

Saturday, 26 January 2013

## Egypt's National Defense Council appeals for calm, considers curfew



Egypt's National Defense Council, headed by President Mohamed Mursi, appealed for calm and called for a national dialogue as deadly clashes raged, the information minister said after the council met. Information Minister Salah Abdel Maqsood, who attended the meeting with Mursi and other ministers including the defense minister who is a general in charge of the army, said in a televised address the council could consider declaring a state of emergency or a curfew in areas of violence if needed.

It also condemned violence that has left nearly 40 people dead in two days of clashes in several parts of the country, calling on political forces "to maintain the peaceful nature of expression." Nine people were killed on Friday as Egyptians took to the streets to demand change on the second anniversary of the uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak. On Saturday, at least 30 people died in the canal city of Port Said after a court handed out death sentences to 21 fans of a local football club over post-match riots last year. The military was deployed in Port Said to try to restore security, but assaults continued into the evening. The army was widely used to keep order by top generals who took over after Hosni Mubarak, but the military has kept a much lower profile since Mursi was elected. Egyptian military forces also were sent into the canal city of Suez after eight people died in Friday's clashes between security forces and protesters opposed to the new president and the Brotherhood. Another protester was killed in Ismailiya, and security officials told the state news agency MENA that two policemen were killed in Friday's protests. Many of the young men who led the protests and clashes hail from the Ultras. They often come from poor neighborhoods and view the police force that was the backbone of Mubarak's authoritarian rule as their nemesis. "The police are thugs!" yelled relatives of the deceased inside the courtroom before the judge took the bench. Near Cairo's Tahrir Square, where tens of thousands had amassed to mark the two-year anniversary a day earlier, al-Ahly Ultras waved their team's red flag as they clashed with police who fired tear gas to disburse the crowd near Cabinet headquarters and Parliament. Underlining the distrust that lingers between much of the public and the police, survivors and witnesses say Mubarak loyalists had a hand in instigating last year's attack, which began after Port Said's home team won the match, 3-1, and that the police at the very least were responsible for gross negligence.