

# DERELICTION OF DUTY Yingluck indicted

AFP, Bangkok

Former Thai premier Yingluck Shinawatra was indicted over a bungled rice subsidy scheme yesterday in the latest legal move against her family that could see her jailed for up to a decade.

Thailand's junta-stacked government is also considering launching a civil suit against Yingluck, the nation's first female prime minister, to seek \$18 billion in compensation for damages caused by the scheme introduced by her government.

The indictment comes after Yingluck was retroactively impeached last month by an assembly appointed by the junta which seized power from her elected government last May.

"We have indicted former prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra... for dereliction of duty" in relation to the costly rice scheme, said Chutichai Sakhakorn, a director-general at Thailand's attorney general, which filed the criminal charges.

The Supreme Court will decide whether or not to accept the case on March 19.

The ousted premier has been banned from leaving the country since authorities announced she would face charges over the populist subsidy scheme on the same day she was impeached, a move that carries an automatic five-year ban from politics.

Yingluck's brother, former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, has been in self-exile since 2008 to avoid being jailed for corruption after he was ousted in a 2006 coup.

The ex-premier has defended the rice scheme as a necessary subsidy to help poor farmers who historically receive a disproportionately small slice of government cash.

The subsidy, which paid farmers in the rural Shinawatra heartland twice the market rate for their crop, cost billions of dollars and inspired protests that felled Yingluck's government and led to a military takeover on May 22.

Experts say the impeachment and criminal charges are the latest attempt by the country's royalist elite, and its army backers, to extinguish the political influence of the Shinawatras, whose parties have won every election since 2001.



This incredible picture shows Niagara Falls partially frozen as chilly temperatures continue to bring snow and ice across the US-Canada border. Temperatures dropped to -14 on Tuesday, while wind chills on Wednesday dipped to as low as -25F, WIVB.com reports. The Weather Prediction Centre is warning of a "historic cold" throughout eastern US today, when the first polar vortex of the season is due to arrive.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## Germany rejects Greek loan proposal

AFP, Berlin

Germany's finance ministry yesterday rejected a Greek request to European partners for a six-month extension to its EU loan programme, but the German vice chancellor called it a "starting point". Debt-wracked Greece has sent a make-or-break request to extend its European loan programme that expires at the end of the month, demanding however an end to hated austerity measures.

A spokesman for German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble quickly slapped it down, saying in a terse statement that "the letter from Athens is not a substantial proposal for a solution".

"In truth it aims at bridge financing, without meeting the requirements of the programme. The letter does not meet the criteria agreed upon in the Eurogroup on Monday."

Taking a more conciliatory stance, Germany's Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, a centre-left Social Democrat, later said the request, although insufficient, should be seen as "a first step".

Gabriel said he agreed with conservative Schauble that the proposal fell short of what was needed, but added that "it must be used as a starting point for negotiations".

## Egypt, Qatar spar over Libya strikes on ISIS

AFP, Doha

Qatar recalled its ambassador to Egypt yesterday following a row over Cairo's air strikes on jihadist targets in Libya, threatening fresh divisions among Western-allied Arab states.

A foreign ministry official said Doha was recalling its envoy "for consultation" after Egypt's delegate to the Arab League accused Qatar of supporting "terrorism", during discussions on Libya. Egypt's new spat with Qatar, which was backed by its Gulf neighbours, came as Libyan officials urged the UN Security Council to lift an arms embargo to allow the country's military to fight jihadists.

Egyptian F-16s bombed militant bases in the eastern Libyan city of Derna on Tuesday, after ISIS in Libya released a gruesome video showing the beheadings of a group of Egyptian Coptic Christians.

Qatar's director of Arab affairs in the foreign ministry, Saad bin Ali al-

Mohannadi, denounced the "tense" statement by Egypt's representative to the Arab League, saying it "confuses the need to combat terrorism (with)... the brutal killing and burning of civilians."

There was no immediate response from Egypt. But Qatar did receive the backing of its Gulf neighbours yesterday.

Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) secretary general Abdullatif al-Zayani said in a statement that it "rejects accusations by Egypt's permanent envoy at the Arab League that Qatar supports terrorism".

Ties between Doha and Cairo have been strained in recent years amid a spat over Qatar's backing for ousted Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi.

Mohannadi's statement also made clear that Qatar does not want a Libyan arms embargo lifted on "the principle of not strengthening one conflict party against another before the end of the dialogue and the formation of a national unity government".

## Leaders pledge to save truce

Condemn violence; Moscow, rebels reject Kiev's call for peacekeepers

AFP, Kiev

The leaders of Ukraine, Germany, France and Russia yesterday pledged renewed support for a tattered ceasefire in eastern Ukraine despite violations -- including the storming of a key town by pro-Russian rebels.

As the leaders condemned the fighting and urged both sides to observe the truce, there was strident opposition from the separatists and Moscow to a plea from Ukraine for international peacekeepers to enforce the ceasefire.

The Ukrainian army, meanwhile, said 90 troops had been captured and 82 were still missing after the rebels seized the strategic town of Debaltseve, in violation of the ceasefire which came into force after midnight Sunday.

The seizure of the town, a transport hub sandwiched between the rebel strongholds of Donetsk and Lugansk, sent government troops into retreat.

The insurgents claimed to have

### UKRAINE CRISIS

captured as many as 300 government soldiers.

Kiev's defeat in Debaltseve, which has had many Ukrainians questioning the competence of their military leaders, prompted Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to appeal for international peacekeepers to be deployed in the east.

Poroshenko again raised the proposal in a four-way telephone conversation Thursday with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Russian President Vladimir Putin, his office said.

He found little apparent support, however, with none of the others mentioning it in statements from their offices, and Moscow denying it was mentioned at all.

Instead, the four called for the

implementation of the full package of measures agreed in Minsk, including a full ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons and the release of prisoners, according to the French presidency.

The EU and US have called the rebel assault of Debaltseve a "clear violation" of the truce aimed at quelling Ukraine's 10-month-old conflict, which has killed more than 5,600 people.

The West accuses Russia of sending troops, tanks and weapons to support the separatists with the aim of keeping Ukraine, an ex-Soviet republic, too destabilised to move closer towards the EU and NATO. Moscow denies the allegation.

US President Barack Obama has also been mulling sending arms to Ukraine if the situation worsens.

Britain and Spain yesterday said the solution to the Ukrainian conflict had to come through dialogue and should not involve military aid to Ukrainian forces.



## Lunar New Year

Chinese-Filipinos pray at the Seng Guan Temple to mark the start of the Lunar New Year in Manila's Chinatown, yesterday. Fortune tellers in Hong Kong said that the Year of the Sheep should be calmer in general than the previous Year of the Horse, which was characterised by catastrophic international air accidents, brutal terror attacks, global political upheaval, a resurgent Ebola virus.

PHOTO: AFP

### US ANTI-EXTREMISM SUMMIT

## US seeks to spur global action

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday sought to galvanize global action against violent extremist groups, amid warnings the world was confronted with "a new war against a new enemy."

Gathering ministers and top officials from more than 60 countries on the third and final day of a White House summit, President Barack Obama pledged the US would be "a strong partner" in seeking to halt the march of groups like Islamic State (ISIS).

Governments must remain "unwavering in our fight against terrorist organizations," Obama said, vowing to work with unstable countries such as Yemen and Somalia to help "prevent ungoverned spaces where terrorists find safe haven."

Nations also needed to confront the "warped ideologies" espoused by groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, Obama stressed, and must tackle the economic and political grievances which "makes those communities ripe for extremist recruitment."

But he stressed: "The notion that the West is at war with Islam is an ugly lie. And all of us, regardless of our faith, have a responsibility to reject it."

However, the summit did not produce concrete steps. Indeed Obama challenged nations to bring their ideas to the UN general assembly in September.

Although there has been some criticism that the conference was hastily announced and representation was spotty, top ministers from Jordan, Denmark, Egypt, France and Belgium which have all suffered serious setbacks at the hands of either extremist groups or lone wolves were present.

The US administration said it would step up information-sharing to thwart would-be foreign fighters, and has pledged to boost cooperation with Interpol.

Top US diplomat John Kerry acknowledged most of the work to try to stop the extremists would be done "without fanfare" quietly in classrooms, community halls and on street corners.

"Today we are asked to wage a new war against a new enemy. The battlefield is different, and so are the weapons that we need to overcome that enemy," Kerry said in a Wall Street Journal op-ed yesterday.

### QUOTE of the day



The notion that the West is at war with Islam is an ugly lie  
US President Barack Obama

## New AIDS drug shields monkeys

AFP, Paris, Feb 18

Scientists said Wednesday a new drug tested on monkeys provided an astonishingly effective shield against an animal version of the AIDS virus, a major gain in the quest for an HIV vaccine.

Macaque monkeys given the drug were able to fend off high repeated doses of the simian version of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), they reported in the journal Nature.

The prototype drug, called eCD4-Ig, comprises two imitations of the receptors, or docking points, where HIV latches on to CD4 cells -- the key defences of the immune cells. The mimics latch on to the virus, tricking it into prematurely launching the docking procedure. The virus can only execute the procedure once, rendering it unable to attach to CD4 cells thereafter.

The scientists likened the effect to closing the door to an intruder and tossing away the key.

The paper reported on a 40-week experiment which showed that inoculated animals thrived even after being injected with four times the dose needed to infect macaques in a "control" group.

## RACIAL BIAS CHARGES US to sue Ferguson police dept

REUTERS, Washington

The US Department of Justice is preparing to sue the Ferguson, Missouri, police department over allegations of racially discriminatory practices unless the police force agrees to make changes, CNN reported on Wednesday.

The network, citing sources, said the Justice Department would not charge the white Ferguson police officer involved in the fatal shooting of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown last August but was expected to outline allegations of discriminatory Ferguson police tactics.

## French government survives confidence vote on reform

AFP, Paris

France's Socialist government yesterday won a confidence vote tied to its economic reform package that could in theory have caused its collapse amid a damaging back-bench rebellion.

A total of 234 mainly opposition deputies voted for the motion of no-confidence, far short of the number required to bring down the government.

The emergency vote was sparked when Prime Minister Manuel Valls on Tuesday employed a rarely-used constitutional device to force through a key package of reforms without a parliamentary vote.

He made this decision due to concerns the rebellion from within his own Socialist party would block the reforms, which now automatically go through after the failure of the no-confidence motion.

The reforms extend Sunday shopping and open up key parts of the French econ-

omy to competition.

The government says they are vital to "unblock" the eurozone's second-biggest economy, which is suffering from chronically high unemployment and sluggish growth.

This was a bid to ensure Paris retains its status as the world's most visited city but it irked the capital's mayor, who has opposed the measures.

Another element of the reforms is to open up to competition previously closed sectors of the economy such as the legal profession.

Notarial lawyers, who set a fixed fee for their services regardless of the size of the job, will be able to charge clients more or less for certain projects, opening up the sector to competition.

But this reform also ran into significant opposition and prompted the unusual sight of these white-collar workers downing tools and hitting the streets in protest.

The package of reforms will now be considered in France's upper house of parliament, the Senate, from April.