

Third night of unrest in Tunisia

Hundreds arrested as protest over austerity measures boils over

AFP, Tunis
A third night of unrest has shaken Tunisia where authorities said yesterday more than 600 people have been arrested this week as anger at austerity measures boils over on the streets.

Tunisia is considered a rare success story of the Arab Spring uprisings that began in the North African country in 2011 and spread across the region, toppling autocrats.

But the authorities have failed to resolve the issues of poverty and unemployment.

Police detained 328 people on Wednesday for theft, looting, arson and blocking roads, the interior ministry said, after arresting more than 280 people over the previous two days.

The latest unrest saw a provincial police station torched, Molotov cocktails hurled at police and tear gas fired, but ministry spokesman Khalifa Chibani said the "violence" was less intense than in previous days.

Twenty-one members of the security forces were injured, Chibani said. There was no immediate toll available for any casualties among the protesters.

Tunisia is often seen as having had a relatively smooth transition since the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

But Tunisians have expressed frustration since the start of the year over austerity measures expected to further increase prices in a struggling economy.

The North African country introduced hikes in value-added tax and social contributions as part of a tough new budget.

Political scientist Olfa Lamloum called the measures "the straw that breaks the camel's back".

"Young people are disappointed with the revolution, especially because of the high cost of living," she said.



Tunisian security forces track down protesters in the Ettadhamen on the outskirts of Tunis late Wednesday, after price hikes ignited protests in the North African country. Hundreds have been arrested and dozens of police hurt during clashes, the interior ministry said, as anger over austerity measures spilled over into unrest.

RITZ HEIST

French police recover some jewels

AFP, Paris

French police have recovered some of the millions in jewels looted from the Ritz hotel in Paris, a police source told AFP yesterday, as officers hunt for two robbers who remain on the run.

The armed gang burst into the five-star hotel on the French capital's glitzy Place Vendôme through a rear staff entrance on Wednesday evening and smashed the display windows of jewellery shops on the ground floor.

Three men were arrested as they tried to flee by the way they came in with bags of gems and watches worth over four million euros (\$4.8 million) but came up against locked doors.

"Obviously there is a security system and an alarm in this type of establishment," a police source said.

Part of the loot was recovered after being scattered about during the arrest of the three suspects.

More jewels and watches were found in a bag dropped by one of the two robbers who got away, another source added, without being able to give an estimate for the value of the goods retrieved.

Czech president faces 8 challengers in polls

AFP, Prague

Czechs will vote in a divisive presidential election starting today, seen as a test for the country increasingly split between the anti-Muslim, pro-Russian views of incumbent Milos Zeman and more liberal currents.

The 73-year-old former communist Zeman is hoping to beat eight other contenders to clinch a second five-year term after his 2013 win in the EU member's first-ever direct presidential vote.

But although polls show him in pole position, the outspoken head of state is unlikely to win an outright majority and may face a run-off round in two weeks.

Jiri Drahos, his most likely opponent in the duel, could not be more different. A liberal centrist, the 68-year-old former head of the Czech Academy of Sciences is staunchly pro-European and has called for Prague to "play a more active role in the EU".

Zeman echoes other populist-minded eastern EU leaders -- especially in Hungary and Poland -- at odds with Brussels over mandatory refugee quotas and various rules they see as attempts by Brussels to limit national sovereignty.

He also has harsh anti-Muslim views, having once called the 2015 migrant crisis "an organised invasion" of Europe and insisted Muslims were "impossible to integrate".

Paradoxically, the country of 10.6 million

people has received only 12 migrants under the EU quota system.

"The vote shows a broader conflict, it shows how society is polarised," independent political analyst Jiri Pehe told AFP.

"It is a clash between... the post-communist part of society represented by Zeman and the other part, say, modern, pro-Western, which simply doesn't want this president any more."

A January survey commissioned by Czech Television showed Zeman losing a run-off to Drahos, who beat him with 48.5 percent to 44 percent.

- Liberal democracy under threat? -

No matter who wins, the next president will find himself battling a political crisis with roots in last year's general election.

Analysts note that a Drahos victory could upset government-building measures by the populist ANO movement of billionaire Andrej Babis, a Zeman ally who won the October 2017 ballot.

ANO topped the vote, scoring 78 of 200 parliamentary seats campaigning on an anti-corruption and anti-euro ticket.

But the controversial tycoon, who is himself facing police charges over EU funding fraud, has found it impossible to form a majority government after being tapped prime minister by Zeman.

Babis appeared set to lose a parliamentary confidence vote scheduled for January 16.



5 accuse star James Franco of sexual harassment

HUFFINGTONPOST.COM

Five women have spoken out in an explosive new Los Angeles Times article accusing actor James Franco of sexual misconduct.

Four actresses who were students in Franco's acting classes and a filmmaker who considered him a mentor say in the article published yesterday that Franco asked them to perform sexually inappropriate and coercive scenes, and described him "storming off" a movie set when women refused his demands to appear naked.

Robot dog dances, recognises people

CNN

Sony's iconic robotic dog Aibo can now dance, find a bone and recognize people in your family.

The Japanese electronics company showed off Aibo's new tricks at CES 2018 in Las Vegas this week.

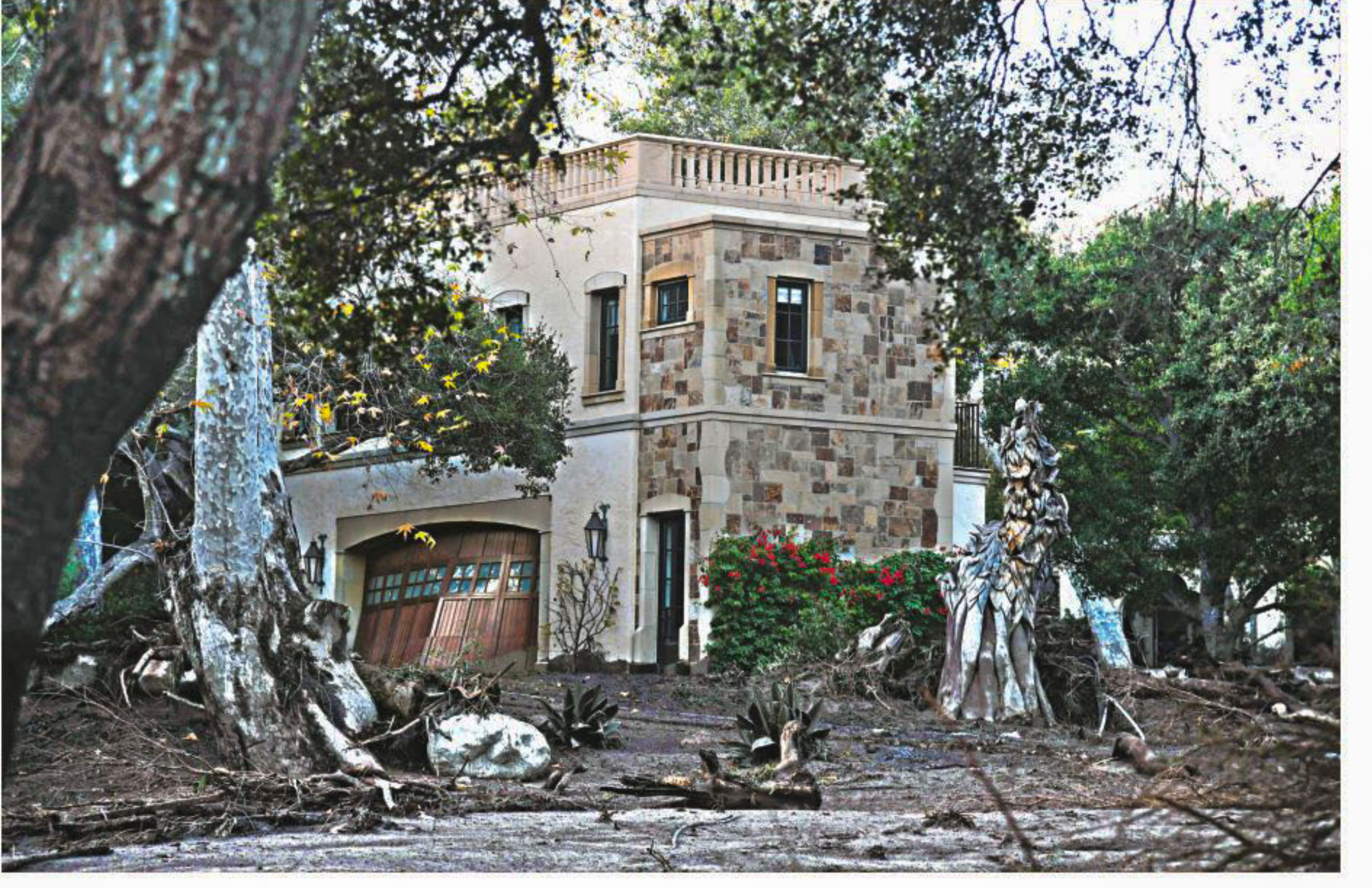
The revamped version of the robotic dog, which Sony first launched in the 1990s, costs ¥198,000 (about \$1,740). Pre-orders began in November, and it will start shipping in Japan next week.

Sony hasn't said when it might become available in other countries.

Aibo drew big crowds at CES, with fans and media eager to see the latest version of the robotic puppy.

Sony has made a slew of upgrades to Aibo. Unlike previous models, it has OLED eyes, which make it look more realistic and display more nuanced expressions.

Aibo is outfitted with new artificial intelligence capabilities, such as developing its own personality over time. It has facial recognition so it can detect different members of your family and can tell people apart from an object like a bone. If someone in your house pets Aibo the most, it will interact with them the most.



A luxury home is surrounded by mud and debris caused by a massive mudflow in Montecito, California, on Wednesday. Search and rescue efforts intensified for hundreds of Montecito residents feared trapped in their homes after deadly walls of mud and debris roared down California hillsides stripped of vegetation by recent, ferocious wildfires. PHOTO: AFP

California mudslide toll hits 17

AFP, Montecito

Rescuers used dogs and helicopters to search for victims on Wednesday of powerful mudslides which left at least 17 people dead in a southern California community that is also home to major celebrities including Oprah Winfrey.

Heavy rains on Tuesday sent rivers of waist-high mud and debris flowing from the hills into Montecito and other towns in Santa Barbara County northwest of Los Angeles, which are still recovering from last month's ferocious wildfires.

"We are saddened to report that the death toll has now risen to 17," Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown told reporters, saying it had been "another extremely challenging day."

At least 28 people were injured, authorities said, while 30,000 remained subject to mandatory evacuation orders.

The US Coast Guard released footage of a couple, their two young children and two dogs being plucked from their roof and hoisted up to a helicopter in baskets.

roads of tons of sticky brown mud in Montecito and other towns as utility workers restored downed power lines.

Talk show host Oprah Winfrey, who has been touted this week as a possible 2020 candidate for the White House, was among those affected by the mudslides.

Winfrey posted a video of herself outside her Montecito mansion wading through near-knee deep mud.

In some neighbourhoods still bearing the scars of the Thomas Fire, houses were completely destroyed while others nearby were untouched.

ক্রেতাদের মাঝে ব্যাপক সাদা ও আলোড়ন সৃষ্টি হওয়ায় এবং ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলা '১৮ উপলক্ষে ডিজিটাল ক্যাম্পেইনের মেয়াদ বাড়লে

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