

Egyptians vote to “Do the right”

● Sisi has argued that he needs longer to complete the job

● Sisi himself was among the first to vote when polls opened

AFP | Cairo, Egypt

Egyptians voted yesterday in a referendum that aims to cement the rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Voters were being asked to back amendments to the constitution to allow Sisi, 64, to run for another six-year term while boosting his control over the judiciary and giving the military even greater influence in political life.

Sisi himself was among the first to vote when polls opened, casting his ballot in the upmarket Cairo suburb of Heliopolis.

In Shubra, a working-class neighbourhood of the capital, dozens of voters, mostly women carrying their children, queued outside a polling station in the local high school.

In Cairo, troops and police were deployed in numbers although the interior ministry denied to give any nationwide figures.

Egypt is still battling a jihadist insurgency based in the Sinai Peninsula that has seen attacks in Cairo and other cities.

Sisi has argued that he needs longer to complete the job of restoring security and stability after the turmoil that followed the overthrow of veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak in the Arab



An elderly Egyptian man casts his ballot in a box while voting at a polling station in a referendum on constitutional amendments, at a school in the capital Cairo's northern neighbourhood of Shubra,

Spring of 2011.

Out on the streets, his supporters waved flags bearing their campaign motto: “Do the Right,” as they pressed passers-by to turn out and vote ‘Yes’.

At a polling station in Manyal, a Cairo suburb overlooking the Nile, Mohamed Abdel Salam, 45, said he was voting enthusiastically in support of the changes. “I don’t care about the presi-

dential terms,” he said.

“Sisi could stay forever as long as he’s doing his job... and he has already done a lot”.

Sisi won his first term as president in 2014, a year after he led the army in overthrowing elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi following mass protests against his single turbulent in power.

Standing virtually unopposed

after the disqualification or withdrawal of all realistic challengers, he was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97 percent.

For the past few weeks, Egypt’s streets have been awash with banners and billboards urging citizens to “Do the right thing” and vote “Yes”, while popular folk singers have exhorted voters to go to the polls.



Earlier in the week, parliament overwhelmingly endorsed the constitutional changes, which also include the creation of a second parliamentary chamber and a quota ensuring at least 25 per cent of lawmakers are women

A DJ blared loud patriotic songs extolling the virtues of Egypt under Sisi’s leadership, including a new song called “I adore Egypt” by iconic Lebanese diva Nancy Ajram.

But not everyone is upbeat about the changes.

Sporting casual attire, a mid-thirties voter at another polling station in the capital said: “We are all staff in the same company and we were instructed by management to go vote.”

“I want to say ‘No’... on extending the presidential terms and the amendments related to the judiciary,” he said declining to give his name for fear of repercussions.

He pointed to his bosses nearby who were making sure employees were voting.

“Even if I say ‘No’, they (the authorities) are still going to do what they want in the end,” he added despondently.

US authorities arrest man linked to N.Korea embassy raid
Washington, United States

US authorities have arrested a former marine in connection with a mysterious February raid on North Korea’s embassy in Spain during which masked assailants roughed-up staff and stole computers, the *Washington Post* reported yesterday.

Citing two sources familiar with the case, the *Post* said federal authorities arrested Christopher Ahn, a former US Marine and member of a group dedicated to the overthrow of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

A dissident organisation known as the Cheollima Civil Defense (CCD) said it had orchestrated the February 22 embassy raid to highlight illicit activities rampant in North Korea’s foreign missions.

The *Post* said federal agents had also searched the apartment of Adrian Hong Chang, a Mexican national who Spanish authorities said last month had led the embassy raid.

An FBI spokesman referred questions on the case to the Justice Department, who declined to comment.

The CCD, a dissident group believed to include high-profile North Korean defectors, said after the raid it had “shared certain information of enormous potential value with the FBI in the United States”.

Bangladeshis protest after sexually assaulted girl burned to death

● Rafi died in hospital on April 10 after suffering 80 percent burns

● Eighteen people, including the head teacher, have been arrested

● One of those accused of the attack told a closed court earlier this week that the principal ordered the killing

AFP | Dhaka, Bangladesh

Demonstrations were held across the Bangladesh capital Saturday for the tenth consecutive day after a teenager who accused a head teacher of sexually harassing her was burned to death.

The killing of 19-year-old Nusrat Jahan Rafi has sparked outrage across the South Asian nation and put police action in the case under the spotlight.

Protesters in Dhaka chanted slogans demanding the death sentence for the killers of the girl, who police say was lured to the rooftop of the Islamic seminary she attended in Feni, south of the capital.

Police said the attackers then ordered her to withdraw a police complaint against the head of



Bangladeshi woman holds a placard with a photograph of schoolgirl Nusrat Jahan Rafi at a protest in Dhaka, following her murder by being set on fire after she had reported a sexual assault

the school. When she refused, she was doused in kerosene and set on fire.

Rafi died in hospital on April 10 after suffering 80 per cent burns.

Eighteen people, including the head teacher, have been arrested.

Her death has set off demonstrations in several cities across the Muslim-majority country of 165 million.

Many believe the murder has exposed a “culture of impunity” surrounding sex crimes against women and children, while those who complain often feel

a backlash.

“Rapes and sexual assaults have risen alarmingly in the country,” protester M. Rahman Apu said. “Nusrat Rafi’s murder proves that the even the bravest of girls do not get justice.”

“Instead she was murdered for daring to lodge a complaint

“ she was murdered for daring to lodge a complaint against the perpetrator. Had police and the administration worked properly, she could have been protected

PROTESTER M. RAHMAN APU

against the perpetrator. Had police and the administration worked properly, she could have been protected,” Apu said.

Party chief held

Garment union leader Kamrun Nahar, who had also joined the protests, said Rafi’s murder has awakened the nation’s conscience.

“We won’t stop protests until the killers of Nusrat, and other perpetrators, are brought to book,” Nahar said.

“We don’t want any more of these grisly murders.”

Rafi went to police in late March to report the case. A leaked video shows the local police station chief registering her complaint but dismissing it as “not a big deal”

The 18 arrested include the seminary headmaster. One of those accused of the attack told a closed court earlier this week that the principal ordered the killing.

The local head of the ruling Awami League party has been detained for allegedly helping the killers.

Rafi went to police in late March to report the case. A leaked video shows the local police station chief registering her complaint but dismissing it as “not a big deal”.

Police said at least five of those under arrest, including three of Rafi’s classmates, tied her with a scarf before setting her on fire. They had planned to pass off the death as a suicide.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has vowed that all those involved will face action and police say they are investigating why more was not done to protect Rafi.

The Manusher Jonno Foundation, a non-government group, says there have been at least 39 cases of children under 18 being raped since April 2.

Another eight have been subjected to sexual harassment, the groups says.

“Our system has failed,” said Shipa Hafiza, executive director of Bangladesh rights group Ain O Salish Kendra

“Often we see that when there are rapes or sexual abuse of women or children, all the powerful people become a group to protect the perpetrators,” she said.