

Iraq in mourning after deadly new Daesh attack north of Baghdad

Mon, 2020-11-23 00:31

SAMARRA/IRAQ: Iraq's Salahaddin province declared three days of mourning from Sunday over a deadly attack blamed on Daesh, as some criticized authorities for failing to fight back militants.

Late Saturday, a roadside bomb hit a civilian car on an open road near Mt. Makhoul, about 200 km north of Baghdad, police and a local official said. When security forces arrived at the scene, militants opened fire on them, police said.

The attack killed at least six Iraqi security personnel and four civilians, including one who died of his wounds overnight, according to local medics. There was no claim by Daesh, but both the local mayor and police blamed the group, which Iraq's government said in late 2017 it had defeated.

That victory came after three years of brutal fighting to wrench back the one-third of Iraqi territory that had been captured by Daesh.

Although the militants no longer hold territory, sleeper cells wage hit-and-run attacks on state infrastructure, particularly in desert areas north of the capital.

Two weeks ago, 11 people were killed in a Daesh attack on a lookout post at Al-Radwanayah on Baghdad's outskirts.

According to a study published this month by the International Center for Counter-Terrorism in the Hague, the extremist group has claimed more attacks in Iraq than in any other country where it is active over the period December 2018 to May this year.

The study said that Daesh activity in Iraq "accelerated precipitously from February 2020 onwards," reaching levels that are "worryingly close" to those preceding its sweep across a third of Iraq in 2014. Still, death tolls remain low. Daesh in Iraq "generally appears to be moving from a (re) building phase into one that is characterised by brazen guerrilla-style attacks," the study noted.

The attacks have coincided with a new campaign by Iraq's security forces to arrest jihadists hiding out in rugged terrain in the country's north and west.

In fact, just a day before the attack, the head of Iraq's federal police Jaafar Al-Batat told state media that the area around Mt. Makhoul had been cleared.

"The incidents carried out by IS (Daesh) in some remote areas are isolated cases and now under control," he said.

That outraged local figures. "Iraqi security forces just assured us this area had been cleaned," wrote Mashaan Al-Jaboury, a lawmaker representing Salahaddin, on Twitter after the violence late on Saturday.

FASTFACT

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country where it is active over the period December 2018 to May this year, according to a study published this month by the International Center for Counter-Terrorism in The Hague.

For Jamal Al-Dhari, another Sunni figure writing on Twitter, the latest ambush “sheds light on the repeated failures in the fight against terrorism.” “The government of (Prime Minister) Mustafa Al-Kadhemi must seriously put in place a national strategy ... and stop being satisfied with ‘investigative committees,’” said Dhari.

Iraqis regularly mock their government for establishing investigative bodies that do not produce results.

The tensions come as the US-led coalition, which helped Iraq fight Daesh starting in 2014, is drawing down its troops.

This year, the US has already shrunk its contribution to the coalition from 5,200 to some 3,000 troops, as other countries have reduced their numbers as well.

The US announced last week it would withdraw another 500 troops by mid-January, which Iraqi officials say is the fourth and final phase of the coalition’s drawdown.

The top US commander for the Middle East, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, said the progress made by Iraqi security forces in recent years had allowed the US to draw down.

Troops remaining in Iraq would focus on training local forces, carrying out air strikes in support of their operations and running drone surveillance over the country.

The US military presence remains a source of controversy.

Iraq’s parliament voted in January to oust all foreign troops, following a US drone strike on Baghdad that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and a leading Iraqi paramilitary commander.

Al-Kadhemi, whose government is seen as US-leaning, has slow-walked the implementation.

Pro-Iran factions have organized a series of rallies in recent months to demand Al-Kadhemi implement the decision.

“If you don’t leave on your own, our rockets will force you out!” one sign at a recent protest read.

It was in reference to dozens of rocket attacks on Western diplomatic and military installations since October 2019.

The US has threatened to close its embassy in Baghdad unless rocket attacks stop.



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[Palestinians may limit Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-11-22 23:55

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Health Ministry has recommended strict limits on Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem this year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Celebrations in the biblical town revered by Christians as Jesus' birthplace are usually attended by thousands of people from around the world.

But this year, the ministry has recommended the upcoming Christmas tree lighting ceremony in Manger Square be limited to 50 people, with the lights of the tree and area restaurants closed at 9 p.m. throughout the Christmas season. In its recommendations Saturday, it said religious services on Christmas Eve should also have limited attendance.

Bethlehem's economy, filled with hotels, gift shops and restaurants, relies

heavily on the Christmas season. The cancelation or scaling back of the celebrations will deal another blow to an economy that already has been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis this year. Palestinian officials are expected to make a final decision on Christmas celebrations in the coming days. Israel's international airport – the main entry point for foreign travelers – has been closed to tourists for months, limiting the potential numbers of pilgrims in any case. The West Bank is in the midst of a spike in coronavirus cases, while Israel is only slowly emerging from a lockdown imposed in September to control a raging outbreak. The northern Israeli town of Nazareth, revered by Christians as the place of Jesus' childhood, has been designated a "restricted" zone by authorities, limiting movement in and out of the area for at least the next few days.



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Egypt sets shop opening hours as second wave approaches

Author:

Mon, 2020-11-23 00:20

CAIRO: In preparation for the expected second wave of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the Egyptian government has announced new opening hours for shops, restaurants, cafes, and workshops and handicrafts shops.

The changes will come into effect from Dec. 1.

The government said that the new times were part of its continued efforts to achieve stability, prevent chaos, maintain the state's infrastructure, preserve the people's health and safety and reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

Minister of Local Development General Mahmoud Shaarawy spoke of the many benefits of this ruling, which was approved by the Supreme Committee for Public Shop Licensing, including saving energy, regulating working hours, allowing local authorities to remove garbage and keep Egyptian streets clean across the country.

General Shaarawy said that shops and malls, excluding restaurants, cafes, and bazaars, will open at 7:00 a.m. and close at 11:00 p.m. daily during the summer, and at 10:00 p.m. in winter. He said that they will close at midnight in summer and 11:00 p.m. in winter on Thursdays and Fridays, as well as on official holidays.

Restaurants, cafes, and bazaars, including those in shopping malls, will open at 5:00 a.m. and close at 1:00 a.m. in summer and midnight in winter. He added that during winter times will be extended on Thursdays and Fridays, as well as on official holidays, so these establishments will close at 1:00 a.m. He said that home delivery services of cafes and restaurants will be available 24 hours all year round.

The minister said that the opening hours for workshops and handicrafts shops in populated areas will be daily from 8:00 a.m. till 7:00 p.m. in summer, and from 6:00 a.m. in winter. He underlined that these hours exclude service establishments such as gas stations, which will be covered by a regulation to be issued by the chairman of the Supreme Committee for Public Shop Licensing. The opening hours for workshops and handicrafts shops inside populated areas may be amended if needed.

Coronavirus cases have surged again in Egypt following a decline during the summer.



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UAE reports 1,205 new COVID-19 cases, 4 deaths
Pompeo: Other Arab countries will normalize relations with Israel

[UAE reports 1,205 new COVID-19 cases, 4 deaths](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-11-22 23:11

DUBAI: The UAE on Sunday recorded 1,205 new coronavirus cases and four deaths.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases in the country since the pandemic began has reached 158,990, with the death toll now at 552.

The ministry added that 791 people recovered over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 148,871.

The emergency, crisis and disaster management committee in the emirate of Fujairah announced that it will ban all types of camping, including caravans, as part of coronavirus precautionary measures.

The decision, announced by Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ahmad bin Ghanem Al-Kaabi, commander in chief of Fujairah Police, comes as the emirate begins its

camping season and as the hot summer weather begins to cool down. As part of daily inspection tours, Dubai Economy shut down a gaming center located on Sheikh Zayed Road for violating anti-COVID-19 measures on Saturday. Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 322 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 140,056. The death toll reached 866 after three new fatalities were registered. Oman's Health Ministry said the country's total number of cases had reached 122,081 and the death toll was 1,380.



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Saudi Arabia announces 19 more COVID-19 deaths UAE confirms 1,269 new COVID-19 cases, 3 deaths

COVID-19 cases soar to record levels in Turkey

Author:

By Associated Press

ID:

1606075743304150000

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ANKARA: Turkey saw a record number of people diagnosed with COVID-19 for the second day running on Sunday as 6,017 new symptomatic patients were documented, the health ministry said.

The number of new daily cases has surpassed the outbreak's previous peak in April.

Evening lockdowns were introduced over the weekend for the first time since June, with businesses such as restaurants and bars ordered to close.

The ministry said 446,882 patients with symptoms have been identified since the country's first recorded case in March. Turkey does not publicly report confirmed coronavirus cases in people without COVID-19 symptoms, a policy that has been criticized for masking the true scope of the national outbreak. Turkey recorded 139 COVID-19 deaths over the previous 24 hours, taking the country's total to 12,358, the health ministry reported.



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