

## Egypt rounds up Islamists after terror listing

A bomb wounded five people when it exploded near a Cairo bus yesterday, officials said, as authorities began rounding up members of the Muslim Brotherhood after declaring it a terrorist group.

Army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who overthrew Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July, vowed to eliminate terrorism as he urged Egyptians to trust the military.

The explosion shattered the windows of the red and black bus as it passed near a busy intersection in the capital's northern neighbourhood of Nasr City.

Police defused a second bomb at the site and cordoned off the area as sniffer dogs searched for more explosive devices, an AFP correspondent said.

The bombing came a day after the military-installed government declared Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation and a suicide car bomber killed 15 people at a police headquarters north of Cairo on Tuesday.

The interior ministry said that attack was meant to intimidate voters ahead of a referendum next month on a new constitution, billed as the first step in a democratic transition ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections.

Egyptian prosecutors yesterday ordered at least 18 Muslim Brotherhood members, including an ex-lawmaker, held on accusations of belonging to a terrorist group, state media reported. Police also arrested 16 suspected Brotherhood members for passing out leaflets in support of the group and "inciting violence," the official MENA news agency said.

The Brotherhood's designation as a terrorist group means anyone joining their rallies could be jailed for five years, while those possessing their literature or supporting them "verbally or in writing" could face up to five years, a ministry statement said.

The authorities also shut down a newspaper and seized several presses belonging to the movement, the interior ministry said.



Thai anti government protesters clash with riot policemen during a rally at a stadium to register party-list candidates in Bangkok, yesterday. *Inset*, an injured is being taken to a hospital after clashes with police. Thai police fired tear gas as violent clashes broke out with opposition protesters who stormed a sports stadium in the capital to try to prevent political parties registering for elections.

PHOTO: AFP

# Doubt grows over Thai polls

Ruling party rejects poll delay call despite violent clashes; 1 killed, dozens wounded

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's government yesterday rejected calls to postpone February elections after clashes between police and opposition protesters in the capital left one policeman dead and dozens wounded on both sides.

The new outbreak of civil strife deepened the crisis facing Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, whose government has been shaken by weeks of mass street rallies seeking to curb her family's political dominance.

The long-running conflict broadly pits a Bangkok-based middle class and elite against rural and working-class voters loyal to Yingluck's older brother Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted as premier by a military coup in 2006.

Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets yesterday at rock-throwing demonstrators who tried to force

their way into a sports stadium in the capital where election candidates were gathered to register for the February 2 polls.

The protesters -- who want to overthrow Yingluck's government and install an unelected "people's council" in its place -- accuse billionaire tycoon-turned-politician Thaksin of corruption and say he controls his sister's government from his base in Dubai.

They have vowed to block the February election, saying it will only return Thaksin's allies to power.

Nearly 100 people from both sides were injured, according to the emergency services.

Twenty-five police officers were hospitalised, with 10 in serious condition, according to a police spokesman. One police officer died of a gunshot wound.

As the violence escalated the Election Commission recom-

mended the February polls be delayed indefinitely.

"We cannot organise free and fair elections under the constitution in the current circumstances," said commission member Prawit Rattanapien, who along with other vote officials had to be evacuated from the stadium by helicopter.

But the government rejected the proposal, saying it would not solve the bitter standoff.

"The government believes delaying an election will cause more violence," Deputy Prime Minister Phongthep Thephanjana said in a televised address to the nation.

He noted that under the constitution, an election should normally be held no more than 60 days after the dissolution of parliament, which happened in early December.

The main opposition Democrat Party -- which has not won an elected

majority in about two decades -- has vowed to boycott the vote.

Thaksin's supporters have accused the protesters of trying to incite the military to seize power again, in a country which has seen 18 successful or attempted coups since 1932.

Those wounded yesterday included one protester who was reported in serious condition with an apparent gunshot wound to his head.

Two journalists, one Thai and one Japanese, were among the injured, according to the public health ministry.

The weeks-long unrest, which has drawn tens of thousands of protesters onto the streets, has left six people dead and nearly 400 wounded.

It is the worst civil strife since 2010, when more than 90 civilians were killed in a bloody military crackdown on pro-Thaksin protests under the previous government.

## 34 children died in UP riot camps

TNN, Lucknow

At least 34 children below the age of 12 years have perished in the relief camps for people displaced during the riots in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts, according to a high-level committee constituted by the UP government to look into the reported deaths.

The deaths occurred between September 7 and December 20. According to the report, 4,783 people are still living in five camps including one in Loi (Muzaffarnagar) and Madarsa Taimul Shah, Malakpur, Barnavi and Edgah (all in Shamli).

To a question on whether there are any "conspirators" in the camps, UP principal secretary (home) AK Gupta said that the committee has said that "only displaced people are living in the camps".

The president of UP's ruling Samajwadi Party, Mulayam Singh Yadav, had created controversy recently stating that "conspirators and political activists" were living in the relief camps.

"Most of the children who lost their lives are the ones who had been taken outside the camps for treatment by their parents or were referred to government hospitals for treatment," Gupta told reporters here.

He was quoting the report of high-level committee set up by the UP government to go into the factual details of the

## Chad peace troops killed in C Africa

AFP, Bangui

Five Chadian peacekeepers have died in clashes in the Central African Republic capital, where French troops on Thursday were out in force a day after heavy gunfire sowed panic in the city.

The circumstances of the Chadian deaths in Bangui, which occurred on Wednesday as chaos and fighting gripped the city, were unclear, a spokesman of the African Union force of which they were part told AFP.

The Chadian contingent of the African Union peacekeeping force has been accused of siding with a mostly Muslim former rebel group in the majority Christian country. The clashes prompted the French force to deploy armoured vehicles near the



A man helps build a barricade as demonstrators clash with riot police (unseen) during a protest against corruption in the Kadikoy district of Istanbul on late Wednesday. *Inset*, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks to journalists as he presents the new ministers' cabinet list at the Prime Minister's office in Ankara, after his meeting with the Turkish President on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Day-old truce near Syria capital broken

AFP, Beirut

A day-old truce in a besieged rebel-held town near Damascus broke down yesterday as Syrian warplanes bombed the divided northern city of Aleppo for a 12th straight day, activists said.

By Wednesday, the Aleppo air blitz that began on December 15 had killed at least 422 people, mostly civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

In Moadamiyet al-Sham, near the capital, clashes broke out yesterday afternoon, a day after opposition and regime sources announced a truce for the town, which had been under a suffocating army siege for a year.

The opposition blamed President Bashar al-Assad's troops for breaking the truce.

On Wednesday rebels raised the national flag above the town in accordance with a ceasefire deal that was supposed to allow food in, but Ahmad said none had arrived.

Negotiations were under way for another truce in Barzeh, northern Damascus, according to activist Emad al-Barzawi, but he said "there has been no decision yet."

## Blast kills 5 in West Bengal

IANs, Siliguri

Five people were killed and four others injured when suspected Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) militants triggered a bomb blast in Jalpaiguri district of northern West Bengal on Thursday evening, police said.

"Five people have been killed. Some others are injured. Our reading is that the blast was caused by an improvised explosive device (IED) kept in a cycle," said inspector general of police, north Bengal range, Sashikant Pujari.

Jalpaiguri's deputy superintendent of police Prabhat Chakraborty told IANS that four injured people were admitted in Jalpaiguri District Hospital.

The blast occurred around 7:00pm in Bajrapara area.

The blast took place two days ahead of December 28, the foundation day of KLO, which came up in 1996.

Following the incident, a high alert has been sounded across north Bengal. A bomb disposal squad has already reached the spot from Siliguri in Darjeeling district.

# Mao Zedong made 'mistakes'

President Xi notes on China's founding father's 120th birth anniversary

AFP, Shaoshan

Communist China's president Xi Jinping yesterday acknowledged its founding father Mao Zedong made "mistakes", as admirers celebrated the 120th anniversary of the late leader's birth with noodles and fireworks.

Mao is the centrepiece of the ruling party's pantheon and commands reverence among many Chinese, including some frustrated by the current state of the nation, but is also condemned by those who say his political and economic campaigns caused tens of millions of deaths.

The combination left authorities looking to mark the occasion with a tricky balancing act.

"Mao is a great figure who changed the face of the nation and led the Chinese people to a new destiny," Xi said in Beijing, according to the official news agency Xinhua.



Mao Zedong



Xi Jinping

But he added: "Revolutionary leaders are not gods, but human beings. (We) cannot worship them like gods or refuse to allow people to point out and correct their errors just because they are great.

"Neither can we totally repudiate them and erase their historical feats just because they made mistakes." Xi -- who has regularly cited Mao's theories -- and

six other top-ranked leaders visited Mao's mausoleum in the morning where they bowed three times to his statue and "jointly recalled Comrade Mao's glorious achievements", Xinhua said.

The 12-decade anniversary has a special resonance in China, which traditionally measured time in 60-year cycles.

Near Mao's childhood home in Shaoshan, in the central province of Hunan, thousands of fans stood through the night and praised the founder of the People's Republic, who led the country for 27 years until his death in 1976.

Mao's sometimes autocratic rule remains a divisive topic in China, where the Communist Party's official stance is that he was "70 percent right and 30 percent wrong". Mao's "Great Leap Forward" is estimated by Western historians to have led to as many as 45 million deaths from famine, and his Cultural Revolution plunged

## Turkey blocks graft probe

PM reshuffles cabinet  
AFP, Ankara

A Turkish prosecutor yesterday said he had been prevented from expanding a corruption investigation that has touched the heart of the government, alleging pressure on the judiciary.

"All my colleagues and the public should be aware that I, as public prosecutor, have been prevented from launching an investigation," Muammer Akkas said in a statement.

A high-level bribery and corruption investigation ensnaring former ministers and top businessmen has prompted a cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, after three ministers stepped down on Wednesday.

Political observers have linked the probe to tensions between Erdogan's government and followers of the influential Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who hold key positions in the police and judiciary.

Erdogan has responded to the operation by sacking dozens of police chiefs.

Meanwhile, Turkey's opposition yesterday accused scandal-hit Erdogan of trying to rule via a secretive "deep state" after the cabinet reshuffle.

"Erdogan has a deep state, (his) AK Party has a deep state and Ekan Ala is one of the elements of that deep state," the head of the biggest opposition party CHP, said in remarks carried by Turkish media. Deep state is a term that for Turks denotes a shadowy power structure unhindered by democratic checks and balances.