

TERROR LISTING

Fresh clashes kill 1 in Egypt

AFP, Cairo

A student was killed and 60 arrested as Egyptian police entered a Cairo university yesterday to confront Islamist protesters who torched a building, amid an intensifying crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, officials said.

The unrest followed nationwide repression of Islamist protests on Friday after the military-installed government listed the Brotherhood, the movement of deposed president Mohamed Morsi, as a terrorist organisation.

A hospital official said a 19-year-old student was shot dead in the clashes at the Al-Azhar University campus, where pro-Morsi students have regularly staged protests since his overthrow by the army in July.

The students entered the commerce faculty during an exam and set it alight, before police burst into the campus and fired tear gas. The violence comes a day after five people were killed in clashes across Egypt, according to a health ministry tally on Saturday, as police stamped out Brotherhood demonstrations.

The interior ministry said 265 protesters were arrested.

Aam Admi Party takes charge in New Delhi

AFP, New Delhi

The leader of an upstart anti-graft party was sworn in yesterday as chief minister of India's capital in what supporters hoped would start the clean-up of the nation's corruption-ridden politics.

Tens of thousands of supporters cheered as 45-year-old Arvind Kejriwal took the oath of office in a public park after living up to his "common man" reputation by riding the subway to the ceremony.

"I will do my duties as a minister honestly," said Kejriwal, 45, a political outsider who led his Aam Aadmi -- Common Man -- Party to a stunning showing in state polls this month.

The engineer, wearing his trademark Gandhi white cap, said he had no "magic wand" to solve the megacity's massive housing, infrastructure and sanitation problems.

"But the people, not the police or bureaucrats will run government," he said, adding, "If we all come together, then we can change the country."

Supporters held banners reading "Today Delhi, Tomorrow the Country" and waved brooms -- the party's symbol for sweeping away India's endemic corruption and bribery.

Kejriwal told the crowd, estimated by police at up to 100,000, to repeat after him: "I promise I will never give bribes or take bribes."

The party, formed just a year ago, won 28 state seats, reducing the Congress party to just eight seats after famously dismissing Kejriwal as "not even on our radar".



Arvind Kejriwal

his party's journey to power a "revolution" and "nothing short of a miracle" but he took no time to celebrate, chairing his first cabinet meeting within hours.

Kejriwal's unprecedented move to use the subway to travel to the oath ceremony echoed a pre-poll pledge to end the privileged culture surrounding Delhi's politicians and make his administration down-to-earth.

Kejriwal has said he and his ministers will not occupy the sprawling white bungalows built by India's former British colonial rulers. Their cars will also not have the red beacons and sirens allowing them to zip through traffic enjoyed by their predecessors.

Business leaders congratulated Kejriwal, who will govern with outside support from Congress.

Kejriwal, named news weekly India Today's Newsmaker Of The Year, plans to keep living in his modest suburban flat.

Some observers believe Kejriwal's success could mark the start of a bigger campaign to break the grip of the two main parties, Congress and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, on national politics.

Congress's rout in Delhi and three other state polls has been seen as one more sign the ruling Congress may lose office in looming general elections.

The rookie party's performance will be closely watched to see what it could deliver for the rest of India. Kejriwal has a radical plan to slash electricity costs, supply free water and decentralise power.

THAILAND UNREST

One protester killed as poll tensions rise

REUTERS, Bangkok

A Thai protester was killed and four wounded yesterday, an emergency official said, when an unidentified gunman opened fire on demonstrators whose efforts to topple Prime Minister Shinawatra have flared into violence in recYingluckent days.

The shooting came 48 hours after clashes between police and the protesters, who are determined to disrupt a snap February 2 election called by Yingluck, outside a voting registration centre in which two people were killed and scores wounded.

The protesters have been rallying for weeks in their attempt to topple Yingluck, who they see as a puppet of her brother, Thaksin Shinawatra, and they have vowed to block an election that Yingluck would most likely win.

Yingluck is determined to go ahead with the poll. On Friday, her government asked the military for help to provide security for candidates and voters. However, the chief of the heavily politicised army declined to rule out military intervention, saying that "the door was neither open nor closed."



Indian rescue personnel attempt to extinguish fire in a burning carriage of the Nanded-Bangalore Express near Puttaparthi in Ananthpur District some 300kms south of Hyderabad early yesterday, after a fire engulfed the train.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian train inferno kills 26

AFP, New Delhi

Fire raced through an Indian train carriage packed with sleeping passengers yesterday, killing at least 26 people, and forcing terrified passengers to smash windows in a frantic bid to escape.

Some passengers were able to break the toilet windows of the train, but other victims were overcome by the thick, swirling smoke and bodies were found heaped at the windows and doors, reports said.

Rescue officials said many bodies were charred beyond recognition and would have to undergo DNA tests to determine their identity.

There were conflicting reports about the number aboard with police saying 65 while national Railways Minister Mallikarjun Kharge said there were 67 people in the carriage, sleeping six to a compartment.

Kharge told AFP the blaze was believed to have been caused by an electricity fault.

Forensic teams were on their way to the

train site to collect body samples for analysis, The Press Trust of India reported.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed "shock and grief at the loss of life in the train accident in Andhra Pradesh" in a statement on his official Twitter account.

The coach caught fire in the pre-dawn hours as it travelled from the high-tech city of Bangalore to Nanded, 300 kilometers from the Hyderabad city.

Two of those who died were children, railway officials said.

The exit doors of Indian trains are customarily locked at night, reports said, while the carriage windows are covered with bars, making escape all but impossible.

The toilet windows are the only ones that have no bars and the spaces and berths are narrow.

The tragedy comes a little over a year after another train accident in the same state of Andhra Pradesh killed 32 people and shone the spotlight again on the Indian rail network's dismal safety record.

NEWSIN brief

UN members order staff, budget cut

AFP, United Nations

The UN General Assembly on Friday ordered a staff and the budget cut for the world body under pressure from the United States and other austerity-stricken industrialized powers.

After protracted negotiations, the 193 nation assembly agreed to cut 221 staff at the UN headquarters and ordered a one-year pay freeze for the more than 10,000 workers in New York. UN members also voted to cut the UN's general budget to \$5.5 billion for 2014-15, \$50 million below the final spending level for the previous two years.

Zimbabwe diplomat asks for asylum

AFP, Sydney

Zimbabwe's ambassador to Australia has asked Canberra for asylum, lashing out at her country's "illegitimate" government and voicing fears for her safety if she returns home at the end of her posting next week, reports said yesterday.

Jacqueline Zwambila said the elections had been "stolen" by Mugabe. It was not immediately clear whether Canberra would approve her request.

Gunmen kill polio vaccinator in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Gunmen shot dead a health officer supervising an anti-polio vaccination campaign and injured two others after storming a hospital where children were being immunised in Pakistan's troubled northwest city of Peshawar, yesterday, officials said. No one claimed responsibility. But the Taliban imposed a ban on polio vaccinations last year as they view inoculation campaigns as a cover for espionage.

Suu Kyi's party to contest polls

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party yesterday vowed to contest crucial elections in 2015 even if the constitution is not amended first to allow her to become president.

The military-drafted charter blocks anyone whose spouse or children are overseas citizens from leading the country -- a clause widely believed to be targeted at the Nobel laureate whose two sons are British.



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC IN CHAOS

Chadian civilians sit in the back of trucks in the 4th district of Bangui as they flee the city yesterday. Top left, civilians run for cover following gunshots in Bangui and bottom left, French troops patrolling in the capital. Hundreds more Chadian civilians prepared to flee to their home country after facing repeated attacks and threats from majority Christians in the strife-torn Central African Republic. French and African troops are struggling to contain the unrest that has wracked the impoverished country since a March coup by mostly Muslim Seleka rebels who installed Michel Djotodia as interim president -- the country's first Muslim leader.

PHOTO: AFP

China, eases one-child policy

Abolishes labour camps

AFP, Beijing

China's top legislative committee -- committee of the National People's Congress, rubber-stamp parliament, at the conclusion of a six-day meeting, formally approved a loosening of the country's hugely controversial one-child policy yesterday and abolished "re-education through labour" camps, state media Xinhua news agency reported.

The widening of existing exceptions to the one-child policy will allow couples where either siblingless parent to have two children, reforming the strict three decade-old family planning policy.

The abolition of re-education through labour, known as "laojiao", will see existing inmates freed, Xinhua said.

China's sex ratio has risen to 115 boys for every 100 girls, while the working population began to drop last year, and the birth rate having fallen, well below the replacement rate, to about 1.5 since the 1990s, Xinhua said earlier.

The one-child policy reforms are expected to come into force in the first quarter of 2014, according to a senior official from the National Health and Family Planning Commission, Xinhua reported last week.

The approval to end the labour camps closes the curtain on the more than the half-century old dark aspect of the country's modern history long criticised by human rights groups and which Chinese authorities admit is no longer viable.

China began re-education through labour in 1957 as a speedy way to handle petty offenders. But the system -- which allows a police panel to issue trial-less sentences of up to four years -- soon became rife with abuse.

A UN report published in 2009 estimated that 190,000 people were held in the camps.

But activists played down the significance of the labour camp system's abolition, pointing out that under Chinese law the authorities can still detain suspects for lengthy periods without a trial.



NSA spying lawful: US court

AFP, New York

A US judge ruled Friday that the National Security Agency's mass surveillance of telephone calls is lawful, igniting a legal conflict that the Supreme Court may ultimately have to resolve.

Federal judge William Pauley in New York threw out a petition from the American Civil Liberties Union and said the program was a vital tool to help prevent an al-Qaeda terror attack on American soil.

Ten days earlier, however, a federal judge in Washington declared that this "almost Orwellian" surveillance is probably unconstitutional, laying the groundwork for a protracted legal fight.

"The question for this court is whether the government's bulk telephony metadata program is lawful. This court finds it is," said the 54-page ruling published in New York on Friday.

Edward Snowden, a former NSA

contractor, sent shockwaves around the world this year by revealing the extent of Washington's electronic eavesdropping on millions of private calls.

The Justice Department welcomed the ruling but the American Civil Liberties Union said it would appeal.

Pauley said the program, since it is protected by judicial, executive and congressional oversight, does not violate the US Constitution's ban on unreasonable searches and seizures.

The judge sided with US spy chiefs who say that by connecting the dots between archived calls and terrorist suspects, US officials can keep the country safe.

The NSA hoovers up information about virtually every telephone call to, from and within the United States, and says it is the only way to discern patterns left behind by foreign terror groups.

The judge quoted the 2004 report by the 9/11 Commission -- the panel

which investigated the 2001 al-Qaeda attack on the United States -- as saying it was a false choice between liberty and security, as "nothing is more apt to imperil civil liberties than the success of a terrorist attack on American soil."

"As the September 11th attacks demonstrate, the cost of missing such a thread can be horrific," he wrote.

Last week, a White House-picked panel recommended that President Barack Obama should curb the NSA's secretive powers. It submitted a 300-page report with 46 recommendations on how to install safeguards and limit the scope of the NSA program.

"The lawsuits are significant regardless of how they turn out, especially insofar as they help ratchet up the pressure on Congress to pursue legislative reforms before -- and perhaps to prevent -- the courts from deciding the issue," Vladeck said.

SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT

Pressure for truce grows

AFP, Juba

East African and Horn of Africa peace brokers gave South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and de facto rebel leader Riek Machar, whom Kiir sacked as vice president in July, until December 31 to start face-to-face talks and stop two weeks of fighting that is thought to have left thousands dead.

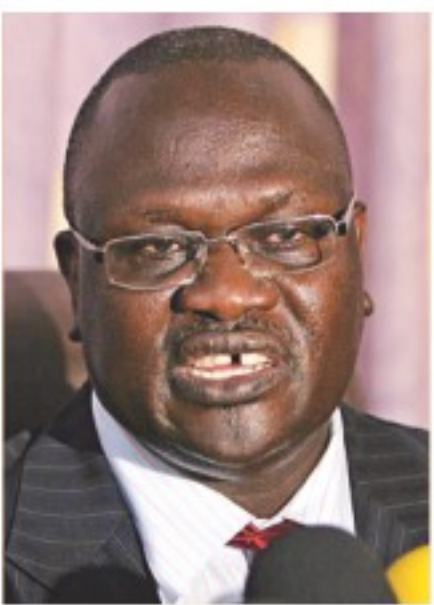
Ethiopia has spearheaded attempts to end the fierce battles for control over several strategic oil-producing areas notably in the north of the country. The United Nations, Washington and Beijing have also joined calls for talks.

Inter-Governmental Authority on Development spokesmen said President Kiir had on Friday expressed willingness for an "immediate" ceasefire though Machar would not immediately commit to a truce as he wanted a mechanism to monitor any ceasefire as well as the release of his arrested political allies, he told BBC -- from an undisclosed location.

The fighting, fanned by ethnic differ-



Salva Kiir



Riek Machar

ences between Kiir's Dinka group and Machar's Nuer clan in the country since its independence in 2011, erupted December 15 after Kiir accused his former vice president of trying to mount a coup. Machar has denied the allegation and retorted that Kiir was trying to eliminate his rivals.

The United Nations -- whose hard-pressed peacekeepers are to be doubled to more than 12,000 -- said more than 120,000 residents have been displaced since the conflict started.

SIEGE ON SYRIA'S ALEPPO

Air raid on market, hospital kills 20

AFP, Beirut

Helicopters dropped TNT-packed barrels on a vegetable market and next to a hospital in Syria's northern city of Aleppo, killing at least 20 civilians including two children, a monitoring group said yesterday.

"The number of people killed has risen to 20 including two children, a teenager, a woman and a media activist," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Syrian Revolution General Commission, a network of activists on the ground, described the bombing as a "massacre". "The raid targeted a crowded market where people were buying vegetables and home appliances," it said. "Many buildings have been damaged, and one collapsed."

According to the Observatory and activists in Aleppo, President Bashar al-Assad's regime has waged a massive aerial offensive against Aleppo and nearby villages since December 15, killing more than 400 people, most of them civilians.

Human rights organisations as well as Arab and Western countries have condemned the offensive as "indiscriminate" and "unlawful," while Assad's regime says it is targeting "terrorists".

US boy, 9, scales South America's highest peak

AFP, Buenos Aires

It's no small feat to scale South America's tallest peak -- especially when you are nine.

That's what Tyler Armstrong managed to do on Christmas Eve, joined by his father and other climbers -- with special permission from authorities for the underaged adventurer.

Aconcagua soars almost 7,000 meters in the Andes on Argentina's Mendoza province along its border with Chile.

Armstrong broke the



Tyler Armstrong

record for the youngest person to scale Aconcagua, said the head of his expedition, Nicolas Garcia, on local C5N television.

His mom, Priscilla Armstrong, wrote on the young climber's website: "Super proud of you honey! I can stop worrying now! Actually, you will probably keep worrying me if you keep being so adventurous! Great-more grey hair!"

Earlier this year, Tyler scaled Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa's tallest peak at 5,900 meters.