

Egypt's Political Foes Grow More Entrenched In Fight Over President's Powers

BY HAMZA HENDAWI
Associated Press

CAIRO — Supporters and opponents of Egypt's president on Sunday grew more entrenched in their potentially destabilizing battle over the Islamist leader's move to assume near absolute powers, with neither side appearing willing to back down as the stock market plunged amid the fresh turmoil.

The standoff poses one of the hardest tests for the nation's liberal and secular opposition since Hosni Mubarak's ouster nearly two years ago. Failure to sustain protests and eventually force Mohammed Morsi to loosen control could consign it to long-term irrelevance.

Clashes between the two sides spilled onto the streets for a third day since the president issued edicts that make him immune to oversight of any kind, including that of the courts.

A teenager was killed and at least 40 people were wounded when a group of anti-Morsi protesters tried to storm the local offices of the political arm of the president's Muslim Brotherhood in the Nile Delta city of Damanhour, according to security officials.

It was the first reported death from the street battles that erupted across much of the nation on Friday, the day after Morsi's decrees were announced. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the

media, identified the boy as 15-year-old Islam Hamdi Abdel-Maqsood.

The tensions also dealt a fresh blow to the economy, which has suffered due to the problems plaguing the Arab world's most populous nation since Mubarak's ouster.

Egypt's benchmark EGX30 stock index dropped 9.59 percentage points Sunday in the first trading session since Morsi issued his decrees. The losses were among the biggest since the turbulent days and weeks immediately after Mubarak's ouster in a popular uprising last year. The loss in the value of shares was estimated at close to \$5 billion.

The judiciary, the main target of the edicts, has pushed back, calling the decrees a power grab and an "assault" on the branch's independence. Judges and prosecutors stayed away from many courts in Cairo and other cities on Sunday.

But the nation's highest judicial body, the Supreme Judiciary Council, watered down its opposition to the decrees on Sunday. It told judges and prosecutors to return to work and announced that its members would meet with Morsi on Monday to try to persuade him to restrict immunity to major state decisions like declaring war or martial law or breaking diplomatic relations with foreign nations.

Morsi supporters insist that the measures were necessary to prevent the courts, which already dissolved the elected lower house of parliament, from further holding up moves to stability by disbanding the assembly writing

the new constitution, as judges were considering doing. Both the parliament and the constitutional assembly are dominated by Islamists. Morsi accuses Mubarak loyalists in the judiciary of seeking to thwart the revolution's goals and barred the judiciary from disbanding the constitutional assembly or parliament's upper house.

Opposition activists, however, have been adamant since the crisis first erupted that they would not enter a dialogue with Morsi's regime before the decrees are rescinded.

Protesters also clashed with police at Cairo's Tahrir Square, the birthplace of the mass protests that toppled Mubarak, and in the side streets and avenues leading off the plaza. The Interior Ministry, which is in charge of the police, said 267 protesters have been arrested and 164 policemen injured since the unrest began a week ago, initially to mark the anniversary of street protests a year ago against the nation's then-military rulers. Forty-two protesters were killed in those demonstrations.

The ministry did not say how many protesters were injured in the latest clashes in Tahrir, but security officials put the figure at 260.

Hundreds of protesters staging a sit-in in Tahrir have vowed not to leave before Morsi rescinds his decrees. The two sides also have called for massive rival protests Tuesday in Cairo, signaling a protracted struggle.

Bangladesh

112 Killed In Fire At Garment Factory

BY JULHAS ALAM
Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh — Fire raced through a garment factory that supplies major retailers in the West, killing at least 112 people, many of whom were trapped by the flames because the eight-story building lacked emergency exits, an official said Sunday.

The blaze broke out late Saturday at a factory operated just outside Bangladesh's capital of Dhaka by Tazreen Fashions Ltd., a subsidiary of the Tuba Group, which makes products for Wal-Mart and other companies in the U.S. and Europe.

Firefighters recovered at least 100 bodies from the factory, Maj. Mohammad Mahub, fire department operations director, told The Associated Press. He said 12 other people who were injured after they jumped from the building to escape died at hospitals.

Local media reported that up to 124 people were killed. The cause of the blaze was not immediately clear, and authorities ordered an investigation.

Army soldiers and border guards were sent to help police

keep order as thousands of on-lookers and anxious relatives of the factory workers gathered, Mahub said.

Tazreen was given a "high risk" safety rating after a May 16, 2011, audit conducted by an "ethical sourcing" assessor for Wal-Mart, according to a document posted on the Tuba Group's website. It did not specify what led to the rating.

Wal-Mart spokesman Kevin Gardner said online documents indicating an orange or "high risk" assessment after the May 2011 inspection and a yellow or "medium risk" report after an inspection in August 2011 appeared to pertain to the factory where the fire broke out. The August 2011 letter said Wal-Mart would conduct another inspection within one year.

Gardner said it was not clear if that inspection had been conducted or whether the factory was still making products for Wal-Mart.

If a factory is rated "orange" three times in a two-year period, Wal-Mart won't place any orders for one year. The May 2011 report was the first orange rating

for the factory.

Neither Tazreen's owner nor Tuba Group officials could be reached for comment.

The Tuba Group is a major Bangladeshi garment exporter whose clients also include Carrefour and IKEA, according to its website. Its factories export garments to the U.S., Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands, among other countries.

The Tazreen factory, which opened in 2009 and employed about 1,700 people, made polo shirts, fleece jackets and T-shirts. Bangladesh has some 4,000 garment factories, many without proper safety measures. The country annually earns about \$20 billion from exports of garment products, mainly to the U.S. and Europe.

In its 2012 Global Responsibility report, Wal-Mart said that "fire safety continues to be a key focus for brands and retailers sourcing from Bangladesh." Wal-Mart said it ceased working with 49 factories in Bangladesh in 2011 because of fire safety issues, and was working with its supplier factories to phase out production from buildings deemed high risk.

New Congress Could Make Deals Harder

BY ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When the next Congress cranks up in January, there will be more women, many new faces and 11 fewer tea party-backed House Republicans from the class of 2010 who sought a second term.

Overriding those changes, though, is a thinning of pragmatic, centrist veterans in both parties. Among those leaving are some of the Senate's most pragmatic lawmakers, nearly half the House's centrist Blue Dog Democrats and several moderate House Republicans.

That could leave the parties more polarized even as President Barack Obama and congressional leaders talk up the cooperation needed to tackle complex, vexing problems such as curbing deficits, revamping tax laws and culling savings from Medicare and other costly, popular programs.

"This movement away from

the center, at a time when issues have to be resolved from the middle, makes it much more difficult to find solutions to major problems," said William Hoagland, senior vice president of the Bipartisan Policy Center, a private group advocating compromise.

In the Senate, moderate Scott Brown, R-Mass., lost to Democrat Elizabeth Warren, who will be one of the most liberal members. Another GOP moderate, Richard Lugar of Indiana, fell in the primary election. Two others, Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas and Olympia Snowe of Maine, are retiring.

Moderate Democratic senators such as Kent Conrad of North Dakota, Herb Kohl of Wisconsin, Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Jim Webb of Virginia are leaving, as is Democratic-leaning independent Joe Lieberman.

While about half the incoming 12 Senate freshmen of both parties are moderates, new arrivals

include tea party Republican Ted Cruz of Texas, conservative Deb Fischer of Nebraska, and liberals such as Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin and Hawaii's Mazie Hirono.

There's a similar pattern in the House, where 10 of the 24 Democratic Blue Dogs lost, are retiring or, in the case of Rep. Joe Donnelly, D-Ind., are moving to the Senate. That will further slash a centrist group that just a few years ago had more than 50 members, though some new freshmen might join.

Among Republicans, moderates like Reps. Judy Biggett of Illinois and New Hampshire's Charles Bass were defeated while others such as Reps. Jerry Lewis of California and Steven LaTourette of Ohio decided to retire.

"Congress seems to be going in the opposite direction of the country, just as the country is screaming for solutions to gridlock," said Democratic strategist Phil Singer.

Marriage Benefits Case Could Reach High Court

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Like a lot of newlyweds, Karen Golinski was eager to enjoy the financial fruits of marriage. Within weeks of her wedding, she applied to add her spouse to her employer-sponsored health care plan, a move that would save the couple thousands of dollars a year.

Her ordinarily routine request still is being debated more than four years later, and by the likes of former attorneys general, a slew of senators, the Obama administration and possibly this week, the U.S. Supreme Court.

Because Golinski is married to another woman and works for the U.S. government, her claim for benefits has morphed into a multi-layered legal challenge to a 1996 law that prohibits the federal government from recognizing unions like hers.

The high court has scheduled a closed-door conference for Friday to review Golinski's case and four others that also seek to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act overwhelmingly approved by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton.

The purpose of the meeting is to decide which, if any, to put on the court's schedule for arguments next year.

Punctured Pipe, Spark Led To Mass. Explosion

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (AP) — A utility worker responding to reports of a natural gas leak in one of New England's largest cities punctured a pipe and an unknown spark ignited a massive explosion that injured 18 people and damaged 42 buildings, the state fire marshal announced Sunday.

Friday night's natural gas blast in Springfield's entertainment district was caused by "human error," State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan said at a news conference. He didn't name the Columbia Gas Co. worker who pierced the high-pressure pipe.

The worker was trying to locate the source of the leak with a metal probe that tests natural gas levels when the probe damaged the underground pipe, Coan said. A flood of gas then built up in a building that housed a strip club, and a spark touched off the blast, officials said.

Columbia Gas planned a news conference for later Sunday afternoon. A message left for a company spokeswoman wasn't immediately returned. Columbia Gas, a subsidiary of public company NiSource Inc., announced earlier Sunday that it planned to open a claims center for residents and businesses affected by the explosion at City Hall on Monday.

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