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Morocco's faltering protest movement hopes for a rebound



Saffiya Ansari, Al Arabiya

Morocco's February 20 protest movement, birthed at the outset of the Arab Spring, has lost its momentum.

Wednesday marks the movement's two-year anniversary, and activists are hoping to re-invigorate it.

A rally in front of parliament is slated to start at around 17:00 GMT, and is based on lingering discontent with the government, which is perceived as corrupt and marred by nepotism.

"People aspire for a government that is transparent, legitimate, functional and results-based," said Mhamed Biygautane, a research associate at the Dubai School of Government.

Following nationwide rallies that began on Feb. 20, 2011, the king introduced a new draft constitution that was passed in a national referendum on July 1.

Legislative elections under the new constitution were held in November 2011, in which the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party won the most seats.

Since the government and constitution were put in place, the number of people affiliated with the opposition has dwindled.

"The overt numbers are falling, but people haven't lost interest, there simply isn't proper organization," said Nouha Johnson, a February 20 coordinator in Rabat.

In recent months, demonstrations have struggled to gather even a few hundred people, reported Reuters.

What happened

Some observers have noted that the protest movement has fundamental, debilitating flaws.

It is “not based on clear and coherent intellectual and political dimensions, its organizational structure isn’t supported by prominent politicians, and its members still communicate largely through the internet,” Biygautane told Al Arabiya.

The “virtual” nature of the movement (it is largely confined to social media websites) has limited its influence on the government. However, activists are still making moves towards a more transparent, accountable government.

“We still face problems in the government, corruption for example. We still need change,” said Johnson.

Events in neighboring countries have encouraged interest in the drive for political change.

“People will never lose neither the interest nor the hope for change, as long as communication tools show them how other nations struggle to achieve better economic and social opportunities,” said Biygautane.

The birth of Morocco’s protest movement was inspired by similar events in Tunisia and Egypt.

Future problems?

Given the government’s “lack of fiscal and managerial experiences, this will lead the country to more crises than before,” said Biygautane.

Unemployment is a major issue. There have been parallel protests by unemployed graduates frustrated with the slowing economy.