Sunday said it has arrested nine people over the twin car bombings that left at least 46 people dead in a Turkish town near the Syrian border, as Damascus rejected allegations that it was behind the attack.

Cranes were seen lifting debris from buildings destroyed by Saturday's blasts in Reyhanli, a major Turkish hub for Syrian refugees and rebels.

The attacks were the deadliest to hit Turkey since the Syria conflict began two years ago and apparently provoked a backlash against Syrian refugees as dozens of cars were wrecked by rampaging crowds, according to witnesses.

The Reyhanli blasts have raised fears that Turkey has been drawn into the Syrian conflict.

Can Dundar, a columnist at Turkey's Milliyet newspaper, wrote: "Turkey seems to be sinking into the Syrian swamp... It has become a stakeholder in this civil war by directly supporting the opposition."

Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay told a televised news conference Sunday that nine people have been held for questioning over the bombings, saying there have been confessions and that the suspects belong to "a terrorist organisation in contact with Syrian intelligence".

Atalay also said that 38 of the 46



People sift through the debris on May 12, 2013 after a car bomb exploded on May 11 in Reyhanli in Hatay, just a few kilometres from the main border crossing into Syria

people killed in the blasts have been identified, of whom 35 were Turkish and three were Syrian.

Officials say dozens more were injured in the explosions.

Turkey's Interior Minister Muammer Guler said: "We have identified those who organised it,

those who carried out recognition (efforts), those who placed the vehicles".

Syria on Sunday rejected claims that it was behind the attack.

"Syria did not commit and would never commit such an act because our values would not allow that," In-

formation Minister Omran al-Zohbi told a press conference broadcast by state television.

"It is (Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip) Erdogan who should be asked about this act... He and his party bear direct responsibility," he added.

Turkey, a member of NATO, distanced itself from its erstwhile ally soon after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad started cracking down on pro-democracy protests in 2011.

Ankara has since become a rear base for the Syrian rebellion and Damascus has already been blamed for a string of attacks on Turkish soil.

The attack sowed panic in Reyhanli, a town of about 60,000 people.

"I heard the first blast, walked out, thinking it was a missile being fired from Syria. Then I found myself on the ground, my arms and right leg hurting, my ears ringing. It must have been the second bomb," said Hikmet Haydut, a 46-year-old coffee shop owner who had minor injuries to his head and body. "I am alive, but all I have is gone."

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, on a visit to Berlin, said it was "not a coincidence" the bombings occurred as international diplomatic efforts to solve the Syrian crisis were intensifying.

The United States and Russia, one of the few remaining supporters of Assad's regime, pledged this week to relaunch efforts to solve the conflict, which the United Nations estimates has killed 80,000 people since March 2011.

Erdogan, who earlier this month branded Assad a "butcher", is due to meet US President Barack Obama in Washington on Thursday.

Saudi-Yemen talks focus on security: agency

AFP - Saudi Arabia's interior minister on Sunday discussed security cooperation with Yemen, home to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Yemen's official Saba news agency reported from the neighbouring kingdom.

Prince Mohammed bin Nayef discussed with Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi in Saudi Arabia "strengthening bilateral security cooperation for preserving security in both countries," Saba said.

They also discussed the impact of new Saudi constraints on foreign workers that have led to the expulsion of thousands of citizens of the impoverished Arabian Peninsula country living in the oil-rich Gulf kingdom.

Riyadh warned this month that illegal foreign workers risk being slapped with prison sentences and fines after a three-month grace period expires on July 3.

Saudi Arabia is resuming a project abandoned in 2004 to build a three-metre-high (10-foot) fence the length of its border with Yemen, local media reported in April.

Al-Qaeda took advantage of the decline in central government control during the upheaval before president Ali Abdullah Saleh's departure to seize control of swathes of south and east Yemen during 2011.

Despite a counter-offensive by the army last year, backed by US drone strikes, the jihadists are still active in the desert east.

The militants have withdrawn to mountainous regions in several provinces and although weakened still manage to launch frequent hit-and-run attacks on the security forces.

President Abdurrahman Hadi was quoted this week as warning of "the presence of sleeping Al-Qaeda cells in Sanaa."

Police on Sunday raided a house in the southern city of Aden, killing one suspected Al-Qaeda militant and arresting three, an official said, adding that the cell had been plotting to attack vital installations.

EU warns Syria crisis at 'breaking point', boosts aid

AFP - The European Commission announced on Sunday an additional €65m (\$84m) in aid for Syrian refugees and internally displaced, warning the crisis is "already at breaking point".

The announcement came in a statement released to coincide with a visit to Syrian refugees in Jordan by humanitarian aid commissioner Kristalina Georgieva.

"The more atrocities and fighting go on in Syria, the more people run. There are no indications whatsoever that this... is going to go down," Georgieva told AFP after visiting the Zaatar refugee camp in Jordan's north.

As temporary home to more than 160,000 Syrians, Zaatar is equivalent to the kingdom's fifth largest city, according to the United Nations.

"We have to dig deep into our pockets (to help the Syrians) because the worst is yet to come. The crisis is beyond humanitarian response. We need to do more and we need to do more in a better way," Georgieva said.

The UN humanitarian office said on Tuesday that the number of displaced Syrians has risen from around two million people to 4.25 million.

The figures, combined with more than 1.4 million who have fled abroad, mean that more than a quarter of Syria's pre-war population of 22.5 million have been forced to quit their homes since the conflict erupted in March 2011.

The overwhelming majority of the refugees have fled to neighbouring Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan.

In its statement, the commission said it was announcing an additional €65m "in response to the rapidly growing scale of the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict in Syria".

"The additional funding will be spent inside Syria, to assist the more than four million people who have been forced to flee their homes, and in neighbouring countries that have generously welcomed some 1.4 million refugees."

Jordan says it is hosting more than 500,000 Syrian refugees and the UNHCR expects that number to soar to 1.2 million by the end of 2013, equivalent to a fifth of the kingdom's population.

"Unless all those involved in the fighting, as well as the international community, find a political solution to the violence very soon the humanitarian community will simply be unable to cope with the unprecedented scale of the needs -- we are already at breaking point," Georgieva warned in the statement.

According to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 82,257 people have been killed in the conflict.

Georgieva told AFP that 60 percent of the refugees are under 18.

"That means a whole generation is at risk of being lost in this conflict. This requires the international community to find ways to help the youth of Syria," she said.

"We need to think of the broader impact and act... the crisis is beyond humanitarian response. We need to do more and we need to do more in a better way."

Iran press divided on presidential hopefuls

AFP - Iran's media was split on Sunday over which candidate to back in next month's presidential election after a key moderate and a powerful government figure entered the fray.

The front pages of the reformist press were plastered with pictures of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a moderate, while newspapers favouring the incumbent president touted government candidate Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei.

The Iranian conservatives, who have fielded the most candidates, did not plump for anyone in particular, but warned that "the revolutionary current" faces a dual challenge from "deviationists," a term used by ultra-conservatives for Mashaei, and "seditionists," referring to Rafsanjani who enjoyed the backing of the reformist movements.

Pro-reformist newspapers Etemad and Arman published photographs of Rafsanjani registering for the June 14 election on the top halves of their front pages.

The oft-banned reformist dailies Sharq and Bahar also dedicated front pages to Rafsanjani, president from 1989 until 1997. Bahar ran the headline: "An epic with Hashemi".

The reformist Aftab daily suggested that other moderate and reformist candidates who registered for the election will forfeit in favour of Rafsanjani.

Meanwhile, newspapers that favour moderate candidates reported an advisory council of reformists met with reformist ex-president Mohammad Khatami and vowed to back Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani, 78, currently chairs the Expediency Council, the highest political arbitration body, whose members are appointed by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Rafsanjani registering is a historic event. The country is currently facing special circumstances," Ahmad



Iranian Mehran Aghadari registers his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election at the interior ministry in Tehran on May 9

Khatami, minister of transport under Khatami's government wrote in an editorial published by Sharq.

"There is a consensus among the reformists towards Khatami and Rafsanjani and a healthy portion of conservatives who are concerned about the future of the nation will back Mr Rafsanjani," he wrote.

State newspaper Iran, which is by law forbidden from campaigning for any candidate, headlined "all currents have come forward."

Several newspapers that support President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, carried a picture of Mashaei, the incumbent's controversial aide and ex-chief of staff.

Mashaei has been targeted by hardliners for the emphasis he places on Persian civilisation, while they favour a focus on Islamic values.

Khorshid (Sun) newspaper ran a front page picture of Mashaei alongside Ahmadinejad at the interior ministry registration centre, headlining "Zendeh baad Bahar," (Long

Live Spring), the campaign chant for Mashaei.

Ahmadinejad is constitutionally barred from seeking a third consecutive term.

In 2009 Khamenei had overturned Mashaei's appointment as first vice president, sparking a rift between the president and conservatives loyal to Mr Rafsanjani," he wrote.

It is not clear whether Mashaei will be approved by the Guardians Council, the unelected body controlled by religious conservatives appointed by Khamenei.

The council is tasked with vetting the candidates to ensure they adhere to constitutional conditions of being faithful to the principles of the Islamic republic and its official religion, before announcing the final list of hopefuls no later than May 23.

The conservative newspapers reported mostly to reporting that the registration was over and publishing around 40 names of known politicians.

Vatan Emrooz, a hardline newspaper

said in its editorial that, "one of the most important messages of the coming election is that Mashaei and Hashemi are one pole, the pole of anti-values (of the Islamic revolution) and the principalists are the opposing pole."

"The record left by Hashemi, Khatami and Ahmadinejad has shown that the office of the president is too critical to be left to anyone," added the editor of the daily who is close to Saeed Jalili, the chief nuclear negotiator who also registered as a candidate without any prior announcement.

Jalili did not receive any special attention in Sunday's newspapers, but some published pictures of him registering his candidacy.

However, newspapers close to Tehran's mayor, the conservative Mohammad Baqir Qalibaf, who unsuccessfully ran for presidency in 2005, ran a picture of him registering, along with his quote on the front page: "I have come forward for the dignified, Islamic Iran."

Penalty spot

Why's Morsi picking up tips from Jose Mourinho? They're both hoping for a second chance: Mourinho to Chelsea, Morsi to the palace after Ramadan. Both need to turn things round: Mourinho to keep John Terry and Frank Lampard happy, Morsi to woo the crowd to his side.

On his left Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as nimble as Nike, the goddess of victory. On his right, taciturn Saudi. After his election Morsi was treated to a lavish banquet in Jeddah designed to usher in a new era of economic cooperation and the start of a fresh political dialogue.

Nothing came of that. The Saudis are wary of the Muslim Brotherhood; cautious the Brothers' fanaticism could upset their own applecart.

It's tempting to regard each of the Arab Spring countries where revolutions hold sway as individual existences. They're not. They are fuelled by two axiomatic injustices: The political iniquity inflicted on Palestinians and the breach of trust felt by the expanding Middle East citizenry.

Few intrepid fain enter Syria's lethal savagery. Obama passed the ball to Secretary of State John Kerry to team with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Cosy conspiratorial conclaves concealing conniving carnage.

The Arab side is missing a commanding commander in chief. Not in Egypt, Saudi or the Gulf. Turkey preens on the fence. Iraq sinks in squalor. North Africa's head is in the sand.

With one exception the Gulf is snoozing this one out. Getting too big for its boots, Qatar's ostentatious ambition is motivated by greed and

therefore bound to fail. They're playing a temerarious game plying energy to Europe, America and Japan. And a lifetime of torpid superannuation to favoured nationals.

The Arabs are captives of armed jihadist hotheads and magniloquent boastful fellow travellers. There's never been a master plan to rescue the Palestinians or their own dispossessed. Avarice is their airy avocation; unbridled power their chosen weapon on mass dilapidation.

They and the West now have to confront the consequences of generations of skulduggery.

Into the mix arrives China: hosting Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinians' Mahmoud Abbas individually but only hours apart. Meeting on Wednesday Prime Minister Li Keqiang told Netanyahu: Palestine is a core issue affecting the peace and stability of the Middle East.

A peaceful two-state solution reached through dialogue and negotiations is the only effective answer, he said.

China straddles a dichotomy. It has growing trade with Israel worth \$8bn a year. It relies on oil imports from Iran and Arab nations to meet its energy needs, half of which come from the Middle East, a dependency that is expected to deepen.

Predictably Israel unleashed the first barrage in the opening fusillade of the second phase of the Arab Awakening. The aerial bombardment of Assad's weapons stores near Damascus deprives Hezbollah of armaments at a critical time.

But it also tests Iran's mettle. Ahmadinejad's maximum two terms end with elections on 14 June. Writ-



PHILIP WHITFIELD

ing for AP Ali Akbar Dareini and Brian Murphy suggest a new president might embark on an international image makeover and open the door to less antagonistic relations.

With Iran preoccupied rigging elections, what of Saudi Arabia? No fear of free elections altering their status quo. But there is a groundswell of neo-revolution building among youth, women and closet jihadists.

According to Fehim Tastekin the Turkish author and politics scientist two factors determine the shade of Saudi Arabia's reactions to the Arab uprising and its regional policies: Its struggle against Iran to build up a Sunni shield against Shiite influence; rivalry with Qatar and Turkey, the two countries with which it cooperates to counter the Syria-Iran axis.

Tastekin says Saudi Arabia fears the prospect of the Muslim Brotherhood backed by Qatar and Turkey coming to power in Syria as it did in Egypt. He surmises Brotherhood rule in two key countries of the Middle East could undo the status quo in Jordan swiftly bringing the Brothers' Islamic Action Front to power there. It's obvious who would be next up.

A domino effect in the Gulf is the Saudis' worst nightmare.

Where does Morsi stand with such a wealthy, experienced power-broker whose tentacles inveigle the inner recesses of the White House and the palaces of Westminster and the Élysée?

We don't know. Flitting round the world with his begging bowl, Morsi says hardly anything of substance.

If Egypt keeps siding with Iran and push comes to shove with Obama Saudi will blow cool on Morsi. Big oil pays Saudi's bills.

Morsi knows beggars can't be choosers. So far he's been a lacklustre fundraiser. He's tapped out if he can't get his hands on five to 20 billion US dollars in quick time.

His problem? Playing in the international Premier League isn't a five-a-side pick-up game where the locals can be shinned.

Morsi's participation in a Saudi-Iran-Egypt triad trying to prevent all-out war over Syria is a nightmare for him. Saudi has relegated him to the sidelines. If he sticks close to Iran he'll incur the wrath of the US.

Morsi's in a helpless spot. At home the Salafis will drag him down if he takes his eye off the ball, forced to take an early shower reminiscing about what might have been if he hadn't been offside most of the time.

The Muslim Brotherhood's religious intolerance in a largely forbearing society defines his heresy, a slavish dependence on majoritarianism – the delusion of dictators in a fool's paradise.

Philip Whitfield is a Cairo commentator

Talking box

By Ziad Akl

On my way home last Friday I saw 5 boys, couldn't be more than 14.

They were running between cars in one of Zamalek's busy streets trying to catch a look at women driving in short skirts or low-cut tops. They regrouped after the raid ended next to my car, I opened my window

and asked them with a smile, "Guys, wouldn't you rather go and try to meet a girl?"

The most depressing part of that story is how the look on all their faces reflected the same thing: the idea had never crossed their mind!

Our society no longer breeds friendship, only perversion.

Whatever happened to the student movement?

There are currently more than three million Egyptian students enrolled in higher education. Before the revolution, most of them dreamed of an opportunity to escape a country that is plagued by both corruption and nepotism.

However, most of them were inclined to take a confrontational stance towards the social problems they once tried to escape. A wave of unprecedented forms of protesting in modern Egyptian history swept over campuses. Strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations and even occupy movements became a usual sight in both public and private universities, something that was thought to be as one of the undesired outcomes of the revolution, an unnecessary new cult that would distract students from their so-called sole purpose in life, studying.

The truth however is that the Egyptian student movement has been playing a vital role in national politics for the last 100 years. At times of excessive tyranny and brutal repression, when social injustices and grievances reached intolerable levels while the political arena and so called elites were shattered each striving after his very own personal interest, it was time for students to act. At times like these, students almost always rose to the occasion and acted as the glue that consolidated different political and social fragments in order to lift injustices off the wide Egyptian society. Yet the question remains, where are the Egyptian students at the moment and why are they so dormant on the national level except for some angry yet repeated statements on social media, despite their unprecedented level of activism inside the walls of the universities?

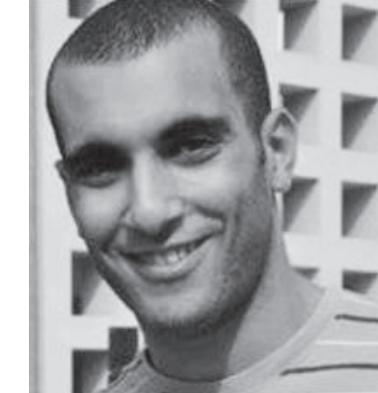
The most difficult challenge students will have to face beside the security apparatus and the gap of trust between them and the student body is the newly formed class of elitist student revolutionaries who have claimed ownership of the revolution and declared impotent marches and chants as a profession that would pave the road for their recognition.

This group of students interprets the slogan "the revolution continues" as the need to be present on the streets at all times without having a clear strategy on how to transform the chants into actual reforms. The problem with this new class of elite activists, who have gained their reputation from taking part in the revolution and engaging in clashes with the Ministry of Interior afterwards, is that despite their respectable tactical experience, they lack long-term strategies. Therefore, they have gradually diverted from their initial goals to the extent that the means have become a goal by themselves.

These students, who are sometimes driven by their affiliation with political parties, prefer limited participation in student protests to ensure maximum media exposure and avoid any unnecessary clashes with the authorities, the same authorities they attack day and night on social media and with lame statements.

If the students are to ever regain their position as a vital player in the national political arena in a time marked by marginalisation of youth from a highly patriarchal society, they would have to regard themselves as the seed of the future Egyptian left. They have to have an applicable long term strategy that builds on past experience and aims to reform educational institutions while focusing on long term benefits. They would also have to realise that as much as they are needed to advocate for reforms on campus, they are also needed to advocate for social justice, political freedom and economic reforms off campus. This is because they are the most vocal and diversified class in a society of both educated and uneducated illiterates.

Can you hear the students sing?



TAHER EL MOATAZ BELLAH
imposed on students without being subjected to public voting is still in itself a major concern for the students who regard this act as blunt state intervention in student affairs regardless of its intentions.

The most difficult challenge students will have to face beside the security apparatus and the gap of trust between them and the student body is the newly formed class of elitist student revolutionaries who have claimed ownership of the revolution and declared impotent marches and chants as a profession that would pave the road for their recognition. This group of students interprets the slogan "the revolution continues" as the need to be present on the streets at all times without having a clear strategy on how to transform the chants into actual reforms. The problem with this new class of elite activists, who have gained their reputation from taking part in the revolution and engaging in clashes with the Ministry of Interior afterwards, is that despite their respectable tactical experience, they lack long-term strategies. Therefore, they have gradually diverted from their initial goals to the extent that the means have become a goal by themselves.

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Taher El Moataz Bellah is the Student Union President at the American University in Cairo and Vice President of the Egyptian Student Union for Private Universities.

Op-ed review: Ikhwan-oriented media and Islamists during the revolution

One columnist addresses the authorities' control of media bodies, and the other discusses how people deny the role of Islamists in the revolution.

'Ikhwanization' of the national media
Yasser Abdel Aziz



proof is that there are no Muslim Brotherhood members working in public media bodies. The columnist replies to that by listing the two things needed to control the media: firstly controlling hiring for top-tier positions and secondly financing media bodies.

The columnist claims that while the Minister of Information controls national television, the Shura Council controls national newspapers. According to the columnist, there are 28 television channels, nine radio stations, and eight journalistic organisations issuing 55 newspapers.

He then points to the latest cover of Akhbar Al-Adab (Literature News), which features Khairat El-Shater, with a quote: "In keeping with the cultural role of businessmen, will Khairat El-Shater reclaim Egypt's cultural soul with his program Al Gama'a?"

The columnist comments that it is "a total farce" for a national magazine, financed by the people's taxes, to be used to polish the image of Muslim Brotherhood member Al-Shater.

He concludes that the Brotherhood-oriented Minister of Information, Article 206 of the constitution, the legally-contested Shura Council authority over newspapers, and the controlling of hiring and financing processes in the media guarantee that the media serves the Muslim Brotherhood's agenda.

Public failures and the distortion of history

Waleed Shalaby
Freedom and Justice Party News-paper
Columnist Waleed Shalaby begins



by saying "the Egyptian political scene is now witnessing a malicious attempt to deliberately distort the events of the revolution". He finds it strange that some people speak of the Brotherhood's role in the revolution and say that they were "the spark" of it, while others ask: "Where were the Islamists when we were being oppressed and tortured by the former regime?"

He blames them for not asking about the "whereabouts" of Islamists during that period: "Were they in five-star hotels or in prisons and detention facilities?" He also blames them for not asking about the "real reasons behind the oppression of Islamists and their exclusion from specific jobs".

He dubs those who attempt to distort the Islamists' role in the revolution as failures "desperately seeking leadership and popularity after failing to affect the Egyptian street".

He also mentions those who claim that the Muslim Brotherhood only took part in the revolution with the Battle of the Camels on 2 February 2011. "They forget that the Muslim Brotherhood members were seen and heard by all, and that is only denied by the ungrateful."

He mentions a statement issued by the Muslim Brotherhood on 23 January 2011, which condones the State Security's summoning of Muslim Brotherhood leaders in different governorates and its attempts to prevent them from participating in protests.

He comments that the statement was issued during a time when "many of those who issued revolutionary statements were frightened of the regime's aggression". He then mentions that people have forgotten the High Court protest, where many leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood were present.

"The Muslim Brotherhood's resistance of the previous regime was for the love of Egypt and its people, and out of obedience to God by refusing injustice, tyranny and encroachment upon God's laws and the squandering of freedom," Shalaby writes.

He adds that Islamic political parties have endured years of injustice, oppression, imprisonment, exile and displacement. "They were denied the simplest rights that were guaranteed by the constitution and law when those who are cosying up to the revolution were not yet born or were kissing up to the previous regime," Shalaby says.

He also mentions that there was true resistance. He adds that some people have made heroes out of the remnants of the previous regime. Shalaby adds that he would not put it past such people to name Mubarak and his entourage as the real spark and protectors of the revolution. He then says that Egyptian history will not be distorted because the people are aware of events and know what really happened. "God save Egypt, its people and its president from every adversity and hardship," Shalaby concludes.

He mentions that the Muslim Brotherhood abhors the term "Ikhwanisation," and they deny any plans to control the media. Their

He adds that after he gave an interview to a pre-recorded television show, some of what he had said was deleted. He then recalls being prevented from participating in another show, as per the show's producer's instructions. "The Minister of Information contacted me and denied that I have been barred from the show," Abdel Aziz says.

He mentions that the Muslim

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Qandil: We seek to secure the IMF loan as soon as possible

DENIES COUNTRY'S RECENT S&P CREDIT DOWNGRADE WILL HAVE NEGATIVE EFFECT ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH IMF

By Mohamed Ayad

Prime Minister Hesham Qandil stated that negotiations currently being held with the IMF to secure the country's pending \$4.8bn loan were ongoing, and said that Egypt's government sought to conclude a deal as fast as possible.

IMF officials stated that the largest obstacle to achieving progress during the negotiation process had to do with Egypt's budget. Managing Director for the IMF Christine Lagarde reiterated during a recent press conference that her organisation sought to help the Egyptian people and was not yet prepared to leave the negotiating table.

During a recent trip to Turkey, Qandil stated that the Egyptian govern-

ment had not requested an increase in the size of the loan, refusing to answer questions as to whether or not Egypt's government wanted to secure more funds.

An agreement between the two parties was nearly reached in December 2012, only to be thwarted after President Mohamed Morsi imposed but subsequently froze a new set of taxes on a number of goods entering the country.

Qandil stated during a recent press conference that "the IMF has reviewed the economic and social reform package put forth by Egypt's government, and we have presented the IMF with the necessary information and data requested. There is no need for IMF delegations to conduct any further trips to Egypt".

A source within Egypt's Finance Ministry stated that Fayyad Abdel Monein, the country's new Finance Minister, recently reviewed the content of negotiations between the IMF and the Egyptian government. The source stated that it was likely that a number of amendments would soon be made to Egypt's economic reform program, including restructuring Egypt's subsidies, tightening the government's private spending gaps, addressing the budget deficit, and increasing the Treasury's foreign currency reserves. Such reforms should allow Egypt to fund its imports for the next 3 months, and ensure that the government operates with transparency in all of its transactions.

Egypt's Central Bank announced last Wednesday that the country's foreign currency reserves had risen to \$14.4bn, with \$1bn recently acquired through a loan received from Libya.

Qandil denied that the country's recent credit downgrade would have a negative effect on the government's negotiations with the IMF.

He said: "We have nothing to hide with regards to our economic reform program, and seek to scale back the size of our budget deficit which is expected to reach EGP 200bn by the end of this current fiscal year. This deficit has been described as large and getting worse, with some claiming that simply scaling it back will not help to achieve growth. However it should be noted that what we need now is to take steps to encourage increased in-

vestment in the country, and reach a state of reconciliation with the international business community."

He reinforced that the country's economic reform program bore costs that "we all must carry together".

A source within Egypt's Finance Ministry stated that securing the loan would most likely be postponed until next July due to decreases in a number of the country's economic indicators, in addition to Egypt's recent credit downgrade. This postponement, he said, would provide the government with ample opportunity to end negotiations regarding the country's budget, implement new tax and subsidy reforms, present a new sales tax law to Egypt's Shura Council, and conclude negotiations

regarding the country's new sales tax law. Both new tax laws, he said, could then be released together.

Qandil further stated that there was nothing to fear regarding the government's program to release additional treasury bonds as a means of closing Egypt's budget deficit, saying such a program was merely a temporarily solution until the government collected more tax revenues.

Amr Darrag, Egypt's new minister of planning and international cooperation, stated that he would not comment on recent negotiations between Egypt's government and the IMF. "I have not reviewed the contents or minutes of the negotiations and I cannot at the moment identify or determine when an agreement will be signed," he said.

Downgrade expected to negatively impact pharmaceutical industry: Experts

Negative impact on banks of downgraded S&P rating extends to pharmaceuticals

By Neal Hussein

The downgrading of Egypt's sovereign rating by Moody's to CAA1 and Standard & Poor's to B- will ultimately raise the cost of pharmaceuticals in Egypt due to the impact of the country's credit score on the financial costs of credit and foreign currencies, according to a number of industry experts.

Vice-President of Credit at EFG Hermes Mohamed Adel explained that since components of pharmaceuticals are imported, their cost is tied to foreign currency and the cost of borrowing through letters of credit.

"These costs all go up as the country's credit rating goes down," he said.

"The pharmaceutical industry suffers from two main problems: the dollar ex-

change rate and the time it takes to create a letter of credit," said Randa Mahmoud, the director of Sales and Marketing at Rafichem, an Egyptian trading office for raw pharmaceutical materials.

"Banks are not giving letters of credit and often when they do, the opportunity for a business deal is already gone. They also require a lot of documentation for money transfers and won't cooperate quickly."

Mahmoud also said that prices for imported materials were rising because of the exchange rate, but the Ministry of Health fixed the prices ten years ago, "so we cannot pass on any of the price to the consumers".

"While this is a problem for all pharmaceutical companies, it is a major problem for the smaller companies. Some

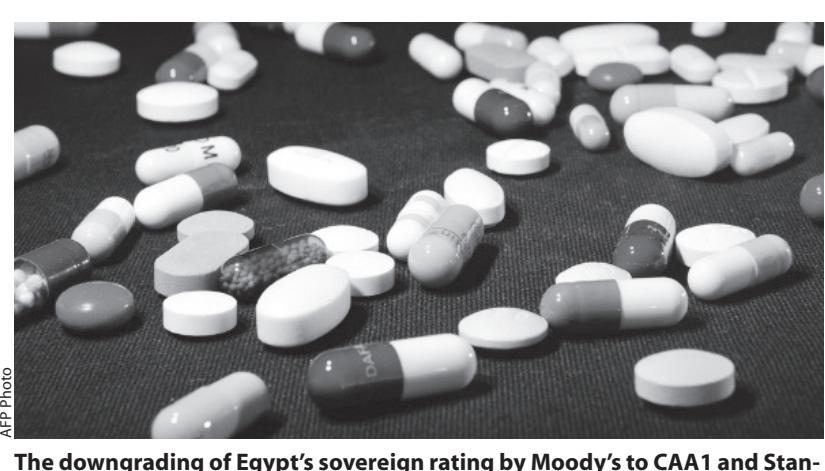
only have twenty or thirty products and do not have a large enough portfolio to balance their losses on one product against other more financially viable products," she said.

Sovereign or credit ratings reflect agencies' assessment of a country's likelihood of default and its banks use the credit rating to determine their interest rates for loans to the country.

Egyptian banks will also feel the impact of the credit downgrade. The lowered credit rating raises the cost of foreign capital for them and for the Egyptian government. The government is "very likely to default on its loans, and most of its bonds and treasury bills have been bought by local banks who will lose their investment if the government defaults", said Adel.

He added that some banks divested from treasury bills after the revolution and have instead allocated money into corporations and retail outlets, but that all banks are directly or indirectly affected by the downgrade because of the devaluation of the pound and risk of default.

In addition to banking and pharmaceutical companies, the biggest impact of the credit rating is that it will increase the cost for vital imports, mainly wheat and energy. "Energy is the biggest issue right now because Egypt must buy it at international prices and most other costs are based in part on it," Mohamed said.



The downgrading of Egypt's sovereign rating by Moody's to CAA1 and Standard & Poor's to B- will ultimately raise the cost of pharmaceuticals in the country, say experts

Egypt, Qatar participate in Gaza reconstruction project

Project to rebuild Gaza homes and infrastructure damaged by Israeli airstrikes uses \$500m in Qatari investments



A child drags his bicycle through wreckage in Gaza following the Israeli airstrikes of November 2012. Egypt and Qatar will take part in a project to reconstruct 70,000 homes and infrastructure damaged by the strikes

By Lamia Nabil

Egypt and Qatar will take part in a project to reconstruct Gaza homes and infrastructure damaged by Israeli airstrikes in November 2012.

The project was announced during a press conference organised by the Export Council for Building Materials, Refractory and Metallurgy Industries (ECBMR) on Sun-

day attended by Minister of Foreign Trade and Industry Hatem Saleh and Minister of Housing and Urban Communities Tariq Tawfiq.

"Qatar has allocated \$500m to buy building materials from Egypt, as well as participating in the reconstruction process itself," said Walid Gamal, the head of ECBMR.

He added that a series of meetings would take place in Sharm Al-Sheikh from 7 to 10 October to

further discuss the project.

The meetings will discuss the participation of Egyptian companies according to the current protocol between the three countries.

"The reconstruction process includes 70,000 housing units as well as infrastructure projects," he said.

Egyptian companies are invited to participate in the exhibition which will be held alongside the Gaza Reconstruction Conference.

Daily EGX30 index performance

Company Name	Reuters Code	Sector	Last Price	Close Price	Returns		Daily Performance		Turn Over (EGP Mill.)	Volume Trade	Market Cap. (EGP Mill.)
					Daily	YTD	12-Mths.	Max. Price			
Commercial Bank	COMI	Banks	33.7	33.71	1.14%	-2.49%	29.36%	33.89	33.32	21.84	647,957
NSGB	NSGB	Banks	28.20	28.24	-1.02%	-19.80%	-5.11%	28.25	28.20	0.548	19,406
Ezz Steel	ESRS	Basic Resources	9.72	9.78	1.56%	-1.51%	35.46%	9.94	9.55	16.47	1,683,971
ELSWEDY ELECTRIC	SWDY	Industrial Goods and Services and Automobiles	20.88	20.37	1.70%	-11.09%	-13.21%	20.90	20.10	0.447	21,938
MRRIDIVE	MOIL	Industrial Goods and Services and Automobiles	1.1	1.11	0.00%	-4.31%	-10.48%	1.11	1.10	0.27	34,775
AIC Contracting	AIND	Financial Services excluding Banks	0.47	0.47	0.00%	-0.00%	-16.07%	0.48	0.46	1.053	2,242,389
Amer Group Holding	AMER	Financial Services excluding Banks	0.58	0.58	0.00%	-9.38%	-15.94%	0.58	0.58	1.23	2,113,835
EK Holding	EKHO	Financial Services excluding Banks	1.15	1.16	-0.85%	-9.38%	6.42%	1.17	1.15	3.535	438,726
EFG-Hermes	HRHO	Financial Services excluding Banks	9.67	9.77	-1.91%	-11.26%	-26.71%	9.90	9.66	23.70	2,425,310
Pioneers Holding	PIOH	Financial Services excluding Banks	4.11	4.17	-0.48%	-14.20%	1.21%	4.23	4.11	1.531	367,078
Citadel Capital	CCAP	Financial Services excluding Banks	3.57	3.61	-0.28%	-4.50%	9.73%	3.66	3.57	6.66	1,844,074
Raya Holding	RAYA	Technology	5.54	5.52	1.47%	-2.47%	2.03%	5.60	5.39	0.892	161,425
Telecom Egypt	ETEL	Telecommunications	13.42	13.32	0.83%	-5.87%	3.98%	13.50	13.17	6.59	494,433
Orascom Telecom Media And Technology	OTMT	Telecommunications	0.50	0.50	0.00%	-9.09%	30.40%	0.51	0.49	7.879	15,756,940
Orascom Telecom	ORTE	Telecommunications	4.68	4.69	0.21%	18.14%	40.84%	4.69	4.67	3.77	804,131
Sidi Kerir Petrochemicals	SKPC	Chemicals	12.61	12.59	0.40%	-4.98%	-0.40%	12.64	12.52	1.659	131,714
Egyptian Financial and Industrial	EFIC	Chemicals	9.3	9.40	1.84%	-5.24%	-13.44%	9.52	9.18	4.13	439,248
AMOC	AMOC	Oil and Gas	68.50	68.49	-0.10%	-6.42%	-20.49%	69.00	68.35	0.678	9,906
Juhayna Food Industries	JUFO	Food and Beverage	9.24	9.24	1.65%	20.16%	110.00%	9.30	9.08	1.88	202,939
Orascom Construction Industries (OCI)	OCIC	Construction and Materials	247.00	245.30	2.08%	-2.80%	-10.29%	247.99	241.98	15.379	62,692
Delta Construction & Rebuilding	DCRC	Construction and Materials	5.94	5.99	-0.50%	-4.01%	5.83%	6.08	5.94	0.24	40,215
Modern Co. for Water Proofing	WATP	Construction and Materials	1.74	1.76	-0.56%	-1.68%	-39.73%	1.77	1.74	2.092	1,190,799
Palm Hills	PHDC	Real Estate	2.23	2.25	-0.38%	-7.79%	13.64%	2.28	2.23	24.10	10,707,570
TMG Holding	TMGH	Real Estate	4.10	4.11	0.00%	-7.22%	-5.95%	4.14	4.07	2.842	691,655
National Real Estate Bank	NRPD	Real Estate	17.29	17.42	-0.85%	-12.64%	-13.12%	17.63	17.27	0.55	31,691
Six of October	OCDI	Real Estate	20.49	20.62	-0.05%	1.43%	14.81%	20.90	20.47	1.971	95,590
El Kahera Housing & Development	ELKA	Real Estate	6.41	6.43	1.58%	-2.13%	41.01%	6.54	6.26	4.89	761,250
Arab Cotton Ginning	ACGC	Personal and Household Products	3.63	3.64	-0.55%	-17.27%	32.36%	3.68	3.59	4.625	1,271,775
Oriental Weavers	ORWE	Personal and Household Products	21.5	21.44	0.37%	-7.98%	16.06%	21.50	21.35	0.11	5,213
											1,922,40

Accounting error in budget

GRAVE MISTAKE MADE WITH REGARDS TO EGYPT'S PUBLIC BUDGET, ECONOMIC COMMITTEE DEMANDS THOSE RESPONSIBLE BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE

By Ibrahim Al-Masri

Mohamed Al-Khouli, member of the Shura Council's Economic Committee, demanded that those responsible for a recent accounting error made with regards to Egypt's public budget be held responsible. He stated in a recent press conference that a committee, led by Al-Khouli and composed of members of the Al-Tayar Al-Masry Party, had recently undergone a careful review of the country's public budget, and determined that a grave financial error had been committed that could only

be attributed to either ignorance or malicious intent.

He emphasised the need to hold those responsible accountable for their mistake, pointing out that the country's budget was already supposed to have been reviewed more than once by a number of legal experts and specialists.

The error had to do with data regarding Egypt's total tax revenues, which were estimated by a series of legal experts to total EGP 120.452bn. However Al-Khouli stated that after careful review these numbers were in fact only EGP 114.452 bn.

Central Bank receives \$3bn Qatari deposit for bonds

Bonds to mature in three years with 3.5% interest rate

Continued from page 1

Both countries have since been in negotiations over the maturity period and interest rates for the bonds, with Qatar initially asking for 18 months and 5%, respectively, according to reports.

"The terms of these bonds must be revealed to the public," said economist Rashad Abdo. "Of course there will be an effect on the economic problems as the foreign currency reserve will increase and the 'revolution of the hungry' will be delayed."

Egyptian officials are trying to "improve their image in front of the IMF and their ability to pay other debts, and to beef up foreign currency reserves to become eligible for the loan", Abdo said, but "it won't solve the general economic problems as there is always a lack of visibility with this government".



Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani speaks during a joint press conference with Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Qandil in Doha on 10 April

AFP File Photo

Expert: Downgrade timing casts doubt over IMF negotiations

New credit rating one level above Cyprus and below Greece and Pakistan

The timing of Standard and Poor's (S&P) decision on Thursday to downgrade Egypt's long term sovereign credit rating to CCC+ just days after Egypt's recent cabinet reshuffle cast doubts on the new government's ability to successfully complete negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the pending \$4.8bn loan, said President of the Research Division for Pharos Holding Hani Genena.

The downgrade, he said, was evidence that international agencies had lost confidence in the ability of Egyptian officials to enact the serious economic reforms needed to secure the loan.

Egypt's previous government often reiterated the need to raise Egypt's foreign currency reserves to \$19bn in order to obtain the IMF loan.

Fakhri Al-Fekki, assistant to the former Executive Director of the IMF, stated that the reasons behind the downgrade can be attributed to the perpetual state of risk within Egypt's economic and political climate. Examples of the risky climate, he said, included the government's failure to remove the prosecutor general, to draft a new elections law, to remove Prime Minister Hesham Qandil, and to escape Muslim Brotherhood control.

Representatives from S&P attributed the downgrade to their fear that Egypt's government was unable to reign in the country's budget deficit and balance its payments, in addition



President of the Research Division for Pharos Holding Hani Genena said that the timing of S&P's recent downgrading of long term sovereign credit rating to CCC+ casts doubt over IMF negotiations. Egypt's credit rating has so far been downgraded three times this year, placing increased significance on the country's acceptance of the IMF loan

to concerns over the lack of political compromise throughout the country.

The government's failure to implement the kind of reform needed to secure the country's pending IMF loan is also a problem, he said.

Egypt's prospects for securing the loan were getting weaker, he added, not only due to the country's recent credit downgrade, but also as a result of the obstruction of a pending \$3bn loan from Qatar.

Bloomberg stated that Egypt's current credit rating was seven levels below the standard needed to successfully secure investment by S&P standards. Egypt currently holds the agency's

second lowest rating, at a time when the country is witnessing increased amounts of financial pressure.

Bloomberg added that the country's long-term sovereign credit rating was one step above that of Cyprus but was lower than that of Greece and Pakistan.

Egypt's credit rating has so far been downgraded three times this year, placing increased significance on the country's acceptance of the IMF loan, a fact which has widened the country's budget deficit and weakened the value of Egypt's currency.

Moody's rating agency also downgraded the sovereign debt value of

Egypt's currency in March, dropping it from B3 to CAA1, under claims that the Egyptian government had not pursued sound policies.

Bloomberg further attributed the downgrade to the failure of Egypt's government over the last two years to successfully engage in negotiations with the IMF and meet the institution's financial conditions.

Trevor Cullinan and Dima Gardani, economic analysts for S&P, stated that the recent decision to downgrade Egypt's credit reflected the company's belief that the government needed to take more concrete steps to put in place a sustainable plan for the medium-term to address Egypt's financial funding issues.

The organisation further stated that they expected Egypt's deficit to make up 11% of the country's GDP from 2012-2016. This came shortly after Al-Morsi Hegazy, Egypt's previous finance minister, stated last month that the country's budget deficit could increase from 11% to 11.7% by the end of the fiscal year ending in June as a result of the government's failure to institute serious financial reform.

Officials from S&P stated that they expected pressure on the Egyptian government to increase with regards to obtaining further grants and loans from international institutions. In this respect, securing the IMF loan, they said, could now be considered a long-term goal.

He added that a set of terms and conditions would be imposed by both agencies on all private consulting agencies seeking to work and operate within the forest, saying that it was important that Egyptians reap the maximum benefit of such a great natural reserve "given to them by God".

Fahmy stated that the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs

would soon hire a guardianship agency to protect the reserve from property infringements. The company will be tasked with protecting the forest in addition to the Wadi Al-Rayyan region, adding that the ministry would create its own prosecution unit to apprehend and legally pursue those who infringe upon forest territory.

A protocol was recently signed aimed at employing the efforts of both ministries in order to end border disputes regarding the forest and New Cairo

He went on to say that a geological garden would be constructed in the heart of the forest, in addition to a taskforce charged with seeking and identifying excavation sites that could be exploited to help establish a museum. The museum would hold samples of fossilised wood found throughout the forest, estimated to be among the world's oldest. Both ministries will seek the aid of a number of research departments in universities located throughout New Cairo to help in this endeavour.

Banks: We are most affected by downgrades

MERIS downgrades long- and short-term credit ratings of NBE, Banque Misr, and CIB

By Nasser Youssef

A number of banks have stated that they consider themselves Egypt's most affected economic sector by

the country's repeated credit downgrades since the outbreak of the 25 January Revolution, seeing as they are the primary owners of government debt securities.



The Middle East Rating and Investors Service has recently downgraded the short- and long-term credit rating of Banque Misr, the National Bank of Egypt, and Commercial International Bank, adding that the future of these banks "does not look good".

Egyptian banks have already faced a number of difficulties in obtaining additional letters of credit and funding from foreign banks as a result of such downgrades, with many European, Arab and African banks requesting that all letters of credit held by Egyptian banks be verified by third parties.

Amr Hassanein, president of the Middle East Rating and Investors Service (MERIS), stated that Standard & Poor's (S&P) will also soon downgrade the credit rating of individual banks operating on the Egyptian market, just days after downgrading the country's credit rating itself.

Such downgrades, he said, will increase the cost of transactions between Egyptian and foreign banks.

Hassanein said that MERIS had recently downgraded the short- and long-term credit rating of the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), Banque Misr, and Commercial International Bank (CIB), adding that the future of these banks "does not look good". Such downgrades, whether on the country or individual bank level, would eventually cause food prices to increase, he added.

The MERIS president went on to say that although S&P's recent downgrade of Egypt's long-term sovereign credit rating from B- to CCC+ would make it increasingly difficult for the country's government to obtain international funding, this would not have an effect on the government's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding the country's pending \$4.8bn loan. Such negotiations began long ago, he stated, with the IMF throughout the process being well aware of the potential for repeated downgrades of Egypt's credit rating.

He also pointed to the need for reconciliation to take place between the country's various political factions, saying that the country's current crisis has made it difficult for investors to operate easily within the country. Such reconciliation, he claimed, would go far in helping the government implement its much-needed economic reform programme.

Hassanein highlighted the importance of speeding up negotiations with the IMF to expedite Egypt's securing of the \$4.8bn loan.

Housing minister: Egypt's Petrified Forest Reserve to become tourism and environmental site

Guardianship agency will be hired to protect 1,300 acre-reserve and guard it from property infringements

By Mohamed Darwish

Minister of Housing and Urban Communities Tariq Wafiq and Minister of State for Environmental Affairs Khaled Fahmy recently visited Egypt's Petrified Forest Reserve, located in New Cairo, on Saturday to review new plans for development and ways to end infringements committed against forest property. These infringements include dumping waste and stealing building materials in the reserve.

Wafiq added that the forest's territory was located on 1,300 acres of land, and would soon be converted into a scientific, environmental, and tourist reserve. He added that a protocol was recently signed aimed at employing the efforts of both ministries in order to end border disputes regarding the forest and New Cairo.

He went on to say that a geological garden would be constructed in the heart of the forest, in addition to a taskforce charged with seeking and identifying excavation sites that could be exploited to help establish a museum. The museum would hold samples of fossilised wood found throughout the forest, estimated to be among the world's oldest. Both ministries will seek the aid of a number of research departments in universities located throughout New Cairo to help in this endeavour.

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LIFESTYLE

EVENTS

MUSIC

Omar Khairat

The second concert of Omar Khairat's trilogy in the Cairo Opera House is set to wow crowds with the exquisite tunes of the great Egyptian musician. Cairo Opera House Grand Hall Borg El Gezira Street Zamalek, Cairo Tel: (02) 2739 0144 13 May 8pm

The Telephone Opera and Les Misérables

The American University in Cairo is hosting an operatic night of a unique nature, where two operas will be sung, one after another. In addition, Les Misérables will be sung in Egyptian Arabic. AUC New Cairo Road 90 Fifth Settlement, Cairo Tel: (02) 2615 1000 13 May 8pm

Ahmed Harfoush

Put on your dancing shoes and enjoy a night of jazz and modern tunes with Ahmed Harfoush at Pub 55. Pub 55 55 Road 9 Maadi, Cairo Tel: (02) 2358 3186 13 May 9pm

EXHIBITION

Hybrid

Artist Shaimaa Sobhy mixes humans with animals to create some innovative creatures in her new collection at Gallery Misr. Gallery Misr 4 A Ibn Zenki Street Zamalek, Cairo Tel: (02) 2735 0604 13 May 11am

Fashion Reincarnated

Fashion designers use an array of materials to recycle them as apparel. The exhibition is in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden. Darb 1718 Kasr El Shama Street Old Cairo, Cairo Tel: 012 7941 1698 13 May 10am

Covering One's Back

The exhibition features a collection of photographs from photographers from Switzerland and the Arab World. Gezira Art Centre I El Masravy Street Zamalek, Cairo Tel: (02) 2737 3298 13 May 10am

Weather



Monday, 13 May

Alexandria	26°C / 18°C
Aswan	38°C / 24°C
Cairo	34°C / 18°C
Hurghada	36°C / 22°C
Luxor	38°C / 23°C
Sharm El-Sheikh	36°C / 22°C
Suez	31°C / 13°C

Cairo, a city of runners



Runners race along the route of Cairo's first half marathon

By Nouran El-Behairy

Men and women of all ages donned their jogging shorts and running shoes, carrying bottles of water as some of them stretched and warmed up on Friday morning; these runners and sports enthusiasts were on their way to participate in Cairo's first-ever half marathon.

The half marathon was the idea of the group Cairo Runners, a group that organised runs and jogs in different areas in Cairo. The sports club had been helping participants prepare for the half marathon since late last year.

"The founder, Ibrahim Safwat, was inspired by the French who frequently ran in the streets and decided to implement the idea in Egypt," said Mohamed Seif, Cairo Runners' media manager.

He added that during 14 runs all around Cairo no major harassment incidents occurred. "Whenever anything happened we were on the spot; people on the streets either encouraged us or made fun of us until we explained the idea, then they were supportive," Seif said.

More than 2,000 participants gathered in Almaza, Heliopolis at 6am on Friday, to run one of two routes for the runners: a short 7km route, or the half marathon route which was 21.7km long.

At 6.30am runners embarked on routes that took them through different areas in Heliopolis like Orouba, Thawra and Nozha, and then returning back to the start/finish line at Almaza.

Runners raced through the streets led by cyclers. "We are from a group called 'Wheeler's' and we're here to support the runners," said Ahmed Hamdy, who cycled next to the runners taking photos of them.

He added that a group of them cycled ahead of the runners to show them the route, stopping cars at intersections and distributed water and energy bars to participants.

"We also help in case someone is injured or tired or anything goes wrong," Hamdy said.

There were multiple water stations along the route where members of Cairo Runners distributed cups of water and cheered the runners on to help them keep going.

The short-route runners arrived at the finish point around 7.30am, where they were met by more cups of water, juice and yoghurt.

"It was a thrilling experience, I had fun, exercised and met many people I know," said Sofie from Denmark who came in third place.

The weather was too hot, but there were a lot of people cheering us and giving us water along the way," said Sofie from Denmark who came in third place.

Runners continued to pour into the finish. "I'm 58 years old and I started running five years ago; I salute them for the perfect organisation," said Ahmed Hamdy, one of the runners.

Following the run, participants made their way to the garden where a number of booths were set up, as organisers prepared to announce the winners; most booths were for charity organisations.

One booth for "Wataneya" attracted particular attention. "It's an organisation for developing orphans and teaching people how to act and what to do when visiting orphans," said Yasmine Al-Hagary, a member of Wataneya.

She added that they joined Cairo Runners because they defied the norms of the society that does not encourage running on the streets, comparing this to how Wataneya also challenges norms of mistreating orphans.

The celebration began at about 10am and was hosted by Nile FM radio presenter Mohamed Safi. Former member of parliament and owner of Al-Sawy Cultural Wheel Mohamed Al-Sawy delivered the cup to the winner.

"Sports in Egypt started today, this is what sports should be like, beautiful morale and public participation," Al-Sawy said.

In second place came Madhu Jena from India. "It was amazing, I used to run in Maadi but this had much more space and it was very well organised," she said.

She added that she participated in a 100km run as well as a full marathon in Salzburg five days ago; she also took part in marathons in Luxor and Dubai.

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Kempinski Soma Bay executive chef shares signature dish recipe



Sedat Bugday



The chef also shares his tips on how to present the sea bass to its best advantage

Sedat Bugday joined Kempinski Hotel Soma Bay as executive chef. A Turkish national, he studied at the Educational Institute of AH&MA.

Prior the Kempinski, Sedat was the executive chef at Cratos Premium Hotel in Cyprus and Rotana hotels in Dubai and Erbil.

Moreover he was part of the opening team of Mardan Palace Luxury Resort in Antalya and worked in several Hilton hotels around the world for seven years. Bugday worked for more than six years for Starwood hotels as well as the Sheraton Miramar El Gouna in Egypt and gained much experience in Middle East and Africa.

To celebrate his new position chef Bugday shares the recipe of his signature dish:

Fresh Sea bass from the Red Sea topped with olive crust

Ingredients:

- 200 gram sea bass fillet
- 50 ml olive oil
- 200 ml veal sauce
- 120 gr fresh asparagus
- 100 gr sweet potato
- 10 gr mushroom
- 5 gr salt
- 3 gr black pepper
- 3 gr fresh thyme
- 20 gr breadcrumbs

Preparation of sea bass:

- Centre cut fish fillet
- Marinate fish fillet with olive oil, thyme, salt and peppercorns.
- Sear fish fillet and cook until 50% done.
- Gratin and cook sea bass fillet with breadcrumbs, olive and butter in the oven at 180C.
- Blanch asparagus and toss in butter.
- Slice sweet potato and grill.
- Boil and reduce veal sauce to half quantity.
- Boil balsamic until 80% reduced.

Serving:

- Light charcoal and put in a small dish, add wood and herbs.
- Place small dish in glass to produce smoke.
- Place fish on top of sweet potato, put glass with smoke on the fish and keep it like this until being served.
- Draw a line with balsamic reduction on a plate.
- Add the asparagus, cherry tomato and mushroom with sauce.
- Add foam with truffle oil on mushroom and sauce.



Nadi Badawi

trying to make it into a literary café, an arts centre, a film club, a place for cooking lessons, and a proper restaurant for grownups with beer and wine. Anytime a restaurant goes through that many changes in that space of time, you know they don't know what they are doing. The food was mediocre-to-bad and the service abominable.

Finally, after firing the first international chef and failing to find another one, the owners had the good sense to hire local consultants Sarah Khanna and Wessam Massoud to come in and fix the problems, which they did by cutting out all the silliness and getting back to basics, things that should have been done before ever opening in the first place. They completed their mission successfully. But now the restaurant is back to running itself and is slowly failing to maintain the reforms and standards. According to my own experiences, and the many comments I have heard from other customers, entropy is winning out, and Left Bank is slowly but surely sliding back into chaos. It's a shame. And the reason is simple. No one is minding the store.

Bite Me Cairo: And so it goes

By David Blanks

As the first year anniversary of my Bite Me Cairo column draws near, I have been reflecting on the fate of the people, places and dining trends that I have been writing about over the past year.

Some things I got dead wrong. There are, to date, no food trucks in Cairo, which is a shame. Sadly, the business men I have spoken to who explored this promising option found that the problem, as usual, was the government: they could not get permits to park the trucks in the places where they would do the most good. Typical bureaucratic shortsightedness.

I wish I had been wrong about the seemingly limitless expansion of cafés and fast food outlets. Just last week signs went up for yet another mega fast-food court, this one on Road 90, just outside the American University in Cairo (AUC) and the Future University in Egypt (FUE). Food on these campuses is already bad enough, mostly consisting of chains such as Beirut Express, TBS, Subway and McDonald's at AUC and, at FUE, places like Arabiata, Candy Mix and Choco Bar. Good thing they have a School of Dentistry. Anyway,

now the students will also have easy access to Hardees, KFC, Tikka, Pizza Hut and God only knows what other horrors. Enough, really.

The general lack of quality in the cafés that are sprouting all over the city is symptomatic of the same problem: customers do not want to try anything new, and business owners are happy to stick to the same old formula. Hence Trio, a promising slow food restaurant with a talented American chef and a local, earth-friendly ethos, has been replaced by yet another run-of-the-mill café, 3enab. From the looks of it, and given what we all know about the market here, it seems they made the right decision. Dreary.

There are some exceptions, such as the very nicely done Wel3a Café, which has just opened a new branch on 33 Abu Feda in Zamalek. The reason they are so good is that they do one thing really well: shisha. The problem with most of the rest of the cafés is that they serve a mediocre product and try to be all things to all people with almost no thought for the food or service, which works because people will flock there anyway, regardless of how bad it is.

Some places which showed early promise last year have gone out of business like Top Dawgs and the Snug, either because people did not get the concept or because they had licensing issues. Au Petit Bistro in Mohandessin experienced a steady decline in quality that led to its demise. And City Stars witnessed a series of closings; the ill-conceived Nordsee fish chain sunk, Wagamama went up in flames, and On The Border slunk back across it.

Other places have waxed and waned. Consistency is always the issue, and while some restaurants have reached new heights, others continue to fight the downhill slide into mediocrity. Oddly, two of these are owned and managed by the same people. A year ago I complained bitterly about the lackadaisical service and tortured cooking at Sequoia, only to find myself now going back again and again. The new design by Eklego is warm, hip and inviting. Mori Sushi is putting out an excellent product with one waiter specifically trained to handle these orders, which he does in a cheery and professional manner; someone has found the rhythm in the grill and

salads section again; the management is training and overseeing the staff; and customers have returned. I really enjoy this place and that is something I honestly thought I would never find myself saying.

On the other side, the eternally plagued Left Bank, a place I want so desperately to love, continues to struggle. Having opened in January 2012, there were problems from the start because the chef, who was hired to do one thing (pastries), was then asked to do another (everything else). The problem is that the management never figured out what to do with this place, at various times