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Al Jazeera

## Workers to continue Egypt strikes

**Thousands of doctors are among those expected to join workers' strike as anti-Mubarak demonstration enters its 17th day**

2/10/2010

Egyptian labour unions held nationwide strikes for a second day, adding momentum to the pro-democracy demonstrations in Cairo and other cities.

The move comes as the demonstrations calling for President Hosni Mubarak's immediate ouster enters its 17th day.

Al Jazeera's Stefanie Dekker, reporting from Cairo, said about 5,000 doctors and medical students were expected to come out on Thursday.

Lawyers, public transport workers and the artists syndicate were also among those who joined the strikes, Al Jazeera correspondents reported.

"It's certainly increasing the pressure on the government here. I think it's worth making the distinction that the strikes going on are more of an economic nature, they are not necessarily jumping on the bandwagon of the protesters in Tahrir Square," Dekker said.

"Many of them are not actually calling for the president to step down, but fighting for better wages, for better working conditions."

Our correspondents reported that around 20,000 factory workers had stayed away from work across Egypt on Wednesday.

"[Strikers] were saying that they want better salaries, they want an end to the disparity in the pay, and they want the 15 per cent increase in pay that was promised to them by the state," Shirine Tadros, reported from Cairo.

Some workers were also calling for Mubarak to step down, she said.

### **Culture minister quits**

Meanwhile, Gaber Asfour, the recently appointed culture minister, resigned from Mubarak's cabinet on Wednesday for health reasons, a member of his family told Reuters.

But the website of Egypt's main daily newspaper *Al-Ahram* said Asfour, a writer, was under pressure from literary colleagues over the post.

Asfour was sworn in following the start of the protests on January 31, and believed it would be a national unity government, *al-Ahram* said.

Determined protesters continue to rally in Cairo's Tahrir [Liberation] Square, and other cities across the country. They say they will not end the protests until Mubarak, who has been at the country's helm since 1981, steps down.

Protesters with blankets gathered outside the parliament building in Cairo on Wednesday, with no plan to move, our correspondent reported. The demonstrators had put up a sign that read: "Closed until the fall of the regime".

There was also a renewed international element to the demonstrations, with Egyptians from abroad returning to join the pro-democracy camp.

Our correspondent said an internet campaign is currently on to mobilise expatriates to return and support the uprising.

Protesters are "more emboldened by the day and more determined by the day", Ahmad Salah, an Egyptian activist, told Al Jazeera from Cairo. "This is a growing movement, it's not shrinking."

Meanwhile, 34 political prisoners, including members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood opposition group, were reportedly released over the past two days.

Our correspondent said that there are still an unknown number of people missing, including activists thought to be detained during the recent unrest.

Human Rights Watch said the death toll has reached 302 since January 28. However, Egypt's health ministry denied the figures, saying official statistics would be released shortly.