

Egypt's President Issues Law Restricting Protests

Rights Groups, Activists Denounce The Ban

BY SARAH EL DEEB
Associated Press

CAIRO — Egypt's interim president on Sunday banned public gatherings of more than 10 people without prior government approval, imposing hefty fines and prison terms for violators in a bid to stifle the near-constant protests roiling the country.

The new law is more restrictive than regulations used under the rule of autocrat Hosni Mubarak, overthrown in Egypt's 2011 uprising that marked the start of unrest in the country. Rights groups and activists immediately denounced it, saying it aims to stifle opposition, allow repressive police practices and keep security officials largely unaccountable for possible abuses.

"The law is giving a cover to justify repres-

sion by all means," said Bahy Eddin Hassan, head of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, one of the local groups that had campaigned against the law.

The military-backed government first floated the law in October. Interim President Adly Mansour approved a slightly amended version Sunday, which removed a proposed ban on sit-ins and a draft portion criminalizing "insulting the state."

The law requires three-day prior notice for protests. It grants security agencies the right to bar any protests or public gatherings, including election-related meetings of political parties, if they deem it a threat to public safety or order. Protesters can appeal the decision, but the law doesn't force judges to rule ahead of scheduled protests.

The new law also bars gatherings in places

of worship, a regular meeting place for all protests in Egypt and one heavily used by Islamist groups. The law also says the police have the right — following warnings — to use force gradually, including the use of water cannons, tear gas and clubs.

Rights groups say the law also gives police unrestricted use of birdshot to put down protests, omitting an article that prohibited the use of force in excess.

Penalties in the law range from seven years in prison for using violence in a protest. It calls for one year in prison for covering the face in a country where many women wear full-face veils. It calls for a similar prison sentence for protesting in or around a place of worship.

The law sets fines of \$44,000 for being violent at a protest. It sets fines of \$1,500 for protesting without a permit, a hefty sum in Egypt, where the minimum monthly salary for public employees has finally been raised to 1,200 Egyptian pounds (\$175).

The law comes 10 days after authorities lifted a three-monthlong emergency order that granted security forces sweeping powers. Rights groups and political forces campaigned heavily against the law.

"The law is labelled one that regulates protests rights, but in essence it is regulates the repression of the right to protest," Hassan said.

Hassan said government officials and supportive media outlets promoted the law as means to halt protests by supporters of ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi, who was removed by the military in July. Morsi's supporters hold near-daily protests that often turn violent, though the size of the demonstrations have dropped due to an intense security crackdown targeting Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood.

Shaima Awad, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's political party, said protests would continue, calling the new law "nonsense."

Wintry Storm That Hit West Churns East, Threatens Thanksgiving Travels

BY RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI
Associated Press

A large storm already blamed for at least eight deaths in the West slogged through Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and other parts of the Southwest on Sunday, leading to hundreds of flight cancellations as it slowly churned east ahead of Thanksgiving.

After the storm plows through the Southwest, meteorologists expect the Arctic mass to head south and east, threatening plans for Tuesday and Wednesday as people hit the roads and airports for some of the busiest travel days of the year.

More than 300 flights were cancelled at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, representing about one-third of the scheduled departures, and a spokeswoman said deicing equipment had been prepared as officials planned for the worst in a flurry of conference calls and meetings.

"It's certainly going to be a travel impact as we see the first few people making their way for Thanksgiving," National Weather Service meteorologist Tom Bradshaw said.

The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm warning for chunks of North Texas from noon Sunday until midday Monday. Parts of Oklahoma are also under a winter storm warning, while an advisory has been issued for other parts of the state. A mix of rain and sleet began falling north of Dallas on Interstate 35 by midday Sunday, and areas of southwestern Oklahoma woke up to several inches of snow.

Some elevated overpasses had icy surfaces, but Bradshaw said the worst weather could be expected between 3 a.m. and 9 a.m., possibly snarling

"It's slow moving and it's sort of bringing its energy out in pieces so it's kind of hard to time these as they come across with a great deal of accuracy."

TOM BRADSHAW

morning rush hour.

Several inches of snow fell overnight in Altus in far southwestern Oklahoma, said Damaris Machabo, a receptionist at a Holiday Inn motel.

"It looks great. I love the snow," Machabo said. The snow and freezing temperatures made driving in the area treacherous, but Machabo said she had no problems getting to work early Sunday. Forecasts called for more snow in the area later in the day.

Portions of New Mexico — especially in some of the higher elevations — also had several inches of snow, and near white out conditions were reported along stretches of Interstate 40 west of Albuquerque.

Then along the New Mexico-Texas border, into the El Paso area, a mix of snow, sleet and ice forced some road closures and created messy driving conditions.

Flagstaff in Arizona had 11 inches of snow by early Sunday, and was expected to get another inch by the end of the day before the storm petered out. Metro Phoenix and other parts of central Arizona received between 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches of rain over the course of the storm. The storms caused cancellations of sporting events and pa-

rades and damaged the roofs of homes across Arizona.

In Tucson, firefighters on Friday recovered the body of a man who was swept away by high water in the Santa Cruz River. Tucson police said Sunday an autopsy revealed signs of trauma, and they were investigating the death as a homicide. They did not say whether they had ruled out the storm as a cause of his death.

By early Sunday, the weather was blamed for at least eight deaths in several fatal traffic accidents. The storm also caused hundreds of rollover accidents, including one that injured three members of singer Willie Nelson's band when their bus hit a pillar on Interstate 30 near Sulphur Springs, about 75 miles northeast of Dallas.

Dallas prepared for the storm by declaring "Ice Force Level 1," code for sending 30 sanding trucks to trouble shoot hazardous road conditions.

At Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, spokeswoman Cynthia Vega said most of the cancelled flights were in the afternoon and evening hours and were with American Airlines and American Eagle. The possibility of ice on the runways led to a series of conference calls and meetings early Sunday, she added, noting the airport had liquid and solid deicers ready for use.

The storm system, though, was particularly hard to predict because a couple of degrees here or there with the temperature will determine whether regions see rain, sleet or snow, Bradshaw said.

"It's very difficult to pin those down," Bradshaw said. "It's slow moving and it's sort of bringing its energy out in pieces so it's kind of hard to time these as they come across with a great deal of accuracy."

Delay Of Newtown Report Fuels Criticism

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A prosecutor is planning to release a report Monday on the investigation into the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, but the public will have to wait longer for the state police's full accounting of the crime.

The decision to continue withholding the bulk of the evidence is stirring new criticism of the secrecy that has surrounded the probe since a gunman killed 20 children and six educators inside the school on Dec. 14.

While the gunman took his own life and authorities are not contemplating any prosecutions, the lead investigator, State's Attorney Stephen Sedensky III, has gone to court to fight the release of 911 tapes, consulted privately with victims' families on what might be included in the report and resisted calls from Connecticut's governor to divulge more information sooner.

In defense of their handling of records, investigators have cited the scale of the criminal investigation — perhaps the most extensive in Connecticut's history — and consideration for the victims' families, some of whom have lobbied for tighter restrictions on public information and complained of being harassed by conspiracy theorists.

Dan Klau, a Hartford attorney who specializes in First Amendment law, said the decision to release a summary report before the full evidence file is a reversal of standard practice and one of the most unusual elements of an investigation marked by secrecy.

Karzai Still Won't Sign Deal With U.S.



Karzai

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — President Hamid Karzai cast fresh doubt on the future presence of thousands of American and allied forces on Sunday by rejecting a recommendation by an Afghan assembly of dignitaries to quickly sign a long-delayed security pact with the United States.

Although the mercurial leader did not fully spell out his reasons for deferring its signature until after the April 5 elections, the move was a slap in the face to U.S. officials who had repeatedly asked for a deal by the end of the year.

The U.S. administration has insisted the deal be finalized by the end of next month, warning that planning for a post-2014 military presence may be jeopardized if it is not approved. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel both asked last week that it be signed by the end of the year.

Failure to do so could be the final blow to the Bilateral Security Agreement, leaving the Americans without a legal basis to keep forces in the country for up to a decade to train and mentor Afghan troops who remain ill-prepared to face a persistent Taliban insurgency.

The U.S. has said it will pull all its forces out of Afghanistan without it, as it did when Iraq failed to sign a similar agreement. Most of America's allies have also said they will pull out their troops in without the deal, a withdrawal that could put at risk more than \$8 billion a year pledged by the international community for Afghan security forces and the country's development.

'Catching Fire' Scorches With Opening

NEW YORK (AP) — Moviegoers satiated their appetite for the "Hunger Games" franchise by making the sequel "Catching Fire" one of the year's biggest hits.

"The Hunger Games: Catching Fire" opened with \$161.1 million at the domestic weekend box office, according to studio estimates Sunday.

It became the biggest November debut ever, as well as Lionsgate's most lucrative opening.

The result fell short of some expectations and failed to dethrone the year's biggest box-office opening, "Iron Man 3" with \$174 million. But the film opened massively worldwide, taking in a total of \$307.7 million.

The marketplace largely ceded the weekend to "Catching Fire." The only other new wide release was Disney's Vince Vaughn comedy "Delivery Man," which sputtered to an \$8.2 million opening.

The box-office performance for "Catching Fire" establishes "Hunger Games," starring Jennifer Lawrence as the archer heroine of Suzanne Collins' young adult series, as among the elite franchises in movies. The budget nearly doubled from the original and Francis Lawrence took over directing duties from Gary Ross. "Catching Fire" received better reviews and drew a broader audience.

The domestic opening for "Catching Fire" is the fourth best ever, following "The Avengers" (\$207 million), "Iron Man 3" and "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II" (\$169 million).

Vatican Unveils Bone Pieces Said To Be Peter's

BY NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican publicly unveiled a handful of bone fragments purportedly belonging to St. Peter on Sunday, reviving the scientific debate and tantalizing mystery over whether the relics found in a shoe box truly belong to the first pope.

The nine pieces of bone sat nestled like rings in a jewel box inside a bronze display case on the side of the altar during a Mass commemorating the end of the Vatican's yearlong celebration of the Christian faith. It was the first time they had ever been exhibited in public.

Pope Francis prayed before the fragments at the start of Sunday's service and then clutched the case in his arms for several minutes after his homily.

No pope has ever definitively declared the fragments to belong to the Apostle Peter, but Pope Paul VI in 1968 said fragments found in the necropolis under St. Peter's Basilica were "identified in a way that we can consider convincing."

Some archaeologists dispute the finding. But last week, a top Vati-

can official, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, said it almost doesn't matter if archaeologists one day definitively determine that the bones aren't Peter's, saying Christians have prayed at Peter's tomb for two millennia and will continue to, regardless.

"It's not as if pilgrims who go to the altar (of Peter's tomb) think that in that moment in which they profess their faith that below them are the relics of Peter, or of another or another still," he told reporters. "They go there to profess the faith."

The relics were discovered during excavations begun under St. Peter's Basilica in the years following the 1939 death of Pope Pius XI, who had asked to be buried in the grottoes where dozens of popes are buried, according to the 2012 book by veteran Vatican correspondent

Bruno Bartoloni, "The Ears of the Vatican."

During the excavations, archaeologists discovered a funerary monument with a casket built in honor of Peter and an engraving in Greek that read "Petros eni," or "Peter is here."

The scholar of Greek antiquities, Margherita Guarducci, who had deciphered the engraving continued to investigate and learned that one of the basilica workers had been given the remains found inside the casket and stored them in a shoe box kept in a cupboard. She reported her findings to Paul VI who later proclaimed that there was a "convincing" argument that the bones belonged to Peter.

Top Vatican Jesuits and other archaeologists strongly denied the claim, but had little recourse.

"No Pope had ever permitted an exhaustive study, partly because a 1,000-year-old curse attested by secret and apocalyptic documents, threatened anyone who disturbed the peace of Peter's tomb with the worst possible misfortune," Bartoloni wrote.

The Vatican newspaper, l'Osservatore Romano, published excerpts of the book last year, giving his account a degree of official sanction.

In 1971, Paul VI was given an urn containing the relics, which were kept inside the private chapel inside the Apostolic Palace and exhibited for the pope's private veneration each June 29, for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. Sunday marked the first time they were shown in public.

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