

Al-Sistani calls for new election law as three more protesters killed in Baghdad

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By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA | AP

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces fired live ammunition and rounds of heavy tear gas in renewed and bloody clashes with anti-government protesters in central Baghdad on Friday, killing three people, while Iraq's top Shiite religious leader warned its government to heed calls for sweeping political reforms. Protesters repeatedly regrouped from under clouds of tear gas as they fought to tear down a concrete wall blocking access to Khilani Square. Security forces erected the barrier to keep the demonstrations from crossing a bridge that leads to the fortified Green Zone, the seat of government and many foreign embassies.

Tuk-tuk drivers ferried the injured back to makeshift medical tents stocked with saline used to douse demonstrators exposed to the tear gas. Many retched on the floor when they got there, saying the gas was the strongest they had ever experienced.

"We aren't afraid of them, the authorities," said Akeel, 21, who asked to be identified only by his first name. "They have already done their worst and their harsh response makes us stronger."

Meanwhile, an improvised explosive device went off in Baghdad's Tayaran Square, killing two people and injuring 12, Iraqi security sources said late on Friday.

It was not immediately clear if the incident was related to anti-government protests going on in the capital's nearby Tahrir Square.

At least 320 people have been killed and thousands have been wounded since the unrest began on Oct. 1, when protesters took to the streets in the tens of thousands outraged by what they said was widespread corruption, lack of job opportunities and poor basic services despite the country's oil wealth. Hours before the clashes erupted, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani emphasized his support for the demonstrators in his weekly Friday sermon, saying none of their demands have been met so far and that electoral reform should be a priority. The senior cleric called for a new election law that would restore public confidence in the system and give voters the opportunity to bring "new faces" to power.

But Iraqi authorities appeared determined to disperse the protesters and keep them confined to a shrinking space in the capital's center.

The confrontations in Khilani Square began on Friday afternoon after hundreds of protesters who breached the concrete barriers streamed into the square, where they were met by soldiers and riot police.

Around 5:30 p.m., live rounds were heard by The Associated Press several hundred meters from the square, and shortly after wafts of stinging tear gas

caused a mass of protesters to run toward the medical tents.

Iraqi security and medical officials, who requested anonymity in line with regulations, said three protesters were killed and at least 25 others wounded.

Several protesters said breaking through the barrier leading to Khilani was key to counter attempts by the security forces to suppress the anti-government movement and limit protesters to the nearby Tahrir Square.

"They are trying to limit us to one place," said Nashat Akram, 24, recovering in a medical tent in Tahrir square.

The atmosphere at Tahrir was a striking contrast with the violence nearby. Baghdad's main square has been transformed into a carnival-like hub where protesters gather around music, comic art installations, pop-up food and street shops.

The demonstrations have kept up for weeks in central Baghdad and the mostly Shiite southern provinces, despite the clamp down by Iraqi security forces. Al-Sistani, who's opinion holds major sway over Iraqis, said a fair electoral law should give voters the ability to replace current political leaders with "new faces."

"Passing a law that does not give such an opportunity to voters would be unacceptable and useless," he said in his weekly sermon Friday.

"If those in power think they can evade dealing with real reform by procrastination, they are mistaken," Al-Sistani said. "What comes after the protests is not the same as before, so be careful."

He said corruption among the ruling elite has reached "unbearable limits" while large segments of the population are finding it increasingly impossible to have their basic needs met.

"People did not go out to demonstrations calling for reform in this unprecedented way, and do not continue to do so despite the heavy price and grave sacrifices it requires, except because they found no other way to revolt against the corruption which is getting worse day after day, and the rampant deterioration on all fronts," he said.

On Monday, Al-Sistani said he backed a roadmap by the UN mission in Iraq aimed at meeting the demands of the protesters, but expressed concern that political parties were not serious about carrying out the proposed reforms.



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Iraqis aim to rekindle protests with Iran football match
Iraqi PM says needs more time to tackle corruption

[Khamenei says Iran wants removal of Israel state not people](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-11-15 12:10

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader said Friday that calls for the abolition of Israel which have sparked outrage in the West target the "imposed state" not the Jewish people.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the future of the land should be decided by Palestinians of all faiths, Jewish as well as Christian and Muslim.

"The 'abolition of the Israeli regime' ... does not mean the abolition of Jewish people; we have no problem with them," Khamenei told a meeting of Islamic countries in Tehran, according to his official website. It means "abolition of the imposed regime and state, that the Palestinian people, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish... choose their own government and oust thugs like (Benjamin) Netanyahu," he added, referring to Israel's prime minister.

The Iranian government does not recognize Israel, referring to it as the "Zionist regime," and support for the Palestinian cause has been a constant feature of its foreign policy since the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Iran openly supports Israeli foes like Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the occupied Palestinian territories and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

"We are not anti-semitic. Jews are living in utmost safety in our country. We only support the people of Palestine and their independence," he said.

Khamenei said that the "enemies of Islam," including Israel and the United States, seek to sow discord between Islamic countries and called for unity in the face of the "common enemy."

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have soared since President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal last year and reimposed crippling sanctions as part of a policy of "maximum pressure."

Since then the arch-foes have come to the brink of military confrontation after drones were downed and tankers and Saudi oil installations mysteriously attacked.



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Former finance minister Mohammad Safadi put forward to be next Lebanese PM

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-15 00:44

Lebanese media are reporting an agreement has been reached to naming ex-Finance Minister Mohammad Safadi as the next prime minister.



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Wife of White Helmets co-founder Le Mesurier banned from leaving Turkey

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Thu, 2019-11-14 23:07

ISTANBUL: Turkey has imposed a travel ban on Emma Winberg, the wife of James Le Mesurier, founder of the Mayday Rescue Foundation, who was found dead in Istanbul on Monday.

Speculation abounds over the circumstances of Le Mesurier's death, with questions over whether the former British intelligence officer was murdered or committed suicide.

Though Turkish police sources believe Le Mesurier jumped to his death from his flat, his wife, 39, has not been allowed to return home because of Turkish law.

Le Mesurier had reportedly told his wife of suicidal thoughts two weeks before the incident. His wife notified the police that he was in a deteriorating psychological state and taking anti-depressants and medication for stress. His hospital records are also being examined.

Umur Yildirim, an attorney specialized in criminal justice, said that according to Turkish law, it was possible for Turkish authorities to impose a travel ban on people not of Turkish nationality of importance to an open investigation.

Winberg will not be allowed to leave the country, as long as the investigation into her husband's death continues.

Based on reports, Le Mesurier's residence was only accessible via fingerprint, and in testimony released by Turkish authorities, Winberg claimed the pair had taken sleeping pills at around 4 a.m. the night before. She was woken by police after they were notified of a body lying outside the building.

The preliminary autopsy reports suggest suicide was the most likely cause of death, with the final report set to be completed next week. The investigation continues.

Le Mesurier was awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) by the UK government in 2016.





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Body of White Helmets' founder James Le Mesurier to be flown to London
Turkey tries to shed light on White Helmets founder's death

[UAE, Egypt plan \\$20 bln spending on social, economic projects](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-11-14 19:47

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates and Egypt plan to jointly invest \$20 billion in economic and social projects, under a bilateral project announced by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on Thursday. Sheikh Mohammed made the announcement on Twitter during a two-day visit to the UAE by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Abu Dhabi Development Holding Company and Egypt's sovereign wealth fund will use the funds to establish joint strategic investment projects, specialized funds and investment tools, in a number of sectors, Egyptian presidential spokesman Bassam Rady said.



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