

Demonstrations Spread to the Capital in Sudan

From VOA Learning English, welcome to AS IT IS. Today, we hear about recent protests in the African nation of Sudan. Then, we learn about the growing interest around the world in ancestry. People in many countries are using online resources to find out more about their heritage. And some companies see a big market.

Sudan has seen its most serious protests in almost 30 years recently. The demonstrations over rising prices have taken place after the government decided to end support that kept fuel prices low. Many people have died as a result of riots that developed out of the protests. Experts say this could be a turning point for the ruling party and longtime President Omar al-Bashir.

The protests started a week ago in one town, but quickly spread to others and the capital, Khartoum. There protesters burned vehicles, gas stations, and police buildings, and threw stones at security forces.

The protests are seen as the greatest show of opposition to President Omar al-Bashir's rule since he came to power in a military takeover in 1989.

Sudanese historian and author Douglas Johnson says there have not been such protests in Sudan since two governments were overthrown in the 1960s and 1980s. Mr. Johnson says the fact that protests have spread beyond Khartoum is important.

"I don't know if they're being coordinated, but that is an indication of a rising sea of discontent. What you've got to have in Sudan for this to be successful is one, you have to have a public that has nothing left to fear -- and I think we're beginning to see that -- and two, you've got to see a loss of morale in security services.

VOA spoke with rebel commander Malik Agar. His forces in the states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan have allied with rebels in the Darfur region. He said the increase in fuel prices was more than most people would accept.

"My perception is that these demos are not going to stop. They are going to go ahead, and I think the people of the Sudan are fed up with the misadministration of the system, they are economically tied and they are even at the stage of economic suffocation. Whether they go for demo or whether they don't, they are going to suffer more and more."

Islam Al-Tayeb is a Sudanese analyst for the international Institute for Strategic Studies in Bahrain. She says the lack of strong opposition parties offering another political choice could be a problem.

She also says that, after being ruled by one man for 25 years, many Sudanese people are worried about joining protests. They believe that they will not receive help from the international community. But the number of deaths has shocked many into action.

“The risk is high, and the mobilization is serious. And the problem this time also is the crackdown has led to the deaths of many Sudanese.”

Al-Tayeb says that the government would sacrifice President Bashir to maintain control of the country. But, this would happen only if risks and demands grow significantly, and if more people take to the streets.

Many people are interested in the history of their families. It is an area of study called genealogy.

Interest in genealogy has increased markedly in recent years. Possibly because of the availability and ease of online databases, people around the world are becoming more interested in their family heritage. So it is no surprise that some businesses see a big market for online genealogy products. Christopher Cruise tells us more in this report from VOA’s Mike Richman.

The research company Global Industry Analysts says there are more than 80 million people who study genealogy for personal interest or as an occupation. It estimates the market for genealogy products and services will grow to \$4.3 billion by 2018.

Two providers of family history records recently announced a deal that will speed access to genealogical records. Ancestry.com is a for-profit business, while FamilySearch.org is operated by a religious group: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They plan to put about one million historical records on the Internet. The records include birth, marriage, death and immigration certificates.

Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org are major players in the genealogy business. Paul Nauta is head of FamilySearch.org. He says the base of people connected through technology is bigger than ever before.

“Because of technology and everyone’s connectedness through technology, one, it is easier and less expensive than ever to make the world’s historic records available for people online. But two, there’s a larger base of our world population than ever that is now connected through this worldwide technology, and they’re using it to socialize and communicate with each other.”

Nick Eastman edits an online genealogical newsletter. He says there are about 10,000 genealogy sites online. He thinks people have always been interested in genealogy and their family history.

“The difference now is we’ve got tools to satisfy that interest, whether you’re seated in your home or whether you have to go to a library someplace.”

Once, genealogy was considered a pastime for older adults and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But people with other beliefs and younger adults are getting interested in finding out about their family heritage.

Nick Eastman says many people have a desire to find out about their ancestors. People from countries that have accepted many waves of immigrants appear to be especially interested in genealogy. Such countries include the United States, Canada, Argentina and Brazil. People from Western European countries also are interested in genealogy products and services. This means the market for such information may only increase over time.

One hundred five years ago, Henry Ford introduced the Model T Sedan. It was first produced on October 1st, 1905. The Model T was not the first car ever made. But it was the first manufactured using an assembly line process. The assembly line permitted workers to be more productive, so that the Ford Motor Company could build more cars at a lower cost.

The lower cost of production made it possible for average Americans to buy a car. Ford stopped making the Model T in 1925. Fifteen million of the cars had been produced by then. Many people consider the Model T to be the car that changed American culture forever.

And that’s our show for today. Join us tomorrow for another As It Is program from VOA Learning English.