

Doctors' strike angers patients

Patients in Suez have reacted angrily to the continuing doctors' strike, but doctors consider escalation of action to improve health services

By Luiz Sanchez and Hend Tarek

A crowd of twenty people gathered at the Suez General Hospital on Sunday to protest the ongoing partial doctor's strike and the subsequent closure of the hospital pharmacy, which protesters claim has led to the deterioration of health conditions for many patients.

The crowd, comprised of local residents receiving treatment at the hospital, gathered in the reception area of the hospital and began shouting at employees about the lack of treatment.

"It is not my fault the doctors are on strike," one patient said.

"I am an elderly person and suffer from fatigue and stress and my right to treatment has been denied for a second month in a row because of the failure to resolve the problem doctors have with the state."

According to the hospital director, Ahmed Al-Amin, the patients were mostly upset because they had no access to the clinics. "They have a right to their demands," he said.

"[The hospital] respected the doctors' strike for two and a half months and now despite this, I must re-open the clinics."

Al-Amin said the decision to reopen the clinics was largely based on security concerns, such as the breaking and entering of clinics to obtain medicine by people who would otherwise suffer without proper diagnosis and medication. With the clinics reopening he hoped at least half the doctors would



Patients are angry at the ongoing strike by Doctors (File photo)

Egypt meets Syrian commission of inquiry

By Luiz Sanchez

The head of the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry in Syria, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, held talks with Foreign Minister Mohamed Amr Sunday morning. During these talks, Amr reiterated Egypt's commitment to finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict, denouncing intervention. The commission, which was set up to monitor and record all instances of war crimes in Syria, shared their plans with the ministry, which was unable to discuss the matter directly.

Nazih El-Naggar, deputy spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted Egypt's strong political stance, hosting the Syrian opposition, stating Egypt is an active country when it comes to supporting the Syrian revolution. "We have adopted a stance that is clearly in support of regime change in Syria," he said. "It is extremely important for the Syrian opposition to be clear on Egypt's position, while another front in the region is still hesitating to support change," he added.

El-Naggar stressed the importance of settling the Syrian crisis by way of a political transition. "Toppling the regime militarily would make it much harder for the nation to stand up and rebuild again," he explained. "We hope that state institutions can live through this very tough experience, if we manage to achieve regime change through a political solution."

Since the onset of the violence, many countries have called for intervention, but El-Naggar dismissed the notion, saying it could lead to opposing power blocks also intervening, thus intensifying the conflict and creating more rifts within the society.

A military intervention, El-Naggar said, would devastate the country. "[On Sunday] we saw a couple of hundred casualties across Syria and in the face of international intervention we can expect the casualties to be much higher. The country is in a difficult situation right now and we would not want to push them into a civil war." Sergio Pinheiro agreed that a military intervention would be off the table.

On the subject of foreign intervention, the ministry spokesperson said Egypt would do its best to minimise foreign intervention, which he admitted also includes financial aid and the supply of arms. "The regime has unfortunately drawn everyone into the conflict," El-Naggar said, adding the Egyptian government still believes a military outcome, even an armed opposition, will not save Syrian unity.

He affirmed that Egypt does not supply Syria with weapons, nor does the government support arming opposition fighters. "Financial support to the Syrian opposition," he said, "does not come from Egypt as we are currently facing a sensitive economic situation."

Iran and Russia are the largest players opposing any form of intervention from the international community. With nearly half the population coming from several different minority groups, Russia argues that military intervention would only serve to fracture the nation even more. As its citizens pay the iron price for the conflict, neither a political nor military end is in sight. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a London-based monitoring group, more than 40,000 people have been killed in the fighting, most of which are reported to be civilians.

Another attempt at a Sudanese Spring

Sudanese in Cairo show solidarity with activists in Sudan who are uniting to decry the government

By Connor Molloy

Sunday was bailed by Sudanese activists as a "Day of Dignity" where people would take to the streets with demands ranging from protection from state security to the overhaul of the regime in Khartoum.

Street protests have flared numerous times in Sudan over the past two years, as some Sudanese seek to replicate the Arab uprisings happening elsewhere in the region.

This week's protests have escalated after four Darfuri students were found dead in the town of Wad Madani, which lies along the Blue Nile in central Sudan. The students had been part of a protest at the University of Al-Jazirah where Darfuri students had been denied tuition benefits that were promised to them under the terms of the Darfur Peace Agreement. Amnesty International confirmed reports that the four students were detained by the National Security Service before being found dead.

Outside the Sudanese embassy in Cairo, 10, primarily Sudanese, protesters held signs and beat a drum to

show solidarity with the protests occurring in Sudan. The group chanted, "Killing one of us is like killing all of us."

Safa Shama, a student in Cairo who had previously studied at the University of Khartoum, was outside

the embassy on Sunday. She said she believes the killing of the Darfuri students was to fuel the flames of racism in her home country and encourage a division that empowers the regime in Khartoum.



Activists rally outside the Sudanese embassy in Cairo to denounce the regime in Khartoum

Shama held a sign that said in English and Arabic, "Your racism is not going to separate us."

"Today is one day that all the activists are coming together in Sudan," said Shama, herself part of a group called Sudan Change Now, which aims to overthrow the Sudanese regime, dismantle legislative institutions, and establish a new justice system to hold political criminals accountable. Shama said that while there are many activist groups in Sudan, they are seizing this opportunity to demonstrate together.

A number of people at the Cairo protests held placards bearing the image of Jilila Khamis. Khamis has been in jail for nine months outside the Sudanese capital and on Thursday her trial began in which she is accused of "waging war against the state." Khamis is a mother of five and was active in documenting the abuses against the people of the Nuba Mountains. Her face has become a symbol of the nascent of the Sudanese protest movement.

Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir is also wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide.

Abu Ismail vacillates in challenge with interior ministry



Damaged cars are seen through a smashed window at Al-Wafid political party headquarters in Cairo

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Al-Wafid Party and newspaper, El-Daly added that the attackers belong to the same group that besieged the Popular Current earlier the same day, state-owned news agency MENA reported.

Essam El-Erian, vice president of Freedom and Justice Party, said Abu Ismail and his supporters are not responsible for the attacks. He further added that those who attacked Al-Wafid Party are probably the same people who attacked FJP's several offices.

Abu Ismail supporters were also accused of attacking director Khaled Youssef while they were holding a sit-in a few days ago, as he tried to enter Media Production City from gate number 2. Youssef has brought a lawsuit against Abu Ismail, holding him responsible for the attacks against him.

Safwat Barakat, coordinator of Hazemoon campaign, said Muslims were angry because the ministry of interior did not protect Sheikh El-Mahallawy. Accordingly, they organised a march to the Popular Current headquarters to express their anger. However, Barakat denied that those who held the march or attacked Al-Wafid headquarters were members of Hazemoon or supporters of Abu Ismail.

"We don't attack people, we were in front of Media Production City for one week and we didn't hurt anybody," he said.

Additionally, Al-Watan newspaper received threats by Salafi groups that it would be the target of the next attack if it continued its "instigating speeches," according to Al-Watan's official Facebook page.

In memory of the Cabinet Clashes

Protesters struggle with their emotions as they remember the brutal clashes that took place at the Cabinet Offices last year

By Hend Kortam

Protesters have organised a march in the memory of the deadly fighting known as the Cabinet clashes.

The confrontation started on 16 December 2011 and continued for several days, leaving at least 17 dead and hundreds injured. On the first day, Sheikh Emad Effat, alongside medical student Alaa' Abdel-Hady and Mass Communication student from the University of Sciences and Arts, Ahmed Mansour, (also a member of 6 April Youth Movement) all died in 6 October city.

The 6 April Youth Movement in 6 October city, along with the Strong Egypt Party, the Popular Current and the October Revolutionaries have organised an event in memory of Mansour on Sunday in 6 October city.

Samir Hosny, the coordinator of the 6 April Youth Movement in 6 October city said the event was organised in coordination with Mansour's family.

Karim Mansour, Ahmed's brother, said that due to other commitments he will not be able to take part in the whole march, but his sister will be present throughout the event. Karim is the eldest of his siblings, followed by Ahmed who was 21 when he died.

Karim said that his brother had always taken part in protests since 25 January 2011. "He was arrested on 28 January and released at night. He protested against the military and took part in the Mohamed Mahmoud clashes, until the Cabinet clashes," he said.

The protesters will begin by gathering outside Mansour's university and will then form human chains after which, the organiser will give

a presentation about the Cabinet clashes as well as Mansour, Effat and Abdel-Hady. Finally, they will march to Mansour's house where more presentations will be given.

Hosny said that 4,000 flyers about the event were handed out and that all of members of the 6 April Youth movement will participate, in addition to some members of Al-Dostour Party, "but on an individual level. It is not the official party's stance." Hosny added that students in Mansour's university will also take part and therefore expects a large gathering.

Another event has been organised in memory of those who died in the clashes on Wednesday afternoon, when protesters plan to march from the High Court Building to Tahrir Square.

The Cabinet clashes, which came weeks after the Mohamed Mahmoud

clashes in November, started when security forces severely beat one protester taking part in a sit-in outside the Cabinet building. The sit-in continued for weeks before the clashes started, in objection to the appointment of Prime Minister Kamal Al-Ganzouri who replaced Essam Sharaf.

Sharaf had resigned in the midst of the Mohamed Mahmoud clashes.

The clashes garnered international attention when a video captured security forces dragging and beating a woman after she fell to the ground, with her clothes torn off. She came to be known as the "girl in the blue bra." Until this day, her identity remains unknown.

On Friday 23 December, a "million man" protest was held in Tahrir Square. In addition, marches were organised and symbolic funerals were held for those killed.

The headquarters of the Popular Current, in Lebanon square, was also besieged by Salafis earlier on Saturday. Salafis chanted slogans criticising the ministry of interior for not protecting Sheikh El-Mahallawy, who was besieged in a mosque in Alexandria after reportedly urging worshippers to vote in favour of the draft constitution.

Salafis had the current leader Hamdeen Sabahi responsible for besieging the mosque.

Members of the Popular Current, responsible for monitoring the constitution referendum, were forced to move to Al-Karama Party headquarters as a result of the Salafi siege. The members moved again to an unknown office, after Salafis attacked Al-Wafid Party and newspaper, located near Al-Karama headquarters.

Director of Giza Investigations Authority Kamal El-Daly claimed it was supporters of Abu Ismail who attacked

Referendum campaigns resume

POLITICAL GROUPS RESUME THEIR CAMPAIGNS, FOLLOWING THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE FIRST ROUND OF THE REFERENDUM

By Rana Muhammad Taha

Following the first phase of the constitutional referendum political groups are looking ahead to the second stage.

Campaigns for and against the constitution continue, with political groups doing their best to raise awareness in the 17 governorates yet to vote. Some groups have picked up the pace of their campaigns, while others are sticking to their initial plans.

"We have so far distributed 60,000 flyers in Beheira, 35,000 in Kafr Al-Sheikh, 60,000 in Fayoum and 30,000 in Minya," Mohamed Adel, spokesperson of the 6 April movement (Ahmed Maher Front), said. Adel added that the movement's target is to distribute around 45,000 flyers per governorate.

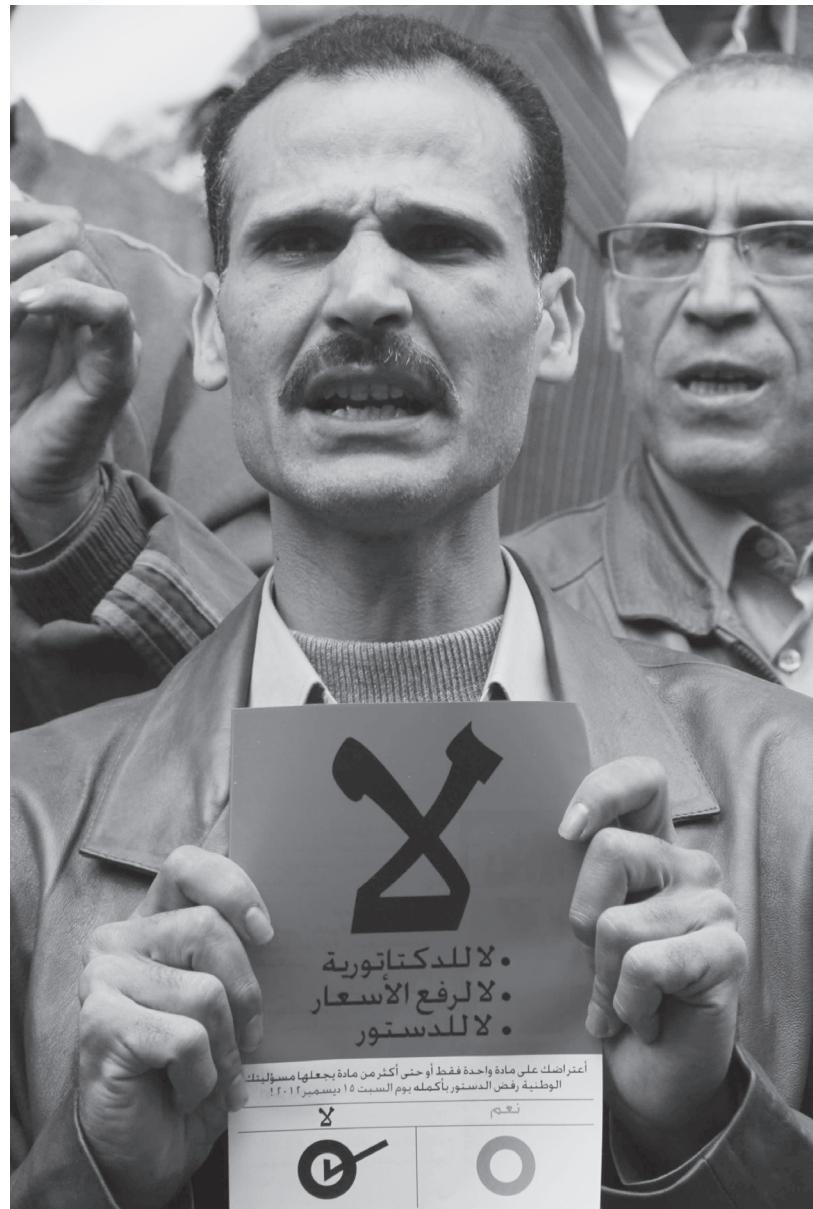
The flyers list reasons why voters should reject the draft constitution. Apart from the flyers, 6 April also arranges popular conferences where projectors are used to display videos about the constitution.

Strong Egypt Party (SEP) is also involved in anti-constitution campaigns. The party's spokesperson, Mohamed Al-Mohandess, stated that the SEP is present among the people in the same manner they adopted before the first round of the referendum.

"It will be difficult to shift the results of the referendum towards 'No' during the second phase," Al-Mohandess said, "but the difference in percentage between both votes is not that big; we shall do our best."

According to the Freedom and Justice party's count, preliminary results of the first stage suggest that "Yes" votes made up 56.5 per cent of the vote. The National Salvation Front (NSF) states that "No" votes made up 66.5 percent.

Al-Dostour Party, one of the NSF



Groups campaigning for a 'No' vote in the referendum are stepping up efforts across the country

members, is resuming their campaigns throughout the entire country, not just the remaining 17 governorates.

"We believe that the first phase of the referendum witnessed large-scale rigging," said Ahmed Al-Hawary,

member of Al-Dostour Party's steering committee. He added that the announced turn-out, almost 30 per cent, is disappointing. "While campaigning, we will call for repeating the first stage of the referendum."

Al-Dostour Party's campaign includes door to door visits and TV commercials. Al-Hawary stated that due to a tight budget, party members are usually forced to campaign at their own expense.

Pro-constitution campaigns are also moving forward. The FJP is still counting on their initial campaign, *With the Constitution, the Wheel of Production Will Spin*. The campaign mainly revolves around distributing copies of the draft constitution among the remaining 17 governorates (to counteract the alleged distribution of misleading counterfeit copies), as well as holding symposiums and popular meetings.

"Usually constituent assembly members, who drafted the constitution, attend our events," said Ahmed Sobey, FJP spokesperson.

Al-Nour party is also holding similar events to "enlighten" voters about the advantages of the constitution and answer to the "alleged shortcomings," stated party high board member Sha'ban Abdel Alim. He added that the party is now working at the same pace it has been throughout the campaigning process.

Al-Wasat Party is also campaigning in favour of the constitution, chiefly by holding workshops to educate its members and travelling the country.

"The members' morale has definitely improved now that we've won the first phase," Amr Farouk, the Al-Wasat Party's spokesperson, said, "it's like we've won the first half of the match."

The referendum on the constitution began 15 days after the draft was finalised, upon President Mohamed Morsy's decree. Several political groups, especially those in the NSF, reject the draft constitution and the swift referendum held on it.

the judges who are refusing to oversee the elections to monitor the second phase next Saturday, in order to limit violations.

Amin said a judge's refusal to monitor the referendum did not necessarily indicate a specific political orientation. "The judge is asking for conditions and guarantees to be met," Amin said, adding that judges refused to oversee elections during Mubarak's era for the same reasons.

Seif Al-Islam Hammad, from the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, said the problem was that it is not possible to tell who was at the polling stations. "We can only know from what the Supreme Electoral Committee says, despite our reservations on it," he said.

The proposed constitution was written by the Constituent Assembly, headed by Hossam El-Gheriary. He is also head of the National Council for Human Rights, which authorises election monitors. Bahy El-Din Hassan, the manager of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies said that many NGOs have boycotted the centre because "it's almost a human rights committee for the Freedom and Justice Party." The council said it issued 24,000 passes, but "to who exactly?" Hassan asked.

Hammad said the fact that Gheriary headed the assembly and council alone proves nothing on. The answer was for the council to publish lists of who applied for passes and who got them.

Hammad said transparency regarding the referendum and "providing information is very important so that the people can decide themselves."

"No one has said who supervised the referendum.... this makes it debatable," he said.

No transparency over referendum supervision experts say

Critics claim it is unclear who is monitoring the constitutional referendum

By Henda Kortam

Judges for Egypt has announced that it oversaw the first stage of the referendum held on Saturday, despite earlier statements to the contrary.

Zaghoul Al-Belshy, the secretary general of the Supreme Electoral Committee had said members of the judge's group would not be allowed to oversee the referendum. However members of the group did just that despite his statements, state-run Al-Ahram reported him saying.

Judges for Egypt is a group of judges seen as being affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Nasser Amin, head of the Arabic Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession, said some of the members of the group may have taken part in the overseeing process but their numbers were small and their participation is not likely to have an impact.

Amin said the government used the same methods that Mubarak used when it decided that members of judicial institutions would oversee the referendum. "Members of judicial institutions are not all judges. They could be just employees in judicial institutions or the Ministry of Judges," he said. "This has not been denied by the government."

Amin said there were very few judges overseeing the larger polling stations, which meant that they could not control them.

The Judges' Club on the other hand, earlier announced that most of its members would not monitor the referendum. It did however set up an operation room to assist the few judges from the club who took part in overseeing the voting process.

Magdy Abdel-Hamid, head of the Egyptian Association for Promoting Community Participation, called on

Constitution articles could be altered after voting lawsuit claims

Lawsuit questions legitimacy of referendum given absence of clear final constitutional draft

Former presidential candidate Khaled Ali filed a lawsuit Sunday demanding the constitutional referendum be halted.

The final draft of the constitution was neither printed in the official gazette nor included in the ballots. Accordingly, the lawsuit argues, the public don't know what they are voting on.

The lawsuit said if the constitution passes, it could be easily altered given that it hasn't been officially documented.

"The Constituent Assembly presented a number of drafts before producing the final one," Ali said. "Even when the final draft was submitted to the president, some Freedom and Justice Party [FJP] members claimed that tainted copies are being distributed to make the people reject the draft."

"When I saw the form of the ballot with the draft missing from it, I was shocked." He then refused to vote on the referendum and filed a complaint instead.

Printing a draft of the constitution was unnecessary, Ali said, as long as the full draft was attached with the voting ballot. Such was the case with the March 2011 referendum on constitutional amendments.

Ali said he had confirmed that the draft constitution was not printed in the official gazette.

"This has transformed from a referendum on constitutional articles to a referendum on identity and political affiliations," Ali said.

The suit was filed in the administrative courts, where Ali hoped a swift decision might be able to halt the referendum. "I expect the session to take place this Tuesday," Ali said.

Freedom and Justice Party legal adviser Mokhtar Al-Ashry denied any legal basis to Ali's complaint.

Al-Ashry said all Egyptians had had the chance to read the "genuine" draft of the constitution currently up to referendum.

"Al-Ahram distributed over 5 million copies of the constitution," Al-Ashry claimed. "The Constituent Assembly distributed another 5 million copies. That is beside the dozens of websites upon which the draft was uploaded, and the different TV channels which reviewed it."

Al-Ashry said Ali's suit was a final attempt to "stall stability" by any means possible.

"I would have rather Ali exerted more effort into rallying people to express his personal opinion instead of using the judiciary to stall the democratic path," Al-Ashry said, warning against involving the judiciary in political matters.

The first round of the referendum on the constitution started Saturday in 10 governorates. Numerous violations were reported by NGOs observing the referendum as well as by voters. The remaining 17 governorates will vote on the constitution next Saturday.

Supreme Constitutional Court besieged again

Judges prevented from entering the highest constitutional court in the country for the second time in a fortnight

By Joel Gulhane

Supporters of President Mohamed Morsy and the proposed constitution demonstrated outside the Supreme Constitutional Court on Sunday.

Demonstrators outside the court prevented the president of the court, Maher Al-Beihery from entering his office, reported state news agency MENA.

Waleed El-Haddad, a spokesperson for the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) denied that any members of his party were taking part in the demonstration on Sunday. He said "we do not condone any actions that prevent the judges from carrying out their work."

Ahmed Mawlawi, spokesperson for the Salafy Front Party also denied that any of its members were part of the demonstration.

The demonstration is a continuation of a sit-in, which began on 2 December in support of Morsy. This resulted in the court indefinitely suspending its operations, which included a scheduled hearing for cases challenging the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly and the Shura Council.

Lawyer Samir Sabry filed a complaint against Morsy and the FJP on 3 December, accusing them of being responsible for the sit-in and called for an investigation into the incident. El-Haddad did admit that some members of the FJP were part of the sit-in when it began but re-affirmed that the party objects to the sit-in and none of its members are currently taking part.

Al-Beihery has contacted the Cairo security directorate to inform it that judges had been prevented from entering the court, reported MENA.

Women critical of referendum process



Egyptian women queue at a polling station in central Cairo to cast votes on the proposed constitution

Continued from page 1

The Ombudsman's Office is a bilateral programme supported by both the NCW and the European Union. It acts as a go-between for professional lawyers and advocates at the NCW and the women of Egypt. In preparation for Saturday's vote, it set up a website, a fax line, a landline, and two mobile lines to receive complaints.

The complaints came flooding in. The Ombudsman's Office is a bilateral programme supported by both the NCW and the European Union. It acts as a go-between for professional lawyers and advocates at the NCW and the women of Egypt. In preparation for Saturday's vote, it set up a website, a fax line, a landline, and two mobile lines to receive complaints.

Moussa described the type of complaints received, "they didn't find their names in the list, others found that some other people signed for them and at some electoral committees there were no judges."

In addition to these complaints, there are issues unique to female voters. State-owned news agency MENA, reported incidents when veiled women were told to show their faces to

ensure their identity, but were not provided with a female judge to reveal themselves to.

Particularly vulnerable to manipulation were illiterate women. Moussa told the story of one woman who could not read so she asked the women next to her for assistance. "The second lady said, 'let's ask the judge.' When they went inside the judge dismissed both of their votes."

The NCW is by no means neutral. Moussa described it as "an entity that is working on women's rights, we reject this draft constitution." The organisation has stated that the constitution needs to include text to combat cultural traditions that are harmful to women, the criminalisation of denying women's inheritances and 40 per cent quotas for political representation, among other issues.

Both sides claim early referendum victory

Continued from page 1

Spokesperson for the NSF, Khaled Dawoud reported, "the figure published in the statement is an estimate from exit and opinion polls from 7pm [Saturday] night."

The FJP statement said the turnout for the referendum is an indicator for "the Egyptian desire to participate in the democratic process and shape the future after 25 January revolution." According to the figures printed in their statement, the turnout for the referendum was 31.5 per cent.

Waleed El-Haddad, a spokesperson for the FJP said, "we received our information directly from the polling stations and they are 95 per cent accurate." He added, "our results are the most accurate; they are from the judges, NGOs and the media."

In response to the NSF's statement

Dawoud refused to make any predictions for the second stage of voting but called on Morsy to postpone the referendum. He asserted the NSF's desire to take part in the second stage of the referendum. He said, "boycott has never been an option. We are strong and we can compete."

"I want to stress that there were serious violations during [Saturday's] vote and we are calling for a full investigation in to this."

The Brotherhood also released a statement congratulating the Egyptian people on a high turnout and encouraged people to vote freely. The statement warned of what the Brotherhood believe to be attempts by the media to influence voters urging them "not [to] listen or think about some of the media owned by the remnants of the former regime, which publish lies and slander the constitution."

Pakistan police battle militants after deadly airport raid

Peshawar, Pakistan (AFP) - Six people were killed Sunday as police and troops battled militants armed with automatic weapons, grenades and mortars in northwest Pakistan's Peshawar, a day after a deadly Taliban raid on the city's airport.

Fierce firing broke out after police acting on an intelligence report stormed a building near the airport, where a suicide and rocket attack on Saturday killed five civilians and the five attackers, and wounded 50 other people.

The assault late Saturday, claimed by the Pakistani Taliban, sparked prolonged gunfire and forced authorities to close the airport, a commercial hub and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) base in Peshawar on the edge of the tribal belt.

It was the second Islamist militant attack in four months on a military air base in nuclear-armed Pakistan. In August 11 people were killed when heavily-armed insurgents wearing suicide vests stormed a facility in the northwestern town of Kamra.

Police backed by troops launched a raid early Sunday on a building under construction near the airport following reports that five militants who

fled after the airport attack had taken refuge there, according to Provincial Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain.

In the fierce shootout that followed, three militants and a policeman were killed, police said, while two other officers were wounded.

The clashes ended after six hours when the two remaining militants detonated their suicide vests inside the building, another senior police officer, Imtiaz Altaf, told AFP.

"All five militants are dead now and the area has been cleared," Altaf said.

"All of them were wearing suicide jackets. Three were killed in a shoot out with police, while two others blew themselves up in the under construction building."

A PAF statement said five attackers were killed on Saturday and no damage was done to air force personnel or equipment.

Doctor Umar Ayub, chief of Khyber Teaching Hospital near the airport, said five civilians had also been killed and some 50 wounded.

"The base is in total control and normal operations have resumed. The security alert was also raised on other PAF air bases as well," the air force added.

The air force said Saturday's attackers used two vehicles loaded with



Pakistani policemen carry away collected evidence after a gun battle with Taliban militants in Peshawar

Peshawar airport is a joint military-civilian facility. Civil Aviation Authority spokesman Pervaiz George said the passenger side had reopened after an 18-hour closure and there was no damage to the terminals.

The air force said Saturday's attackers used two vehicles loaded with

explosives, hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. One vehicle was destroyed and the second badly damaged.

Security forces found three suicide jackets near one of the vehicles, it said.

"Security forces consisting of Pakistan Air Force and Army personnel

who were on full alert, cordoned off the base and effectively repulsed the attack," the air force said.

Television pictures showed a vehicle with a smashed windscreens, another damaged car, bushes on fire and what appeared to be a large breach in a wall.

Five nearby houses were destroyed after rockets landed on them and several other houses developed cracks, while the bomb squad detonated five out of eight bombs found near the base after the attack.

Pakistani Taliban spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan told AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location that the group would continue to target the airport.

"Our target was jet fighter planes and gunship helicopters and soon we will target them again," he said.

The armed forces have been waging a bloody campaign against the Taliban in the country's northwest in recent years and the militants frequently attack military targets.

Aside from the August attack on Kamra, in May 2011 it took 17 hours to quell an assault claimed by the Taliban on an air base in Karachi. The attack piled embarrassment on the armed forces just three weeks after US troops killed Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

Pakistan says more than 35,000 people have been killed as a result of terrorism in the country since the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Its forces have for years been battling home-grown militants in the northwest.

Lieberman resignation a gamble: Israel media

Jerusalem (AFP) - Avigdor Lieberman is hoping for a quick return to government after resigning as Israel's foreign minister over corruption charges, but his bid for a speedy resolution could be a gamble, Israeli media said Sunday.

On Sunday morning, Lieberman officially submitted his resignation after informally announcing it on Friday, a day after the attorney general decided to charge the ultranationalist leader with fraud and breach of trust offences.

The resignation takes effect within 48 hours, but Lieberman made clear he did not expect to be out of government for long.

"I'm leaving the government very temporarily... I hope that my trial will be quick, it's the right way," he said, adding that he would not "rule out" any resolution, including a plea bargain with the attorney general.

Lieberman's resignation from the government still leaves him with his Knesset seat, and he will stand in a snap 22 January general election, paving the way for a return to government if he can quickly resolve the case against him.

"He's going, so as to return," the top-selling *Yediot Aharonot* wrote. "He understood that to be a member of the next cabinet he must deal as quickly as possible with the charges against him."

"Lieberman is counting on a friendly legal system... but he could just find himself in for a nasty surprise"

Much of the media speculated that Lieberman would try to reach a deal.

"He is seeking a quick and easy plea bargain that would let him off with almost nothing and would bring him back into the cabinet within a few months, where he will choose whatever portfolio he desires; defence, foreign affairs or finance," the left-leaning *Haaretz* newspaper wrote in an editorial.

The daily pointed out that Lieberman's main concern will be to avoid a conviction with a finding of "moral

turpitude" and imprisonment, which could prevent him from returning to parliament.

"Lieberman is not worried about a conviction, but the severity and type of moral turpitude that might be attached to it," the editorial said.

Israeli legal precedent means that a person convicted of a crime with a finding of "moral turpitude" attached to it, as well as a prison sentence, must wait seven years before returning to court.

For now, Lieberman remains head of the rightwing *Yisrael Beiteinu* party, which is running on a joint list with the Likud party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the election.

Polls put the list far ahead of the opposition, with the latest numbers taken before Lieberman's resignation showing them garnering around 38 of the Knesset's 120 seats.

It was not yet clear whether the indictment had hurt the list's chances, though a poll in *Yediot Aharonot* on Sunday showed 78 per cent of Israelis felt the level of corruption in their governing institutions was "high or very high."

"The ideal situation for him [Lieberman] is to put an end to this entire affair before the elections on 22 January," wrote commentator Shalom Yerushalmi in the *Maariv* daily.

"To wit, to lift his immunity, to sign a convenient plea bargain agreement, to take a light sentence and to start over as a relatively clean foreign minister."

Law professor Suzan Navot, also writing in *Maariv*, warned that holding a trial by 22 January would be "complex," deeming it "doubtful" that a court would agree to clear its schedule to help speed up the proceedings.

Reaching a plea deal would require court approval, and still contained no guarantee of a resolution before the election, she wrote.

Yerushalmi pointed out that Lieberman's plan to seek a speedy resolution of the case was something of a gamble, noting that he could find himself out in the cold if the legal process drags on, or the final conviction has a moral turpitude finding attached to it.

"Lieberman is counting on a friendly legal system," he wrote. "That is a good bet, but he could just find himself in for a nasty surprise."

RUSSIA-PUTIN-OPPOSITION-PROTEST

Russia frees protesters after anti-Putin rally

Moscow (AFP) - Russian police said Sunday they had released some 40 people detained during a banned protest against Vladimir Putin, including opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

nearly equal to the annual average salary in Russia.

According to police, 700 people showed up, over 300 of them journalists and bloggers. Participants say a few thousand poured into the square, many of them with flowers they laid at a monument to victims of Stalin-era purges.

Udalov said some 5,000 were in attendance.

Observers say the opposition movement is struggling to maintain momentum in the face of the authorities' tough crackdown on dissenters since Putin's return to the Kremlin in May and internal divisions between liberals, leftists and nationalists.

Up to 120,000 people gathered near the Kremlin walls at the peak of the protests last winter.

While some observers said Saturday's rally proved that many people were undeterred by the threat of heavy fines, others called it a disappointment and a blow to the opposition movement.

"The rally was an absolute mistake," political observer Yulia Latynina said on Echo of Moscow radio.

The opposition, she said, had taken unnecessary risks by urging people to show up at the unauthorised rally and was fortunate that the protest had not ended in violent clashes.

Scores of activists are facing jail time for taking part in 6 May protests on the eve of Putin's inauguration for his third term as president.

Political turmoil marks Iraq's first post-US year

Baghdad (AFP) - In the space of a year since the departure of United States forces, Iraq has faced political turmoil including calls to remove the premier, a top official being sentenced to death and rising Arab-Kurd tensions.

Disputes among Iraqi politicians escalated as US troops departed on 18 December, ending a nearly nine-year war that cost the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis, thousands of Americans and hundreds of billions of dollars.

The continual conflicts among top politicians show Iraq has still not achieved the political reconciliation that American officials hoped would accompany the 2007-2008 surge of US troops, which helped to bring rampant bloodshed in Iraq under a semblance of control.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned Iraq political leaders about the negative impact of their strained relations on both governance and security during a December visit to Baghdad.

And while Iraqi security forces have held their own in their first full year without US troops to support them, they still face shortcomings and insurgent attacks remain common.

In the past year, members of the secular, Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc boycotted parliament and the cabinet, the president of the autonomous Kurdistan region, Massud Barzani, repeatedly sparred with Prime Minister



Iraqi policemen check a vehicle at a checkpoint on a road leading to Baghdad airport

Nouri Al-Maliki, and powerful Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr also criticised the premier.

Opposition to Maliki among members of his less-than-unified national unity government ultimately escalated into calls for him to be removed from power, but his opponents lacked the parliamentary votes to do so.

Authorities also issued an arrest warrant for Vice-President Tareq Al-Hashemi, a Sunni member of Iraqiya, who fled the country and insists the charges are politically motivated.

He has since been given multiple death sentences in absentia for crimes including murder.

The Kurdish region meanwhile drew Baghdad's ire by making oil deals with foreign firms without federal ap-

proval, and halted its oil exports via the federal government for more than four months over a payments dispute.

And capping a year of turmoil, a deadly shootout during an attempt by Iraqi forces to arrest a Kurdish man and the establishment of a new federal military command covering disputed territory have led to high Arab-Kurd tensions in north Iraq, with both Baghdad and Kurdistan deploying military reinforcements.

Ban told heads of Iraqi political blocs that poor relations among Iraqi leaders are a problem that "hampers the adoption of necessary reforms and constitutionally mandated legislation. It impedes effective governance, the delivery of services and the fair distribution of resources."

"Above all, I worry that increased political polarisation could stoke sectarian violence and reverse the precious security gains against terrorism in recent years," Ban said.

Iraqi security forces have held their own since the US withdrawal, with the number of people killed in the first 11 months of 2012 less than the same period the year before, according to Iraqi government figures.

"The security situation has remained largely unchanged, despite the withdrawal of American troops. This in itself is a remarkable achievement," said Joost Hiltermann, deputy director of the International Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa programme.

But insurgent groups remain a threat, carrying out attacks in Iraq almost every day that kill well over 100 people per month and wound many more.

And "the security forces' main deficiencies - poor intelligence coordination, poor logistics support, mutual distrust - remain unresolved," Hiltermann said.

Iraq has only limited naval forces, and will have an air defence gap until it receives F-16 jets it has ordered from the US, which Washington has said will not begin to be delivered until 2014.

Iraq also faces a looming long-term security threat from civil war-racked Syria to the west.

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Traders differ on the impact of EGP devaluation

EXPORTERS SEE OPPORTUNITY WHILE IMPORTERS SEE A DISASTER IN DEVALUATION OF CURRENCY

By Mohamed SalahEldin

The continuing increase of the US dollar has cast a shadow on several sectors of the economy but investors disagree on the evaluation of currency fluctuation.

The Egyptian pound recently lost five piastras against the US dollar, which reached 617 piastras in inter-bank transactions last week, while it was sold to individuals at 619 piastras on Thursday.

The scarcity of US dollars is explained by the inability of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) to intervene, in light of its foreign reserves which have dwindled to \$15 billion and its obligation to repay \$1 billion of Egypt's external debt which matures at the end of December.

Theoretically, the increase in foreign currency price should have an impact on imports, as it increases imports prices and hence lowers overall imports, which should have a positive impact on the balance of trade.

However, the head of the Importers Division Ahmed Shihha said, "this is not accurate. Egyptian industry depends totally on imported raw materials; refrigerators, washing

machines, LCD screens, while other industries have the majority of their components imported, the industry will not dispense imports."

Stabilising the exchange rate will not be achieved by a single decision according to Shihha: "It's a whole system; political stability will attract foreign investment and tourists back to Egypt." The prosecution of business men on the other hand would only scare away potential investors and convey a negative message to the outside world that "we will fight incoming investors."

The tourism sector is deeply affected by the current instability. Tourism workers are idle and the majority of Christmas reservations have been cancelled according to the head of the Importers Division who added, "I think this government will not be able to achieve anything. I call upon President Morsy to appoint a strong government with people who have a good reputation and good foreign relations, like the former Minister of Industry and Commerce Rashid Mohamed Rashid."

"When stability is achieved, dollars will flow in" said Shihha. "The other side of investment is stability, the lack of it drives investors to neighbour-

ing countries like Lebanon, Jordan or Saudi Arabia which offer free factories for entrepreneurs."

The businessman denied that Saturday's referendum on the draft constitution would bring stability. So far about half of voters appear to be against the constitution, many of its articles are controversial, including those that address the economic system, and fraud allegations threaten the credibility of the referendum.

Shihha expects the US dollar exchange rate to continue to increase in the near future. If the government doesn't take the appropriate measures, it may exceed seven pounds per dollar within a month, he speculated, noting that the current foreign reserves are not enough to finance three months of food imports.

The upturn of the dollar is seen differently by exporters, whose products will have better access to foreign markets thanks to a relative price decrease.

"The increase is not dangerous," said the former chairman of the readymade garments export council, Magdy Tolba. "This trend is economically positive; it promotes imports, and renders Egypt a more attractive touristic destination being less expensive."

A five to 10 per cent movement of exchange rate will not harm the market.

"Reducing imports is required because we have been witnessing an importation extravagance, the bill is huge," continued Tolba. "We have to pressure imports and fix the trade deficit by moving the exchange rate in a certain limit, and under the supervision of the Central Bank to see the real value of the pound and to increase the credibility of our economy in front of international institutions and donor countries".

To overcome the negative consequences of the currency losing value, Tolba suggests an integrated package of reforms. The government must take serious steps to increase the depth and integrity of industry, and give incentives to manufacturers, in the field of textiles for example, to amplify the locally produced component.

On the other hand, Tolba criticised what he called "negative" industries that have a majority of imported components, like cars. He emphasised the importance of having an added value measurement in each sector and each branch inside the sector, to identify the sectors with highest value added and promote them.

Investors postpone Egypt visits due to political unrest

Business councils have pushed back meetings until political dust settles

By Ahmed Salama

Business councils have cancelled meetings with foreign investors as a result of the political deadlock and instability surrounding the constitutional declaration.

An Ethiopian delegation postponed its trip to Egypt to an undetermined date, as well as a conference it was scheduled to hold entitled, Rebuilding Sinai. This came in addition to several Turkish and Qatari delegates postponed their investments in the country, as part of a larger move by nearly all business associations to do the same.

"The Rebuilding Sinai conference was cancelled because of the perpetual state of division that Egypt has found itself in, since voting on the referendum began," said the President of the North Sinai Investors Association, Tamer El-Shorbagi. "All parties involved agreed to push the conference back to an unnamed date." Aymen Eissa, president of the Egyptian-Ethiopian Business Council, said this was not the first time the Ethiopian delegation had cancelled its

trip, and he didn't see the situation improving in the coming months.

"Egyptians have not been meeting with their Qatari counterparts because of a lack of stability in the country," said the Secretary General for the Council of Egyptian-Qatari Businessmen, Adel Rahouma.

Fayez Ezz El-Din, president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Cairo, said that a number of companies who have gold drilling contracts in Egypt would be ready to pump money into the economy if not for the unstable political situation. He added that these companies would renew their investments once a clear political vision has been laid out.

Ahmed Galal, representative of the Turkish MUSIAD organisation in Egypt, said the group has postponed its City Scape, Next Move exhibition that was scheduled to be held 18 December. He added that this was the second time the conference had been postponed and that the political environment in Egypt has led many Turkish companies to delay their investments.

Government offers land for wind energy projects

By Mohamed Adel

The New and Renewable Energy Authority (NREA) will soon offer 7,622 sq km of land for private sector investors to begin work on energy development projects under the Build, Operate, Transfer (BOT) scheme.

Laila Georgy, the NREA executive chairman, stated that a bid round would be held for the rights to construct wind energy stations on land in the Gulf of Suez (1222 sq km), West Nile (4200 sq km) and East Nile (2200 sq km) regions.

The NREA would require investors to sell their electricity to private sector companies without government guarantees that this electricity would be purchased.

The government has decided to set aside this land for construction of new and renewable energy stations to be executed by either the public or the private sector. Land would be sold to private companies for a small fee under the BOT scheme, granting them use for anywhere between 20



Wind turbines like these could one day stud the Gulf of Suez

to 25 years. Products used by private companies in the production of renewable energy sources would not be subject to taxes or customs duties.

A committee formed within the High Council of Energy tasked with seeking out development projects involved in the production of elec-

tric energy is currently discussing the issue of the government's inability to provide guarantees to private sector companies regarding the purchase of electric energy.

Georgy said she has recently joined this committee and hopes to reach an agreement with the parties in-

volved regarding government guarantees of purchase.

The NREA is currently reviewing a feasibility study for two projects in the Gulf of Suez, one in conjunction with the German Reconstruction Bank, the French Development Bank, the European Investment

Bank and European Commission, that would produce 200 MW of energy.

Regarding plans to build 85 MW wind farms in the city of Zafrana, the NREA requested the Spanish company tasked with building these farms amend some aspects of its contract

before taking over construction.

Georgy added that the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation was currently using solar energy to power small villages far from the country's main energy grid, adding that the NREA was able to provide energy to villages within 600 km of the electrical network located off the 4.5 km Suez road.

The NREA sought to involve Egyptian banks and investors in the plans to develop new and renewable energy in the coming months.

Georgy added that the cost of producing new and renewable energy was between 5 and 6 cents per kWh, and that wind energy was currently cheaper to produce than solar.

She also discussed plans to fund a 200 MW plant in conjunction with the German Reconstruction Bank, European Investment Bank and European Commission and to have their Egyptian counterparts represented in the NREA. Plans to build a 220 MW plant are also under way with the Japanese government.

Daily EGX30 index performance

Company Name	Reuters Code	Sector	Last Price	Close Price	Returns		Daily Performance		Turn Over (EGP Mill.)	Volume Trade	Market Cap. (EGP Mill.)
					Daily	YTD	12-Mths.	Max. Price			
Commercial Bank	COMI	Banks	34.35	34.08	3.65%	82.25%	57.41%	34.50	33.40	36.13	1,060,269 19,636.84
NSGB	NSGB	Banks	34.24	33.77	-4.71%	66.27%	51.78%	38.98	33.02	17.801	527,075 15,718.91
Ezz Steel	ESRS	Basic Resources	9.99	9.74	-4.28%	161.13%	105.92%	10.00	9.30	17.90	1,838,373 5,074.10
ELSWEDY ELECTRIC	SWDY	Industrial Goods and Services and Automobiles	22.23	22.22	1.0%	7.14%	-0.54%	22.75	22.00	0.466	20,984 4,910.73
MRRIDIVE	MOIL	Industrial Goods and Services and Automobiles	1.13	1.12	4.67%	-9.33%	-16.24%	1.14	1.09	7.63	1,109,358 383.93
AIC Contracting	AIND	Financial Services excluding Banks	0.48	0.47	2.17%	-9.62%	-14.55%	0.48	0.46	2.987	6,350,548 245.93
Amer Group Holding	AMER	Financial Services excluding Banks	0.73	0.73	1.39%	32.73%	12.31%	0.74	0.72	8.38	11,464,818 2,188.58
EK Holding	EKHO	Financial Services excluding Banks	1.17	1.16	2.65%	18.37%	12.62%	1.18	1.15	2.111	293,820 948.40
EFG-Hermes	HRHO	Financial Services excluding Banks	10.94	10.84	2.85%	8.29%	6.27%	11.05	10.59	20.03	1,848,114 5,041.23
Pioneers Holding	PIOH	Financial Services excluding Banks	4.39	4.29	3.87%	93.24%	63.12%	4.41	4.12	11.971	2,790,378 2,065.00
Citadel Capital	CCAP	Financial Services excluding Banks	3.53	3.48	3.26%	36.47%	20.83%	3.56	3.35	10.11	2,907,922 2,203.03
Raya Holding	RAYA	Technology	5.30	5.26	3.54%	51.15%	37.70%	5.38	5.00	3.262	620,250 326.26
Telecom Egypt	ETEL	Telecommunications	12.97	13.02	1.56%	-1.44%	-6.73%	13.10	12.86	2.15	164,885 21,884.66
Orascom Telecom Media And Technology	OTMT	Telecommunications	0.56	0.55	1.85%	59.30%	59.30%	0.56	0.53	19.812	36,054,195 2,832.67
Orascom Telecom	ORTE	Telecommunications	3.82	3.84	1.32%	122.17%	122.17%	3.87	3.77	30.45	7,937,732 19,881.17
Sidi Kerir Petrochemicals	SKPC	Chemicals	13.08	13.01	1.72%	9.24%	4.08%	13.17	12.80	1.139	87,575 6,714.75
Egyptian Financial and Industrial	EFIC	Chemicals	9.82	9.67	3.98%	8.53%	6.97%	9.85	9.30	3.86	399,446 644.51
AMOC	AMOC	Oil and Gas	74.80	73.92	0.03%	10.43%	8.39%	74.80	70.11	0.360	4,867 6,362.79
Juhayna Food Industries	JUFO	Food and Beverage	7.09	7.00	4.63%	79.49%	66.67%	7.15	6.72	2.46	350,881 4,723.50
Orascom Construction Industries (OCI)	OCIC	Construction and Materials	254.55	252.06	3.61%	25.31%	18.87%	255.35	243.80	23.760	94,266 50,830.54
Delta Construction & Rebuilding	DCRC	Construction and Materials	6.46	6.32	4.46%	-17.82%	-27.44%	6.52	6.10	1.78	281,998 139.79
Modern Co. For Water Proofing	WATP	Construction and Materials	1.85	1.79	4.07%	-22.17%	-19.73%	1.86	1.74	2.482	1,383,539 175.44
Palm Hills	PHDC	Real Estate	2.35	2.33	4.48%	113.76%	89.43%	2.39	2.22	53.23	22,846,105 2,337.75
TMG Holding	TMGH	Real Estate	4.35	4.27	2.89%	44.26%	23.77%	4.40	4.15	24.325	5,691,461 8,563.78
National Real Estate Bank	NRPD	Real Estate	20.26	20.13	9.28%	2.60%	-9.97%	20.26	19.00	3.00	149,283 71.89
Six of October	OCDI	Real Estate	19.70	19.43	3.57%	143.79%	98.67%	19.79	18.90</		

The referendum and then what?

What next?
Hassan Nafaa
Al-Masry Al-Youn newspaper



Nafaa asks what will come after the constitutional referendum. Regardless of the result, the writer denounces the political polarisation produced by the vote. Tens of thousands were driven into the street to either support or oppose President Morsy, the result of which was hundreds injured and dozens killed. This climate has weakened the mutual trust between the presidency and the judiciary, particularly after Morsy sacked former Prosecutor General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud. Egyptians are now confused, says the writer. They want to know who is really in charge in the palace.

Looking ahead to parliamentary elections, Nafaa has little hope for a transparent vote, keeping in mind the experience in the constitutional referendum so far. Nafaa, however, suggests a number of proposals to solve the current dilemma. He calls on Morsy to immediately dismiss the current government and appoint a new cabinet to work towards national accord. The writer also advises Morsy to make a decision to ban political protests for at least six months, to pave the way for the new government to pursue national unity. He finally recommends the new cabinet should be the only

Egyptians are at the edge of their seat to know the results of Saturday's constitutional referendum. Columnists wonder how Egyptians will behave in the coming months, taking punts on what comes next.

institution responsible for supervising the upcoming parliamentary elections.

The referendum is poison
Wael Qandil
Al-Shorouk newspaper



It seems the current Egyptian opposition did not learn their lessons under Mubarak, writes Qandil. He criticises the opposition's changeable position towards political developments. The 25 January revolution has always been exceptional for its unified slogans, but now opposition groups are changing their demands regularly. As thousands of protesters surrounded the Presidential Palace to denounce the 21 November constitutional declaration, they unexpectedly changed their position after it was cancelled and started calling for the cancellation of the referendum instead.

After they had completely opposed the constitution, the writer wonders how the opposition could then call upon Egyptians to queue up to vote "No". If they disagree on the constitution, the writer believes it is illogical to campaign for or against the idea of voting. Believing in the opposition, Qandil was disappointed to hear different slogans chanted in separate marches against Morsy. Some chant against the constitutional declaration, others

against the constitutional referendum and others against Morsy himself. Unlike the situation in the 2011 uprising, the opposition today is fractured.

The new terrorism
Fahmy Howeidy
Al-Shorouk newspaper



Howeidy warns of a new type of terrorism threatening our polarised society. Egyptians are viewing each other as enemies. The recent clashes have shown that the community is sinking into fear and confusion. Howeidy says fearing authority would be preferable to fearing society itself. Egyptians were more united under Mubarak. Howeidy believes, although they were deprived of their rights to freely express their opinions. Now that Morsy rules the country, people are facing off violently.

Howeidy says Egyptians are not afraid of state institutions as they used to be. He explains that during Mubarak's reign, everybody was afraid of the government. Today, even the police forces are not a source of fear. Egyptians fear each other instead. The long years of authoritarianism managed to oppress Egyptians. Now though, this dictatorship has led them to fight each other and to produce an advanced stage of terrorism; societal terrorism.

Post Bashar Syria: Local, Global and Regional Players.

The United States has probably started on the bad side of Syria by putting "Al-Nusra Front" on the list of terrorist organisations. There are legitimate concerns that neighbouring countries have fears of the west destabilising an already volatile region. However, insisting on delegitimising Al-Nusra will only complicate matters worse.

The world did nothing; it just stood by as Syria was being pounded by Bashar armies and watched as civilians were being killed on a daily basis. For a long time, Syrian revolutionaries and its oppositional figures in exile had been asking for western and Arab intervention, even if only in the form of a creating a no fly zone.

Syrians insistently kept asking for help from western powers, the United Nations and other Arab states, even aiming their themed protests at Russia, but their calls were completely ignored. Eventually, Syrians lost hope of any tangible foreign intervention, including Russia, China and Iran observing the conflict with a sense of humanity. Syrians became solely dependent on their poorly equipped civilians-turned-amateur soldiers. It is understandable that the conflict has extremely high risks for any foreign direct intervention, given its global proponents.

The Al-Nusra Front has turned itself into a household name, being one of the most organised, most disciplined and effective groups, thus attaining popular support. Al-Nusra has been able to gain key strategic, heavily secured areas, including at least one military airport. They are also well known for leaving behind all civilian valuables after battles, along with their black flags and showy videos of their achievements. Unlike some other rebel groups, Al-Nusra has zero tolerance for corruption in its ranks. It does not profit from this war and is not locally associated with Al-Qaeda.

It is no wonder then, that 29 oppo-

sitional groups have signed a petition calling for protests in support of Al-Nusra, groups which included rebel brigades and civilian committees. Friday 14 December, witnessed mass protests in every Syrian province calling the day, "No terrorism in Syria except Bashar's Terrorism," which was a direct reply to the American administration.

In Morocco's latest Arab meeting regarding Syria's turmoil, many who spoke with Al Jazeera said the U.S. administration's latest statements on Al-Nusra were unwise and unacceptable to the Syrian people. This included Wael Merza, Secretary of the Syrian National Council, who spoke to Al Jazeera.

The latest move by the U.S. is largely seen as a last moment attempt to meddle with the outcome of the Syrian crisis. It is in everyone's interest for it to be a peaceful transition. Although those on the ground will have the final say. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely the oppressed Sunni majority which has seen the highest death tolls in this revolution will settle for a half-hearted position in post-Bashar Syria.

The Russian Federation has certainly been delusional the whole time, until recently; when formal statements have been frank about the upcoming loss of their tyrant ally. Russia certainly had its chance, early on in the revolution, to withhold its support for Bashar when it met with Syrian oppositional figures.

It would not be farfetched to say Russia may well have lost everything in Syria, including the possibility of keeping its naval base in Tartous. Perhaps the only card Russia can use to its advantage is intelligence about Syria's chemical weapons, if it has any that is.

Jordan, which is already on the verge of a revolution, has quickly taken an initiative it is wary of in Syria. In Amman on 15 December, "The Free National Union" announced its formation and aims to work with other oppositional groups. The Union is headed by ex-

members of the Syrian regime including former Prime Minister Riyad Hijab. It is highly unlikely that emboldened Syrian revolutionaries will accept this gathering since it is mostly comprised of previous pro-Bashar, recently-turned-dissidents; given that Jordan is already on the opposite side of the Arab Spring and the negative experiences of the Arab Spring countries with previous regime cronies.

It is probably best for the US to stay away from direct intervention in the conflict and let Turkey, Qatar and other Arab states settle Syria for a transition that is acceptable to its people and producing a system that will stabilise the country and guarantee Syria does not export any woes to its neighbouring countries.

As Bashar is about to face his demise, either fleeing or getting killed; the coming days will show how the scattered groups will solidify into bigger organised gatherings. The region is certainly volatile and it is crucial that the appropriate mediators intervene and do not allow inappropriate ones to be part of the problem.

Mustafa Salama is a political researcher and freelance journalist. He has an extensive academic background on Islamist movements and Middle East affairs. Salama holds a bachelor's and master's degree in political science from the American University in Cairo



MUSTAFA SALAMA

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The other Islam

Before the 25 January revolution,

shock but also lose the hope that had I obtained after the fall of the Mubarak regime.

The loss of hope that I speak of is not the result of the actions of one person or even a group of people who seek to present themselves as model Muslims. It is the result of a general air of hostility propagated by many elements of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis and jihadis alike. Curses and accusations labeling other Egyptians as infidels, liars and agents of foreign powers have unfortunately become tiresome and common.

That being said, in the early days of the revolution it was hard for me to join in the chants of others shouting that "the army and the people are one hand," and it wasn't long before I began to feel disgusted when I heard of the crimes committed by the army. Starting with the forcible removal of people from Tahrir Square just two weeks after Mubarak's resignation, these crimes slowly began to include forced virginity checks for female prisoners, and the conversion of the Egyptian museum into a makeshift torture chamber.

When one compares the circumstances of this period to those of other countries who have gone through similar transitions, it became clear that the army had become the third, hidden hand in Egyptian politics.

Today, my shock stems from the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis and those who generally label themselves as "Islamists," as they are somehow able to pull off the use of violence while at the same time convincing others through their words that they are in fact the defenders of righteousness.

However what I have witnessed recently causes me to not only feel



GAMAL EID

benefit is entirely different than that advocated for by the Prophet Muhammad.

The religion of the Prophet was a humble one, which encouraged positive rhetoric that was both forgiving and encouraging, as opposed to the words of Islamists today which are the source of slander and abuse.

The Prophet was a man who lived up to his promises and did not lie, whereas Islamists today are advocates of division, actively engaged in clouding the judgement of those who follow them.

I am against violence in all its forms, however even if I was the kind of person who felt its use was sometimes justified, I would still be shocked to hear the rhetoric coming from the mouths of Islamists. This rhetoric contradicts the values of their faith and until now was usually only heard amongst the lowest sectors of society.

However despite all this, I would prefer to remain as someone who is shocked at the existence of this brand of Islamist, as opposed to being complicit in the notion that it is natural for our religion to be used as a mechanism to divide people and sow the seeds of discontent.

Gamal Eid is a human rights lawyer

REBEL ECONOMY WRAP

Egypt's constitution and why the wheel won't turn

Early results in Egypt's referendum on a draft constitution put supporters in a narrow lead, with an unofficial tally placing backers of the charter at 56.5 per cent of the vote.

Though voting will continue in other parts of Egypt next week, Saturday's vote is important because it represents Cairo and Alexandria, the nation's two biggest cities. These areas represent the stronghold of the opposition to the constitution.

Conflicting results from the Muslim Brotherhood and the main opposition umbrella group, the National Salvation Front, both claimed victory. However in past votes, the Brotherhood's preliminary numbers have closely matched final results. All will be announced after the 22 December second round vote.

Yesterday's figures show the referendum is likely to be passed and the challenge now rests with the country's President Mohamed Morsy, who has already undermined confidence in the democratic transition and the economy. He campaigned with billboards that read: "With the constitution, the wheel will turn". But reality paints a different picture.

The most punishing challenges are ahead for Morsy:

Morsy's mandate will be slim and he will find himself in an untenable position at times when tough austerity measures will be harder to enforce without serious backlash. His

credibility is already wavering with a large part of Egypt because of his decision to hold a referendum without the support of the opposition.

Morsy is weaker than he has ever been. Every day that passes, the president makes a move that is met with resounding protest and opposition.

His backflip over tax reforms and the International Monetary Fund loan have only offered proof to his critics that he is not presidential material. This is not necessarily because of the nature of the reforms but how he chooses to deliver the message, that is, almost always in a void with little communication and explanation to the public.

In the streets, chants of "Get out Kairat Al-Shater" can be heard. It is reminiscent of the protests last year against Mubarak's gang of corrupt businessmen including Ahmed Ezz. There are mounting concerns over Morsy's clique, especially Al Shater, a Brotherhood businessman who appears to have a great influence over the country, but who remains a mystery to most. Transparency is not Al Shater's strong point.

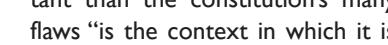
Finally, the constitution itself has raised questions over how the Egyptian economy will run. Improved labour rights and the extent to which these are addressed in the constitution, and the dominant interpretation of Islamic Shari'a and how this could influence banking and finance are major queries. Yet more import-

tant than the constitution's many flaws is the context in which it is being proposed," as discussed in a recent Economist article.

When Mr Morsy captured the presidency in June by a slim margin, he signalled magnanimity by formally quitting the Muslim Brotherhood and appointing a largely technocratic government. Egyptians cheered in August when he removed the domineering generals who had shakily guided the post-revolutionary transition.

But Mr Morsy has proven equally erratic and domineering. The Brotherhood, meanwhile, has infiltrated state institutions. It has tried to shape the message of the state-owned press, arranged for its members to distribute government-subsidised goods, and quietly scaled back family-planning programmes.

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FARAH HALIME

When the dust settles in Gaza

THE CONTINUING BATTLES OF AN INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST IN PALESTINE

By Connor Molloy

Ebaa Rezeq paused for a moment as the cappuccino machine hissed behind her in the Gaza cafe. She spoke to the bartender in Arabic, making sure he was finished before we started our interview. "Okay? Khalas hek? Teman?" she said to the barista. Turning back to her computer she said, "awesome. We can start."

Ebaa lives, studies, and is politically active in the Gaza Strip. She is not a militant. She is not affiliated with either of the two largest parties, Hamas or Fatah. Neither is she an apologist for the Israeli occupation and the international complicity that keeps her hemmed in by the sea on one side and walls and gun turrets on the other.

She studies English and French literature at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. Outside the classroom she is a friend, daughter and sister. And uncompromising opponent of the Israeli siege, the duelling Palestinian governments, and the flaccid international community.

"This is what makes the situation for us here as Palestinians harder than anywhere else," said Ebaa. "Here you have your local authorities, and it's not only one government its two governments. Then you have the Israeli occupation. Then at the same time you have the siege imposed on Gaza. Sometimes it's really hard, even for us Palestinians to understand the reality of where we are living or how to deal with it."

She wanted to explain life under siege, but had trouble. "You can't touch it, you can't see it. It's not on the land but it's surrounding you from everywhere else."

"It's like you're trapped in this teeny-tiny area and you can't see your enemy and you can't deal with it, but it's controlling you from 'up there.' It's like a movie you know? It's really close to this Jim Carrey movie, The Truman Show."

In 2005, in the last year of Ariel Sharon's premiership, Israel pulled all their settlers and soldiers out of the Gaza Strip. But, Ebaa said, the perception of freedom is deceptive. "They tell you 'you are free, you have the freedom to control your borders, to move in and out and so on,' but it's just a lie. It makes it even harder for you to survive the day."

Battle number one: Ebaa versus Hamas and Fatah

Ebaa called Hamas and Fatah, the ruling political factions of Gaza and the West Bank respectively, the two dictators. "For me, personally, I think they are just two faces of the same coin; they're no different."

Despite this, Ebaa was part of a loosely knit coalition of activists, including Hamas and Fatah youth, that came together on 15 March 2011 to call for national unity.

While the protesters were in the Gaza streets, Hamas security infiltrated the group and beat many of them.

"That was a very wrong call from the youth movements to do that," Ebaa said. "Why would you be calling for the freedoms of speech and expression and so on by bringing the two dictators back together?"

Since then it has become routine for youth activists to be harassed, and in the West Bank it is no different.

"The PA has tried different tactics in repressing any dissenting voices," said Linah Alsaafin, also an uncompromising, independent, female activist in Palestine who just returned from a rare opportunity to visit her grandparents in Gaza. Linah lives in the West Bank where Fatah is in power. "[The PA/Fatah] has beaten up protesters twice in the summer who returned from the scheduled visit of war criminal Shaul Mofaz [Kadima party chairman and former Defence Minister] to the PA headquarters in Ramallah."

Linah said even during autho-

rised protests, she can always spot mukhabarat, Palestinian intelligence officials, and policemen in plainclothes, lurking nearby. The mukhabarat keeps close tabs on the protesters, videoing them with their mobile phones.

"What Palestinians suffer from, especially the youth," said Linah, "is the lack of a truly representative Palestinian body. The PA is known for its shameless collaboration with Israel and corrupt nature, and Hamas on the other hand has proven to be just as autocratic and suppressive when it comes to crushing dissenting voices."

When Hamas gained full control of Gaza following their war with Fatah in 2007, they had a long list of Fatah-affiliated people who were banned from travel in and out of the area. Now that list has gotten longer.

The Gaza travel ban is increasingly applied to anyone who speaks out against the government, even if it is on Facebook. "It doesn't include Fatah people only, but anyone who dares to defy the local authority in Gaza right now," Ebaa said. "A lot of my friends are banned from travelling now, and are on that list. I will be trying to leave for a short while at the end of this month and hopefully I won't be banned."

Ebaa calls Hamas and Fatah the two dictators, "for me, personally, I think they are just two faces of the same coin, they're no different."

At the same time, the Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority is using their international financing to impose what Ebaa called a "national strike" in Gaza. The PA pays Fatah supporters in Gaza to stay at home and not go to work, lest they be seen as collaborating with Hamas. Ebaa calls it blackmail. "If you don't respect the Fatah government's decision, you'll be threatened and kicked out of your job."

With their disgust directed at all political parties, I have often wondered why the ambitious youth movements in Palestine do not found their own political party.

"We have too many political parties," answered Ebaa. "Especially the youth, they are fed up with the idea of political parties. I think founding a new one is not a solution. Fatah, when they were in power, we thought that they were the problem and that they're selling us out. But then Hamas came in power and it's getting worse, they're



Fishing boats lie in the water off the coast of Gaza

falling in the trap Fatah was in before. So, no. No for political factions."

I posed the same question to Hania Mansour, a young female lawyer in Egypt who is also a member of the 6 April Youth Movement, which is politically active but has yet to run a candidate in elections. "As a movement we have many things to do now, before becoming a political party," said Hania. "The revolution is not finished and there is not a good political system." Her and her group demonstrated this ethic last week in the lead-up to the constitutional referendum. Instead of marching, like many others did under the banners of their political parties, 6 April went door-to-door to discuss the constitution.

"I think the people are now going toward being independent and giving up on their political affiliations," said Ebaa. "I think the independent people in Palestine, their numbers are getting bigger and bigger. It's for the better in Palestine."

Battle number two: Ebaa versus the world

Ebaa also blames the international community for supporting the political division within Gaza and supporting the Israeli occupation.

"The international community is not helping that much. They give money to the PA for example in the West Bank, but giving this money to the PA, they're feeding this division and supporting the Palestinian fragmentation."

Ebaa said the PA uses international money to help finance their national strike strategy in Gaza. "I don't think this is ethical or moral on behalf of the international community. This is the international community supporting Fatah in their conflict with Hamas."

Ebaa said she believed the international community is aware this is taking place and they have no problem with it. She says that the United States and European Union could pressure the PA to

stop this by threatening to cut off financing. "They know that they can use this tool. They used it when Abbas went for the UN bid. They blackmailed the Palestinians and said, 'if you do that stuff, you'll no longer receive our money.' Since they can use it, they better use it for our own good."

These accusations are not just the hyperbole of a young activist. I spoke with Dr Mohammed Ibrahim Miggad who is the vice-president for research at the Islamic University of Gaza. "Ramallah receives donations from different countries to pay all their employees, some are working and others are not working, especially those who are in Gaza," he said.

Miggad agreed that the US and EU are aware of what is going on with the PA's finances and believes foreign governments see the division of the Palestinian government as a better alternative than Hamas rule.

Ebaa is sick of the Palestinians being treated as pawns in global strategies instead of being put first in aid decisions. This disregard for the Palestinians was most apparent when democratic elections were widely undermined by the international community after Gazans elected a Hamas majority.

"When the people chose Hamas before, everyone stood against us, everyone stood against the free will and the free choice of the people of Gaza. Everyone boycotted Hamas, everyone imposed this collective punishment on the whole population of the Gaza Strip." Ebaa was talking about the Israeli blockade on Gaza in response to Hamas' election.

"Everyone knows that after Hamas won in 2006 the international community refused to deal with the new government of Hamas," said Miggad. "They refused to deal diplomatically and they refused to offer any donations. Also, this new [Hamas-led] government in 2006 faced the problem of closure. All countries closed down the area and put a siege on Gaza."

Although this siege was directed at the government of Gaza, Miggad said the government did not suffer most. "It is against the population in Gaza. The people are the ones who face the siege. It's not Hamas government or the Hamas movement."

Ebaa said, "what is going on here is inhumane and it is unacceptable. At the same time the UN issued a statement that said the siege is actually legal."

Last year's Palmer Report that examined the events surrounding the Israeli military's killing of Turkish activists on an aid flotilla to Gaza. The report differentiates between the land and naval siege, but unequivocally found the naval siege legal, writ-

ing. "The panel is not persuaded that the naval blockade was a disproportionate measure for Israel to have taken in response to the threat it faced."

"The international community is making the situation very bad in these two directions, when it comes to Israel and the occupation and when it comes to the internal conflict of Hamas and Fatah," Ebaa said. "In both ways they're not really helping, they're not trying to change the situation or improve it. They're trying to maintain the status quo, or at least that is how it seems to us here."

Battle number three: Ebaa versus Israel

I spoke with Hilik Bar, the secretary general of Israel's Labour Party, at the party's low-key headquarters on the ground floor of a Tel Aviv residential bloc. The Labour Party is billed as the centre-left of Israeli politics, though Bar preferred to present his party as the popular, reasonable, and humane centre of a bickering political spectrum.

In fact, Bar said, the main difference between his party and Meretz, a more leftist party, was less about policy than it was about decorum. He said that while Labour agreed that settlers should be pulled back to the 1967 borders, he did not think Meretz should villainise those settlers. Bar emphasised that settlers are legitimate citizens of Israel who deserve the respect of Israeli political parties.

Bar stated that Labour is more than prepared to retreat behind the 1967 borders in exchange for peace with a Palestinian state that recognises Israel and renounces violence. He added that a few settlements would stay. He declined to be more

Eventually, the right of return is the core of the Palestinian cause. It is the main issue in our struggle.

specific, but when I brought up Ma'ale Adumim and Ari'el, he acknowledged that those two would be staying with Israel.

Ebaa has never been to Jerusalem/Al-Quds, her capital, where Bar is the sitting minister of tourism. But she has friends in the West Bank and she is more than a little aware of Ma'ale Adumim and Ari'el; "they have thousands of settlers there." Over 53,000 according to Israeli numbers.

"He says this if it is a generous offer, or as if it is moderate, or as if we have to thank him for it. But no. Based on international law, all settlements are illegal."

Ebaa said this appendix to Bar's offer of statehood makes it insincere. "He can't possibly be endorsing a Palestinian state based on the '67 borders because these settlements are built on the '67 borders and are a part of the Palestinian state he is pretending to support in the future. No thank you, this is not generous," she thought for a moment before adding, "or legal."

When I asked the Labour secretary general about his country's shut out of Hamas after their electoral victory, Bar shook his head and clarified that Israel recognised the Hamas victory,

but simply refused to deal with Hamas politically.

"It's not true," said Ebaa, herself a bitter Hamas opponent. "After Hams won the election, Israel arrested a third of the Palestinian legislatures. Twenty two PLC members are still in Israeli jails under administrative detention. That means that they're being held without charge or trial."

Ebaa said Israel, along with the international community, supported a coup by Fatah against Hamas. When Hamas managed to hold on to control of the Gaza Strip, Hamas agreed to ceasefires but, "Israel never stopped their ground incursions, navy violations, air raids, assassinations and arrests. It's not me talking, you can check their jails; there are a lot of Hamas members there for nothing but for their political affiliation. For me and for the Palestinians this is not respect or recognition of the Hamas victory. I cannot see any reason for Israel to continue fighting with Hamas as Hamas government did recognise the '67 border, and that means recognising Israel by default, right?"

Finally we spoke of the right of return. The right of return has become almost an afterthought in international discussions of a two-state solution. No Israeli I have ever talked to, even Israelis that attest to being radical leftists or peace advocates, thinks that the right of return is possible. On this account Bar and Ebaa both agreed with me.

Ebaa said in response to this stance she would say, "Thank you, because you are emphasising our point of view here." They refuse to stand by the UN resolution that endorsed the right of return. Every international law guarantees the right of return. They are stating this in public and no one objects to that. So actually I do not care what political parties say, because eventually, the right of return is the core of the Palestinian cause. It is the main issue in our struggle. Without implementing the UN resolution, there is no solution whatsoever to this ongoing struggle of more than 60 years."

Ebaa is in many ways the voice of a new generation in the Middle East. A generation which is happy to, and capable of, redefining the paradigm of dissent in the region.

It is relevant that she is young and politically independent. But she is also female. It is not breaking news that the region has a horrid track record regarding women's rights, but being the victim of oppression should not be mistaken for weakness. Young activists like Ebaa are aware of the patriarchy that surrounds them and are doing more to confront it than any of the woeful western voices will ever manage.

Not only is Ebaa an independent voice, but she is a voice speaking on behalf of independence. When asked what she would say if she had an opportunity to address the international community, she offered this: "They can just respect the people's choice, and actually defer to the people to solve their own problems. We're addressing our leaders, the international community, and everyone in the world. It's time to listen to the Palestinian people and their demands."



Maher Al-Abed

