

Saturday, 26 January 2013

## At least 27 killed in Port Said violence after verdict on football carnage



At least 27 people were killed, including two footballers and two policemen, in the Egyptian city of Port Said on Saturday following a court ruling that sent 21 people to the gallows for their role in one of the world's deadliest incident in football violence. The Feb. 1 soccer melee killed 74 fans of the Cairo-based Al-Ahly team. Executions in Egypt are usually carried out by hanging.

All the defendants - who were not present in the courtroom Saturday for security reasons - can appeal the verdict. Judge Sobhi Abdel-Maguid did not give his reasoning when he read out the verdicts for 21 out of the 73 defendants Saturday. The verdict for the remaining 52 defendants, including nine security officials, is scheduled to be delivered March 9. Some have been charged with murder and others with assisting the attackers. Die-hard soccer fans from both teams, known as Ultras, hold the police at least partially responsible for February's violence, which was the world's worst soccer violence in 15 years, saying officers at the game did nothing to stop the bloodshed. They also criticize Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi for doing little to reform the police force or the judiciary since he took office in July. Tamer al-Fahla, former goalkeeper of the al-Masry team, and Mohammad al-Dadhwi who played for Port Said's al-Mareekh team, were both killed on Saturday's violence. The board of directors at al-Mareekh's team did not comment on the sentence, but it held the political leadership responsible for what happened. In response to the sentences, supporters gathered at Al Ahly club in Cairo cheered. In the courtroom on the outskirts of Cairo, families of victims clapped and some wept with emotion. "God is greatest" one shouted, while others held up pictures of the victims. Meanwhile, people gathered near the Port Said prison where most of the suspects were held. State television reported the sound of gunshots and said police fired tear gas in the area. Egyptian security officials said two senior police officers were shot dead. In the latest tally of casualties, the health ministry reported that the death toll in the clashes has reached 22. Egypt's Al Ahram new website reported that train lines to the coastal city were suspended to protect travellers. The state news agency MENA reported that the army was deployed in the city to restore stability. Army armored personnel carriers and military police were seen deploying on the streets of Port Said, according to witnesses. The army had earlier been deployed in Suez, another port city on the Suez Canal, in response to Friday's anti-government protests. Eight people were killed in clashes in Suez, although there was no reports of violence there on Saturday.