

Iraq security forces arrest armed men after protester killed

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BASRA: Iraqi security forces arrested at least five men from a local political party's headquarters in the southern city of Basra Monday after a protester was shot dead outside the building.

It was the first death since modest anti-government protests resumed on Sunday, ending months of relative calm just as new Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhemi was sworn in.

Kadhemi has extended a hand to demonstrators and promised accountability for the more than 550 people killed in violence at anti-government rallies that first erupted in October.

Late Sunday, protesters had massed around the office of a local party in Basra, once more demanding the ouster of the Iraqi ruling class they see as corrupt and beholden to Iran.

A 20-year-old protester was shot in the head and later died in hospital, a medical source told AFP.

Hours later, security forces stormed the party office located around one kilometer (less than a mile) from Basra's main protest camp.

"We arrested five men who shot at protesters from the headquarters," Bassem Al-Maliky, the press officer for Basra's security forces, told AFP.

They also seized rifles and ammunition from the base.

The arrests marked a rare incident of a swift official response to protest-related deaths, for which only a handful of security forces have been held to account.

Demonstrations meanwhile continued in Baghdad and different parts of Iraq. In the town of Kut on Monday morning, protesters surrounded the home of the local governor, AFP's correspondents there said.

There were also rallies overnight in Diwaniyah, with hundreds gathering despite advice from authorities to maintain social distancing to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Hassan Al-Mayahi, a protester there, said that "despite the dangers of the coronavirus, the political deals of the parties and their neglect of our past demands have forced us to return to the street again to pressure them to give us our rights."



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Death of Iraq's last princess closes tumultuous chapter in Middle East history
Iraqi PM Al-Kadhimi calls on govt to meet peoples' demands

[Israel government swearing-in delayed a day by Pompeo visit](#)

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Mon, 2020-05-11 11:15

JERUSALEM: The swearing-in of Israel's new unity government has been postponed by one day to Thursday due to the upcoming visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, officials said.

A parliament spokesman said Monday the joint administration of incumbent

premier Benjamin Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz would be inaugurated on Thursday instead of Wednesday. A spokesman for Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party told AFP the delay was "because of the visit" of the US top diplomat on Wednesday. Pompeo's trip comes as US President Donald Trump's administration gives its blessing to Netanyahu's plans to annex much of the occupied West Bank, despite warnings from the Palestinians that the move will kill the prospects of a long-term peace agreement. Israel's new government is the result of a deal allowing Netanyahu to continue on as prime minister for another 18 months, before the former military chief Gantz takes over the post for the same period. The proposed government had been challenged in the high court, with opponents arguing Netanyahu is ineligible due to corruption indictments he faces. But the judges ruled there was no legal reason to prevent him from serving as prime minister. Netanyahu has secured the participation of Gantz and his center-left allies in his coalition along with the ultra-Orthodox parties. But the six-member right-wing Yemina has so far refused to join over what it criticizes as the emerging "left-wing" nature of the incoming government. Pompeo's visit will give Netanyahu another day to attempt to bring Yemina into the coalition.



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[Libyan intelligence chief Abdul Qader Al-Tuhami dies of heart attack in Tripoli](#)

Sun, 2020-05-10 15:07

LONDON: Libya's intelligence chief Abdul Qader Al-Tuhami died of a heart attack on Saturday in the capital Tripoli, the country's presidential council said.

In a statement, the council offered condolences to his family and colleagues, describing Al-Tuhami as "one of Libya's loyal sons."

The Libyan Government of National Accord's presidential council appointed Al-Tuhami as the deputy head of the Libyan Intelligence Service for Security Affairs on April 24, 2017, and he was the acting head of the service until he died.

Al-Tuhami, who hails from Aqar Al-Shati, south Libya, served as an officer in the security apparatus under toppled leader Muammar Gaddafi.



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Coronavirus narrows options for migrants buffeted by Libya's war
Libyan officials: Shelling at Tripoli's only working airport

New Iraq PM releases protesters, promotes respected general

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By SAMYA KULLAB | AP

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Sun, 2020-05-10 11:29

BAGHDAD: Iraq's judiciary ordered courts on Sunday to release anti-government protesters, carrying out one of the first decisions of the recently inaugurated prime minister just as dozens of demonstrators burned tires in renewed protests against the new leadership.

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi also promoted a well-respected Iraqi general, who played a key role in the military campaign against Daesh, to lead counter-terrorism operations. Former leader Adel Abdul-Mahdi had previously mysteriously demoted the general, prompting outrage and sparking popular protests in northern Iraq and Baghdad in October.

The Supreme Judiciary Council said in a statement that it had ordered the release of protesters detained since those demonstrations erupted, in line with the new prime minister's call.

The council released detainees based on Article 38 of the constitution which guarantees the right to protest, "provided that it is not accompanied by an act contrary to the law," the statement said.

In a press briefing Saturday night following his first Cabinet meeting as premier, Al-Kadhimi said demonstrators should be protected and that all protesters should be released, except those involved in violence.

Protests erupted in Baghdad and across the country's south on Oct. 1, when frustrated Iraqis took to the streets to decry rampant government corruption, unemployment and poor services. Human rights groups say at least 600 people died in the following three months at the hands of Iraqi security forces who used live fire and tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The demonstrations petered out with the rise of the coronavirus pandemic, though dozens of protesters are still camped out in Baghdad's Tahrir square determined not to let the movement die.

Al-Kadhimi also said he was promoting Lt. Gen. Abdul Wahab Al-Saadi to become head of Iraq's elite Counter-Terrorism Service, just as the country was experiencing an uptick in attacks by Daesh in the north. Previously he was a force commander in the the service before Abdul-Mahdi demoted him in September to a post in the Defense Ministry. The Iraqi public considered his sudden demotion a sign of corrupt government practices and took to the streets in outrage.

Al-Saadi, 56, was one of the leading commanders in the fight against Daesh and the battle to retake Mosul, taking the lead in many operations.

In a recent briefing with reporters, American Lt. Gen. Pat White, head of the Combined Joint Task Force responsible for fighting Daesh, said the group was failing "miserably" in a renewed campaign to launch more attacks.

“IS leadership has stated what their intent is, and they do this every year. They put out what is generally described as a military campaign,” he said. “To date, they have failed miserably at achieving those goals.” Still, plumes of acrid smoke choked the air Sunday as protesters, unpersuaded by Al-Kadhimi’s decisions, returned to the streets and burned tires on a key bridge leading to the heavily fortified Green Zone, the seat of Iraq’s government. Protesters said they rejected Al-Kadhimi and any candidate chosen by the political establishment and gathered by the dozens near Jumhuriya bridge, closed off since late last year in a standoff with riot police.



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Iraqi PM Al-Kadhimi calls on govt to meet peoples' demands Saudi crown prince calls new Iraqi prime minister

Needy Tunisians get food aid via text messages

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TUNIS: A Tunisian NGO has set up a food bank that dispenses aid by text message to some 300 needy families rendered more vulnerable because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The initiative, which had been long in the making, was finally launched at the end of April to coincide with the start of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

It targets families who have lost jobs because of the lockdown imposed by Tunisia to contain the spread of the virus, like that of Messaouda Raouafi, a cleaning woman forced to stay indoors.

"Because of Ramadan and the lockdown I can no longer go out to work," said the 49-year-old.

"I cannot clean homes and earn money to feed my seven children."

Her family was among the 300 chosen by the women's affairs ministry and signalled to the NGO known as the "Banque Alimentaire Durable" or Sustainable Food Bank.

Under the initiative, Raouafi receives a code by text message allowing her to spend 40 to 60 Tunisian dinars (around \$21-32) weekly at specially designated grocery stores.

With that money, Raouafi has been able to buy basic goods such as oil, milk, coffee and flour.

Farah, who runs a grocery store in the working-class district of Kram, is among those who signed up to take part in the project.

"The money is sent to us ahead of time – that way the clients can buy what they want with the funds allocated to them," she said.

Farah said this works much better than allowing customers to buy on credit, a system that takes its toll on her own finances.

"In our area there are many poor families and unemployed people," she said, explaining why she decided to embrace the initiative.

A member of the NGO, Aisha Zakraoui, said she hopes the initiative will grow so as to reach more needy families across Tunisia.

The NGO also aims to help families become more self-sufficient through training in skills such as growing their own vegetables or baking bread to sell.

"Our objective is to provide food aid to needy people and in exchange they agree to take part in initiatives aimed at integrating them socially and professionally," Zakraoui said.

Even before the virus outbreak, Tunisia has been struggling with economic and social hardship that has worsened since the country went into lockdown in March to battle the pandemic.

The government estimated that two million of Tunisia's 11.5 million

population were in need of financial assistance during that time. In March and April, the government made emergency handouts of 200 dinars to vulnerable families. Tunisia, which has officially declared 1,000 cases of the novel coronavirus including 45 deaths, began easing its lockdown on May 4. In the early days of the containment measures, several hundred Tunisians had demonstrated in working class districts of the capital demanding government support and protesting the lockdown.



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Tunisian actress Hend Sabri to star, create new Netflix drama-comedy Tunisia to partially reopen economy from next week