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STORY**



People watch Colonel Gaddafi make his speech live on Libyan television

LIBYAN LEADER REFUSES TO GIVE UP

On 22nd February Muammar al-Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, made a 75-minute speech shown live on television. Mr Gaddafi, better known as Colonel Gaddafi, was angry. He shouted at the camera that he will never run away from his country, and would rather die a [martyr](#) in Libya than leave.

The night before, in Tripoli, Libya's capital city, there was a rumour that Colonel Gaddafi had left and was flying to Venezuela. Many believed the man who had run Libya for the last 41 years had finally fled, especially as he and Hugo Chávez, the president of Venezuela, are known to be good friends. Thousands of people in Tripoli came out onto the streets of the city to celebrate. Yet soon afterwards soldiers who support the Libyan leader began shooting at them.

Later, Colonel Gaddafi made a brief appearance on the government-controlled

television channel. Holding an umbrella and leaning out of a vehicle, he said he was not on his way to Venezuela but still in Tripoli.

Libya was once an Italian colony. It became an independent nation in 1951. Then King Idris the First led the country. In 1969 Colonel Gaddafi seized power while the King was away on a trip abroad. At the time Colonel Gaddafi was a 27-year-old army officer. Most people thought his leadership would not last. Yet he has become one of the longest-serving leaders in the world.

Colonel Gaddafi has run his country as a dictator. There are no democratic elections and opposition political parties are not allowed. Colonel Gaddafi lives in a traditional Bedouin tent and often wears brightly coloured military uniforms. He is guarded by a specially trained group of female bodyguards.

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Teenagers' brains

Copying black bears

Boeing's new plane

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Earthquake in New Zealand

Nokia-Microsoft alliance

Election in Uganda

Mediterranean migrants

Demonstrations in Bahrain

Jumping fleas

Secret of Coca-cola

Model United Nations

Is there a ninth planet?

Significant shipwreck

Brazil's new hydroelectric dam

Purple Hijab Day

Saving South American potatoes

Book review

Glossary and Sudoku prize competitions

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The trouble in Libya began at the beginning of February. It started in Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, in the east of the country. People were angry because a local lawyer had been arrested. But they were also encouraged by what has recently happened in Tunisia and Egypt. There large street protests forced the unpopular presidents of the two countries to flee or to stand down. People living in Benghazi arranged their own large demonstration in the city on 17th February.

Many people in Libya have the same complaints as those in Tunisia and Egypt do. Young people find it difficult to get jobs. They say the police force, which is accused of arresting people for no reason and torturing prisoners, has too much power. And they want to be able to democratically elect their own leaders. They also say those running the country have made themselves rich through dishonesty and corruption.

Foreign news reporters are not allowed in Libya, so it has been difficult for people in other countries to find out what has been happening.

In Benghazi fighting soon broke out between the demonstrators and members of the army and police. Yet many of the soldiers decided to join the protesters. Those supporting Colonel Gaddafi withdrew. The protesters are now thought to control Benghazi and the whole of the eastern part of Libya.



After Benghazi, protests began in Tripoli. There, soldiers loyal to Colonel Gaddafi opened fire on the protesters who had gathered in the centre of the city. Nobody knows for sure, but it's believed that hundreds of people have been killed. One of Colonel Gaddafi's sons, Saif al-Islam, spoke on live television on 20th February. He warned the protesters to stop or there would be a civil war in the country.

Later air force jets began attacking parts of Tripoli. Yet two pilots said they could not obey the orders they had been given to bomb the city. Instead they flew their planes to the island of Malta to **defect**.

Many tribal and religious leaders have announced that they are now on the side of the demonstrators. Some senior military leaders and the troops they command have also changed sides. Many Libyan officials working in other countries have declared that they too want Colonel Gaddafi to go.

Libya is a large oil-producing country. Much of its oil is sold to European countries. There are many foreigners working in the oil and construction businesses in the country. These workers' own countries, such as Ukraine, France, Bulgaria, Turkey, South Korea, Russia, the USA, and the UK have sent planes and ships to help them leave Libya.

People living in Tripoli claim foreign **mercenaries**, from other African countries, are doing most of the shooting. They say some are forcing young people to take part in demonstrations in support of Colonel Gaddafi. In his television broadcast Colonel Gaddafi blamed other countries, such as the USA and the UK, for organising the protests. He claimed those taking part were either drunk or on drugs.

Most now predict that Colonel Gaddafi will eventually be deposed. This is because the number of his supporters seems to be getting smaller and smaller. Yet many people in Libya and other countries worry that, unlike what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, thousands of Libyans will lose their lives before there is finally a resolution to the crisis. ■

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