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## EU supports NGOs' role in Egyptian vote

Doaa Soliman

THE head of the European Union (EU) Delegation in Cairo Marc Franco yesterday said that the EU would not be involved in Egypt's forthcoming elections, whether the parliamentary elections this autumn or the presidential polls next year.

Franco added, in a press conference on the occasion of the launching of the local EU presidency in Egypt, that the EU was supporting the civil and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supervising the elections.

"We are very interested in following the election process in Egypt, but there will be no international monitoring, because Egypt hasn't asked for it," Franco said.

"The elections will be supervised internally by local Egyptian organisations, which we fully support."

With Belgium's six-month EU presidency term having started on July 1, boosting relations with Egypt, facilitating the issuance of visas and addressing regional issues with the Egyptian Government are the most important things on the agenda of the EU local presidency, along with following up the election process.

Franco met on Wednesday with the spokesman for the Egyptian Foreign Ministry Hossam Zaki, and he asked after President Hosni Mubarak's health. "Zaki assured me that Mubarak is in very good health and that he is keeping very busy," he said.

"This is not the first time for President Mubarak's health being debatable," Franco added. "Zaki told me yesterday [Wednesday] that Mubarak's health is fine and I believe this could be sensed from the President's many recent activities."

Egyptian Minister of Information Anas el-Fegi said on Wednesday that the reports about a deterioration in Mubarak's health were false, two days after a US newspaper claimed Mubarak was dying of cancer.



**Mourning Gazans:** Palestinians mourning during the funeral of Mohamed al-Shnbari in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanun after he was yesterday killed in an Israeli strike that also wounded 10 people. Meanwhile, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said yesterday he would decide in the next seven days whether conditions are now ripe to proceed to face-to-face peace talks with Israel. Abbas says he has a promise from Washington that if he agrees to direct negotiations, Israel would prolong a partial moratorium on West Bank settlement building that is due to expire in September. But he wants to know in advance what shape and size of a future Palestinian state Israel is prepared to discuss in direct negotiations, and whether it is ready to quit the Jordan Valley and entrust security there to a third party.

## Mubarak outlines national priorities

Tamer Mohamed

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak last night pledged constant efforts to boost the social justice as a key priority on his agenda.

"We will continue to stand by poor families not only to protect them and enable them to face the burdens of life, but also to help them get extricated from the circle of poverty," Mubarak said in a televised address to the nation on the 58th anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution.

He cited bolstering economic growth as another key priority of his administration. "This will be pursued by attracting more investments and projects, giving a fresh impetus to our exports, going ahead with economic reforms and expanding investment-friendly infrastructure facilities," he said.

The Egyptian leader urged all political parties to put forward their ideas on the two issues of economic growth and social justice "for being two indisputable priorities".

In addition, he vowed continued commitment to human rights and rule of the law. "We do not accept that the Egyptian human rights or dignity be violated," said Mubarak. "We are working for a society where the citizen will reach to the highest level of education and unleashing his potential away from favouritism. Our monitoring agencies are standing up against corruption."

## Bedouin report failed bid on fugitive's life

Ashraf Sadek

EGYPTIAN Bedouin in Sinai said yesterday they had foiled a conspiracy to poison a local man who is the most-wanted fugitive by the police.

"We nabbed a young man, called, Sayyed Aql who was attempting to put poison in water and tea for Bedouin fugitive Salem Abou Lafi of the el-Tarabin tribe," said Moussa el-Daleh, a spokesman for central Sinai Bedouin tribes.

He added that Aql had admitted he had been paid LE40,000 (around \$6,000) by a security official to kill Abou Lafi.

"Aql also owned up that the official promised to release his father who was sentenced to 25 years in jail, and that a former MP had meddled in the affair," el-Daleh said.

Abou Lafi fled a prisoner transfer truck last year after being accused of killing a policeman. He has been a fugitive since then and the police have been searching for him.

## National TV marks half a century

IN the photo above, the number 50 can clearly be seen illuminated on the facade of the Egyptian Television and Radio Building on the Nile Corniche in Maspero, while the curved front of the building below is lit up with lasers, in order to mark its golden jubilee. At a ceremony held on the Pyramids Plateau near the Sphinx, Minister of Information Anas el-Fegi last night honoured a number of figures who have helped developing Egyptian TV, which is owned by the Government. Among those honoured were Safwat el-Sherif and Abdel-Qader Hatem, both former information ministers, and some other former and current TV officials.

Construction of Television and Radio Building was completed in 1960, with the first Egyptian Television being broadcast on July 21 that year.



## Divers scour Nile for bodies of 2 girls

Ashraf Madbouli

MORE than 20 Egyptian divers are scouring the Nile riverbed in Helwan, south of Cairo, in search of the bodies of two Christian girls who drowned after their boat sank more than a week ago. Seven other girls were killed in the mishap.

"Qadri Abou Hussein, the Governor of Helwan, ordered 24 divers to go ahead with the search for Rozifin Refaat and Marihan Welson, who drowned last Thursday," said lawyer Naguib Gabraeil.

He added that the divers would explore a long stretch of the river in search of the two bodies. Seven other bodies have already been recovered.

The Nile passenger boat sank last Thursday, killing nine Christian

schoolgirls who had been on a church outing. The boat was on a Nile trip organised by a church in Maadi, and had 19 females on board, more than the boat could handle.

Ten girls were rescued, security sources said. The outing was for girls aged between 10 and 18 years old.

Meanwhile, Egypt's Chief Prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmoud referred the owner of the boat to Court. His trial will start tomorrow.

"The owner of the ship, Ali Eweis, will stand trial for being the cause of the girls' death, as the boat was found to be unfit for sailing and was carrying extra weight," a legal source said yesterday.

Public riverboats in Egypt are often overcrowded and passenger manifests are often absent or inaccurate, but the boat that sank was not a large vessel.

## Weather

Cairo	.....36	.....24
Alexandria	.....31	.....25
Suez	.....37	.....24
Mersa Matruh	.....30	.....23
Aswan	.....43	.....30
Luxor	.....42	.....28
Sharm El-Sheikh	.....39	.....28
Hurgada	.....38	.....28
Taba	.....35	.....22
Siwa	.....40	.....23

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## Gaza flotilla has roots in pro-Palestinian group

BEIT JALA, West Bank (AP) – The stream of ships heading to Gaza in defiance of Israel's inextinguishable blockade reflects the success of a pro-Palestinian group that's been creatively confronting Israel for years. High on victory, they are flush with new volunteers.

Activists of the International Solidarity Movement first sailed to Gaza in summer 2008 to challenge Israel's blockade of the Hamas-ruled territory. Most recently in May, it organised a Gaza-bound flotilla that led to a botched Israeli raid that killed nine activists, sparked an international outcry and forced Israel to ease its 3-year-old blockade.

In recent weeks, Israel has allowed more goods into Gaza.

"Around the world, we motivated people who were frustrated but didn't know what to do," said Huwaida Arraf, 34, co-founder of the ISM and its naval spinoff,

the Free Gaza Movement, which organised the May flotilla. Since the movement's ships began, other groups have joined them or imitated them with their own ships trying to reach Gaza's shores, some of them successfully.

Israel is trying to crack down harder on ISM, and the group has also come under criticism for putting volunteers in danger. Still, more people are volunteering.

Palestinian activist Hisham Jamjoum says the since the May flotilla, 10 recruits a week have attended his workshop, required for ISM volunteers, double the average.

The ISM was launched in 2001 for sympathetic foreigners to help Palestinians throw off Israeli rule. Its founders are a mix, Arraf, a Palestinian who is a dual Israeli-US citizen; her husband, Adam Shapiro, an American Jew; Neta Golan, an Israeli, and Ghassan Andoni, a Palestinian from the West Bank.

Some 7,000 people – a third of them Jews – have participated since, mainly serving as peaceful, but provocative buffers between Palestinians and Israeli forces, mostly at protests. The group was first noticed in 2002 when its activists rushed past Israeli tanks to shield the besieged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in his West Bank headquarters.

The chance to participate in a compelling conflict is popular with college-age students on summer breaks. For many Jews, it's a chance to understand the conflict from a radically pro-Palestinian perspective.

But while most activists read about Mideast politics, volunteers can be clueless about conservative Palestinian culture. That's led to tensions, including sexual harassment. Some Palestinians assume female activists are permissive because they don't behave like conservative Palestinian women.

During last week's workshop,

Jamjoum, 52, laid the rules out. He asked women to cover their arms and legs. For men: long pants only. Another volunteer explained how to dodge sexual harassment.

Jamjoum taught the volunteers Arabic phrases, including "please", "thank you", and "I'm a vegetarian". Activists don't realise they are offending Palestinian housewives when they don't eat their chicken dishes, he explained.

Noting a Palestinian stereotype about unwashed "hippie" activists, Jamjoum told the girls makeup was OK. "Some people think to show solidarity with Palestinians, you have to wear ugly clothes. No. We like you nice and clean."

Upon graduation, an ISM dispatcher sends activists to demonstrations in coordination with Palestinian protest leaders. They distribute footage of clashes on YouTube, blogs and Facebook.

Palestinians have mixed views about their foreign friends.



Reproduced from Al-Youm Al-Sabea website

**Copts protest priest's wife disappearance:** Hundreds of Copts protesting outside a main cathedral in Cairo yesterday over the disappearance of a wife of a priest from the Minya city in Upper Egypt. The protesters urged Egyptian authorities to intervene and intensify their efforts to look for the woman called Kamilia Shehata Zakhir, the wife of Bishop Tadrus Saman. "The police should do something to help return Kamilia, who disappeared Sunday night. This laxity is unacceptable," Weisa Sobhi, a bishop, said. He added that Pope Shenouda, who is now in the US for medical treatment, had been briefed on Kamilia's disappearance. "He is following everything," Weisa said. Kamilia's father, meanwhile, denied that his daughter had been kidnapped or taken by Muslims against her will, saying: "We still know nothing about the reason for her disappearance."

