

WHAT IS LEFT OF THE ARAB SPRINGS

- BAHRAIN**
- Protest movement erupted on February 14, 2011
 - Protest put down a month later
 - Shiite majority contests the ruling Sunni dynasty to this day
- EGYPT**
- President Hosni Mubarak handed over to the army on February 11, 2011
 - Almost 850 died in the general revolt
 - First freely elected President Mohammed Morsi ousted by armed forces on July 03, 2013
 - More than 1,000 (mainly Morsi supporters) killed in street clashes since
- LIBYA**
- Authorities struggled to maintain order since Moamer Gaddafi's regime collapse in October 2011
 - They rely on former rebel groups
 - The armed militias challenge the state if their interests are threatened
- SYRIA**
- Shiite Muslims pitted against Sunnis after peaceful protests transformed to all-out war since March 2011's brutal crack-down headed by President Bashar al-Assad
 - Millions displaced and more than 126,000 dead
- TUNISIA**
- Birthplace of the "Arab Spring"
 - Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled on January 14, 2011
 - Still without a strong central government
 - A constituent assembly dominated by Islamists from the Ennahda party was elected in October 2011
 - Beset by chronic social unrest and political crises
 - Two opposition figures murdered this year
- YEMEN**
- President Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in February 2012
 - Still struggling to establish a new constitution under a UN- and Gulf-backed transition
 - The main sticking point is southern Yemen's demand for autonomy

AFP, Nicosa

Mandela family feuded as he lay in state

AFP, Johannesburg

A feud within Nelson Mandela's family raged even as the peace icon lay in state, with members arguing over access to his rural homestead, a report said yesterday.

The Times daily reported that family members had "pushed out" Mandla Mandela, the statesman's oldest grandson and heir to his clan title, from the family home in the village of Qunu in the Eastern Cape province where the anti-apartheid hero was laid to rest on Sunday.

The newspaper said locks were changed at the Mandela house shortly after his eldest daughter, Makaziwe, arrived there on Thursday.

Makaziwe is said to have overseen the funeral preparations, while Mandla was the public face of the family.

The two have long been arguing about control of Mandela's legacy.

Ukraine leader seeks cash from Putin

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's embattled President Viktor Yanukovych left behind furious anti-government rallies yesterday to negotiate a multi-billion lifeline with Russia's Vladimir Putin that protesters fear will ruin their EU integration dreams.

The ex-Soviet nation of 46 million has been at the heart of a furious diplomatic tug of war since Yanukovych's shock decision last month to ditch a landmark EU partnership agreement and seek closer ties with its traditional master Russia.

Yesterday's high-stakes meeting at the Kremlin comes two days after frustrated EU officials suspended months of negotiations they had hoped would pull Ukraine out of Russia's orbit for the first time.

"Ministers confirmed again today the European Union's readiness to sign the (agreement) as soon as Ukraine is ready and the relevant conditions are met," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said on Monday after a ministerial meeting in Brussels.

But Yanukovych will instead be hoping to win an urgently needed cash advance from Russia -- estimated by local media at anywhere between \$5 and \$12 billion -- that his critics view as Putin's reward for Kiev's U-turn on the EU pact.

"A Russian loan can help Yanukovych keep power. And the Kremlin is ready to help him because this meets Putin's strategic interests," said Ukrainian political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko.

Yanukovych's reversal sparked the largest anti-government rallies since the 2004 pro-democracy Orange Revolution that first nudged Ukraine on a westward path.



A young Palestinian Bedouin girl eats a peice of bread at their encampment in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. A fierce winter storm shut down much of the Middle East last week leaving people to clear up following flood waters and heavy snow in some countries.

PHOTO: AFP

Merkel elected as chancellor for 3rd term

AFP, Berlin

Germany's parliament elected Angela Merkel as chancellor for a third term yesterday, ending nearly three months of uncertainty since elections that forced her to seek a 'grand coalition' with her rivals.

Merkel, 59, who is now set to govern Europe's top economy for another four years, was re-elected by 462 members of the Bundestag lower house of parliament, with 150 voting against and nine abstentions.

"I accept the election result and thank you for your trust," said Merkel, dressed in a black trouser suit, having accepted a bunch of flowers before shaking the hands of supporters.

Eighty-six days after general elections but majority, the Bundestag came as no surprise.

With 504 of the 631 tives and their new centre-Democrats (SPD), hold a hard-fought 'grand She must now be Joachim Gauck at his the Bundestag to be sworn in as Germany's only third post-war chancellor to win a third mandate.

Merkel on Monday promised "solid finances, secure prosperity and social welfare" and said that "a grand coalition is a coalition for grand tasks - we want to make sure that the people in 2017 are better off, even better off, than they are today".

She has defended the time spent haggling over policy and posts with an initially reluctant SPD as time well spent, voicing appreciation on signing the coalition pact Monday "that we listened to each other".



she swept to victory in failed to grab an outright vote, although secret, seats, Merkel's conservative partners, the Social huge majority under their coalition' deal. confirmed by President palace before returning to the Bundestag to be sworn in as Germany's only third post-war chancellor to win a third mandate.

Thai opposition undecided on election boycott

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's opposition party said yesterday it remained undecided over whether to boycott snap polls called by the government to mollify massive street protests.

A boycott would likely plunge the kingdom deeper into turmoil, after weeks of street protests against Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her brother Thaksin.

Yingluck called the February 2 election after the opposition Democrat Party resigned en masse from parliament on December 8 to join the demonstrations, which have drawn tens of thousands to Bangkok's streets.

A boycott -- which would echo the Democrats stance in 2006 that precipitated the army coup that ousted Thaksin -- would placate street protesters, he explained, but risked "long-term damage" to the party by stepping outside of the existing political process.

Conversely, participation would see the party "lose support of the protesters," spokesman for the Democrats Chavanond Intarakomalyasut said.

Snowden in asylum offer to Brazil

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Edward Snowden has offered to help Brazil investigate US spying on its soil in exchange for political asylum, in an open letter from the NSA whistleblower to the Brazilian people published by the Folha de S Paulo newspaper.

"I've expressed my willingness to assist where it's appropriate and legal, but, unfortunately, the US government has been working hard to limit my ability to do so," Snowden said in the letter.

Snowden -- granted a year's asylum until next summer in Russia -- said he had been impressed by the Brazilian government's strong criticism of the NSA spy programme, including monitoring the mobile phone of the Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff.

In his letter, Snowden used Brazilian examples to explain the extent of the US surveillance he had revealed. "Today, if you carry a cellphone in São Paulo, the NSA can track where you are, and it does -- it does so 5bn times a day worldwide.

Snowden's offer comes a day after the White House dashed hopes that the US might be considering an amnesty for the whistleblower, insisting he should still return to the US to stand trial.



US warns China against imposing South China Sea air zone

AFP, Manila

US Secretary of State John Kerry warned China yesterday against imposing an air defence zone over the South China Sea, similar to one it declared over disputed islands in the East China Sea.

"The zone should not be implemented and China should refrain from taking similar, unilateral actions elsewhere in the region, and particularly over the South China Sea," Kerry told a news conference in Manila.

The Philippines warned last month that China's announcement of an Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea raised the prospect of it doing the same for the South China Sea.

The Philippines, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have overlapping claims to parts of the strategically vital and potentially resource-rich South China Sea.

"Today, I raised our deep concerns about China's announcement of an East China Sea air defence identification zone," Kerry said, referring to his discussions in Manila with Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario.

"I told the foreign secretary that the United States does not recognise that (East China Sea) zone and does not accept it."

Analysts warn that the ADIZ in the East China Sea is a forerunner to a similar zone in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety.

Tensions between the Philippines and China have risen in recent years as Beijing becomes more forthright in asserting its claim over most of the South China Sea.



Clockwise from left: Tunisians yesterday, carry portraits of assassinated opposition figure Mohamed Brahmi, gather to mark the third anniversary of the uprising that toppled deposed president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Sidi Bouzid's Mohamed Bouazizi square. A Tunisian man prays at the graveside of 26-year-old street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation three years ago led to the uprising. Tunisian cigarette vendor Adel Khadri sits on the ground after immolating himself in an act of desperation on a street in Tunis on March 12, 2013 hours before lawmakers were to vote on a new government to pull Tunisia out of political crisis.

PHOTO: AFP



NEWSIN brief

India downgrades privileges of US diplomats

PTI, New Delhi

India yesterday reacted strongly to the arrest of its Deputy Consul-General in New York by initiating series of steps to strip U.S. diplomats and their families of privileges including withdrawing all airport passes and stopping import clearances for the embassy.

Asking all consulate personnel and their families to turn in their ID cards immediately, the government has also sought key information such as salaries paid to all Indian staff employed at the consulates and by consulate officers and

Air raids kill 13 in Syria's Aleppo

AFP, Beirut

Two children were among at least 13 people killed in new air strikes on a rebel-held district of Syria's main northern city of Aleppo yesterday, a watchdog said.

The new raids came after air strikes on rebel-held areas of Aleppo on Sunday killed 76 people, among them 28 children. Strikes on Monday killed a further 10 civilians,

Lebanon car bomb targets Hezbollah

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A car bomb went off near a Hezbollah base in eastern Lebanon early yesterday, officials said, the latest in a wave of deadly attacks that have targeted the Shia militant group's interests in Lebanon.

The Lebanese National News Agency said a suicide bomber detonated his vehicle in the remote area of eastern Bekaa Valley near the village of Sbouba in the Baalbek region, about a mile from a base belonging

UN supplies Philippine farmers seeds

AFP, Rome

The UN food agency yesterday said it had begun supplying farmers in the Philippines with emergency seed supplies after a devastating typhoon that struck just at the beginning of the planting season.

The Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said it was delivering rice and corn seed to rural communities in the Visayan island group that will allow farmers to collect a harvest in

Battles rage in Juba

AFP, Juba

Fierce battles raged yesterday in South Sudan's capital Juba, witnesses said, as troops loyal to the president fought rival soldiers accused of staging a coup in the world's youngest nation.

The continued gunfire resumed in the early hours