



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
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Affairs

Middle East Change Observer

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Egypt

Authorities – General Shatin, a member of Egypt's governing Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, said *that parliamentary elections* could be held in September, with presidential elections before the end of the year.

The Armed forces council has approved a new draft law to crack down on crimes such as intimidation, thuggery and disturbing the peace – criticised by the opposition as a means to control protests. On the other hand, 38 youth taken prisoners during the protests on March 9 – among them the actor Aly Subhy – were *released*. Some 150 more are still under arrest and face military, not civilian, tribunals.

The Council set up a committee tasked with investigating the shooting of demonstrators during the 25 January revolution. It took testimonies in the Interior Ministry and will submit its report to Attorney-General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud shortly.

Violence – on March 8 a women's demonstration for the International Women's Day was forced to leave Tahrir by what was described as a concentrated effort of thugs.

A day later a dozen of people were killed by bullets in *sectarian violence* in south Cairo, when Coptps blocked a highway to demand the restoration of a nearby church burnt a March 4 in a local inter-religious incident. Police was passive during the deadly incident.

These incidents are regarded as attempts do rekindle sectarianism and bring about chaos by members of the suspended State Security. They were condemned by PM Sharaf, Essam Erian from MB, Amr Moussa. The new interior minister Mansour el-Eissawy is in charge with the restructuring of security apparatus. Symbolically, army engineers took first steps to reconstruct the burnt church.

Protests – in response to the sectarian violence and the resurgence of thugs (*baltagiyya*), who cleared Tahrir last week and are suspected of being on the payroll of "counterrevolution", thousands have taken place in a demonstration of "*national unity*" on Tahrir.

Societal change – there are changes in many levels in state institutions. The state university unions on strike against the presidency n many universities since March 6 met in Cairo with the new minister of Education and agreed on renewed elections to the unions bodies. The state universities are no longer guarded by Ministry of Interior security forces.

An organisation of independent unions were established and met with Labour minister this weekend in a public discussion about the right to organise and protest.

Constitutional referendum – a vote about the constitution amendments announced on 26 February 2011 by the 10-member ad-hoc constitution committee is due to take place on Saturday March 19.

There is a marked controversy among the revolutionaries about the constitutional changes. These are criticised as too few – especially leaving the president with all his extensive rights (and strictly

restricting the presidency candidate on the basis of citizenship, thus ruling out some opposition figures) and potentially object of abuse by the new president. The young revolutionaries, M. al-Baradei and Tagammu of the old opposition oppose the changes and call for a negative vote and a whole new constitution; the Muslim brotherhood endorses it. Due to the critical public discussion there is now uncertainty about whether the referendum would pass.

Elsewhere

Last week was marked by security forces backlash, not only in Libya. While incipient talks stalled or offerings of economic relief failed demonstrations Bahrain, Yemen, SA and Syria go on and meet with violence.

In **Libya** the initial gains by the rebels stalled as Qadhafi's army restructured and attacked and after protracted urban fights and shelling retook the two oil centres of Zawiya and Ra's Lanuf. Qadhafi's military regained the upper hand. After some signs of negotiations and recognition of rebels groups the regime's rethoric returned to the usual aggressive confrontation and feeds increasing fear of violent retribution, should further rebel held cities fall. After the embattled Brega the next is Ajdabiya, already heavily bombarded by Qadhafi's aviation. It is the hometown of one of the first deserted ministers, the general Abdel Yunis, and his clan, which indicates that he might stall Qadhafi's offensive.

In **Bahrain** a demonstration was broken up on March 13. The large financial concessions the king has offered could not appease the protestors asking for political equality and participation. The government might take even tougher stance on protestors again.

In **Yemen** four died demonstrations continue and meet toughest response so far as security forces tried to clear the protest square.

Demonstrations were also staged in **Saudi Arabia** and in **Syria** – in both countries police succeeded to impede large crowd gathering.

Mar11 Saudi police used guns to quell demonstrations

In **Jordan** March 8 600 journalists, MP's and a minister demonstrated against censorship.

Quotes

Ahram: "*Many critics and politicians agree that the counter-revolution is the reason behind all the brutal incidents taking place between Egyptian Coptps and Muslims,*" Amr Hamzawy, Carnegie Middle East Centre

MacClatchy: "*The regimes might withstand these pressures and remain, but they'll never be the same,*" said Mohammad al Qahtani, president of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association. "*Now, the status quo can't be maintained anywhere in the Middle East.*"

Expected events

Libya's leader Qadhafi's forces head towards rebel's strongholds and risks of bloodshed increase.

In **Egypt** the referendum is supposed to be held on Saturday. There are signs that the military might postpone the vote.