

Morocco says arrests extremist who planned 'suicide attack'

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RABAT: Moroccan anti-terror police announced Sunday the arrest of an alleged extremist who "planned a suicide attack."

The 41-year-old extremist tried to "build expertise in the use of arms," Morocco's central office for judicial investigations said in a statement. He was imbued in the "ideological propaganda" of the Daesh group, it added. "Electronic devices and documents... on the making of explosives" were seized, the office said.

Long spared extremist violence, Morocco was last year hit by the gruesome murder of two Scandinavian tourists in the High Atlas mountains, committed in the name of Daesh.

The perpetrators were sentenced to death, a penalty not carried out in Morocco since 1993.



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Backer of Iraq anti-government protests killed in Baghdad

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BAGHDAD: A supporter of Iraqi anti-government demonstrators was gunned down in Baghdad, a police source said Sunday, the fourth backer of the protest movement to be killed in two weeks.

Mohammed al-Doujaili, 24, was shot in the back near the Tahrir Square protest hub on Saturday night, the police source said.

Another man who was with him was wounded in the same attack, and al-Doujaili died of his wounds at a Baghdad hospital Sunday morning, relatives said.

Doujaili, who helped distribute food to protesters encamped in Tahrir Square, was buried in Baghdad's Shiite-dominated district of Sadr City.

He is the fourth protester to be killed by unidentified assailants over the past two weeks.

Father of five Ali al-Lami was shot and killed by several bullets to the head earlier this week and prominent civil society activist Fahem al-Tai was killed in a drive-by shooting in Iraq's shrine city of Karbala.

In one particularly gruesome case, the bruised body of 19-year-old Zahra Ali was found on December 2 outside her family home in Baghdad, hours after she had gone missing.

Iraq's capital and its Shiite-majority south have been gripped by more than two months of rallies against corruption, poor public services and a lack of jobs.

Around 460 people have been killed and 25,000 wounded, most of them protesters, since the youth-led rallies erupted on October 1.

Since then demonstrators in the capital and southern cities have disappeared almost daily, in most cases taken from near their homes as they returned from protests.

Protesters accuse pro-Iran armed factions of playing a role in the killings and abductions.

London-based rights group Amnesty International on Friday urged Baghdad to clamp down on what it called a "campaign of terror targeting protesters".

Demonstrations once again took place on Sunday in Baghdad and across the south of Iraq, where schools and public administrations remained closed, AFP correspondents said.



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Pompeo warns Iran of 'decisive response' if US interests in Iraq harmed

[Thousands of Lebanese protesters return to parliament after crackdown in Beirut](#)

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HUSSEIN MALLA and DALAL MAWAD | AP

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Sun, 2019-12-15 17:47

BEIRUT: Thousands of Lebanese protesters defiantly returned Sunday to rally outside parliament in Beirut, hours after security forces chased them out,

using tear gas and rubber bullets and injuring dozens.

Saturday night into Sunday saw one of the most violent crackdowns on protesters since nationwide anti-government demonstrations began two months ago, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Oct. 29. Attackers in northern Lebanon also set fire to the offices of two major political parties, the state-run National News Agency said.

The protesters who showed up in Beirut on Sunday chanted against the security crackdown and called for an independent new head of government unaffiliated with established political parties.

The crowd, many raising Lebanese flags, said: "We won't leave, We won't leave. Just arrest all the protesters!"

Others raised posters saying the tear gas won't keep them away. "We are crying already," said one, in a jab at the deep economic crisis Lebanese are facing. The streets leading to parliament were filled with men, women and even children. Some huddled in smaller groups while others were lifted on shoulders chanting in megaphones.

The overnight confrontations in Beirut left more than 130 people injured, according to the Red Cross and the Lebanese Civil Defense. The Red Cross said none of the injured were in serious condition and most of them were treated on the spot.

The violence and Sunday's rally came just hours before the president was due to meet with representatives of parliamentary blocs to name a new prime minister. After weeks of bickering and despite calls from the protesters for a technocratic government, politicians seem set on bringing Hariri back to the post.

The demonstrators were clear they wouldn't accept his return. "Saad, Saad, Saad, don't dream of it anymore."

"I came back today to pressure the parliament to make the right choice tomorrow and choose a prime minister from outside the political parties. If they don't choose someone acceptable, we will be back to the streets again and again," said Chakib Abillamah, a protester and businessman who was demonstrating Saturday when violence broke out.

Caline Mouawad, a lawyer, said she watched as security forces violently broke up the protests and decided to join in solidarity. "What happened last night provoked me. I came down even it means getting beaten tonight."

Interior Minister Raya Al-Hassan on Sunday ordered an investigation into the clashes, which she said injured both protesters and security forces. She said she watched the confrontations "with concern, sadness and shock."

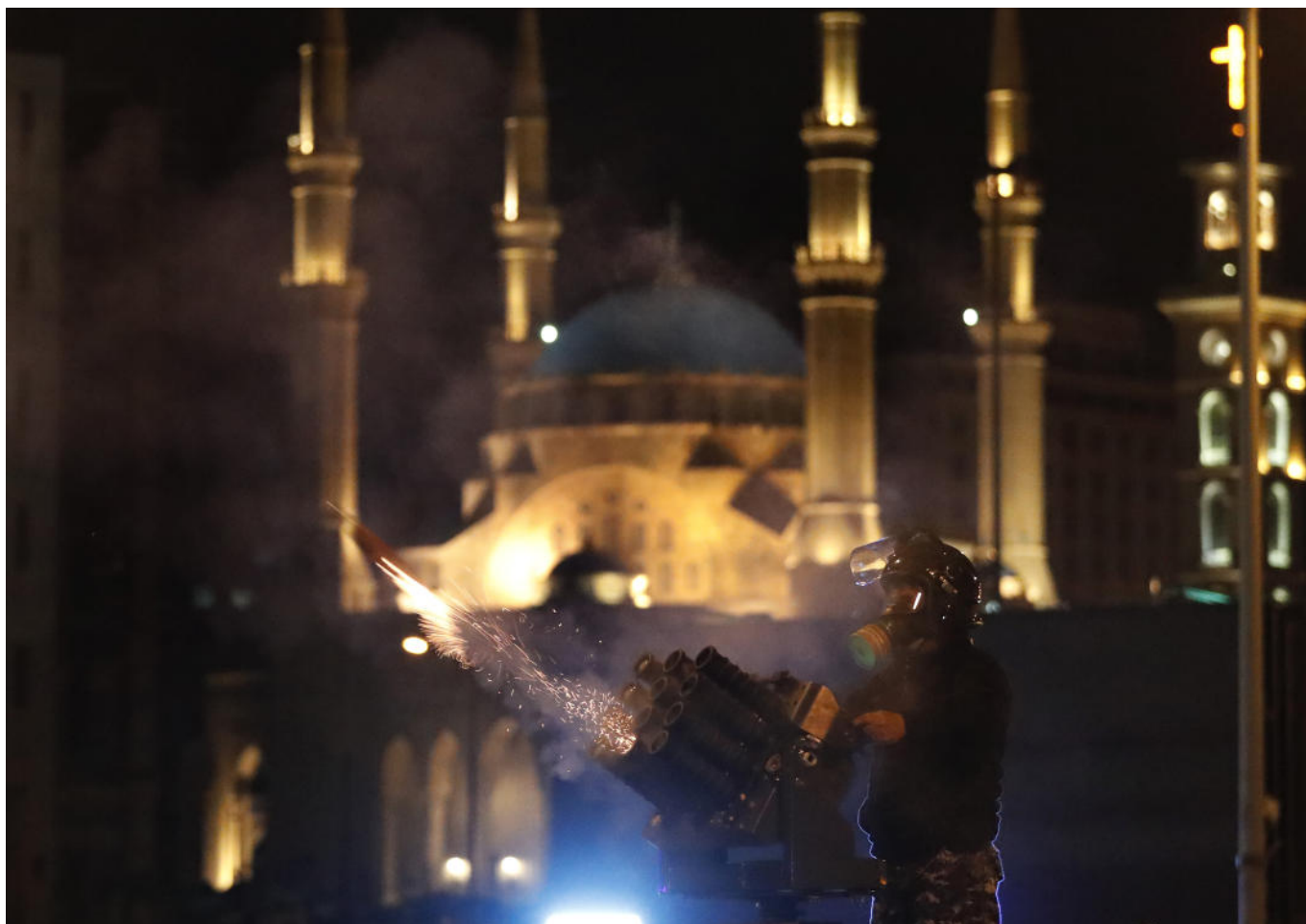
Al-Hassan blamed "infiltrators" for instigating violence and called on the demonstrators to be wary of those who want to exploit their protests for political reasons. She didn't elaborate.

The head of the Internal Security Forces, Maj. Gen. Imad Osman, turned up at the protest rally Sunday. He told reporters on the scene that the right to protest was guaranteed by the law. "But calm down, no need for violence," he said, appealing to protesters.

In the northern Akkar district, attackers broke the windows and set fire to the local office of Hariri's political party in the town of Kharibet Al-Jundi. Photos circulated on social media of shattered glass and the aftermath of the fire, which torched the building.

In a separate attack in Akkar district, assailants stormed the local office of the largest party in parliament, affiliated with President Michel Aoun and

headed by Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil. The party said the contents of the office in the town of Jedidat Al-Juma had also been smashed and burned. The mayhem came just hours after the capital was rocked by violence. Lebanese security forces fired rubber bullets, tear gas and used water cannons throughout the night to disperse anti-government protesters from the city center – the epicenter of the protest movement in Beirut – and around parliament. The protests had largely been peacefully since they began on Oct. 17.



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54 injured as Lebanese security forces and Hezbollah supporters clash in central Beirut
Beirut-based photographer discusses his viral image of Lebanon's ongoing protests

Brazil opens Jerusalem trade center as step to embassy shift

Sun, 2019-12-15 18:32

JERUSALEM: Brazil opened a trade office in Jerusalem Sunday, in a ceremony attended by President Jair Bolsonaro's son and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Speaking at the ceremony, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a lawmaker, said his father intended to make good on a pledge he made early this year to move Brazil's embassy in Israel from the city of Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

"He told me that for sure – it's a commitment – he's going to move the embassy to Jerusalem, he's going to do that," the younger Bolsonaro said, in Netanyahu's presence.

President Bolsonaro in January pledged to follow US President Donald Trump's controversial step and relocate his country's embassy from Tel Aviv.

The Brazilian head of state visited Israel in March, when he announced his country's intention to open a trade office in the disputed city.

Virtually all countries maintain their embassies in the city of Tel Aviv, insisting Jerusalem's status be defined through Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, as Palestinians view east Jerusalem as the capital of its own future state.

The United States broke with that decades-long consensus in May 2018 and relocated its Israeli embassy to Jerusalem, with only Guatemala following suit so far. Paraguay made the move but later backtracked.

Hungary has also opened a trade office in Jerusalem.

Fears have been raised that moving the embassy could endanger Brazil's valuable meat exports to Arab markets but Eduardo Bolsonaro said any delay was due to Brazil wanting to prepare the move in a thorough manner.

"We want to do a movement to Jerusalem not only for Brazil but to be an example for the rest of Latin America," the Brazilian lawmaker, who is also chairman of his parliament's foreign relations and national defense commission, said.

Speaking at the ceremony, Netanyahu noted "President Bolsonaro's commitment to open an embassy in Jerusalem next year."

Netanyahu thanked Brazil for its support of Israel in international forums and noted recent bilateral aid the Jewish state provided to cope with natural disasters.

"Israel was there, and Israel will always be there for the people of Brazil and for our common friendship," Netanyahu said.



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Israel closes Palestinian organisations in Jerusalem
Palestinians to file complaint over Honduras Jerusalem move

[Home-cooked food in Iraqi square brings protesters together](#)

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By NASSER NASSER | AP

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Sun, 2019-12-15 07:06

BAGHDAD: In Baghdad's Tahrir Square, there are the anti-government protesters demonstrating for a better future for Iraq, and there are the volunteers who feed them.

From stuffed lamb and fish, to the giant pots of soups and rice, to the plates of lentils and other beans, there is no shortage of food to go around. Volunteers from the capital and southern provinces cook traditional dishes that reflect the country's rich cuisine and bring protesters together.

Tahrir Square has been the focal point for the protests that have continued to roil Iraq since Oct. 1. The spontaneous, leaderless demonstrations were organized on social media over long-standing grievances including government corruption, unemployment and a lack of basic services. For many, the square in central Baghdad has become a miniature model for the kind of state they dream of, where factional and sectarian politics play no part and public services exist.

Services, including the near-constant supply of food, have been integral to keeping people in the square, but volunteers are eyeing a gradual drop in donations with concern.

Iraqis are used to communal meals and many volunteer food. Every year, during the annual Shiite religious commemoration known as Arbreen, volunteers prepare food for pilgrims making their way to their sects' holy shrines in the city of Karbala. Shortly after the protests started Oct. 1, volunteers began setting up similar tents to cook and distribute traditional Iraqi dishes for the protesters in and around Tahrir Square.

"We make it for the hungry people, and people in need here in Tahrir Square," said a woman who gave her name as Um Ammar, which means "Ammar's mother." She is from the southern province of Missan and was cooking Seyah, a thick mixture of rice flour and water fried on a hot plate. Other popular dishes are lentils and beans; Tepsy, a traditional Iraqi casserole; Dolma, consisting of stuffed cabbage and grape leaves, onions and aubergines cooked in tomato sauce; and Makhlama, a mixture of potato, tomatoes, onion and egg all fried together and put in bread. It is a favorite breakfast for people in Baghdad.

"It is an old Baghdadi (dish). It is common in the morning. All the Iraqi people, but specifically the people of Baghdad, love this food," said Muhsin Salman, a cook from the capital who was making Makhlama.

Arouk bread – a tandoor bread made of dough mixed with celery and spices – is another favorite.

And there are the popular sweets: Hareesa is boiled whole wheat sweetened with sugar and cinnamon. Cherek is baked wheat flour bread stuffed with dates. And there's also the fried dough balls called Awamah.

On any given day, people can be seen lining up to fill plastic dishes with food. Protesters say the free food is important to help sustain the protest movement, especially for those who cannot afford to eat meat on a regular basis. But it's not the main attraction, they say.

Hashem Al-Jabouri said that after more than two months of protests, he's worried that support for the movement is dwindling. Speaking as he fried falafel in a huge pot, he said support was not as strong as it was in the beginning. "There's a lot of pressure and threats targeting the volunteers," he said.

At least 400 people have been killed at the hands of security forces and unidentified assailants firing live ammunition and tear gas to disperse the

demonstrations since the protests erupted in October. A string of targeted assassinations, forced disappearances and arrests of civil activists and journalists have also fostered fear among protesters. Some said they will not be intimidated.

"I distribute food to my protester brothers. We will not retreat even if they kill or threaten us. We don't care," said Um Mohammed, who was cooking rice and beans on a recent day. Her husband was killed in Iraq's sectarian conflict in 2006.

"I am a martyr's wife, but it is OK," said the mother of four. "I am not retreating and will not leave the square. My house is here now, until they give me my rights."







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