

## POLITICAL CRISIS IN TURKEY

## Judiciary hits back at govt

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey's top judicial body yesterday hit back at the government's plans to curb its powers, adding fuel to a bitter row over a vast corruption probe engulfing Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The proposed reforms, to be debated in parliament later yesterday, would give the justice ministry more powers to decide who makes up the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and strip the legal body of its powers to pass decrees.

The changes were slapped down by the judicial body itself as unconstitutional, while the United States and the European Union weighed in citing serious concerns.

The government had moved to rein in the HSYK after a vast corruption probe broke, implicating key allies of Erdogan.

The firebrand prime minister has responded angrily to the investigation, also sacking hundreds of police chiefs in a major purge.

Alarmed by the developments, Washington stressed the importance of "a legal system that meets the highest standards of fairness, timeliness, and transparency in civil and criminal matters".

Lawyers and the liberal media also opposed the reforms, with the influential Union of Turkish Bar Associations calling them unconstitutional and warning that they violate the principle of separation of powers.

"This is the last nail in the coffin of democracy," columnist Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in Hurriyet.

The crisis erupted on December 17 when police rounded up dozens of people including sons of former ministers and the top businessmen suspected of numerous offences including bribery for construction projects and illicit money transfers to neighbouring sanctions-hit Iran.

## NEWS IN brief

## Malaysia court scraps charge against Anwar

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysian court yesterday threw out illegal-assembly charges against opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim over his part in a 2012 rally that could have barred him from standing for election, his lawyer said. Anwar, 66, and two other members of his party were charged in 2012 with violating newly enacted restrictions on public gatherings as well as a court order banning the rally from the centre of the

## Plebgate scandal: Cop admits lying

AFP, London

A British policeman yesterday admitted he falsely claimed to have witnessed a row over a bicycle that brought down a government minister. Police constable Keith Wallis, 53, pleaded guilty to misconduct in a public office by pretending he witnessed the argument between former Conservative chief whip Andrew Mitchell and an officer at the gates of Prime Minister David Cameron's Downing Street

## Cuba, US resume migration talks

AFP, Havana

Cuba and the United States held talks Thursday on compliance with a nearly two-decade-old agreement aimed at encouraging safe and legal migration, both sides said. The Cuban foreign ministry said the talks, the second since the two countries resumed contacts on migratory issues last year, "took place in a

## 'Dawood in Pakistan'

PRI, New Delhi

India's most wanted terrorist Dawood Ibrahim is in Pakistan and joint efforts with the US were being made to nab him, Union home minister Sushilkumar Shinde said yesterday. "As per our information, Dawood is in Pakistan," Shinde said when asked about the whereabouts of Dawood who is wanted in a number of cases by Indian agencies including the 1993

## 30 Shebab rebels killed in Somalia

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya yesterday said it had killed at least 30 Shebab rebels including top commanders in an air strike on a training camp in Somalia, although the militants

## US 'tried to oust Karzai'

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The US government tried to oust the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, by manipulating elections in 2009, in what amounted to a "clumsy and failed putsch", the former defence secretary Robert Gates has been quoted as writing in his memoirs.

Karzai has long claimed that the US tried to manipulate the poll to remove him from office, while Washington insisted it was an impartial supporter of democracy. The revelations in Gates's account of his years in power, which is published next week and covers the war in Afghanistan, appear to vindicate the Afghan leader's suspicions.

The top US diplomat Richard Holbrooke supported Karzai's rivals in the hope of pushing the poll to a second round that the incumbent would lose, Foreign Policy magazine reported.

"It was all ugly: our partner, the president of Afghanistan, was tainted, and our hands were dirty as well," Gates is quoted writing.

Holbrooke, who died in December 2010, was the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and played a key role in 2009 efforts to remove Karzai from power. He paid public lip-service to the idea of a level playing field, but was working behind the scenes to ensure the opposite, Gates writes: "Holbrooke was doing his best to bring about the defeat of Karzai... What he really wanted was to have enough credible candidates running to deny Karzai a majority in the election, thus forcing a runoff in which he could be defeated."

Tactics included advising candidates, attending their rallies and organising high-profile photo opportunities, the memoir claims. Karzai soon noticed the efforts, it adds.

In the end, the election was plagued by serious fraud and worries about violence. The candidate who got through to a second round against the president eventually called off the vote and conceded defeat.

A White House spokesman, Caitlin Hayden, strongly denied Gates's claims.



Hamid Karzai



Robert Gates

"The US's interest was in a stable Afghanistan, with credible democratic elections – not in helping any candidate win or lose," she said.

Karzai has cited concerns about foreign interference in a vote to choose his successor later this year as one reason for the delay in signing a long-term security pact with Washington to keep troops in the country after their combat mission ends later this year.

The deal is unlikely to be signed on the timetable the US government would like, the ambassador to Kabul warned in a secret cable leaked to the Washington Post.

## Israel unveils 1,800 settler homes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday unveiled plans to build more than 1,800 new settler homes, a move the Palestinians said was a signal to the US to abandon efforts for Middle East peace.

The announcement comes a week after US Secretary of State John Kerry visited the region in his latest attempt to push Israeli and Palestinian leaders towards an elusive peace deal.

But the US chief diplomat's 10th trip was clouded by bitter recriminations from leaders of both sides, who accused each other of lacking commitment to building peace after decades of conflict.

The housing ministry announced the plans for 1,076 units in annexed east Jerusalem and 801 in the occupied West Bank, said the Israeli settlement watchdog Peace Now.

Kerry is due back in the region next week.

INDIAN REACTION TO DIPLOMAT'S ARREST  
Mix of Cold War legacy, politics?

CNN ONLINE

Before most Americans had heard of Devyani Khobragade, Indian officials were already giving the world's superpower a good drubbing.

Politicians from left and right refused to meet with a visiting US congressional delegation in New Delhi as uproar over the Indian diplomat's arrest and strip search consumed all of India.

Here's what Narendra Modi, a leader from the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, tweeted:

"Refused to meet the visiting USA delegation in solidarity with our nation, protesting ill-treatment meted to our lady diplomat in USA."

So how is it that one diplomat's troubles resulted in a massive international row between the world's most populous democracy and its most powerful one? Why is the arrest of one woman threatening to seriously damage warm relations between the two allies?

"There is a lot of protest in India. I personally believe they are politically motivated," Aseem Chhabra, a columnist for Mumbai Mirror newspaper, told CNN. "We have elections coming up in May."

Chhabra pointed to the refusal to meet with the US delegation as political grandstanding.

However, Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid told parliament that there were larger issues at stake.

"It is no longer about an individual. It is about our sense of self as a nation and our place in the world," he said to usually bickering politicians who have displayed rare unity on this incident.

Devyani, India's deputy consul general in New York, was arrested and strip-searched last week on charges of visa fraud related to her treatment of maid and nanny Sangeeta Richard.

India claims US marshals overstepped their bounds in their treatment of a diplomat.

Indian officials retaliated quickly by removing security barriers outside the US Embassy in Delhi and revoking diplomatic identification cards. People took to the streets to protest what they perceived as American bullying.

This is not the first time an Indian official has had an encounter with American law. In recent years, former President APJ Abdul Kalam was told to remove his shoes at airport security. Indian Ambassador Meera Shanker got a pat-down, and India's permanent representative to the United Nations, Hardeep Puri, was detained after he refused to take off his turban, also at an airport.

Not much was made of those incidents. But this time things have changed. India, as it becomes a superpower itself, has made its statement clear: treat India equally.

India had been at odds with the US since the days following independence in 1947 and the country's formation of a strong alliance with the Soviet Union.

"There's a Cold War legacy when India was at odds with the United States over a range of issues," said political scientist Sumit Ganguly.

The Cold War residue surfaces from time to time. And this seems to be one of those times -- when that particular message is playing well.

In the meantime, global observers worry about the widened rift between India and the United States.

Nicholas Burns, former US undersecretary for political affairs, considers India one of America's most important allies.

"Hopefully this can be diffused so we can go back to working on the very important issues on our agenda," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian visitor poses for a photograph with a kite during the International Kite Festival near Dhordo village, some 500 kms from Ahmedabad, yesterday. The International Kite Festival is taking place across the state of Gujarat.

## CHAOS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

## President resigns over failure to stem unrest

AFP, N'djamena

Landlocked Central African Republic (CAR) had flown to Chad on Thursday at the behest of Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno to try to resolve the crisis as it threatened to spill over into neighbouring countries.

Djotodia has come under fire for failing to stem the spiralling violence between the mainly Muslim former rebels who brought him to power last year and militias formed by the Christian majority.

Earlier yesterday, thousands of residents in the Central African capital Bangui took to the streets demanding Djotodia's departure.

The United Nations has warned that both ex-Séléka rebels and CAR former soldiers have crossed into the volatile Democratic Republic of Congo, causing local residents to flee.

All 135 lawmakers from the

## Kejriwal's anti-graft hotline becomes a hit

AFP, New Delhi

An anti-corruption hotline launched by the Indian capital's new graft-busting government was overwhelmed by thousands of calls on its first day, with the city's top politician saying the response exceeded "all expectations."

India's corruption fighter and newly elected chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said the graft hotline aimed at stopping rampant corruption among bureaucrats received 3,904 calls in the first seven hours of operation on Thursday.

The hotline, open from 8:00am to 10:00pm, counsels people what to do if any government official asks for a bribe to do his duty. Kejriwal said the hotline centre could handle just 824 of the calls Thursday and it would double staff to 30 to handle the flood of callers.

The Mail Today newspaper yesterday reported that sales of spy-cams and other surveillance equipment had surged as citizens looked to trap corrupt officials on camera.

## More woes for embattled French president

Magazine alleges Hollande having affair with actress

AFP, Paris

A magazine yesterday reported that Francois Hollande routinely rides a scooter to spend the night with an actress, an alleged affair that has created yet another headache for the unpopular French president.

Hollande reacted furiously to the allegation -- backed up by photos reportedly showing the president entering the flat of actress Julie Gayet -- but did not deny it, threatening legal action over what he called an attack on his right to privacy.

Closer's Friday edition carried a seven-page spread on the 59-year-old president's alleged infidelity under the headline "Francois Hollande and Julie Gayet - the president's secret love".

In a statement to AFP, Hollande slammed the report as an attack on the right to privacy, to which he "like every other citizen has a right".

Rumours that Hollande is having an



Julie Gayet

Francois Hollande

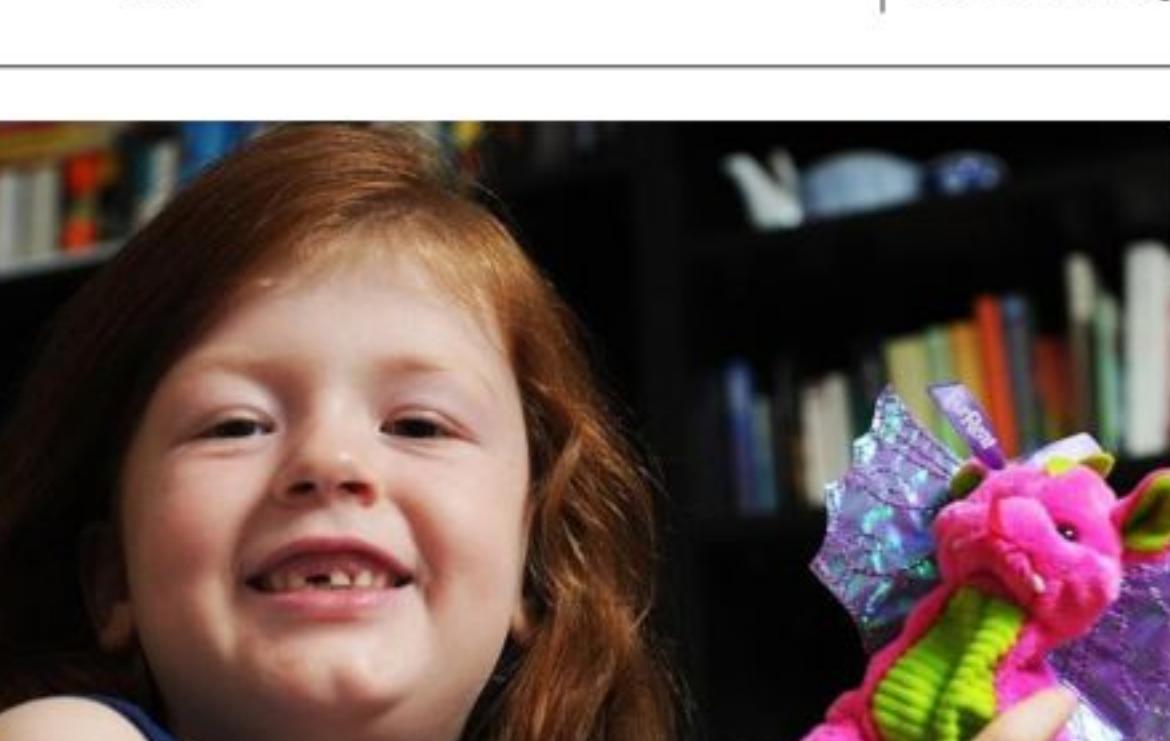
affair with Gayet, a mother-of-two who is separated from Argentinian filmmaker Santiago Amigorena, have swirled for months.

Hollande lives with his partner Valerie Trierweiler, a journalist for whom he left fellow Socialist politician Segolene Royal, the mother of his four children.

## Sorry, we couldn't give you a dragon

Aussie scientists to 7-yr-old girl

AFP, Sydney



been able to create a dragon or dragon eggs... we are sorry."

The CSIRO said scientists overseas had recently pondered whether dragon fire would be produced by flint, gas, or rocket fuel, and speculated whether its own research into alternative fuels could be a starting block for its dragon research and development programme.

The enquiry had a fairytale ending yesterday when the CSIRO announced that, thanks to Sophie's letter, "a dragon was born".

"We couldn't sit here and do nothing. After all, we promised Sophie we would look into it," they explained in a new blog.

"Toothless, 3D printed out of titanium, came into the world at Lab 22."

The electric blue and grey dragon, small enough to be held by hand, is currently en

## 'Snowden no hero'

AFP, Washington

FBI Director James Comey said Thursday he does not consider Edward Snowden worthy of being called a whistleblower or hero, and was baffled by reports granting him the label.

The federal criminal investigation and intelligence chief swiftly dismissed calls for clemency issued by The New York Times and The Guardian newspapers, which said Snowden had done the United States a service by exposing the vast scope of secret digital surveillance run by the National Security Agency.

"I see the government operating the way the founders intended," Comey told a small group of reporters, "so I have trouble applying the whistleblower label to... someone who basically disagrees with the way our government is structured and operates."

Reports based on Snowden's leaked files have revealed a global dragnet run by Washington and its allies in the English-speaking world, scooping up Internet traffic and

telephone call logs.

The revelations triggered outrage, including from some US telecoms users and foreign governments targeted in the indiscriminate sweeps, and it has touched off a political and legal debate in the United States.

Fugitive intelligence contractor Edward Snowden's theft of 1.7 million secret documents could potentially put US military forces in "lethal" danger worldwide, American lawmakers warned Thursday, citing a confidential Pentagon report.

The Defense Department prepared and sent on Monday to prominent members of Congress a classified paper analyzing the potential impact of revelations by the former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor.

The report itself was not made public.

While Snowden remains in Moscow, protected under a one-year grant of political asylum, US courts have begun examining the legality of the snooping and the White House has carried out an internal

## US warns S Sudan's democracy at risk

AFP, Washington

The United States, which played midwife to South Sudan, is increasingly alarmed the young democracy may collapse, and pushed the sacked vice president to agree to a truce with no preconditions.

Washington, which helped give birth to the world's newest nation in 2011, has rushed advisers and envoys to Juba to try to help negotiate a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, South Sudan's government yesterday said it was mobilising thousands of additional troops as it battled to recapture two rebel-held cities, although regional mediators insisted they were still hopeful for a ceasefire.

The unrest began on December 15 as a clash between army units loyal to President Salva Kiir and those backing Machar, who Kiir sacked accusing him of an attempted coup.