

# Egypt SC rules Senate illegal

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's highest court yesterday invalidated the Islamist-dominated Senate and a panel that drafted the constitution, throwing the country into fresh political uncertainty.

The Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) said the law governing the elections of the Shura Council was unconstitutional, as were the rules for the selection of the members of a committee that drafted the constitution.

However presiding Judge Maher al-Beheiry said that the Shura Council should remain in place until the election of a new parliament.

It was not immediately clear whether the Shura Council would continue to legislate during this time.

Some judicial sources said the Shura Council, a historically powerless body which was thrust into a legislative role when parliament was dissolved, now has no authority to make laws.

But others say the body's powers will be restricted to issuing legislation governing the next elections.

As for the constitution, it will remain in place because it was adopted by a popular referendum, judicial sources said.

Despite the uncertainty over its impact, Sunday's ruling it will cast a dark shadow over the legitimacy of the Shura Council and the constitutional panel, which were touted by Islamist President Mohamed Morsi as shining examples of Egypt's new democracy.

The constitution was at the heart of a bitter conflict between Morsi's mainly Islamist supporters and his opponents who slammed the text for failing to represent all Egyptians and stifling freedoms.

The conflict had spilled out onto the streets causing the worst political polarisation since the popular uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

The case against the Shura Council is based on several challenges by lawyers of the law that governed the election of its members.

Both the upper and lower houses were elected under the same electoral law, which the SCC last year deemed invalid, prompting the dissolution of parliament.

The ruling creates a crisis for Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyed said, "because they wanted to use the Senate to pass several laws that they feel they could not in a new parliament," said Sayyed.



Demonstrators clash with police during a protest in central Ankara yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## WHY IS THIS PROTEST?

Violent anti-government protests that have engulfed Istanbul were triggered by plans to redevelop iconic Taksim Square in the heart of the city, a project that will involve razing some 600 trees in an adjoining park.

The plan includes building a replica of military barracks from the Ottoman Empire to house a cultural centre, but residents fear the area will in fact become a shopping district. The ambitious project was planned in 2002.

But the protests now broadened into anti-government action after a tough police response.

# TURKEY TURMOIL Protests spread as 17,00 held

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish police fired tear gas at protesters in Ankara yesterday while thousands of people occupied Istanbul's main Taksim Square on the third day of mass demonstrations against Turkey's Islamist-rooted government.

Interior Minister Muammer Guler said more than 1,700 people had been arrested in the unrest that has spread to 67 cities nationwide, though most have since been released.

In Istanbul, a sea of protesters from across Turkey's political spectrum flooded the iconic square a day after police pulled out of the area, waving flags and chanting "Government, Resign!" and "Istanbul is ours, Taksim is ours!".

From a nearby rooftop, a banner with the words: "Do not surrender" was unfurled.

Taksim has been at the heart of a wave of protests that have spread across the country in the biggest public outcry against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government since it took power in 2002.

After two days of violence and appeals by Turkey's Western allies for restraint, the situation appeared to have calmed in Istanbul yesterday after police pulled out of Taksim and officials took on a more conciliatory tone.

But in Ankara police fired tear gas and used water cannon to disperse some 1,000 protesters who were attempting to march on the prime minister's high-security office, images that were shown live on the private NTV news network.

Authorities say almost 100 police vehicles, 94 shops and dozens of cars have been damaged in protests nationwide since Friday. The total damage is estimated at more than 20 million liras (over eight million euros), Guler said.

Turkey's Nato allies Britain, France and the United States have all urged the Erdogan government to exercise restraint in recent days.

# UK Queen marks 60 yrs on throne



AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth II was marking the 60th anniversary of her coronation in private yesterday after indulging in her passion for horses with a day at the races.

The 87-year-old monarch and her husband Prince Philip spent Saturday at the Epsom Derby, echoing the events of a year ago that kicked off her diamond jubilee party.

Elizabeth took the throne on February 6, 1952 upon the death of her father king George VI, but to allow for a period of national mourning, she was only crowned 16 months later in London's Westminster Abbey in Britain's first televised coronation.

The queen will be joined by the royal family and 2,000 guests at the abbey tomorrow for a service celebrating the anniversary of the rainy summer's day on June 2, 1953 when the imperial state crown was placed on her head.

The queen was marking the actual anniversary day in a low-key fashion.

"The queen will be spending Sunday privately," a Buckingham Palace spokeswoman told AFP.

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip will return to duty on Monday, attending a reception for the Royal National Institute for the Blind at St James's Palace in London.

The coronation anniversary is being staged with far less fanfare than the diamond jubilee celebrations last year.

Royal thoughts are now turning to the birth expected in July of Prince William and Catherine's baby, which will be third in line to the throne.

The coronation celebrations include exhibitions of memorabilia, gun salutes and a series of garden parties.

## ODDLY enough

### Goats detained in India!



AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Three goats were caught and detained by police in the southern Indian city of Chennai after they allegedly vandalised a new police patrol vehicle, the Times of India has reported.

According to the complaint, about 12 goats dented the vehicle when they and climbed on top of it.

Police said the goats had a record of damaging vehicles of residents, but had "crossed the line" with an attack on a new patrol vehicle.

### More germs in restaurant ice than toilets!

MAIL ONLINE

The ice served in six out of ten of Britain's most popular high street restaurants contains more bacteria than the water found in their toilets, an investigation by The Mail has found.

Scientific tests have shown that ice from branches of McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, Starbucks, Cafe Rouge and Nando's all had higher levels of bacteria than samples of water taken from toilets.

# Iraq busts Qaeda poison gas cell

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's defence ministry said on Saturday it has broken up an al-Qaeda cell that was working to produce poison gas for attacks within the country as well as in Europe and North America.

The group of five people built two facilities in Baghdad to produce sarin and mustard gas, using instructions from another al-Qaeda group, spokesman Mohammed al-Askari told a news conference.

The members of the cell were prepared to launch attacks domestically, and also had a network to smuggle the toxins to neighbouring countries, and further afield to Europe and North America, Askari said.

The arrest of the cell members was possible because of cooperation between Iraqi and foreign intelligence services, he added.

# US, China to hold regular, hi-level talks on hacking

AFP, New York

The United States and China have agreed to hold regular, high-level meetings aimed at setting standards for behavior on cybersecurity and commercial spying, The New York Times reported Saturday.

It would be the "first diplomatic effort to defuse the tensions over what the United States says is a daily barrage of computer break-ins and theft of corporate and government secrets," the report said.

An unnamed senior US official involved in negotiations to hold regular meetings said in an interview with the daily on Friday that "we need to get some norms and rules." The first talks were set for July.

The development comes ahead of President Barack Obama's informal summit in Rancho Mirage, California Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"American officials say they do not expect the process to immediately yield a significant reduction in the daily intrusions from China," the Times report said.

In Singapore Saturday, US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel accused China of waging cyber espionage against the United States, raising pressure on Beijing over the issue ahead of a key summit between their leaders.

The Pentagon chief, speaking at a Singapore security forum attended by senior Chinese military officials, pointedly blamed the Chinese government and armed forces for repeated intrusions into sensitive US information systems.

Hagel's remarks came just days after China's defense ministry dismissed a Pentagon report accusing Chinese hackers of accessing US weapons designs.



Babies take part in a Baby Race to mark International Children Day in Vilnius, Lithuania on Saturday. Lithuania every year arranges this race where the parents of the participants tempt them with chocolates or toys to run or crawl faster.

PHOTO: AFP

# All sides responsible for atrocities in Syria

Says UN as key battle looms; Geneva talks may take place in July

CNN ONLINE

The United Nations chief warned that all sides will be held accountable for the killing of civilians in a besieged Syrian border city, where President Bashar al-Assad's forces and Hezbollah fighters have been battling rebels for control.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's warning on Saturday came as he urged forces loyal to al-Assad and rebels to allow civilians to leave the town of Qusayr, the latest flashpoint in the more than two-year-old conflict that has left about 80,000 people dead.

In a statement, Ban said "the eyes of the world are upon them, and they will be held accountable for any acts of atrocity carried out against the civilian population."

As many as 1,500 people are believed to be wounded and in need of medical care in the town, and the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross called on both sides to allow the wounded to be evacuated.

Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Valerie Amos, the emergency relief coordinator for the United Nations, called the situation in Qusayr "desperate."

Qusayr is a key location because it sits astride

one route to the Syrian coast and another to the Lebanese border. For the rebels, holding Qusayr is important because it's another way of strangling the regime's ability to sustain itself, and it complicates Hezbollah's access to Syria.

But the fight for control of Qusayr has also raised fears the Syria conflict could destabilise Lebanon, with news that Hezbollah fighters have joined al-Assad's forces in laying siege to the city.

At least 16 rockets were fired from Syria into Lebanon early Saturday, NNA, the Lebanese state news agency, reported.

Word of the attack came as reports surfaced that al-Assad's government will get at least 10 fighter jets from Russia, raising concerns the move would further damage already rocky diplomatic efforts to try to bring about an end to the Syrian civil war.

Russia also reportedly has sold six S-300 air defense systems to Syria under a 2010 contract.

Meanwhile, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius yesterday said that a peace conference on Syria in Geneva could take place in July, later than previously expected.

He said time was "too short" for the conference to be held in June as originally planned.

# China defends its maritime role Top general says patrols in Asian seas 'legitimate'

AFP, Singapore

Chinese warships will continue to patrol waters where Beijing has territorial claims, a top general said yesterday, amid simmering rows with neighbouring countries over the South China Sea and islands controlled by Japan.

Lieutenant General Qi Jianguo, deputy chief of the general staff of the People's Liberation Army, defended the patrols as legitimate and said his country's sovereignty over the areas could not be disputed.

"Why are Chinese warships patrolling in East China Sea and South China Sea? I think we are all clear about this," Qi told the annual Shangri-La Dialogue security conference in Singapore.

"Our attitude on East China Sea and South China Sea is that they are in our Chinese sovereignty. We are very clear about that," he said through an interpreter.



An anti-China rally held in Vietnam yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

"So the Chinese warships and the patrolling activities are totally legitimate and uncontroversial."

Qi was responding to a question from a delegate after giving a speech in which he sought to assure neighbouring countries that China has no hegemonic ambitions.

"China has never taken foreign expansion and military conquering as a state policy," he said.

China is locked in a territorial dispute with Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea.

The four states have partial claims to islands but China says it has sovereign rights to nearly all of the sea, including areas much closer to other countries and thousands of kilometres from the Chinese coast.

China also has a dispute with Japan over the Senkaku islands, which Beijing calls the Diaoyus, in the East China Sea.

# Ahmadinejad survives chopper malfunction

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing in northeast Iran yesterday after an unspecified "accident", the presidency reported, adding that he was unhurt.

The helicopter carrying Dr Ahmadinejad and a number of officials on Sunday had an accident, but the pilot managed to land the aircraft safely," the website president.ir reported, without elaborating.

He had been en route to inaugurate a local project in a mountainous region of northeast Iran when the incident occurred.

"With God's help the president



and the officials accompanying him were not hurt. After the landing the president inaugurated the project and returned to Tehran by car," the website added.

Iranian state television showed footage of Ahmadinejad flanked by his ministers and other officials inaugurating the tunnel.

It did not give further details of the incident nor specify the make of helicopter.

Ahmadinejad is coming to the end of his second term as president of the Islamic republic.

Eight approved candidates are standing for president in an election on June 14, and Ahmadinejad's term in office ends on August 3.

## NEWSIN brief

### India, Nepal agree to share intel

PTI, Kathmandu

India and Nepal have agreed to exchange information to combat terrorism and curb criminal activities like human and drug trafficking and smuggling of Indian counterfeit currency across their open border.

During the annual Home Secretary-level talks between Home Secretary R K Singh and Nepalese counterpart Navin Kumar Ghimire that concluded here on Saturday, both sides agreed to increase vigilance and

### Zardari won't contest again

PTI, Islamabad

President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday said he will not contest the next presidential polls later this year as his Pakistan Peoples Party no longer has a majority in the national and provincial assemblies after it was routed in the historic May 11 general elections.

PPP no longer has the numbers to ensure the re-election of Zardari, who became chief of the PPP after his wife was assassinated in

### US tornado toll hits 14

AFP, Chicago

Tornadoes and floods in the United States killed at least 14 people, including two children, officials said Saturday, with most of the fatalities in Oklahoma where a monster twister struck last month.

Friday night's storms battered areas in and around Oklahoma City with high winds, heavy rain and hail, much of it near where 24 people were killed in the May 20 tornado.

### Japan to give \$1b for Sahel region

AFP, Yokohama

Japan said yesterday it would give \$1 billion in aid to help stabilise the Islamist-infested Sahel region of Africa, five months after the death of 10 Japanese in a hostage crisis.

The money is part of a \$14 billion aid package to be given to Africa over five years, which Abe announced Saturday.

It comes in addition to a \$120 million aid pledge Tokyo announced in January, days after Islamist gunmen overran a gas plant in the Algerian desert, killing dozens of foreigners.

### 57 militants killed in Afghanistan

IANS, Kabul

57 militants have been killed in a series of military operations in Afghanistan in the past 24 hours, the Interior Ministry said yesterday.

The Afghan National Police supported by the army and the Nato-led coalition forces carried out several joint operations in Kandahar, Ghazni, Helmand, Kapisa, Paktika

### Strong quake hits Taiwan

AFP, Taipei

A strong earthquake hit Taiwan yesterday, killing one person, injuring 21 others and violently shaking buildings in the capital Taipei, officials said.

The quake sent people running into the streets and was also felt in Hong Kong, more than 700 kilometres away.

Taiwan's Seismology Centre measured the quake's magnitude at 6.3, while the US Geological Survey put it at 6.2.