

Egypt's revolutionaries united in their cause, for now

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The Daily Star

CAIRO: At the entrance of Tahrir Square, the heart of Egypt's revolution, scores of demonstrators gathered for yet another day of protesting. Some raised signs that read "Stability + Freedom = New Egypt" and "New Egypt = 7,000 years + youth," referring to the age of the Egyptian civilization, as well as the young people who are ushering in an era of change in the country.

A 12-year-old beggar sat on the ground, facing a large banner listing the names of the martyrs who died in the revolution.

On one side of the Downtown Cairo square, an assembly of Muslim faithful knelt in prayer, while a man carrying a child on his shoulders took pictures with his phone.

The muezzin's call emanating from the mosque barely stifled the voice of a singer on a stage with a full sound system, a few meters away, who sang revolutionary songs that stimulated young people and political activists' fervor.

The plethora of people gathered in Tahrir Square came from all walks of life, but they shared a common objective: After succeeding in toppling the regime of Hosni Mubarak on Feb. 11, they were calling for the ouster of interim prime minister Ahmad Shafiq, who finally met their demands by tendering his resignation Thursday.

Since Mubarak's overthrow, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians have turned out in Cairo's Tahrir Square and other cities to celebrate his downfall and send a message to the military that the people will not be ignored.

Leaders of the 18-day uprising that forced out Mubarak had been pressing the military to fire Shafiq, arguing that a prime minister sworn in by the ousted leader should not stay in office. They also argued that his Cabinet was filled with figures from the old regime.

The revolt's leaders also want Mubarak's National Democratic Party dissolved along with the hated State Security Agency blamed for some of the worst human rights violations during



A woman sits in Cairo's Tahrir Square, where protesters have returned almost daily to push for political reform.

Mubarak's rule. Other demands include the release of political prisoners.

The groups represent a diverse array of political currents, but so far they have remained united in their efforts to unseat their common enemies, first Mubarak and then Shafiq.

"It is not logical that only one party organizes the protests because we aim at gathering all Egyptians," said Abdelrahman Sarin, the ElBaradei Movement's campaign organizer in the Revolution Youth Committee.

The committee encompasses five political parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, Justice and Freedom, April 6 movement, the Popular Democratic Movement for Change and ElBaradei Movement, and meets daily on Mahmoud Bassouri Street, near the heart of the revolution.

Ramy el-Shaer, the owner of Museum View hotel overlooking Tahrir Square, said "there was no organizer of the protests."

Shaer attributed the uprising, which began on Jan. 25 to an Internet initiative, saying, "everybody went to the protests after reading calls on Facebook groups."

"Our main demand is to allow all political parties to work in a healthy atmosphere without restriction," said Ahmad Eid, member of the Democratic Front Party in the Egypt Youth Coalition. "We want to push for people's demands and not demands that are related to a specific political party."

"The Coalition urges to raise the minimum wage and put an end to torture in police stations which people in lower-class areas suffer the most from."

In the busy Cilandro coffee shop, which faces Tahrir Square, Mahnan Mamdouk Mahran, managing editor of An-Naba al-Watany newspaper, said "a lot of people claimed to organize the revolution but no faction or individual could do it alone."

Mahran added that the "Internet just helped collecting different groups to come out and [come] together."

ESSAM SHARAF: EGYPT'S NEW PRIME MINISTER

Egypt's military rulers have appointed former transport minister Essam Sharaf to form a new government, the army said Thursday. Here are a few facts about Sharaf:

- Born in Egypt in 1952.
- He completed his bachelor's degree in civil engineering at Cairo University in 1975.
- He gained a masters in civil engineering at Purdue University, Indiana, in the United States in 1980 and a doctorate from the same university four years later.
- He joined Cairo University in 1985 as an assistant professor of highway and traffic engineering, where over the next two decades he researched maintenance management, pavement management, highway management, safety management and transport asset management.
- Sharaf served as minister of transport from July 13, 2004 until Dec. 31, 2005, at a time when former Prime Minister Ahmad Shafiq was minister of civil aviation.
- Sharaf returned to academia in 2006 as a professor at Cairo University. — Reuters

"The Muslim Brotherhood doesn't work as a single entity [and] doesn't have a specific demand for its members only but [for] all Egyptians," he said.

"Today, the Brotherhood still doesn't want to get involved in protests for fear of police repression."

The committee planned protests by taking joint decisions, Abdelkarim said. But it remains unclear whether the various camps will continue to stay united without a single identifiable leadership. For now, their best organizer is a common sense of oppression.

"You need an enemy to stir up the revolution, now it's Shafiq," Engi M. El-Hahhada, a 40-year-old woman sitting in a coffee place next to Tahrir Square said, just days before the prime minister resigned.

"The best organizer is the stupidity and the brutal force of the government," she said. "The government is responsible for organizing the revolution because the people reacted unanimously, the protests were not masterminded."

"Protests started with workers and syndicates ... in 2005, which opened the way to people."

According to Mahran, who has published numerous interviews with Muslim Brotherhood members since the uprising began, the Islamic group did not get involved in the revolution at its inception, but the protests gained momentum when the Brotherhood participated in the Jan. 28 demonstration.

It "gave trust to people" and, since that day, the Muslim Brotherhood became an effective faction in organizing the protests, Mahran said.

But Moaz Abdelkarim, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood youth committee denied their involvement.

He said the Brotherhood "feared the police's repression after years of imprisonment under Mubarak. The leadership [just] permitted them [members] to join the demonstrations as individuals."

Abdelkarim also works as the media representative for the Revolution Youth Committee.

AFP/Khaled Desouki