

# Egyptians divided as trial begins for ex-president Mubarak

BY ANDRE FECTEAU, FOR POSTMEDIA NEWS AUGUST 3, 2011

CAIRO — There was one major topic on the minds of Egyptians as they broke the Ramadan fast Wednesday night: the fate of Hosni Mubarak, whose trial opened Wednesday morning with the ailing former dictator lying on a hospital bed in a steel cage in the courtroom.

National television is bringing coverage of Mubarak's trial live into the homes of Egyptians, many of whom have already made up their minds about his guilt in the wave of violence that took place during the 18-day protest in Tahrir Square last January and February.

"Yes, he has ordered the killings," said Hoda Saeed, a saleswoman in her 20s at a women's clothing store near Tahrir Square. She wants the death penalty for the now-frail Mubarak. "He wasn't fair for 30 years and lots of people died in Tahrir," she said.

Mubarak faces a civilian tribunal on charges of premeditated murder and attempted murder of protesters during the uprising that culminated with his resignation. The government's violent crackdown on protests left as many as 850 people dead throughout Egypt, many in Tahrir Square.

The 83-year-old former president is also charged with diverting public funds to purchase five villas in the Sinai peninsula worth more than \$6 million, and profiteering from a natural gas deal with Israel, a sore point with many Egyptians. If found guilty, Mubarak could face the death penalty.

From his bed, Mubarak told the court: "I deny all these accusations completely."

Many Egyptians were surprised by the former president's frail appearance, and some don't like the idea of a trial, even if they think Mubarak is guilty.

"He is old and served the country for a long time," said Mohamed Ibrahim, a shopkeeper who spent Wednesday morning watching the televised trial at a packed coffee shop.

Ibrahim said people became emotional as they watched the former president inside the defendant's cage that is standard in Egypt's courtrooms. Mubarak doesn't deserve this, Ibrahim said.

Moataz Mostafa, a Cairo businessman, was less sympathetic.

"I thought Mubarak would look hopeless and sick, but he appeared defiant and in good health," he said. "He looked like he didn't care (about the trial)."

Contradictory reports have emerged about the health of Mubarak, who has been hospitalized in the resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh on the Red Sea. Some reports had him in a coma, for instance, and it is believed that he suffers from stomach cancer.

Mostafa said the trial was important because it would shed light on who ordered the killings at Tahrir Square.

"If he has ordered the killing, he must be judged for it," he said.

Mahmoud Samir, a street vendor who works at a T-shirt kiosk on one of downtown Cairo's main thoroughfares, said he believed Mubarak's trial would bring a sense of justice to the country and serve as a warning to the next president.

Samir, however, has his doubts about the fairness of the trial, which he views as a show.

"If they wanted to judge him, they would have done so a long time ago," he said.

Mubarak stands accused with his sons Gamal and Alaa Mubarak, and seven others, including former interior minister Habib al-Adly, and businessman and family friend Hussein Salem, who is on trial in absentia. The trial was adjourned until Aug 15.

Mubarak ruled as president of Egypt for 30 years until Feb. 11, 2011, when he resigned after almost three weeks of protest against his regime.

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