

Egypt judges boycott referendum

Top court strike continues; Newspapers declare not to print today

AGENCIES

Judges in Egypt yesterday refused to oversee a vote on the country's new draft constitution, to be held in two weeks.

The Judges' Club's decision follows a confrontation between Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court and Islamist supporters of President Mohammed Morsi, reports BBC.

The court said it was suspending its work after its members were prevented from ruling on the legitimacy of the body that drew up the constitution.

Opposition groups called for protests against the referendum on Tuesday.

They said Morsi had broken a promise not to call a referendum without gaining a wide national consensus.

"The National Salvation Front condemns the irresponsible act by



A copy of Egyptian newspaper "Al-Tahrir" with the headline "No to Dictatorship" with a cartoon of a newspaper in human form chained in a cell was pasted, right, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi. PHOTO: AFP

the president of the republic in calling a referendum on an illegitimate constitution that is rejected by a large section of his people," an alliance of opposition groups said in a statement. The judges, many of whom remain from the era of toppled dictator Hosni Mubarak, had been due to examine the legality of the panel that drafted the charter following a boycott by

liberals, leftists and Christians.

It was also to look into the legality of the Islamist-dominated senate, the only remaining elected legislative body after the court dissolved parliament on a technicality.

The press threw its weight behind the mounting protests against Morsi.

A cartoon of a newspaper in

human form chained in a cell was pasted on the front of independent papers including Al-Watan and Al-Masry Al-Youm with the line "A constitution that cancels rights and shackles freedoms. No to dictatorship".

Eleven independent and opposition party newspapers also declared they would not go to print today, reports AFP.

The latest developments heighten the tensions between President Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood supporters on one side, and his mainly secular political opponents and the judiciary on the other.

Hours after the Supreme Constitutional Court suspended its work, the Judges' Club, the union which represents the profession nationwide, said it had turned down the judges' traditional role of electoral oversight for the referendum.

Ukraine govt resigns, stays on in interim

REUTERS, Kiev

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich yesterday accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov and his government and told the cabinet to stay on in an interim capacity, according to a decree published on the presidential website.

A number of government members, including Azarov, were elected to parliament in an election on October 28 and had been expected therefore to resign from their cabinet posts.

In his two and a half years as prime minister, Azarov has sought to revive an indebted economy which was hard hit by recession in 2009.

NEWS IN brief

Vietnam mortar kills 4 kids

AP, Hanoi

A mortar shell left from the Vietnam War has exploded in a southern village, killing four children and seriously injuring five other people.

Hieu Nghia village official Le Van Giang says three children aged 4 to 11 died at the scene on Sunday afternoon and a 6-year-old boy died at the hospital. The blast seriously injured two other children and three men.

Giang said the shell exploded when the children who found the shell from bamboo brush were playing with it. A villager found the shell five years ago when dredging a canal.

Congo troops enter Goma

AFP, Goma

Democratic Republic of Congo troops entered the eastern mining hub of Goma Monday, two days after rebel M23 fighters ended an almost fortnight-long occupation in line with a regionally brokered deal.

The rebels' lightning capture of Goma last month -- eight months after they launched an uprising against Kinshasa -- had sparked fears of a wider war and major humanitarian crisis, and their withdrawal was widely welcomed.

Maldives president to face trust vote

AFP, Colombo

The Maldivian parliament yesterday voted to hold a secret vote on a no-confidence motion against President Mohamed Waheed in a move that threatens the leader who took charge during turmoil less than a year ago.

The 75-member parliament voted 41 to 34 in favour of a secret vote against Waheed who took power after the ousting of the country's first democratically elected president in February, the parliament website showed.

No date has been fixed to take up the no-trust vote, but the MDP has expressed confidence of mustering the required simple majority to topple Waheed who depends on a coalition of parties for survival.

10 slaughtered in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

Ten Christians had their throats slit and militants killed two police officers during attacks on churches and border posts in a fresh wave of violence in northern Nigeria, officials reported Sunday.

The Islamist group Boko Haram was thought to be behind the slaughter of the Christians late on Saturday in the northern town of Chibok, local officials said.

"The attackers came in around 9:00 pm chanting 'Allahu Akbar', which made us suspect they are Boko Haram," said a local government official on condition of anonymity.

Typhoon moves towards Manila

AP, Manila

A strong typhoon was heading towards southern Philippines yesterday hundreds of people were evacuated coastal areas in the storm's path.

Fishermen and ships were warned not to venture out in the sea. Typhoon Bopha is expected to hit land tomorrow morning but would not directly hit Manila if it stays on its current path, government weather forecaster Jori Loiz said.

Colombia sets deadline for Farc

AFP, Bogota

Colombian leftist rebels faced yesterday a new deadline for striking a peace deal with the government after President Juan Manuel Santos warned they have less than a year to reach a negotiated end to Latin America's longest-running insurgency.

The warning on peace talks came after the Colombian military launched a new operation against the FARC rebels at the weekend, in which it said at least 20 rebels were killed.

UK coalition divided over future of press

PM to meet media owners, editors

AFP, London

Cameron's government is divided on the future of the press after the Liberal Democrats, the junior partners in his Conservative-led coalition, said they would join forces with the opposition Labour party and support a new law.

The rift was sparked by Thursday's publication of a report by judge Brian Leveson which, in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal at Rupert Murdoch's News of the World, proposed a new independent self-regulatory body backed by law.

British Prime Minister David Cameron will meet national newspaper editors and owners next week to urge them to agree a timeframe for setting up a new press watchdog, a government spokesman said Saturday.

The meeting follows proposals set out by judge Brian Leveson in a major report into press ethics in Britain, conducted in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal at Rupert Murdoch's News of the World, which was published on Thursday.

The meeting will be hosted by Maria Miller, the culture minister who has responsibility for the media.

The main agenda will be trying to "set a timeframe for a response" from the newspaper industry to Leveson's recommendation for independent self-regulation of the press, the spokesman added.

News Corp names new chief

AFP, New York

News Corp announced a new head of its troubled British newspaper arm yesterday and said it was ending publication of its iPad app, The Daily.

The media conglomerate said Mike Darcy, a former chief operating officer of BSkyB, will replace Tom Mockridge as CEO of News International. Mockridge leaves the company at the end of the year.

At the same time, News Corp said it will cease publication of The Daily iPad app on December 15. Its founding editor-in-chief, Jesse Angelo, was named publisher of the New York Post.

"From its launch, The Daily was a bold experiment in digital publishing and an amazing vehicle for innovation," News Corp CEO Rupert Murdoch said.

"Unfortunately, our experience was that we could not find a large enough audience quickly enough to convince us the business model was sustainable in the long-term," he said.



Mike Darcy

MALDIVES AIRPORT ROW

India threatens to cut off annual aid

AFP, Male

The Maldives said yesterday it would ignore a court ruling staying its decision to kick out Indian infrastructure group GMR, risking a deeper row with New Delhi, which has threatened to cut off annual aid worth \$25 million.

GMR, which won a 25-year contract to manage and upgrade the main international airport in the Maldivian capital under the former government, was given five days to leave the country last week by President Mohammed Waheed's administration.

The privatisation deal has been targeted by Waheed and others in the government over alleged corruption and for patriotic reasons, leading to

fury in India, the regional power.

GMR said Monday it had won "injunctive relief" against the decision in the Singapore High Court, where arbitration was being heard, but the Maldivian government said it would ignore the ruling.

The decision to terminate the lease was "non-reversible and non-negotiable", government spokesman Masood Imad told AFP from the capital Male. "We will not accept the (interim) order," he added.

India, whose influence in the Indian Ocean faces competition from China, warned its south-western neighbour on Monday that it might freeze annual aid worth \$25 million due in 2013 after a review of the airport decision.

Hillary warns Assad over chemical arms

Arab league chief says regime could fall 'anytime'; Putin holds talks on missile

AFP, Prague, Turkey, Damascus

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday issued a "strong warning" to the regime of Bashar al-Assad over the potential use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people.

"This is a red line for the United States," Clinton said after meeting Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg in Prague. "Once again we issue a very strong warning to the Assad regime that their behaviour is reprehensible. Their actions against their own people have been tragic," she added.

"I'm not going to telegraph in any specifics what we would do in the event of credible evidence that the Assad regime has resorted to using chemical weapons against their own people, but sufficing to say that we're certainly planning to take action if that eventuality were to occur," the top US diplomat stressed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin met Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip



Turkey's PM Erdogan speaks with Russia's President Putin in Istanbul yesterday, right, a Turk holds a placard that reads "Bloody Assad associate in guilt with Putin" and sporting defaced images of Putin and Assad.

PHOTO: AFP

Erdogan in Istanbul yesterday on a trip focused on resolving sharp differences over the near 21-month conflict raging in Syria.

Protesters chanted anti-Putin slogans outside Erdogan's office and another demonstration was staged outside the Russian consulate in Istanbul before the two leaders began their meeting.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the Russian strongman will

raise with Erdogan the planned deployment by Nato of Patriot missiles along Turkey's volatile border with Syria, the Interfax news agency reported.

The missile deployment "worries Russia and does not facilitate stability of the already fragile situation" in the region, Peskov said.

Turkey insists the US-made Patriots would be used for purely defensive purposes but Russia has warned that such a

move could spark a broader conflict that would draw in the Western military alliance.

Meanwhile, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime is in danger of collapse "anytime" as the opposition gains ground on the military and political fronts, Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi told AFP on Monday.

"That could happen anytime," the secretary general said in an exclusive interview.

"Now they are fighting in Damascus," and after 20 months of violence, "I think there will be something soon," he said.

"Facts on the ground indicate very clearly now that the Syrian opposition is gaining, politically and militarily. Every day they are gaining something," Arabi said.

He said a new coalition of Syrian opposition groups now based in Cairo was "moving ahead."

The Arab League, which is also based in the Egyptian capital, last month recognised Syria's National Coalition as the "legitimate" representative of the Syrian opposition.

Resist acts of destruction

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government's firm stance on holding war crimes trial, Hasina said the trial must take place in the country as it is the demand of the nation.

Criticising Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia for announcing movements in this month of victory, the premier said the BNP chairperson declared their programme at a time when the trial of war criminals has been started.

She raised questions, "What is the movement for and against whom the movement is? Is it a movement to protect the war criminals? Was she [Khaleda] hurt with the surrender of the defeated forces in this month 41 years ago?"

"Was she giving the programmes for movement to join hands with the defeated forces? I leave it to the countrymen to judge," Hasina told her audience.

The premier also urged people to remain united so that the activities of the anti-liberation forces could not hamper the independence of the country.

Referring to the 15th amendments to the constitution, the premier said her government amended the constitution to restore the spirit of Liberation War and safeguard democracy.

Awami League (AL) General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam, its Presidium Member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, among

others, spoke at the programme.

The premier, most of her cabinet members, senior leaders of AL and its associated bodies, eminent cultural personalities also witnessed a cultural programme there amid tight security.

Earlier in the morning, Hasina along with her party's senior leaders paid respects to the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in front of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi.

Talking to reporters, Syed Ashraf, spokesperson of AL, said Jamaat-e-Islami has started to create anarchy across the country as the time for the verdict of war crimes trial was near-

ing.

"We hope the verdict against some identified war criminals will start coming by the end of the month. Knowing this beforehand, they [Jamaat-e-Islami] have become desperate," he said.

Ashraf urged all to put aside political differences and become united against the "war criminals" in the month of victory.

He alleged that Jamaat-Shibir activists are launching guerrilla-style attacks on police only to protect their leaders from facing the trial.

He said the police administration had failed in this case as they could not respond according to the information provided to them in advance.

China opposes US bill on islands

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday branded a US-Japan security treaty "a product of the Cold War" after Washington reaffirmed its commitment to Japan in its territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands, known in Chinese as the Diaoyus.

The amendment, attached to the National Defense Authorisation Bill, noted that while the United States "takes no position" on the ultimate sovereignty of the territory, it "acknowledges the administration of Japan over the Senkaku Islands".

It added that "unilateral actions of a third party" would not affect its position.

The legislation passed last week reaffirmed the US commitment to Japan under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security and warned that an armed attack against either party "in the territories under the administration of Japan" would be met in accordance with its provisions.

'China looking to build ties with India'

THE HINDU ONLINE

Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo told National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon here yesterday that China was looking to forge stronger ties with its neighbours following the leadership transition.

Dai, who is also Menon's counterpart as the Special Representative (SR) on the boundary talks, said Monday's visit had assumed "special and important" significance as it was one of the first visits by a foreign leader to China following November's Party Congress, which formalised a once-in-a-decade leadership transition.

"You're one of the first few foreign leaders we are receiving after the party congress," Dai told Menon at their first session of talks.

"I'm sure through your visit the Indian side will have a better sense of China after the eighteenth Party Congress and China's foreign policy, and how best to join forces to further promote the development of China-India relations".

The first session of Monday's talks was devoted to briefing Menon on China's transition. Two other sessions later on Monday will focus on Sino-Indian relations and are expected to cover a range of topics from the boundary question to wider strategic issues.

Menon is expected to meet Wu Bangguo, the head of the National People's Congress or Parliament and the second-ranked member of the outgoing Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) which stepped down last month, at the Great Hall of the People today morning.