

# NEWSIN brief

## Iran nabs UK 'spy'

AFP, Tehran

Iranian security forces have arrested a "spy" working for the British government in Kerman, a judicial official in the southeastern province told the state IRNA news agency yesterday.

The announcement came just a day after Iran's new envoy to Britain held talks in London on his first visit since his appointment last month, which ended a two-year freeze in diplomatic relations. Iran said the suspect had confessed to his crimes and was now being tried.

## Obama urges gun law reforms

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama yesterday marked the anniversary of the shooting of 26 people at Newtown school in Connecticut, by urging Americans to press for gun law changes to prevent similar incidents. On Friday, the eve of the Sandy Hook slaughter, a schoolboy in Colorado armed with a shotgun opened fire at his school and wounded two fellow students -- one critically -- before killing himself.

## Iran sends second monkey into space

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday that it had safely returned a monkey to Earth after blasting it into space in the second such launch this year in its controversial ballistic programme. In January, Iran said it had successfully brought a live monkey, which it named Pishgam (pioneer), back to Earth from orbit.

## UN urges sanctions over Syria attacks

AFP, United Nations

UN chief Ban Ki-moon called on the international community Friday to sanction those responsible for Syrian chemical weapons attacks documented in a newly released report.

The UN report, issued Thursday, concluded that such banned arms were used at least five times before Damascus agreed to dismantle its arsenal. The report did not, however, lay blame on any part over the attacks.

## Fire at Mumbai high-rise kills 7

PTI, Mumbai

Seven persons were killed in a massive blaze that broke out in a high rise residential building in South Mumbai on Friday night, firebrigade officials said yesterday.

Six fire personnel, including two officers, were also injured while carrying out rescue and firefighting operations. The fire started on the 12th floor of the 26-storey Mont Blanc building in upscale Kemps Corner area.



## 'LONG WALK' NEARS END

The hearse carrying the coffin of South African former president Nelson Mandela passes by a tent dome funeral venue set up for today's funeral in his boyhood village of Qunu, yesterday. *Top right*, a candle burns in the former jail cell at Robben Island where Mandela was imprisoned. *Bottom right*, people react while waiting for his body to arrive in Qunu and *bottom left*, officials carry his coffin. Mandela will be buried today, ending 10 days of national mourning and global tributes for the prisoner-turned-president who transformed his country and inspired the world. Mandela, one of the towering political figures of the 20th century, died in Johannesburg on December 5, aged 95. (Story on page 16)

PHOTO: AFP



## Panel hands Obama report

AFP, Washington

A review panel handed President Barack Obama a report Friday on surveillance by US spy agencies following explosive revelations on vast phone and Internet sweeps by fugitive Edward Snowden.

The report contains more than 40 recommendations the White House will consider, and Obama will deliver a speech on the subject after a full-scale review of US eavesdropping activity concludes in January, National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said.

The report is said to recommend a continuation of National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance programs, which have alarmed US allies and civil liberties groups, but with some new privacy safeguards.

The White House will study the five-man panel's work and decide which recommendations to adopt, which need further study, and which to discard.

The report looks at how Washington can use its intelligence capability to guard national security while maintaining public trust.

Obama said last week that he would introduce some restraints on the NSA following the review.

Snowden's revelations show that the NSA has systematically raked in metadata and information from millions of emails and phone calls, some of it about US citizens.

The leaks have provided a rolling embarrassment for the White House and damaged US national security, while the scale of the eavesdropping has shocked and angered US allies.

The New York Times reported that the review panel would recommend making public the privacy protections foreign citizens can expect when the NSA gathers their phone or Internet records.

Separately, a US official said the White House had also decided to maintain the "dual-hatted" arrangement that sees a single military officer head the NSA eavesdropping service and US cyberwarfare operations.

The Wall Street Journal, meanwhile, said the task force would recommend that records of phone calls held by the NSA after the massive data mining operations should be held by telephone companies and not the spy agency.

The Times reported that the review panel would recommend that top White House officials directly examine the list of foreign leaders whose communications are monitored by the NSA.

The Times also said that the White House review would create a corps of lawyers who would argue against NSA attorneys over espionage operations in the existing Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

White House officials declined to comment on the reports.

## SURVEILLANCE REFORM

## Afghan president says does not 'trust' US

AFP, New Delhi

Visiting Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday said in New Delhi he no longer "trusts" the United States, accusing the Americans of saying one thing and doing another in his troubled homeland.

Karzai's statement to journalists came a day after he insisted he would not be "intimidated" into signing a security pact allowing US troops in Afghanistan to stay on after next year.

"I don't trust them," Karzai said in a wide-ranging discussion at a local hotel in which he singled out a letter US President Barack Obama wrote last month assuring him that US forces would "respect" the safety of Afghans in their homes.

Karzai was speaking on the second day of a three-day visit to India during which the United States hopes New Delhi can persuade him to sign the troubled troop deal.

Karzai, who is due to stand down after elections next year, initially endorsed the so-called Bilateral Security Agreement, or BSA.

But he later said the agreement could only be signed after the presidential election in April, warning against a Nato presence if it just meant "more bombs and killings".



## Egypt to vote on charter on Jan 14-15

REUTERS, Cairo

Egyptians will vote on a new constitution on January 14 and 15, state news agency MENA said yesterday, a treaty designed to replace one passed by ousted Islamist President Mohamed Morsi.

The new constitution will be the first step in the army's political transition plan that should conclude with parliamentary and presidential elections next year.

It would strengthen the army's independence and put more restrictions on the formation of religious political parties.

About 50 million Egyptians of the population of 85 million have the right to vote in the constitutional referendum.

## Japan, Asean call for freedom of air, seas

### US-China maritime near-collision revealed

REUTERS, Tokyo/washington

Japan and Southeast Asian countries called for freedom of the air and sea yesterday, as China's military assertiveness raises regional tensions and after US and Chinese warships narrowly avoided collision in the disputed South China Sea.

China's recent announcement of an air defence zone covering disputed islands in the East China Sea and its territorial claims in the South China Sea have raised concerns that a minor incident in the disputed seas could quickly escalate.

The near-miss between a US guided missile cruiser, USS Cowpens, and a Chinese warship operating near China's only aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, last week was the most significant US-China maritime incident in the South China Sea since 2009, said security expert Carl Thayer at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

"It is a gravely disturbing development," said Ian Storey, a regional security analyst at Singapore's Institute of South East Asian Studies.

"If China continues to challenge the presence of foreign naval ships in the South China Sea, it is only a question of time before a serious and potentially deadly incident occurs."

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) agreed at a summit in Tokyo on the need for freedom of the high seas and skies and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

The statement did not criticise China's new air zone, which has triggered protests from Japan, United States and South Korea. Many Asean members have deep economic ties with China.

China and several Asean nations have competing territorial claims in the energy-rich South China Sea.

## JP leaders

FROM PAGE 1

Briefing reporters at the JP's research and strategic office at Gulshan, Bobby said Ershad and other party leaders had applied for a withdrawal of their nomination papers, but the authorities did not accept the applications.

"All the instructions from HM Ershad will directly go to Jatiya Party Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader and its presidium member GM Quader," he mentioned.

Asked if he had any written or verbal approval from the JP chief to be the party's spokesperson, Bobby said he had been in regular contact with the party chairman.

Meanwhile, after meeting Raushan Ershad at her Gulshan residence, JP office secretary Tajul Islam Chowdhury told reporters that the JP was united under the leadership of Ershad and the party would contest the election.

But JP presidium member Kazi Firoz Rashid, who was also present at the meeting, rejected Tajul's statement, claiming that they had not made such a decision.

Members of an intelligence agency picked up Ershad from his Baridhara residence and took him to the hospital on Thursday night.

**EC ALLOCATES 'PLOUGH'**  
The Election Commission yesterday allocated the "plough" to the Jatiya Party nominees, although Ershad had requested the EC not to allocate the party's electoral symbol to any candidate.

About the EC's move, Bobby Hajjaj said the government could do anything if it wanted to. "The Jatiya Party chairman had applied for withdrawing his candidature, but the Election Commission didn't accept it."

## It's painful

FROM PAGE 16

He said Mollah was undoubtedly hanged because of his loyalty and solidarity with Pakistan in 1971, according to Pakistani newspaper Dawn.

"Till the very end before creation of Bangladesh, he [Mollah] remained supporter of a united Pakistan and today every Pakistani is saddened and grieved on his death," the Dawn report quoted him as saying.

Criticising Bangladesh for what he said opening old wounds by executing Mollah, Nisar, in a statement said executing Mollah after a delay of 42 years to the events of 1971 was very unfortunate and tragic and some circles are declaring it a judicial murder.

Meanwhile, parliamentary leader for Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami Sahibzada Tariqullah had demanded

that the National Assembly passed condemnatory resolution and adjourn for the day in memory of the executed politician, according to Dawn.

Inter-Provincial Coordination Minister Riaz Hussain Pirzada received time from Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq until Monday to seek the opinion of the foreign ministry and other parties in the house about the execution.

Pakistan opposition Tehreek-i-Insaf President Javed Hashmi regretted that there was no foreign minister -- a portfolio held by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif -- to respond to the members' concern in the house.

Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan was not present in the house.

## The map behind Middle East troubles

### Border lines drawn with a ruler in WW1 still rock the region

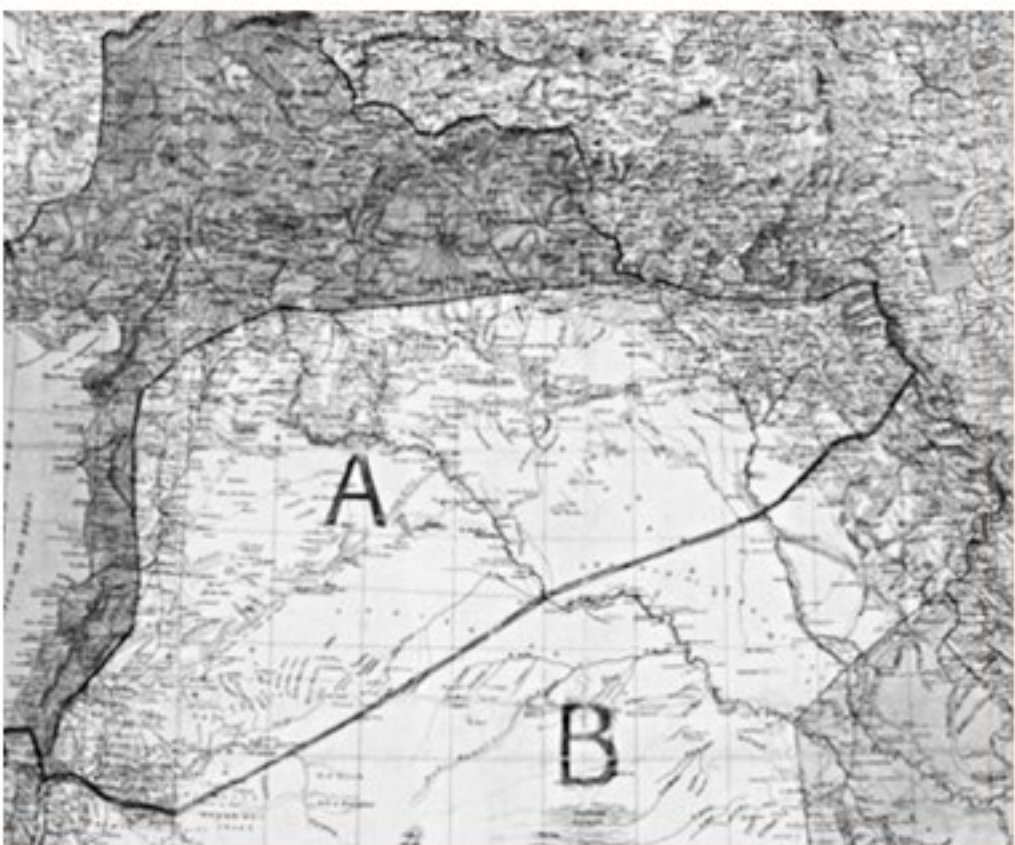
BBC ONLINE

A map marked with crude chinagraph-pencil in the second decade of the 20th Century shows the ambition -- and folly -- of the 100-year old British-French plan that helped create the modern-day Middle East.

The key tenets of the 1916 agreement Mark Sykes (representing the British government) and Francois Georges-Picot (from the French government) had negotiated in relative haste amidst the turmoil of the World War One continue to influence the region to this day, and poses three problems with the geo-political order.

First, it was secret without any Arabic knowledge, and it negated Britain's main promise to the Arabs in the 1910s of independence if they rebelled against the Ottomans and brought the empire down.

That independence not materialising after WW1 was a key factor behind the rise of the militarist regimes that had come to dominate many Arab countries from the 1950s until the 2011 Arab uprisings. Arab politics -- in North Africa and in the eastern Mediterranean -- took a gradual, yet decisive, turn from building liberal constitutional governance systems to asserting nationalism -- whose main objective was getting rid of the colonialists.



The original secret Sykes-Picot map of 1916: "A" would go to France, "B" to Britain.

The second problem lay in the tendency to draw straight lines. The thinking behind Sykes-Picot did not translate into practice, meaning the newly created borders did not correspond to the actual sectarian, tribal, or ethnic distinctions on the ground.

The third problem was that the state system that was created after WW1 has exacerbated the Arabs' failure to address the crucial dilemma of

the century and a half old identity struggle between, on one hand nationalism and secularism, and on the other, Islamism (and in some cases Christianity).

Despite major advancements in industrialisation, the dramatic inequity between the upper middle classes and the vast majority of the populations continued. The strong men of Arab nationalism championed a different (socialist, and at times militarist) narrative, but at the expense of civil and political freedoms.

That state structure was poised for explosion, and the changing demographics proved to be the trigger.

Over the past four decades, the Arab world has doubled its population with two-thirds of them being under 35 years old -- a generation that has inherited acute socio-economic and political problems that it did not contribute to, and yet has been living its consequences.

At core, the wave of Arab uprisings that commenced in 2011 is this generation's attempt at changing the consequences of the state order that began in the aftermath of WWI.

This currently unfolding transformation entails the promise of a new generation searching for a better future, and the peril of a wave of chaos that could engulf the region for several years.