

Egypt’s President Grants Himself More Powers

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt’s Islamist president unilaterally decreed greater authorities for himself Thursday and effectively neutralized a judiciary system that had emerged as a key opponent by declaring that the courts are barred from challenging his decisions.

Riding high on U.S. and international praise for mediating a Gaza cease-fire, Mohammed Morsi put himself above oversight and gave protection to the Islamist-led assembly writing a new constitution from a looming threat of dissolution by court order.

But the move is likely to fuel growing public anger that he and his Muslim Brotherhood are seizing too much power.

In what was interpreted by rights activists as a de facto declaration of emergency law, one of Morsi’s decrees gave him the power to take “due measures and steps” to deal with any “threat” to the revolution, national unity and safety or anything that obstructs the work of state institutions.

Morsi framed his decisions as necessary to protect the revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak nearly two years ago and to cement the nation’s transition to democratic rule. Many activists, including opponents of the Brotherhood, criticize the judiciary as packed with judges and prosecutors sympathetic to Mubarak. Brotherhood supporters accuse the courts of trying to block their agenda.

Crowded Field Emerges To Replace Jackson

CHICAGO (AP) — At least a dozen candidates have been mentioned to replace Jesse Jackson Jr. in Congress, and some Democratic leaders are concerned about a potentially crowded field.

Jackson resigned Wednesday following a leave of absence for bipolar disorder. He also admitted he is the subject of a federal probe and is cooperating with investigators.

Among the possible contenders to replace him are Chicago Aldermen Anthony Beale and Will Burns and defense attorney Sam Adam Jr.

Jackson’s brother Jonathan also has been mentioned. So has his wife, Chicago Alderman Sandi Jackson.

That prompted Congressman Bobby Rush to tell would-be candidates: “Cool your jets.”

Syrian Rebels Reportedly Take Key Army Base

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels strengthened their hold Thursday on an oil-rich province bordering Iraq, activists said, capturing a key military base that was considered one of the last bastions for President Bashar Assad’s loyalists in the strategic region.

The reported fall of the Mayadeen base, along with its stockpiles of artillery, caps a series of advances in Deir el-Zour including last week’s seizure of a military airport.

The province borders on western Iraq. Syria’s rebels enjoy strong support with the Sunni tribes of Iraq’s west, and many Iraqis with combat experience from their own war are believed to have crossed to fight in their neighbor.

Rebel fighters also say that weapons seized when bases fall have been essential to their transformation from ragtag brigades into forces capable of challenging Assad’s professional army.

Activist groups and a local fighter told The Associated Press the Mayadeen base was taken in the morning hours, after a three-week siege. The fighter spoke on condition of anonymity because of security concerns.

Panel: Let Courts Decide Fast And Furious

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House panel said Wednesday it believes federal courts have the authority to decide a dispute in which Attorney General Eric Holder is refusing to provide Congress with Justice Department documents about a botched criminal investigation into gun-trafficking on the Southwest border.

In a 65-page filing about Operation Fast and Furious, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee said federal courts have routinely reviewed the validity of congressional inquiries. The lawyers for the House said Holder’s contention that courts cannot adjudicate political disputes would permanently shut the courthouse doors to virtually all disputes between the executive and legislative branches.

In court papers filed last month, the Justice Department said the courts must defer to the time-tested political process of stepping aside and letting Congress and the executive resolve their political differences.

In the dispute over Operation Fast and Furious, President Barack Obama has invoked what is known as executive privilege. The Republican-run House in June voted Holder in contempt of Congress for refusing to turn over subpoenaed records that might explain what led the Justice Department to reverse course after initially denying that federal agents had used a controversial tactic called gun-walking in the failed law enforcement operation.

In Fast and Furious, agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives abandoned the agency’s usual practice of intercepting all weapons they believed to be illicitly purchased, often as soon as they were taken out of gun shops. Instead, the goal of the gun-walking approach was to track such weapons to high-level arms traffickers who long had eluded prosecution, and to dismantle their networks.

Federal agents lost track of many of the guns. The operation identified more than 2,000 illicitly purchased weapons, and some 1,400 of them have yet to be recovered.

Death Of Iranian Blogger: A Cyber Crackdown

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — In his last blog entry, activist Sattar Beheshti wrote that Iranian authorities had given him an ultimatum: Either stop posting his “big mouth” attacks against the ruling system or tell his mother that she will soon be in mourning.

“We will tear down your cruel cage,” Beheshti typed on Oct. 29 before signing off.

A day later he was arrested. Within a week, his family had collected his body. They began calls for an investigation that have been echoed by Washington, European allies and rights groups.

Arrests of activists and claims of abuse in detention are commonplace in Iran, but deaths behind bars are much rarer. Iran’s judiciary responded to the growing pressure and authorized an investigation. It claims three of Beheshti’s interrogators have been arrested while post-mortem reports are studied.

But while the specific circumstances of Beheshti’s death may be given a public reckoning, the more far-reaching aspect of the case — Iran’s rapidly growing corps of Web watchers — may remain in the shadows, as well as their motives in targeting an obscure blogger whose site was actively followed by more than a few dozen viewers.

Mideast Violence | Analysis

U.S. Pinning Hopes On Egypt

BY BRADLEY KLAPPER AND MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In Egypt we trust.

In frantic diplomacy, the Obama administration helped seal a cease-fire that puts heavy responsibility on Egypt’s young Islamist government to ensure the end of Hamas rockets from the Gaza Strip. If Egypt delivers, the United States will have rediscovered the stalwart regional partner it has lacked since the autocratic Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in a popular revolt last year. If it fails, stability across the region will suffer.

Much depends on whether the agreement brokered by Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi proves durable and halts not only a week of open warfare that killed more than 160 Palestinians and six Israelis, but definitively ends rocket attacks on southern Israel from Gaza that grew increasingly frequent in recent months.

Standing beside Morsi’s foreign minister in Cairo, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the deal would improve conditions for Gaza’s 1.5 million people while offering greater security

for the Jewish state — but the fierceness of the recent encounter meant no one was declaring it a success yet.

And U.S. officials familiar with Clinton’s last-minute diplomatic shuttling warned against making any judgments until the cease-fire proves to hold.

The U.S. is counting on Morsi to shepherd the peace. The former Muslim Brotherhood leader emerged from his first major international crisis with enhanced prestige and now has a track record as someone who can mediate between the two sworn enemies, something the United States cannot do because it considers Hamas a terrorist organization and doesn’t allow contacts between its members and American officials.

Hours into the cease-fire, Morsi seemed to have persuaded Hamas, a Brotherhood offshoot, to abide by its conditions.

He won immediate praise from Washington, with President Barack Obama thanking Morsi “for his efforts to achieve a sustainable cease-fire and for his personal leadership in negotiating a cease-fire proposal.” In their sixth phone call since last week, Obama on Wednesday welcomed Morsi’s “commitment to regional security” and the lead-

ers agreed to work toward a “more durable solution to the situation in Gaza,” according to a White House statement.

The diplomacy clearly strengthened a U.S.-Egyptian partnership that has been strained in the 21 months since Egyptians toppled Mubarak. In that time, Washington angrily protested Cairo’s crackdown on U.S.-funded pro-democracy groups, its slow response to attacks on the Israeli and U.S. embassies, and its inconsistent control over the Sinai Peninsula. The U.S. regularly threatened to withhold aid, and Obama remarked in September that he no longer considered Egypt an ally.

That breakdown was a marked reversal from the legacy of Mubarak’s three-decade autocracy, when the Arab world’s most populous and influential country closely cooperated with the United States in fighting al-Qaida, containing the influence of Iran and mediating between Israel and the Palestinians. Although Morsi’s government has promised to abide by the 1979 Camp David Accords with Israel, his Muslim Brotherhood resume had raised concerns about his true commitment. And continued comments against the peace treaty from Brotherhood members raised ire in Israel and the U.S.

AT YOUR SERVICE



Volunteer Kate Zorka stirs the gravy to be used in the Thanksgiving dinner at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Thursday.

Same-Day Delivery Eyed By Post Office

WASHINGTON (AP) — Emboldened by rapid growth in e-commerce shipping, the cash-strapped U.S. Postal Service is moving aggressively this holiday season to start a premium service for the Internet shopper seeking the instant gratification of a store purchase: same-day package delivery.

Teaming up with major retailers, the post office will begin the expedited service in San Francisco on Dec. 12 at a price similar to its competitors. If things run smoothly, the program will quickly expand next year to other big cities such as Boston, Chicago and New York. It follows similar efforts by eBay, Amazon.com, and most recently Wal-Mart Stores Inc., which charges a \$10 flat rate for same-day delivery.

The delivery program, called Metro Post, seeks to build on the post office’s double-digit growth in package volume to help offset steady declines in first-class and standard mail. Operating as a limited experiment for the next year, it is projected to generate between \$10 million and \$50 million in new revenue from deliveries in San Francisco alone, according to postal regulatory filings, or up to \$500 million, if expanded to 10 cities.

The filings do not reveal the mail agency’s anticipated expenses to implement same-day service, which can only work profitably if retailers have enough merchandise in stores and warehouses to be quickly delivered to nearby residences in a dense urban area. The projected \$500 million in potential revenue, even if fully realized, would represent just fraction of the record \$15.9 billion annual loss that the Postal Service reported last week.

But while startups in the late 1990s such as Kozmo.com notably failed after promising instant delivery, the Postal Service’s vast network serving every U.S. home could put it in a good position to be viable over the long term. The retail market has been rapidly shifting to Internet shopping, especially among younger adults, and more people are moving from suburb to city, where driving to a store can be less convenient.

Postal officials, in interviews with The Associated Press, cast the new offering as “exciting” and potentially “revolutionary.” Analysts are apt to agree at least in part, if kinks can be worked out.

Black Friday Creeps Into Thursday

BY ANNE D’INNOCENZIO AND TOM KRISHER
AP Business Writers

NEW YORK — Put down that turkey leg. It’s time to shop. Really.

Stores typically open in the wee hours of the morning on the day after Thanksgiving known as Black Friday, named for the period when stores traditionally turn a profit for the year. But Black Friday openings have crept earlier and earlier over the past few years. Now, stores from Wal-Mart to Toys R Us are opening their doors on Thanksgiving evening, hoping Americans will be willing to shop soon after they finish their pumpkin pie.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. will have early bird shopping specials at 8 p.m., two hours earlier than a year ago. Target Corp. is opening its doors at 9 p.m. on the holiday, three hours earlier than last year. Sears, which didn’t open on Thanksgiving last year, is opening during from 8 p.m. and will stay open until 10 p.m. on Black Friday. And Toys R Us will be opening at 8 p.m., an hour earlier than last year.

It’s an effort by stores to make shopping more convenient for Americans, who still face economic uncertainty. Many shoppers are worried about high unemployment and a package of tax increases and spending cuts known as the “fiscal cliff” that will take effect in January unless Congress passes a budget deal by then. At the same time, Americans have grown more comfortable shopping on websites such as Amazon.com, where they can get cheaper prices and buy from the comfort of their home or office cubicle.

Early data from IBM Smarter Commerce show that as of noon EST, online sales for Thanksgiving are up 14.3 percent from last year, with just over a quarter of consumers using a mobile device to visit a retailer’s site, up from 15.8 percent in 2011.

That has put pressure on brick-and-mortar stores, who can make up to 40 percent of their annual revenue during the two-month holiday shopping season, to compete. That’s becoming more difficult: the National Retail Federation, an industry trade group, estimates that overall sales in November and December will rise 4.1 percent this year to \$586.1 billion, or about flat with last year’s growth. But the online part of that is expected to rise 15 percent to \$68.4 billion, according to Forrester Research.

As a result, brick-and-mortar retailers are trying everything they can to lure consumers into stores by making shopping as easy as possible. In addition to expanding

their hours into Thanksgiving, many are offering free layaways and shipping, matching the cheaper prices of online rivals and updating their mobile shopping apps with more information.

Michael Prothero, 19, and his friend, Kenny Fullenlove, 21, have been camped outside a Best Buy store in Toledo, Ohio, since Monday night, waiting to get 40-inch televisions, some video games and a low-priced tablet computer mainly for relatives. They came early to make sure they got the deals, even though the next person in line didn’t arrive until almost 24 hours later.

“Better safe than sorry,” Prothero said.

Retailers are hoping that the Thanksgiving openings will draw shoppers who prefer to head to stores after their turkey dinner rather than braving the crowds early the next morning. Overall, about 17 percent of shoppers plan to take advantage of Thanksgiving hours, according to the International Council of Shopping Centers-Goldman Sachs survey of 1,000 consumers conducted from Nov. 15 to Nov. 18. Last year, that figure was 16 percent. For Black Friday, traditionally the busiest shopping day of the year, 33 percent intend to shop that day, slightly down from 34 percent in 2011.

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