Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky
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Syria: protests spread despite crackdown

Despite the invasion of the cities of Dera'a and Douma and mass arrests, large **protests** came out on April 30. This time, several political, ethnic and religious groups which previously kept their distance from the uprising, joined the protests. Among theme were the Muslim Brotherhood and the Druze minority, the Kurds in Qamishli and other minorities. A petition signed by dozens of writers and academics from all ethnic groups showed that the uprising is above sectarian considerations. There were also sizable protests in the crucial metropolitan centres of Aleppo and Damascus that had remained relatively calm before.

Security forces are said to have killed 62 persons bringing the total deaths at estimated 600. Mass killing by the 4th brigade went on in the Alawi area near the Lebanese border.

More news came out about **mutiny** or a split in the 5th Army Division over killing civilians. Over 300 members of the Baath Party have resigned and publicly condemned the crackdown. Protest groups have vowed to hold daily noon protests until the "sieges" of Dera'a and Douma end. In a Kurdish village near Qamishli some 2,000 people attended the funeral of a conscript believed to be killed for refusing to take part in the repression.

Syrian authorities have offered an **amnesty** to opposition groups which have defied the regime, saying the "vandals and terrorists" have 15 days to hand themselves in or face the consequences.

The USA imposed **sanctions** on several key members of the Assad regime, among them on Assad's brother, Maher, commander of the Syrian Army's 4th Armored Division.

Libya: Qaddafi targeted as he loses ground

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi survived a NATO air-strike on April 30 that killed his youngest son Saif al-Arab and three of his grandchildren in a command-and-control centre near Bab al-Azizia. The NATO coalition denied assassination attempts but conceded a change of tactics towards targeting the decision-making centres of the Libyan regime in Tripoli and Sirte after it had destroyed most accessible targets.

Qaddafi had tried to mine Misrata harbor, and had threatened a tribes' attack against the city, nothing of which materialised. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged the Libyan president to step down.

Egypt: shift in foreign policy, and a new party

Palestinian politics - In a surprise announcement following secret talks in Cairo, the Fatah party and its Islamist rival Hamas said they had put a four-year rift behind them. The two parties pledged to form an interim unity government with elections in both the West Bank and Gaza to be held in December. After the reconciliation, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil al-Araby has urged the United States to support the declaration of an independent Palestinian state. The Foreign Ministry of Egypt also announced it intends to open its border with Gaza.

As if to add a dramatic effect, the gaz pipeline towards Jordan and Israel exploded near Arish on April 28.

Islamists - In its first meeting since 1995, held on April 30, the Muslim Brotherhood's Shura Council announced the leaders of its would-be political party and pledged not to run for more than half the parliamentary seats in Egypt's upcoming parliamentary elections. This would mean an increase in the number of candidates the party will field in the September elections up from an announced 30 % of the constituencies, in a sign of the increasing confidence of Egypt's Islamists. The contradiction with earlier statements makes the Brotherhood appear less credible. The group affirmed that it would not support any member who decides to compete for the state's highest executive office, in reference to the prominent reformist Abdel Moneim Abouel Fotouh, who had announced he might run for president on his own behalf.

The Muslim Brotherhood's legislative body appointed Mohammed Morsy as president of the Freedom and Justice Party, Essam al-Erian as vice president and Saad al-Katatny as secretary general. As a sign of the independence of their political party from the mother organization - a plea constantly reiterated by observers and the group's reformist voices - the Shura Council required the three leaders to relinquish their positions in the Guidance Bureau. The appointment was criticised by young Brotherhood members.

Protests - Three recently-appointed governors were rejected by the public, causing unrest in the respective governorates.

Egyptian workers chanted against Mubarak during the Labor Day celebrations on 1 May. Prime Minister Essam Sharaf did not attend the celebrations even though he was invited. In a dramatic end, a group of thugs overran the stage and put an end to the party.

Justice - The prosecution received a report from a fact-finding commission charged with investigating the events of the 25 January revolution, stating that prison breaks were planned and that police used ammunition and tear gas to create chaos.

Budget - Before the unrest, Egypt had predicted a deficit of 7.9 percent of GDP for fiscal 2010/11, but later revised that upwards to 9.4 percent. The IMF projects a plunge in growth of 1.0 percent this year, after a 5.1 percent expansion in 2010. Planning and International Cooperation Minister Faiza Abu el-Naga announced on Monday a development plan worth LE230 billion to kick-start the economy after Mubarak's ouster.

Yemen: end of a deal

President Saleh did not attend the signing of the deal negotiated by the Gulf states, bringing down the only serious attempt to end the crisis. Large duelling demonstrations were held in the capital of Sanaa. Tens of thousands of protesters marched up demanding the ouster of the President.

Morocco: a terrorist attack

On April 28 a bomb in a crowded tourist cafe in Marrakesh killed 16 people, in a first Al-Qaeda style attack since the Arab revolutions began.

On May 1, thousands of people, including trade union members, marched in Morocco's cities demanding a faster transition towards democracy and decrying terrorism.