

Bus bombing kills 9 people, injures 6 near Iraqi city of Kerbala

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KERBALA, Iraq: A bus bombing killed at least nine people and wounded another six on Friday near Iraq's holy city of Kerbala, south of Baghdad, local police said.

An explosive device planted on the bus detonated at a northern entrance to the city, setting fire to the vehicle, two police spokesmen in the area said. They said the wounded were rushed to hospital.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast.

Such attacks in the mostly Shiite Muslim south of Iraq have been rare in recent years, especially after the territorial defeat of Daesh in Iraq in 2017 and the routing of its Al-Qaeda predecessors in the mid-2000s.

Daesh insurgents have continued to carry out regular attacks mostly against security forces in the north of the country, however.



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Thousands protest in Algiers despite tight security

Author:

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Fri, 2019-09-20 14:29

ALGIERS: Thousands of protesters took to the streets of the Algerian capital on Friday in defiance of a heavy security presence to demand the ouster of the country's army chief.

Demonstrators gathered near the capital's main post office square, the epicentre of Algeria's protest movement that forced longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to step down in April, this time calling for the ouster of General Ahmed Gaid Salah.

"The people want the fall of Gaid Salah," the strongman in post-Bouteflika Algeria, they chanted. "Take us all to prison, the people will not stop." Friday's protest marked Algeria's 31st consecutive week of rallies, but protesters faced a heavy deployment of security forces in the city centre and along its main avenues.

Salah on Wednesday ordered police to block protesters from outside Algiers entering the capital to boost numbers at the anti-regime rallies.

The tougher line on protests came just days after interim president Abdelkader Bensalah announced a December 12 date for a presidential election to fill the vacuum left by Bouteflika's departure.

The army chief has led the push for polls by the end of 2019, despite mass protests demanding political reforms and the removal of the former president's loyalists – including Gaid Salah himself – before any vote.

In the runup to the latest rally, as on previous Fridays, police made several arrests near the square, AFP photographers said.

Police stopped vehicles on main streets in the capital and an AFP journalist saw officers in plainclothes ask for identity papers, before some were led off to nearby vans.

As a police helicopter scoured the skies, security forces also stopped cars headed towards the city centre from its southwest entrance, where a dozen anti-riot police vans were stationed.

Said Salhi, deputy head of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, condemned the heightened security measures as "illegal".

Demonstrations have officially been banned in Algiers since 2001 but the prohibition had been ignored since rallies started on February 22 against the ailing Bouteflika's bid for a fifth presidential term.





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Algeria to go the polls on December 12, says interim president Algerian PM to resign, paving way for vote after protracted protests

Trump says US has sanctioned Iran's central bank

Fri, 2019-09-20 17:24

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Friday revealed the details of additional sanctions against Iran, which he described as the toughest ever imposed.

The Treasury Department decided to take action against Iran's central bank after US officials concluded that Tehran was responsible for last weekend's drone and missile attacks on Saudi oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais.

"We have just sanctioned the Iranian national bank," Trump said during a press conference in the Oval Office. "These are the highest sanctions ever imposed on a country."

When asked about the possibility of a military response, Trump said: "The easiest thing I could do (is) knock out 15 different major things in Iran. I could do it right here in front of you and that would be it. And then you would have a nice, big story to report."

"But I think the strong-person approach, and the thing that does show strength, would be showing a little bit of restraint. Much easier to do it the other way. It's much easier. And Iran knows if they misbehave, they're on borrowed time."

Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday strongly condemned the attacks. During a telephone call to King Salman, he said the strikes were a "serious violation" of the Kingdom's security and stability, and had affected on the global energy market.

According to SPA, Xi pledged China's firm support for the Kingdom and highlighted the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two nations.

He said his country would back Saudi efforts to ensure its security and territorial integrity, and expressed the appreciation of China for the measures taken by the Kingdom to maintain the flow of oil exports in the days after the strikes.

King Salman said the “criminal” attacks represented a serious escalation and significant threat to the security and stability of the region and to the world’s oil supplies. He added that the Kingdom will take appropriate measures to protect itself after completing the investigation into the attacks.

Expert analysts said a number of options remain available to Washington in response to the rogue actions of the regime in Tehran.

“The first option, of course, is the military option, with punitive strikes on oil and military infrastructure,” said Dr. Theodore Karasik, a senior adviser at Gulf State Analytics in Washington. He added that there are other options covering the spectrum of military operations, but the capabilities of Iran must be taken into consideration.

“There is a requirement to understand how violent state actors use drone technology and spread it to terrorist groups and vice versa. This question is important in terms of US options because of the ubiquitous drone issue,” he said.

“The second option is to push for UN support against Iran – condemning Iran for the global significance of the asymmetric attack.”

The third option, Karasik said, would be the deployment of the International Maritime Security Construct, an international surveillance mission the US is assembling involving 55 ships in the waters off Iran.

Dr. Hamdan Al-Shehri, a Saudi political analyst and international-relations scholar in Riyadh, said the most direct response would be to target Iranian oil refineries and facilities in a tit-for-tat attack.

“Option 2 would be to hit Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps installations and intelligence-gathering facilities inside Iran,” he said.

A third option would be to launch a cyber attack in an attempt to cripple Tehran’s command-and-control systems, according to Al-Shehri.

“This was done in the past when a computer worm called Stuxnet caused substantial damage to Iran’s nuclear program,” he said.



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US military to present several options to Trump on IranKSRelief chief urges UN to condemn Iranian violence in Yemen

[Record 12.4m people reached with food aid in Yemen: UN](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1568978926183537200

Fri, 2019-09-20 11:23

GENEVA: A record 12.4 million people in Yemen received food aid in August, the first time the targeted population was reached fully, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) said on Friday.

At the same time, WFP said it still needed \$600 million from donors to provide uninterrupted food deliveries for the next six months in the war-torn country. Rations could be cut from October if funds are not forthcoming, it added.

Houthi forces have used access to aid and food as a political tool, exacerbating what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with high rates of severe child malnutrition.

"New numbers from the August distribution cycle indicate that the UN World Food Programme has reached a record 12.4 million food-insecure people with food assistance in August. This is the highest number ever reached," WFP spokesman Herve Verhoosel said in a statement.

WFP previously reached about 11 million Yemenis per month with rations. The agency halted most aid in Sanaa on June 20 out of concern that food was being diverted, through a local partner, away from vulnerable people. However, it maintained nutrition programs only for malnourished children, as well as pregnant and nursing mothers.

WFP resumed distributions to 850,000 people two months later in the Yemeni capital after reaching an agreement with the Iran-aligned Houthi authorities who control the city. WFP said at the time a biometric registration process would be introduced for 9 million people living in areas under Houthi control.



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Houthis destroy UN food aid after blocking it from delivery in Yemen UN aid official: Yemeni militia blocking food for thousands

[Kuwait raises security alert level at oil and commercial ports](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2019-09-20 09:54

DUBAI: Kuwait has raised the security alert level at all of its ports, including the oil terminals, the state-run Kuwait News Agency reported on Friday, citing a decision by the trade and industry minister.

“The decision emphasizes that all measures have to be taken to protect the vessels and the ports facilities,” it said.



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UN compensation panel pays out \$270m for Kuwait oil companyKuwait committed to implement accord to reduce oil output, says oil minister