

# Unrest engulfs Tunisia after president flees to S Arabia

## Election in 60 days

AP, Tunis, Tunisia

Unrest engulfed Tunisia yesterday after a popular rebellion forced the president to flee: Dozens of inmates were killed in two prison fires, looters emptied shops and torched the main train station and gunfire echoed through the capital.

Power changed hands for the second time in 24 hours in this North African country after President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country Friday for Saudi Arabia. The head of the Constitutional Court declared yesterday that Ben Ali has left office for good - not temporarily - and rejected the prime minister's move to assume power.

The speaker of the lower house of parliament, Fouad Mebazaa, took the highest office instead, and was given two months to organize new elections.

Anger over corruption and the lack of jobs ignited a month of protests, but Ben Ali's departure - a key demand of demonstrators - has not calmed the unrest. While the protests were mostly peaceful, after Ben Ali's departure rioters burned the main train station in Tunis and looted shops.

A fire in a prison in the Mediterranean coastal resort of Monastir killed 42 people, coroner Tarek Mghirbi told The AP yesterday.

Sporadic gunfire was heard in the capital of Tunis. Smoke billowed over a giant supermarket outside the capital as looters torched and emptied it. The army fired warning shots to scare them away, to little avail.

An Associated Press photographer saw soldiers try to stop looters from sacking the huge supermarket in the

Ariana area north of the capital. Shops near the main bazaar were also looted.

A helicopter circled low over the capital, apparently acting as a spotter for fires or pillaging. Gunfire crackled anew yesterday morning.

Saudi King Abdullah's palace confirmed yesterday that the ousted president and his family had landed in Saudi Arabia, saying the kingdom welcomed him with a wish for "peace and security to return to the people of Tunisia."

Ben Ali won frequent praise from abroad for presiding over reforms to make the economy more competitive and attract business. Growth last year was at 3.1 percent.

President Barack Obama said he applauded the courage and dignity of protesting Tunisians, and urged all parties to keep calm and avoid violence.



PHOTO: AFP

People celebrate at the Bourget airport (upper left) and people are seen looting a store near a supermarket (lower left) yesterday in La Gazella city near Tunis as the country falls into deep chaos even though the fallen President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (right) quit Tunisia after weeks of deadly protests.

## NEWS IN brief

### Fresh political violence kills 17 in Pakistan's Karachi

AFP, Karachi

At least 17 people have been killed in a fresh wave of political violence in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi, officials said yesterday.

Tensions are high between the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Awami National Party (ANP), which each represent different communities in Karachi, straddling political fault lines in the city.

"At least 17 people were killed in targeted killings since Thursday," Sindh province's home ministry spokesman Sharfuddin Memon told AFP.

"Dozens of suspects linked to targeted killing have been rounded up," he said.

Memon said that extra police and paramilitary rangers had been deployed in the trouble-prone western neighbourhoods of Karachi and patrolling

### At least 42 dead in Tunisia prison fire

AFP, Tunis

A fire at a prison yesterday in Monastir in eastern Tunisia killed at least 42 inmates, a hospital doctor said.

"Thirty-one bodies were taken to the morgue and another 11 have followed," Dr Ali Chatli, head of the forensic medicine department at Fatouma Bourguiba hospital at Monastir, 160 kilometres (100 miles) south of Tunis, told AFP.

Chatli said the fire was caused by an inmate who set fire to a mattress in a dormitory housing nearly 90 people in an attempt to escape, sparking panic.

The victims died of severe burns and asphyxiation, he said.

The fire comes as Tunisia reels from the ousting of President Zine Abidine Ben Ali after weeks of violent protests against his rule.

Chatli said prisoners also panicked because they

### Sri Lanka frees ex-Tigers to mark harvest festival

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan authorities yesterday released 78 suspected Tamil Tiger rebels from an internment centre to mark the Tamil harvest festival of Thai Pongal, an official said.

A total of 48 women and 30 men left a military-run facility in the northern town of Jaffna, the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation Brigadier Sudantha Ranasinghe said.

Sri Lanka's minority Tamils celebrate Thai Pongal yesterday, but the festivities have been marred by floods that destroyed farmland and left more than 30 people dead across the island's northern, central and eastern regions.

"We have about 4,500 men and women left in rehabilitation centres, and they will also be released

### Iran to display US drones it shot down

AFP, Tehran

Iran will put on public display two US Navy drones shot down by its elite Revolutionary Guards, a top Iranian commander said yesterday.

"The planes that were shot down are among the most modern US navy drones and have a long-range capability," Ali Fadavi, commander of Guards' naval forces, was quoted as saying by Fars news agency.

On January 2, the head of Guards air force said the elite unit had downed two "Western spy" drones. He had not said when the two drones were actually shot down.

"These aircraft are in our possession and at an appropriate time they will be displayed" to the public, Fadavi said, rejecting Western media reports that quoted Washington officials denying the drones were shot down by Iranian forces.

The US military and Central Intelligence Agency regularly use drones to launch missile strikes in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's lawless tribal belt, but

## 'Jasmine revolution' in Tunisia jolts Arab world

AFP, Cairo

The ousting of Tunisia's president after violent protests is a stark warning to authoritarian regimes across the Arab world, whose people have long voiced similar grievances, analysts said yesterday.

A joke making the rounds in Egypt shortly after the news that the Tunisian leader, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, had fled the country after 23 years in power, reflects the mood on the streets of Arab nations.

It says: "Ben Ali's plane is approaching Sharm el-Sheikh (Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's residence on the Red Sea resort) not to land, but to pick up more passengers!"

Tunisia's "Jasmine Revolution," as it has been dubbed, "is the first popular uprising to succeed in removing a president in the Arab world," said Amr Hamzawy of the Carnegie Middle East Centre based in Beirut.

"It could be quite inspiring for the rest of the Arab world."

"Some ingredients in Tunisia are relevant elsewhere," from Morocco to Algeria and Egypt to Jordan, he said, citing unemploy-

ment, heavy handedness of police and human rights violations.

The Tunisian example also shows change can come from the Arab societies themselves.

"It doesn't have to be an invasion like in Iraq. It's a big lesson for autocratic regimes in the region," Hamzawy said.

The Lebanese daily An Nahar said in an editorial that the "echo" of the unprecedented revolution would resound "in more than one country of the region."

On Friday, dozens of Egyptians joined a group of Tunisians outside their embassy in central Cairo amid scenes of jubilation and a heavy police presence.

"Listen to the Tunisians, it's your turn Egyptians!," they chanted.

In neighbouring Algeria, deadly riots have also rocked the country this month in protest at the rise in price of basic goods.

In Jordan, thousands took to the streets on Friday in several cities to protest against unemployment and inflation, demanding the sacking of the government.

### Tunisia reopens all airports, airspace

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia reopened all airports and the country's airspace yesterday, a day after president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia following violent anti-government protests, the civil aviation authority announced.

It said travellers should still contact airlines to avoid any airport congestion due to flight cancellations or delays.

"Tunisian airspace and national airports are open to air traffic," said the authority in a statement quoted by official TAP news agency.

Airport officials had announced the closure on Friday as Ben Ali prepared to flee the country.

## BRAZIL FLOODS Week of mourning declared

AFP, Nova Friburgo, Brazil

Rio de Janeiro state yesterday declared a week of mourning for 550 people who died in flash floods and mudslides in mountain towns seen as Brazil's worst natural disaster.

The period of official grieving is to begin tomorrow on orders of state governor Sergio Cabral.

The flooding, which hit the Serra region just north of Rio de Janeiro city on Wednesday, has left a staggering toll of death and destruction.

There were fears further landslides could still occur after rain continued to fall on the region, though there was a respite early yesterday.

Around 14,000 people have been left homeless. Nova Friburgo, the worst-hit town with 249 deaths, was still largely without electricity, drinking water, food, gasoline and medicine three days after the tragedy.

Outside a makeshift morgue set up in a school, one resident, Waldecy Caetano, told AFP: "I didn't lose anyone, but (a friend) lost a daughter, and another friend lost her mother, she just identified her. And so we're just leaving it all to God."

The friend who lost his daughter, Marcel Ferraz da Silva, angrily blamed local politicians for allowing poor people to build their homes on unstable hillsides.

### S Korean freighter hijacked off Somalia

AFP, Seoul

A South Korean cargo ship with 21 crew on board was hijacked apparently by Somali pirates yesterday, a Seoul foreign ministry source said.

The 10,000-ton chemical freighter owned by Samho Shipping, based in the southern port city of Busan, was commandeered by pirates in the Indian Ocean, he told AFP.

The ship was carrying eight South Koreans, two Indonesians, and 11 crew from Myanmar.

## China to station troops in N Korea

AFP, Seoul

China is in discussions with North Korea about stationing its troops in the isolated state for the first time since 1994, a South Korean newspaper reported yesterday.

The Chosun Ilbo newspaper quoted an anonymous official at the presidential Blue House as saying that Beijing and Pyongyang recently discussed details of stationing Chinese soldiers in the North's northeastern city of Rason.

The official said the soldiers would protect Chinese port facilities, but the location also gives access to the Sea of Japan (East Sea), while a senior security official was quoted as saying it would allow China to intervene in case of North Korean instability.

A spokeswoman for the Blue House said she had no information, while China's defence ministry declined comment to AFP on the matter this week.

"North Korea and China have discussed the issue of stationing a small number of Chinese troops to protect China-invested port facilities" in the Rason special economic zone, the unnamed official was quoted as saying.

## 'Last trumpet' sounds in South Sudan vote

AFP, Juba, Sudan

A Christian bishop blew the "last trumpet" yesterday on south Sudan's landmark vote on independence from the Muslim north as he cast his ballot an hour before the close of the seven days of polling.

Bishop Paul Yugusuk was among the last to have his say in the referendum, centre-piece of a 2005 peace deal that ended a devastating 22-year civil war pitting the mainly Christian and African south against the north, at a cost of around two million lives.

"I have blown the last trumpet at the very end of voting," said Yugusuk, sporting a purple episcopal cassock after sounding his orange vuvuzela, draped in the black, red and green of the south Sudanese flag.

"This is the signal not only of the end of

the voting but of an end to our slavery, oppression and the beginning of our freedom," said the bishop of the Episcopal Church of Sudan who chairs the Religious Referendum Leaders' Initiative.

Organisers said all polls would close as planned at 6:00 pm (1500 GMT) except among emigre voters in flood-hit areas of Australia where there would be a five-day extension.

The organising commission's chairman, Mohammed Ibrahim Khalil, an elder statesman who served as foreign minister in the 1960s, hailed the "most peaceful" election he had ever seen in Sudan.

A handful of voters trickled to the polls on the final day of the landmark referendum that is set to turn the page on five decades of north-south conflict.

## Civilisations' rise and fall 'recorded in trees'

BBC ONLINE

An extensive study of tree growth rings says there could be a link between the rise and fall of past civilisations and sudden shifts in Europe's climate.

A team of researchers based their findings on data from 9,000 wooden artifacts from the past 2,500 years.

They found that periods of warm, wet summers coincided with prosperity, while political turmoil occurred during times of climate instability.

The findings have been published online by the journal Science.

"Looking back on 2,500 years, there are examples where climate change impacted human history," co-author Ulf Buntgen, a paleoclimatologist at the Swiss Federal Research Institute the website.

The team capitalised on a system used to date material unearthed during excavations.

"Archaeologists have developed oak ring width chronologies from Central Europe that cover nearly the entire Holocene and have used them for the purpose of dating artefacts, historical buildings, antique artwork and furniture," they wrote.

"Chronologies of living and relict oaks may reflect distinct patterns of summer precipitation and drought."

The team looked at how weather over the past couple of centuries affected living trees' growth rings.

During good growing seasons, when water and nutrients are in plentiful supply, trees form broad rings, with their boundaries relatively far apart.

But in unfavourable conditions, such as drought, the rings grow in much tighter formation.

The researchers then used this data to reconstruct annual weather patterns from the growth rings preserved in the artefacts.

Once they had developed a chronology stretching back over the past 2,500 years, they identified a link with prosperity levels in past societies, such as the Roman Empire.

"Wet and warm summers occurred during periods of Roman and medieval prosperity. Increased climate variability from 250-600 AD coincided with the demise of the western Roman empire and the turmoil of the migration period," the team reported.

"Distinct drying in the 3rd Century paralleled a period of serious crisis in the western Roman empire marked by barbarian invasion, political turmoil and economic dislocation in several provinces of Gaul."

Dr Buntgen explained: "We were aware of these super-big data sets, and we brought them together and analyzed them in a new way to get the climate signal."

"If you have enough wood, the dating is secure. You just need a lot of material and a lot of rings."

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Admission Interview : Tuesday, 18 January 2011  
Class Commence : Sunday, 23 January 2011

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