

The Arab Spring Lives On

News:

On the anniversary of the Arab Spring in Tunisia on 13th Jan 2018, demonstrators were back on the streets not celebrating the anniversary but protesting once again at the state of the country. Tunisians are in a renewed state of anger. During the past few days, protestors took to the streets across the country, with over 300 arrested by security forces. Their demand remains the same as in 2011.

Comment:

In January 2011, 7 years ago, the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouazizi created a sweeping wave, which crossed the artificial border to Egypt, then to Libya, Yemen and Bahrain until it engulfed most of the Muslim world. What began with a single man in the markets of Tunisia spread to thousands on the streets in Cairo and evolved to hundreds of thousands demanding political change for the entire region. Within months, rulers who had been in power for decades fell like dominos. The West stood in astonishment as its lackeys fell one after the other, after constructing the region's political architecture exactly 100 years ago. For the Ummah there was much hope that the region was on the cusp real change. But today, 7 years later, Arab Spring in Tunisia has all but run out of steam as well as across the region.

By 2014 Ennahdah, who dominated the post-Ben Ali regime had abandoned all notions of Islamic rule. The people of Tunisia grew frustrated with the delays in the formation of the new constitution, alongside the economic struggles that had persisted since Ben Ali's presidency. Matters reached boiling point in February 2013 when Chokri Belaid, a prominent secular opposition leader was assassinated. This triggered mass protests and riots across Tunisia. With the government already struggling to rule, the killing of opposition lawmaker Mohammed Brahmi in July 2013 led to political gridlock. The ongoing demonstrations and public criticism by the secular opposition forced Ennahda to step down in October 2013 and allow a technocratic government to draft the new constitution.

The elections of October 26 2014 saw the reversal of Ennahda's fortunes and the return of the secular groups, including many cronies from the Ben Ali era. Many in Tunisia united on the post-Ben Ali era. As the months turned into years Ennahda were unable to deal with any of the pressing issues affecting the lives of the people. Broken promises, paired with a struggling economy and violence for long fuelled cynicism of Ennahda. Everyday issues such as poor rubbish collection and widespread joblessness prompted many to say things were better under Ben Ali. Despite receiving the support of the masses only a few years earlier, Nidaa Tounes founder, Beji Caid Essebsi, an 87-year-old veteran of both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, returned to power. Ben Ali's cronies were back in power.

But the secular rulers have proven themselves to be as incompetent as Ennahda. Nidaa Tounes has done little to restructure the economy which depends on tourism and is being held to ransom by the EU. The country continues to be held to ransom by the IMF who has forced crippling austerity measures, the Tunisian government finds its economic options limited. This leaves little room to invest in the vast and underdeveloped central and southern areas that make up the hotbed of simmering discontent and despair. As a result, Tunisia's economic priority has been cutting the budget deficit rather than creating jobs and taking care of the people's affairs.

Tunisia was the birthplace of the Arab Spring and the demands for change still remain with the people of Tunisia as well as the wider region. Foreign interference and the old guard waiting to maintain the status quo has hampered real change. On the seventh anniversary what is clear is the fact that the status quo is struggling for survival and we don't have long for the people of the region to come back to the streets again. But this time they would be clear that systemic change is necessary, not just a change of faces.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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