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STORY**



Demonstrators wave their national flag in Tunisia

WILL JASMINE REVOLUTION SPREAD?

On the evening of 14th January a private plane took off from the airport at Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. On board were the country's president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, his wife, and a few of their relatives. Mr Ben Ali and his family had decided to flee the country.

At first the president's plane headed for France. Yet French authorities refused it permission to land. The plane then changed direction and flew to Saudi Arabia. A few hours later it landed and the country's leaders welcomed Mr Ben Ali and his family.

Mr Ben Ali has been the elected president of Tunisia for 23 years. Yet many people believe he and his political party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), have fixed the elections in Tunisia, as they always easily won them. Many Tunisians felt their president acted more like a dictator than an elected

leader and were unhappy about having few freedoms.

Mr Ben Ali, his wife, their children, and close relatives ran many of Tunisia's larger businesses. Some people claim it was impossible to set up or grow a larger company unless part of the ownership was handed over to one of the president's family. Many people in the country thought Mr Ben Ali, his wife and relatives were corrupt and dishonest. The president's family members all lived in luxury houses and owned very expensive cars.

The trouble in Tunisia began in December. Many young well-educated people in the country are unemployed, and cannot find jobs. As a protest, one young university graduate set himself on fire. He later died from the burns. The man was angry because the police had forced him to shut down the small vegetable stall he had set up to try to make some money.

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After this incident hundreds of young people began to demonstrate in the streets of towns and cities. When several protesters were shot and killed by the police, older people joined the demonstrators. Houses and businesses owned by members of Mr Ben Ali's family were attacked and some were set on fire.



The president ordered the army to take control but its commanders refused. Many police officers then decided to join the protesters. The president realised his life was in danger and decided to flee the country. A few days later over 30 of Mr Ben Ali's and his wife's relatives were arrested when they tried to leave Tunisia.

When demonstrators bring down an oppressive [regime](#) or dictator in this way it is often called a revolution or described as 'people power'. Other recent similar revolutions

have been given nicknames. Examples are the Rose Revolution in Georgia, in 2003, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, in 2005. Soon after Mr Ben Ali fled Tunisia reporters in other countries began to describe the events as the Jasmine Revolution. Jasmine is the national flower of Tunisia.

Mohamed Ghannouchi, the country's prime minister and a member of the RCD, declared he would form a temporary government. He announced that new elections will be held within the next six months. He also said all political prisoners would be immediately released and the government would stop controlling the media. Many Tunisians were surprised to suddenly discover that newspapers, television news, and the internet were no longer being [censored](#) by RCD officials.

However, many people continue to protest against the RCD. They insist no RCD members, including the prime minister, should be members of the temporary government. Most want the RCD to be shut down, or disbanded.

Some people now wonder if similar 'revolutions' might happen in oth-

er North African countries. The leaders of Algeria, Libya, and Egypt have all been in charge for a very long time. These countries are also home to a large younger generation, many of whom are unemployed. Many believe when elections take place in these countries they too are fixed, as the ruling parties always seem to win easily.

People in other North African countries watched what was happening in Tunisia on news broadcasts and the internet. Soon afterwards there were smaller street demonstrations in Algiers, the capital of Algeria. There were even reports of a few people in countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia setting themselves on fire.

On 25th January thousands of people began demonstrating in the centre of Cairo, Egypt's capital city. It was reported that the protesters had organised the demonstrations by contacting each other on the internet. Hosni Mubarak is the president of Egypt. He has been the country's leader for the last 30 years.

Tunisia is a former French colony. The USA, France, and several other European countries have traditionally supported Mr Ben Ali and other leaders of North African and Middle Eastern Muslim countries. Political experts say they do this because they know these leaders would never allow Islamic militant groups to take over their countries.

Some people predict a strict Islamic group may now try to take control of Tunisia. Yet others think this is unlikely. They say most people in Tunisia want to live in a country where they have both freedom from censorship and the freedom to democratically elect their own leaders. ■

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