

Sunday, June 3rd, 2012 |

Egypt candidate attacks Islamist By BBC



Journalist Magdi Abdelhadi says some in Tahrir Square are calling for the elections to be scrapped

Egyptian presidential hopeful Ahmed Shafiq, a former PM under jailed ex-leader Hosni Mubarak, has accused his Islamist rival of harassing Christians.

Mr Shafiq, who was speaking as protests continued in Cairo over the outcome of Mubarak's trial, said the Muslim Brotherhood aimed to create a "sectarian" state.

About 1,000 anti-Mubarak activists remain in Cairo's Tahrir Square, angry that he and his two sons were acquitted of corruption and six former police chiefs also escaped punishment.

Mubarak himself was sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty of complicity in the killing of protesters during last year's Arab Spring uprising.

But many activists were disappointed that the court did not sentence the former president to death.

Volatile atmosphere

Mr Shafiq faces an election run-off against the candidate of the socially conservative Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Mursi, on 16-17 June. Mr Shafiq was Mubarak's last prime minister and a former air force commander.

At a televised news conference on Sunday he accused the Brotherhood of trying to blackmail the Christian Copts and prevent them from exercising their voting rights.

He also said the Brotherhood was "terrifying" voters in a bid to influence them, "especially those who voted for me in the first round".

Meanwhile, the public prosecutor has confirmed that an appeal will be launched against Mubarak's life sentence.

The BBC's Yolande Knell in Cairo says the new legal proceedings will only inflame the crowd's anger.

One demand of the protesters was also answered by the public prosecutor, however: there will also be an appeal against the acquittal of the former police commanders, who had been accused of involvement in last year's killings of unarmed protesters.

Protesters see the success of Ahmed Shafiq in the first round of the election as proof that the allies of the former president still have huge influence, our correspondent says.

Thousands protested overnight in Cairo and other cities after the sentences were handed down. Many chanted "down with the military rule" – the slogan of last year's revolution.

Mubarak, 84, and his former interior minister Habib al-Adly were jailed for life for complicity in the killing of protesters. But there was widespread anger over the acquittals.

Mohammed Mursi visited Tahrir Square on Saturday night and later told reporters that, if elected, he would retry Mubarak and former regime officials suspected of involvement in killing protesters.

"The best guarantee to reach our goals is for the revolution to continue," he said.



Many Tahrir Square protesters are determined to hold an open-ended sit-in

Mubarak is the first former leader to be tried in person since the start of the Arab Spring in early 2011.

Announcing the verdicts, Judge Ahmed Refaat said Mubarak and Adly had failed to stop security forces using deadly force against unarmed demonstrators.

Mubarak and his two sons, Alaa and Gamal, were acquitted on separate charges of corruption.

But his sons will remain in detention as they are to be charged with stock market manipulation.

Mubarak, who ruled the country from 1981 to 2011, had faced a possible death sentence over the killing of about 850 protesters.

The first leader toppled during the Arab Spring was Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, who was found guilty in absentia of drugs and gun charges in July.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed by rebels in October. Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh received immunity from prosecution after handing over power in November.

