

# *Egypt Army Chief Says He Will Run for President*

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Cairo, March 27 (RHC-MENA) Egypt's military chief Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi announced Wednesday that he will run for president, in elections expected next month.

According to analysts, with Wednesday's announcement, el-Sissi has now put himself on an apparent track to lead a nation rocked by ongoing turmoil and violence, a broken political order, a dilapidated economy and concerns over the chances for building a democracy.

Since the July removal of President Mohamed Morsi, the military-backed interim government has waged a fierce crackdown on Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood, arresting thousands of members and killing hundreds of protesters in clashes.

Morsi supporters say el-Sissi's candidacy confirms that Morsi's removal was a coup aimed at wrecking democracy, as Islamists have contended.

In his address Wednesday night, el-Sissi invited other candidates to run and political parties to participate in subsequent parliamentary elections. Likewise, he promised "no alienation, exclusion or discrimination" and "open arms to everybody here or abroad" — except Egyptians indicted by law.

However, on the ground, there have been no signs of any move toward reconciliation with the Brotherhood. Authorities on Wednesday announced the latest in a series of mass tribunals of suspected Islamists, putting 919 defendants, including the top leader of the Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, on trial for murder and other charges.

Earlier this week, an Egyptian court sentenced to death 528 suspected Morsi supporters, capping a swift, two-day mass trial, in which defense attorneys were not allowed to present their case.

Morsi supporters have continued protests against el-Sissi and the interim government. On Wednesday, students in several universities, most of them Islamists, held protests that turned into clashes with security forces. An 18-year-old student was killed in the violence at Cairo University, the Health Ministry has confirmed.

Meanwhile, the country's election commission is expected to announce the date of the election over the weekend.

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