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Al Jazeera

Egypt's 'final push' protests begin

Protesters flood Tahrir Square, for 'Day of Departure' against a president who has said he is ready to go but not yet

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Chants urging President Hosni Mubarak to leave are reverberating across Cairo's Tahrir Square, Egypt's protest epicentre, where hundreds of thousands have gathered for what they said was the "Day of Departure".

As the country entered its eleventh day of unrest, mass demonstrations commenced after Friday prayers.

Thousands gathered in the city of Alexandria, holding up placards and chanting "He must go!" an Al Jazeera correspondent there reported. Three thousand people also joined demonstrations in Giza.

"The feel here is that today is the final day for Mubarak, it's time for him to go," Gigi Ibrahim, a political activist told Al Jazeera from Tahrir Square.

"This whole process has been about who is more determined and who is not willing to give up. And everyday [the protesters] get more and more determined," Ibrahim said.

Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Egypt's defence minister, also visited the square earlier on Friday. He talked with the protesters and other military commanders.

Earlier, Ahmed Shafiq, Egypt's new prime minister, said the interior minister should not obstruct Friday's peaceful marches. And Mubarak, on his part said he wanted to leave office, but feared there will be chaos if he did.

Speaking to America's ABC television he said, "I am fed up. After 62 years in public service, I have had enough. I want to go."

But he added: "If I resign today, there will be chaos."

Mubarak's government has struggled to regain control of a nation angry about poverty, recession and political repression, inviting the Muslim Brotherhood - Egypt's most organised opposition movement - to talks and apologising for Wednesday's bloodshed in Cairo.

Transition government

In a bid to calm the situation, Omar Suleiman, the vice-president, said on Thursday that the banned Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest opposition political movement, and others had been invited to meet the new government as part of a national dialogue.



Protesters chanted 'He must go!'

An offer to talk to the banned but tolerated group would have been unthinkable before protests erupted on January 25, indicating the gains made by the pro-democracy movement since then.

But sensing victory, they have refused talks until Mubarak goes.

Opposition actors including Mohamed ElBaradei, the former UN nuclear watchdog head, and the Muslim Brotherhood said again that Mubarak, who wants to stay on until elections scheduled for September, must go before they would negotiate with the government.

"We demand that this regime is overthrown, and we demand the formation of a national unity government for all the factions," the Muslim Brotherhood said in a statement broadcast by Al Jazeera.

The government's overture came after Shafiq, the prime minister, apologised for Wednesday's violence and the breakdown in law and order.

Shafiq also said he did not know who was responsible for the bloodshed, blamed by protesters on undercover police.

In an important move, Mohammed Al-Beltagi, a leading member of Muslim Brotherhood, told Al Jazeera on Friday that his organisation has no ambitions to run for the presidency.

The developments come as the [New York Times reports](#), quoting US officials and Arab diplomats, that the US administration is discussing with Egyptian officials a proposal for Mubarak to resign immediately and hand over power to a transitional government headed by Omar Suleiman, the newly appointed vice-president.

This report, though unconfirmed by the White House, comes after Mubarak's statements on Tuesday this week where he agreed to cease power, but only in September at the end of his current term.

Mohamed Talaat El-Sadat, brother of the late Egyptian president Anwar El-Sadaat has backed Suleiman for the top post. He told Al Jazeera on Friday that he supported the youth revolution but did not want Egypt to go to civil war.

"We don't want chaos and call for meeting demands of demonstrators who should stay at Tahrir Square," he said, adding "I expect Mubarak will voluntarily and openhandedly step down and transfer power to Omar Suleiman."

Bloody clashes

At least 13 people have died and scores were injured, most over the last two days when Mubarak loyalists launched a counter-revolution on pro-democracy protesters.



The army took little action while the fighting raged in Tahrir Square over the past two days. However, there was a more visible military presence on Thursday; but this did not prevent new clashes.

The interior ministry has denied it ordered its agents or officers to attack prior pro-democracy demonstrations.

While vice president Suleiman told ABC Television that the government would not forcefully remove protesters. "We will ask them to go home, but we will not push them to go home," he said.

Ahead of Friday's mass protests, eyewitnesses told Al Jazeera that thugs, with the assistance of security vehicles, were readying to attack Tahrir Square. They said protesters were preparing to confront them.

Protesters also reported finding Molotov cocktails on security personnel dressed in civilian clothes.

An Al Jazeera correspondent, who spent Thursday night in Tahrir Square, said "the numbers did not die down one bit" through the night. He added that there was an atmosphere of defiance among all the protesters he had spoken to.

The army's role in shaping events is crucial. Only on Thursday did soldiers set up a clear buffer zone around the square to separate factions after having stood by. That did not prevent new clashes as opposing groups pelted each other with rocks.

Though less numerous than earlier in the week, there were demonstrations on Thursday in Suez and Ismailia, industrial cities where inflation and unemployment have kindled the sort of dissent that hit Tunisia and which some believe could ripple in a domino effect across other Arab police states.