

## Inspired by Egypt, thousands protest on Moroccan streets

### Morocco

By Omar Waraich  
in Casablanca

THOUSANDS of people flooded on to the streets of cities across Morocco yesterday, hoping to wrest some powers from the ruling monarchy in the first large protests inspired by events in Tunisia and Egypt. At the front of the nearly

thousand-strong crowd in Casablanca, excited youths held aloft a banner bearing the image of Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian vegetable seller, whose self-immolation touched off the Arab revolt. They admired his sacrifice, but

were revealingly modest in their demands. A larger demonstration took place in the capital Rabat, where some 5,000 protesters gathered opposite parliament. Smaller protests took place in Marrakech and Tangiers. The chants at times echoed those heard in Egypt's Tahrir Square, but differed crucially. "The people want an end to corruption," they chanted, wrapped in Moroccan flags, under the gentle drizzle that fell over Casablanca's Place Mohammed V. In Egypt, they wanted the end of the regime.

References to the monarch were also scarce. Some held aloft banners, denouncing the government, but paying homage to the 47-year-old King, who inherited this kingdom from his father Hassan II 11 years ago. Even the toughest protesters dared not utter his name. "First was Ben Ali, second was Mubarak... we know who'll be the sixth," they chanted. Since assuming the throne, Muhammad VI has cast himself as the "king of the poor" and the "king of women". His chubby-cheeked, youthful visage is widely in evidence.

"We want the King to reign, but not rule," said Reda Oulamine, an articulate 40-year-old lawyer. "Why can't we have a constitutional monarchy like England or Spain?" While Morocco has the trappings of a more liberal regime, with dozens of political parties, unions and civil society groups, power remains tightly concentrated with the monarchy, the protesters say.

A fifth of the budget is lavished on its palaces, while the monarchy controls a vast empire of business interests, including the largest bank and mobile phone company. "The King's holding conglomerates should be returned to the people," said Tarik Armili, 30, a businessman. "We want our wealth back." Officially, unemployment in Morocco is at 10 per cent, but Moroccans



About 5,000 protesters march on parliament in Rabat  
SENNA/AFP/Getty

insist it is several times higher. Criticism is possible, but heavily circumscribed. Newspapers studiously avoid unflattering mentions of the King and his top generals.

"We need justice, health and education," said Mr Oulamine. "There is no independent judiciary, the King appoints fearful judges. The old have no health care. There is no investment in schools. Most of the country is illiterate."

Many were disappointed by the turnout. "There is a fear," said a teacher who stayed at home. "I have sympathy with the protesters, things are bad here. But I don't want there to be any trouble in my country."

## President's offer of talks is rejected by political opposition

### Yemen

By Ahmed Al-Haj  
in Sanaa

YEMEN'S EMBATTLED President yesterday sought a way out of the political crisis gripping his impoverished Arab nation, offering to oversee a dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition to defuse the stand-off with protesters demanding his ouster.

The offer by the American-backed President Ali Abdullah Saleh - which opposition groups swiftly rejected - came as protests calling for him to quit continued in at least four cities around the country for the 11th straight day.

A health official in the southern city of Aden said yesterday that a 16-year-old boy died the night before from

wounds suffered at a protest, bringing the countrywide death toll to eight since the protests began.

Protests continued yesterday, with 3,000 university students marching in Sanaa, the capital. Demonstrations were also held in Aden's Mansoura district, the town of Taiz and the province of al-Hadida.

Mr Saleh's rule continues to show signs of resilience in the face of the sustained protests that have seen security forces and regime supporters battling demonstrators. But the Yemeni regime is not doing as well in the south of the country, where resentment of Mr Saleh's rule is far more entrenched and a secessionist movement is steadily gaining strength. South Yemen used to be an independent nation, but became united with the north in 1990. AP

## King Abdullah finally has his say on reforms

### Jordan

By Jamal Halaby  
in Amman

JORDAN'S KING Abdullah II yesterday called for "quick and real" political reforms to give the public a greater role in governing and to eliminate corruption, favoritism and nepotism.

The King's comments are his first public remarks since anti-government

protests began in Jordan seven weeks ago. Activists are demanding a stronger role in politics and greater political freedoms. King Abdullah vowed to forge ahead with political reforms, saying it was "in the interest of our people".

He called for a comprehensive review of all bills, especially a greater role in governing and to eliminate corruption, favoritism and nepotism. The King's comments are his first public remarks since anti-government

## Security forces stop rallies on the streets of Tehran

### Iran

THOUSANDS of Iranian security personnel were deployed on the streets of Tehran and other cities yesterday to prevent protesters rallying in spite of a ban.

The websites of opposition leaders Mirhossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi had issued calls for nationwide rallies to commemorate two people killed in protests last week and show "decisive support to

the pro-reform movement and its leaders". Reports that one person had been killed in clashes in central Tehran were denied by a senior government official.

The daughter of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was detained for "chanting provocative slogans" at a rally. But the semi-official Fars news agency later said she had been released after saying she was "out shopping for clothes". REUTERS

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