New Egypt charter guarantees equality

Says Morsi; downplays economic woes

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi yesterday said a disputed new constitution guaranteed equality for all Egyptians, and downplayed the country's economic woes in an address before a newly empowered senate.

Egyptians voted in a

December referendum in favour of the charter, which was rushed through by an Islamist-dominated council amid political turmoil and became the focus of the country's worst crisis since Morsi's election in June.

The senate has been invested with legislative powers under the new charter until a parliament is elected in two months' time.

"All are equal before the law, and in this constitution," he said of the charter, adding that there would be "freedom for all people, with no exceptions."

The constitution has been fiercely criticised by human rights activists and the secular-leaning opposition for failing to guarantee women's rights and potentially curtailing freedom of expression and freedom of worship.

"General indicators for the social and economic situation have shown some noticeable progress," Morsi said of the economy, despite concerns over a downturn.

A declining Egyptian pound and a \$4.8 billion IMF loan stalled after weeks of often violent protests have put the country on edge, two years after the economy nosedived with an uprising that overthrew president

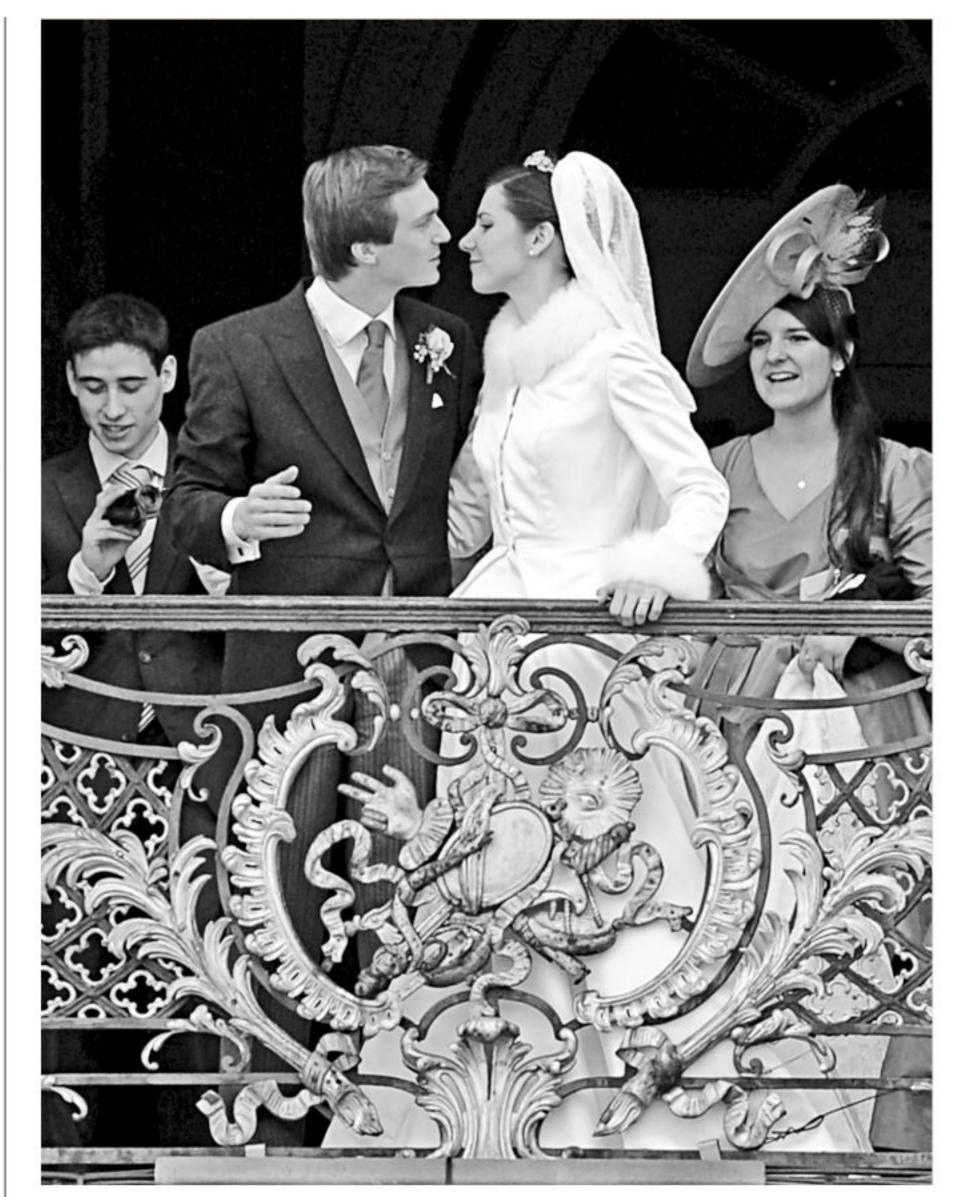
Hosni Mubarak.

In a televised speech on Wednesday, Morsi welcomed the approval of an Islamistbacked charter in a referendum, despite fierce opposition protests, and pledged to turn his attention to the economy.

He also promised to reshuffle his cabinet. Two ministers, including an Islamist ally of Morsi, have so far resigned in disagreement with government policy.

Mass rallies that began in November after Morsi adopted extensive powers -later repealed -- have now subsided, but the opposition this week called for further protests against the new constitu-

The opposition, led by the National Salvation Front coalition, sees the charter as a possible tool to introduce strict Islamic sharia law by weakening human rights generally, women's rights and the independence of the judiciary.



Archduchess Adelaide Drape-Frisch, 3rd from left, and archduke Christoph of Austria, 2nd from left, kiss after their wedding on the balcony of the Nancy tonwnhall in Nancy, France yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US signs law to curb Iran's LatAm ties

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama enacted a law Friday to counter Iran's alleged influence in Latin America, through a new diplomatic and political strategy to be designed

by the State Department.

The Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act, passed by lawmakers earlier this year, calls for the State Department to develop a strategy within 180 days to "address Iran's growing hostile presence and activity" in the

region. And within Latin American countries, the text provides for a multiagency action plan to provide security in those countries, along with a "counterterrorism and counterradicalization plan" to

isolate Iran and its allies.

Assad won't cede power Says Russia; Syria peace envoy in Moscow

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday acknowledged that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad would not be persuaded to leave power, but nonetheless insisted there was still a chance of finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict.

Moscow's caution came as forces loyal to Assad seized a

district of the strategic central city of Homs after a fierce assault that a Britain-based watchdog said sparked a humanitarian crisis. The latest diplomatic push saw Russian

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov meet UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi for talks that represented a final end-of-year bid to accelerate moves to halt 21 months of bloodshed. The talks came amid emerging signs

that Russia was beginning to distance itself from Assad's government and urgent efforts by Brahimi to resurrect a failed peace initiative that world powers agreed to in Geneva in June.

Lavrov said both he and Brahimi agreed there was hope for a solution as long as world powers put pressure on the warring parties to accept a mediated end to violence that has claimed more than 45,000

Regarding Bashar al-Assad, he repeatedly said, both publically and in private... that he is not planning to leave, that he will remain in his post," Lavrov said.

"There is no possibility to change this position," he added. Moscow has been under

intense pressure to urge the leadership of its last Middle East ally to accept a face-saving agreement that would see the rebels assume gradual command as

Yet analysts have questioned the actual sway the Kremlin has over Assad, and Lavrov appeared to betray a hint of frustration when revealing that Assad had this week told Brahimi that he does not intend to leave.

the fighting reaches Damascus itself.

Russia also confirmed on Thursday that it had invited the head of the opposition National Coalition -- recognised by Western powers as Syria's representatives -- for the two sides' first formal talks.

But National Coalition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib rejected holding any meeting in Moscow. He also said the Kremlin must apologise for its past support of Assad before any meeting could be held in a third country.

'No peace talks till Abbas in power'

AFP, Jerusalem

The head of Israel's ultranationalist Yisrael Beitenu party, ex-foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, lashed out Friday against Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, saying new peace talks would be possible only if he leaves office.

from the leadership of the Palestinian Authority will it be possible to renew the diplomatic process," Haaretz

tion if there was no Israeli movement towards renewing peace talks after the general election on January 22. In Thursday's Haaretz interview, Abbas said that he

with the Palestinians and freeze settlement construction while they were in progress.

the phone and call Netanyahu," he said.

"I'll tell him... Sit in the chair here instead of me, take the keys, and you will be responsible for the Palestinian Authority. Once the new government in Israel is in place,

Talks between the two sides have been on hold since September 2010, with the Palestinians insisting on a settlement freeze before returning to the negotiating

NEW Sprief

China sets date for 12th NPC

AFP, Beijing

China has fixed March 5, 2013, as the date it will convene a key legislative session, state media reported Friday, with new Communist Party chief Xi Jingping set to become president during the two-week meeting.

The date for the start of the first annual session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) was approved at an NPC Standing Committee meeting Friday, the official Xinhua news agency

Cherie Blair awarded

CBE

DAILYMAIL ONLINE

Cherie Blair was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the New Year Honours for her services to women's issues and charity.

Cherie Blair

Blair, 58, has used the prominence she gained as wife of former prime minister Tony Blair to

Karachi bus explosion kills five

AFP, Karachi

An explosion on a bus in Pakistan's largest city Karachi yesterday left at least five people dead and wounded 35 others, police said.

It was not immediately clear what had caused the blast in Sadar, a congested shopping area of Karachi, officials said, adding that a bomb disposal team was trying to determine whether it was caused by a bomb or an exploding compressed natural gas cylinder.

Karachi is in the grip of a long-running wave of militancy, political and sectarian violence.

China tightens Internet rules

AFP, Beijing

China has approved new rules that require Internet users nationwide to provide real-name identification, state media reported on Friday, as the government increases its already tight online grip.

With more than half a billion Chinese now online, authorities are concerned about the power of the Internet to influence public opinion in a country that maintains tight controls on its

Myanmar to lift newspaper ban

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar will allow private newspapers to publish daily from April 1, ending a decades-old ban in a further easing of the country's draconian censorship regime, the government said Friday.

Currently state-owned newspapers are the only dailies allowed, prompting many private companies to provide news via the Internet for a population hungry for information after years of restrictions.

The issuing of the new daily licences -announced on the information ministry's website -- will come two years after the launch of a new reformist government, with private news-

Elders unwanted! Germany deporting old and sick

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Growing numbers of elderly and sick Germans are being sent overseas for long-term care in retirement and rehabilitation centres because of rising costs and falling standards in Germany.

The move, which has seen thousands of retired Germans rehoused in homes in eastern Europe and Asia, has been severely criticised by social welfare organisations who have called it "inhumane deportation".

But with increasing numbers of Germans unable to afford the growing costs of retirement homes, and an ageing and shrinking population, the number expected to be sent abroad in the next few years is only likely to

rise. Experts describe it as a "time bomb". Germany has one of the fastest-ageing populations in the world, and the movement here has implications for other western countries, including Britain, particularly amid fears that austerity measures and rising care costs are potentially undermining standards of residential care.

According to Germany's federal bureau of statistics, more than 400,000 senior citizens are currently unable to afford a German retirement home, a

figure that is growing by around 5% a year. The Sozialverband Deutschland (VdK), a German socio-political advisory group, said the fact that growing numbers of Germans were unable to afford the costs of a retirement home in their own country sent a huge

"alarm signal". It has called for political intervention. "We simply cannot let those people who built Germany up to be what it is, who put their backbones into it all their lives, be deported," said VdK's president, Ulrike Mascher. "It is inhumane."

Researchers found an estimated 7,146 German pensioners living in retirement homes in Hungary in 2011. More than 3,000 had been sent to homes in the Czech Republic, and there were more than 600 in Slovakia. There are also unknown numbers in Spain, Greece and Ukraine. Thailand and the Philippines are also attracting increasing numbers.

With Germany's population expected to shrink from almost 82 million to about 69 million by 2050, one in every 15 – about 4.7 million people – are expected to be in need of care, meaning the problem of provision is only likely to worsen.

ITALY POLLS Monti to lead coalition

AFP, Rome

Italy's caretaker Prime Minister Mario Monti said Friday that he will contest February elections at the head of a centrist coalition, driving a wedge between centre-left and centre-right parties.

"I agree to assume the role of head of the coalition, and I will commit myself to guaranteeing the success of this operation," Monti said after meeting for four hours with representatives of centrist groups and civic organisations.

Monti, 69, announced a week ago that he would step down after 13 months at the head of an unelected team of technocrats that was appointed to steer Italy out of a financial crisis that could have had dire consequences for the entire 17-nation eurozone.

Technically, as an Italian senator for life, the former European commissioner cannot himself run for office, but is in a position to be renamed prime minister if a party or coalition he supports wins the vote on February 24-25.

Monti is seen as a way of preventing scandal-tainted former premier Silvio Berlusconi from returning to power and undoing hard-won reforms.

In a Senate hall -- and not at the seat of government -- Monti said Friday he was "not creating a new party" but an alliance to have various groups that already back his programme "To Change Italy, To Reform Europe" work together.

Analysts had expected Pier Luigi Bersani of the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) to be named prime minister, and to then appoint Monti as a "super economy minister".

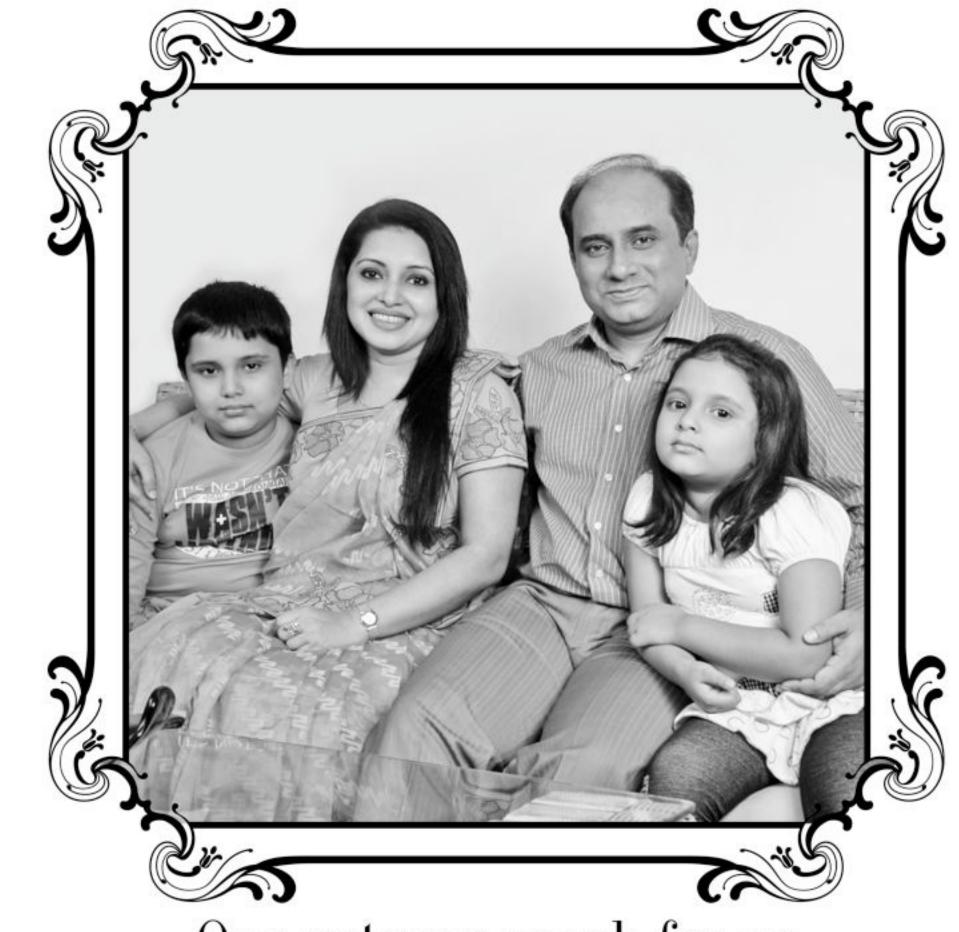
Avigdor Lieberman "Only after his disappearance daily's website quoted him as saying in a statement. Lieberman's comments came a day after Abbas told

the paper he would disband his West Bank administraexpected Netanyahu to lead his next coalition into talks

"If there is no progress even after the election I will take

Netanyahu will have to decide -- yes or no," Abbas said.

table and the Israelis insisting on no preconditions.



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Mr. Syed Abdul Alim & family, Morning Glory, Uttara, Dhaka

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