

NEWSIN brief

Egypt govt resigns

AFP, Cairo

The government of Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi said yesterday it has resigned, ahead of a presidential poll which will likely bring army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to power.

Sisi, by far the country's most popular political figure, has not yet announced his candidacy for this spring's presidential election, but aides say he has already decided to run and will make the announcement soon.

Iran's Zarif plans India visit to revive ties

AFP, Tehran

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will travel to India later this week as Tehran seeks to open a "new chapter" in relations with New Delhi, media reported yesterday.

Leading a high-ranking delegation, Zarif will hold talks with top Indian officials to bolster ties during the two-day visit that begins Thursday, the official IRNA news agency said.

Top Qaeda operative killed in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Al-Qaeda's representative in Syria was killed Sunday in a suicide bombing, the rebel Islamic Front announced on its Twitter account.

Abu Khalid al-Suri, who was appointed last year by Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri as his representative, died in the northern city of Aleppo, said the group.

3rd Thai child dies from protest violence

AFP, Bangkok

A six-year-old girl died early yesterday from wounds sustained during a grenade attack on a busy Bangkok shopping area, hospital officials said, taking the number of children killed in Thai political violence over the weekend to three.

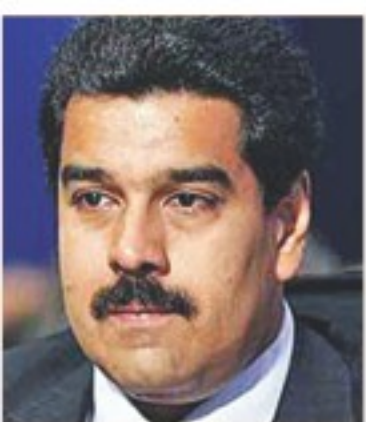
The attacks, which appear to mark an escalation of unrest in nearly four months of political crisis, earned condemnation from UN chief Ban Ki-moon while Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra labelled them "terrorist acts".

Stray Leopard sparks panic in Indian city

AFP, New Delhi

A leopard sparked panic in a north Indian city when it strayed inside a hospital, a cinema and an apartment block while evading captors, an official said yesterday.

VENEZUELA UNREST Maduro for talks to defuse protest threat



AFP, Caracas

Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro is readying crisis talks to try to defuse a deadly wave of protests that have brought the biggest challenge yet to his government.

"This is a national peace conference I am calling for Wednesday with all social, political, union and religious groups," Maduro told supporters outside the presidential palace.

Groups of mainly elderly people marched Sunday in downtown Caracas in support of Maduro, a day after Venezuela's largest demonstrations in weeks of escalating protests left 25 people injured.

Maduro is grappling with the biggest crisis of his government since narrowly being elected last year after the death of leftist icon Hugo Chavez, with at least 10 people killed since protests erupted on February 4.

Hundreds of thousands of pro- and anti-government protesters had hit the streets of the capital on Saturday, leading to night-time clashes with security forces that were some of the most serious to date.

Student and opposition demonstrators are campaigning over bleak economic prospects, including a shortage of food and commodities, repression by police and a dire job market.

Dozens of people, including opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, have been arrested or wounded.



South Sudanese women wait in line for food distribution in Juba yesterday. Around twenty six-thousand South Sudanese IDP's from the Nuer ethnic group are sheltered in a temporary camp inside the UNMISS compound. Nuer IDP's cannot leave the camp due to ethnic tensions with the Dinka's.

PHOTO: AFP

Ukraine seeks fugitive leader

Russia questions new leadership; US, allies for united Ukraine

AFP, Kiev, Moscow, Washington

Ukraine issued an arrest warrant yesterday for ousted president Viktor Yanukovich over the "mass murder" of protesters and appealed for \$35 billion in Western aid to pull the crisis-hit country from the brink of economic collapse.

The dramatic announcements by the ex-Soviet nation's new Western-leaning team -- approved by parliament over a chaotic weekend that saw the pro-Russian leader go into hiding -- came as a top EU envoy arrived in Kiev to buttress its sudden tilt away from Moscow.

Three months of unceasing protests over Yanukovich's shock decision to spurn an historic pact with the European Union in favour of closer ties with its old masters in the Kremlin culminated in days of carnage last week in Kiev that claimed almost 100 lives.

Ukraine's new interim head of the federal police said he held Yanukovich and his team of feared security insiders directly responsible for the deaths.

Meanwhile, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev yesterday questioned the legitimacy of Ukraine's new leadership and said that Western countries which accept it are mistaken, in his first reaction to the transfer of power in Kiev.

Medvedev said that Russia was unable to accept the new authorities in Kiev as a partner for talks and could not negotiate with rebels "carrying Kalashnikovs".

"Strictly speaking, there is no one for us to communicate with there today. The legitimacy of a whole number of organs of power that function there raises great doubts," he was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies.

"Some of our foreign, Western partners think otherwise... this is some kind of aberration of perception when people call legitimate what is essentially the result of an armed mutiny," Medvedev said.

On the other hand, US National Security Adviser Susan Rice said Sunday that Russia, Europe and the United States all have an interest in keeping crisis-hit Ukraine from breaking apart.

A new era dawned in the ex-Soviet state when parliament appointed a pro-Western interim leader after impeaching a defiant president Viktor Yanukovich.

"It's not in the interests of Ukraine or of Russia or of Europe or of the United States to see the country split," Rice told NBC's "Meet the Press" talk show. "It's in nobody's interest to see violence return and the situation escalate."

She warned that it would be a "grave mistake" for Ukraine's old master Russia to send in forces to restore the kind of government it would like to see in Kiev.

Mamata better PM candidate

Says Shahi Imam from Delhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid Syed Ahmed Bukhari today commended West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's work for minorities in the state and said she would make a better prime minister for a secular India than others.

Rubbishing the charge of a covert pact between BJP and Mamata-led Trinamool Congress, as alleged by Congress and Left parties, Bukhari hoped Banerjee would not go for a post-poll alliance with BJP.

"After going through the details of the developmental work she has done for the development of minorities and Muslims in the state, I personally feel India needs a secular leader like her who believes in work and not lip service," Bukhari told PTI.

He had written letters to all chief ministers, except those of BJP-ruled states, inquiring to what practical measures the state governments had taken for the welfare of the Muslim population in their respective states.

"I had written to all chief ministers, except those in BJP-ruled states. But no one of them has bothered to reply to my letter. Only Mamata Banerjee did with a detailed report of the steps the Bengal government has taken for the development of Muslims," Bukhari said.

Asked if he felt Mamata would go with BJP-led NDA post poll, Bukhari said "I feel, she is a secular leader and will not go with BJP or NDA".

West Bengal has 27 per cent Muslim population which wields a considerable influence in at least 140 assembly seats out of 294 in the power sweep-stake and is courted aggressively by all political parties.

Morsi jailbreak trial postponed to rule on judges

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday postponed the jailbreak trial of deposed Islamist president Mohamed Morsi after defence lawyers requested that the judges withdraw from the case.

The trial, one of three cases against Morsi, is part of a relentless government crackdown targeting him and his Muslim Brotherhood movement since his ouster by the army in July.

"The court decided to stop looking into the case until a decision is taken on the recuse request" filed by defence lawyers, presiding judge Shaaban el-Shamy said before ending yesterday's session.

An appeal court is to look into the request on March and decide whether to appoint a new panel of judges, a defence lawyer, Mohamed Abou Leila, told AFP.

Morsi and 130 other defendants including Palestinian and Lebanese militants are charged with organising jailbreaks and attacking police stations during the 2011 revolt against strongman Hosni Mubarak.

At yesterday's hearing, lawyers of some of the defendants requested that a new panel of judges look into the case, complaining over a soundproof glass cage in which the accused are held during the court sessions.

The soundproof dock is designed to stop Morsi and the other defendants from interrupting the proceedings with outbursts, as they have done in several hearings.



OPPOSITION'S PREPARATION FOR GOVT

Ukraine's Main players

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's new opposition-led parliament must by today approve a new cabinet that can keep the country from falling off the financial cliff while reviving public support for the corruption-stained authorities. Will lawmakers opt for a government led by a technocrat or a charismatic politician? Here is a look at the main political players in Kiev.

Vitali Klitschko



While the former heavyweight boxing world champion's moderate views have occasionally angered more radical demonstrators, Klitschko, 42, could

prove a consensus candidate for president at an election scheduled for May once constitutional changes hand more powers to parliament.

Yulia Tymoshenko



Ukraine's divisive "Iron Lady", former prime minister Tymoshenko, 53, has surged back to centre stage after being released from more than two years of imprisonment on Saturday.

Petro Poroshenko



A billionaire chocolate baron who has openly supported the pro-EU protest movement, Poroshenko, 48, is a political insider with a history of flip-flopping between governments over the past decade. Viewed presently as one of the country's most popular politicians, the

lawmaker has previously clashed with Tymoshenko and controls the key opposition Kanal 5 television station.

Oleksandr Turchynov



Elected interim president Sunday after parliament voted to oust Yanukovich, Turchynov, 49, is the right-hand man of Tymoshenko and followed in her

slipstream to become for a time chief of the security service and deputy prime minister.

Oleh Yatsenyuk



Head of the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party, Yatsenyuk, 45, has seen his star rise as he has been accepted as one of the main leaders of the protest move-

ment.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk



An intellectual pro-EU former foreign minister, Yatsenyuk, 39, has risen to prominence from an unfancied technocrat to an unlikely firebrand during the three months of mass protests.

The Maidan

Arguably the most important player remains the disparate coalition of demonstrators still camped out on Kiev's Independence Square -- known in Ukraine as the Maidan -- who have paid for change in the country with their own blood.

Oldest-known Holocaust survivor dies aged 110

AFP, London

Alice Herz-Sommer, the world's oldest known Holocaust survivor and the subject of an Oscar-nominated documentary, has died in London aged 110, her family announced Sunday.

Herz-Sommer, originally from Prague in what is now the Czech Republic, spent two years of World War II in Czechoslovakia's Terezin concentration camp, where she entertained inmates by playing the piano.

Her grandson, Ariel Sommer, said: "Alice Sommer passed away peacefully this morning with her family by her bedside. Much has been written about her, but to those of us who knew her best, she was our dear 'Gigi'."

"She loved us, laughed with us, and cherished music with us.

She was an inspiration and our world will be significantly poorer without her by our side. We mourn her loss and ask for privacy in this very difficult moment."

According to an update on the Facebook page for her Oscar-nominated film "The Lady In Number 6: Music Saved My Life", she died on Sunday after a short illness.

"She was still living in her apartment, when she fell ill on Thursday, she spent two nights in hospital and passed this morning," it said.

The 38-minute film, in which she shares her life story and describes the importance of music and laughter for a happy life, is up for best short documentary at Sunday's Academy Awards.

Producer Nicholas Reed said of the film: "Kids all over the world grow up on superheroes, what we, their parents, must remind them, is documentaries tell stories about 'real superheroes'."



PHOTO: AFP

Pranab Boro, an activist of Krisak Mukti Sangram Samiti self-immolates in a protest demanding land rights for local people in various regions of eastern Assam state, in front of the Assam Secretariat in Guwahati yesterday. Boro died after hospitalisation with burns covering over 90 percent of his body.