

## Egypt seethes over divisive constitution vote - Tehran Times

Middle East Desk

12 December 2012 15:34 -



Cairo (Gulf News) -- Egypt's crisis over an upcoming referendum on a controversial constitution is set to deepen as a compromise between the secular-minded opposition and the ruling Islamists looks increasingly remote, according to analysts. "Prospects for a way out of this crisis are dimming, given that the referendum are due to be held on December 15," said Ahmed Abdul Ghafar, a political expert.

After talks with politicians, mostly Islamists, at the

weekend, President Mohammad Mursi scrapped a contentious decree broadening his powers, but kept the scheduled vote, further infuriating his opponents.

Mursi's aides said that he could not delay the date of the referendum due to legal curbs. According to the aides, if the referendum is voted down, there will be an election within three months for a new assembly to write the constitution.

The opposition has condemned the constitution, drafted by an Islamist-dominated assembly as a sham, and demanded the vote be cancelled.

"Mursi is in an unenviable position," said Abdul Ghafar. "He risks angering his Islamist allies by postponing the referendum. Islamists believe he has already made a concession to the opposition by cancelling the (November 22) constitutional declaration.

Now Islamists are in the process of mobilizing their supporters to say 'Yes' to the constitution. They are confident that the charter will be approved in Saturday's vote," he added.

Mursi's opponents and backers Tuesday launched mass demonstrations, raising fears about

fresh violence. The two sides fought last week outside the presidential palace in Cairo, leaving five dead and 775 injured, according to official figures.

Protesters camping in Cairo's Tahrir Square Tuesday said that at least seven of them had been wounded in a dawn attack by unknown assailants.

The deadlock has been Egypt's worst since Mursi became the country's first elected civilian president in June. He is frequently criticized for allegedly running the country at the behest of his group, the Muslim Brotherhood.

"The only justification for Mursi's failure to back down on the referendum on the constitution is that the Brotherhood leadership, mainly its Supreme Guide Mohammad Badei and his influential deputy KhairatAl-Shater refused any suggestion to delay the referendum," said Hassan Nafae, a professor of political science.

"If this is the case, then Egypt's affairs are being handled from the Brotherhood office, not from the presidential palace. Therefore, it is unlikely that Mursi will move swiftly to seriously defuse the crisis that has ominously divided the country," he added.