



# PEOPLE POWER

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE HAS PUT EGYPT ON THE PATH TO DEMOCRACY



A demonstrator defaces a poster of Hosni Mubarak in Alexandria.

## POLITICAL HISTORY

EGYPT has the largest population in the Middle East and its 80 million people are mostly Arab and Muslim. For 30 years from 1981, the country was ruled by the National Democratic Party, with Hosni Mubarak as president.

But as the country's population grew, many believed the government was not keeping up with the needs of the people.

An estimated 20 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. There have been concerns about human rights abuses for many years and the police force is seen as brutal and corrupt. Many people believe that parliamentary elections held in November were fraudulent.

## WHAT HAPPENED?

EGYPTIANS joined others in the Arab world in protesting the way their governments were running their countries.

Anti-government groups used Facebook and Twitter to let other Egyptians know they believed it was time to demand an end to the Mubarak regime.

On January 25, the first protesters took to the streets of the capital, Cairo, and the uprising gathered momentum over the next two weeks. Mubarak sacked the government, called in the army, shut down the internet and imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

He also appointed a vice-president, Omar Suleiman, promised constitutional reform and said he would not contest the presidential election due later this year.

But it wasn't enough. The protests continued and finally on February 11 he resigned. The United Nations estimates more than 300 people died during the turmoil.

Egypt's revolution is seen as one of the most significant democratic uprisings of modern times.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Egypt's new military leadership has said it will rule for six months or until presidential and parliamentary elections are held.

The international community sees Egypt



Graffiti on a wall in Cairo's Tahrir Square, epicentre of the popular revolt.



Citizens celebrate their victory.

as a key ally for maintaining peace in the Middle East, and the US has expressed concerns that radical elements could try to take power in Egypt.

The military leadership has said it will continue its historic peace accord with neighbouring Israel, which has helped keep peace in the region for more than 30 years.

## ANCIENT HISTORY

Famous for its ancient civilisation that built the pyramids, Egypt is in northern Africa, bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Its relative



Badges celebrating the ousting of Hosni Mubarak.

isolation and the bounty of the annual Nile River flood allowed for the development of one of the world's greatest civilizations.

Egypt as a unified state dates to about 3200BC, ruled by a series of dynasties the next three millennia until the Persians took control. They in turn were replaced by the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines. The Arabs introduced Islam and the Arabic language in the 7th century and ruled for the next six centuries.

A local military caste, the Mamluks, took control around 1250 and continued to govern after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks in 1517. Following the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt became an important world transport hub and Britain seized control in 1882. In 1952 Egypt acquired full sovereignty after the overthrow of the British-backed king.



## FACT BOX

- OFFICIAL NAME:** Arab Republic of Egypt
- CAPITAL AND LARGEST CITY:** Cairo
- POPULATION:** 80,471,869 (July 2010)
- OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:** Arabic. English and French widely understood
- NATIONAL ANTHEM:** "Bilady, Bilady, Bilady" (My Homeland, My Homeland, My Homeland)
- LIFE EXPECTANCY:** 72.4 years
- UNEMPLOYMENT RATE:** 9.7% (2010)
- POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LINE:** 20% (2005)
- INTERNET USERS:** 20.136 million (2009)
- EXCHANGE RATE:** A\$1 = 5.95 Egypt Pounds
- TOTAL AREA:** 1,001,450 sq km
- CLIMATE:** desert; hot, dry summers with moderate winters
- TERRAIN:** vast desert plateau interrupted by Nile valley and delta
- NATURAL RESOURCES:** petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, phosphates, manganese, limestone, gypsum, talc, asbestos, lead, rare earth elements, zinc
- NATURAL HAZARDS:** periodic droughts; frequent earthquakes; flash floods; landslides; hot, driving windstorm called khamsin occurs in spring; dust storms; sandstorms
- AGRICULTURE:** cotton, rice, corn, wheat, beans, fruits, vegetables; cattle, water buffalo, sheep, goats
- INDUSTRIES:** textiles, food processing, tourism, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, hydrocarbons, construction, cement, metals, light manufactures

