

Cairo braces for sixth day of anti-Mubarak anger

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Crowds of protesters began massing in central Egypt for a sixth day of angry revolt against Hosni Mubarak's regime Sunday, with over 100 already dead in protests demanding the veteran president quit.

Around 200 civilians spent the night on the central Tahrir square, the epicenter of protests since Tuesday, surrounded by army tanks although troops took no action against those breaking a night-time curfew.

More people began arriving on the square early Sunday, normally the start of the working week in Cairo, with a man waving an Egyptian flag as a military helicopter circled overhead.

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Groups of club-carrying vigilantes slowly left the streets that they had been protecting from rampant looting overnight amid growing insecurity as the Arab world's most populous nation faced an uncertain future.

Youths handed over to the army those they suspected of looting, with the police that has been fighting running battles with stone-throwing protesters in recent days hardly visible.

Many petrol stations are now running out of fuel, motorists said, and many bank cash machines have either been looted or are no longer working. Egyptian banks and the stock exchange have been ordered closed on Sunday.

Embattled Mubarak on Saturday named military intelligence chief Omar Suleiman as his first-ever vice president and also a new premier, Ahmed Shafiq, but protesters dismissed the moves as too little, too late.

Both men are stalwarts of Egypt's all-powerful military establishment.

Suleiman, 75, has spearheaded years of Egyptian efforts to clinch an elusive Israeli-Palestinian peace deal and tried so far in vain to mediate an inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

Shafiq, 69, is respected by the Egyptian elite, even among the opposition, and has often been mooted as a potential successor to Mubarak.

Fresh riots Saturday, the fifth day of the revolt, left 22 people dead in the town of Beni Sueif, south of Cairo, where protesters tried to burn down a police station, witnesses and a security source said.

Another three protesters died in Cairo and three police were killed in the Sinai town of Rafah, raising to at least 102 the number of people killed since the unrest erupted on Tuesday, including 33 on Saturday, according to medics.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the Nobel laureate and former UN chief nuclear inspector who has emerged as a dissident leader in his homeland, said Mubarak's new political appointments were insufficient.

"I tell President Mubarak and his regime to leave Egypt as soon as possible. It will be better for Egypt and for you," he said in remarks to Al-Jazeera television.

Egyptians were watching to see if widely hated Interior Minister Habib al-Adly, in office since 1997 and responsible for the security apparatus, will keep his job.

On Saturday evening, the army stood back as protesters fought running battles with police in front of the interior ministry.

Hundreds of demonstrators threw Molotov cocktails at police near the downtown heart of the protests, and policemen responded with live rounds of gunfire, witnesses said. Medics said three people were killed.

As Mubarak stood his ground, influential Arab cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi called on him to quit, in an interview with Al-Jazeera.

"Leave Mubarak. Have pity on the people and get lost before the destruction spreads in Egypt," said the Egyptian-born president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, who called the president "deaf, dumb and blind."

And the banned Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's best-organised opposition group, called for a peaceful transfer of power through a transitional cabinet.

The United States said Saturday that Mubarak should carry out "real reform" beyond a government reshuffle, as the US president met top aides on the crisis and anti-Mubarak protests spread to US cities.

President Barack Obama gathered his national security team at the White House for a session lasting just over an hour on latest developments in Egypt.

The US president "reiterated our focus on opposing violence and calling for restraint; supporting universal rights; and supporting concrete steps that advance political reform within Egypt," a White House statement said.

With tanks taking up positions around the Cairo Museum to protect the priceless artefacts inside, concern also grew for foreign tourists stranded in the land of the Pharaohs, with around 500 Japanese stranded at Cairo airport after their EgyptAir flights were cancelled.

Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara expressed his concern at a meeting with ambassador Walid Mahmoud Abdelnasser in Tokyo and called on Egypt to "establish a stable government through dialogue and solve the problem in a peaceful manner."

Many countries have warned against all but essential travel to Egypt.

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