

Four police dead in back-to-back bomb blasts in Iraq

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SAMARRA, Iraq: Four Iraqi policemen were killed Sunday in two back-to-back bomb blasts north of the capital, officials said, in an attack claimed by Daesh.

"At around 8:00 am, the police officers were taking up their post at the southern entrance of Al-Sharqat," the town's mayor, Ali Dodah, told AFP. "One bomb went off, killing two police officers and wounding eight. An hour and a half later, as reinforcements arrived, a second bomb went off," Dodah said.

A police officer speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed the first blast's toll to AFP and said the second explosion killed two officers and wounded three.

And a medical source at Al-Sharqat's hospital confirmed a total of four officers were killed.

Daesh's propaganda agency, Amaq, released a statement claiming the attack. Al-Sharqat, around 250 kilometers (150 miles) north of Baghdad, was held by Daesh until autumn 2017.

It was one of the last areas recaptured by the government, which announced several months later that it had ousted Daesh from Iraq.

But hit-and-run attacks – particularly assassinations and kidnappings of local officials – still take place and hint at an underground network of Daesh sleeper cells in some of the country's most remote areas.

On Thursday, a car bomb killed a police officer near Hawija, another former Daesh stronghold.



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Protesters storm Turkish base in north Iraq, teenager killed
Iraqi charged with rape, murder in Germany's 'Susanna case'

[Algerian opposition names its candidate for presidential poll](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-01-26 21:45

ALGIERS: Algeria's main conservative party, the Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP), said on Saturday it has decided to take part in April's presidential election.

During the night of Friday to Saturday "the consultative council decided by an overwhelming majority to take part in the presidential election and to present Dr. Abderrazak Makri as the party's candidate," the MSP's head of

communications Abdellah Bouadji told AFP.

Presenting itself as moderate, the MSP had supported aging incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika within a governing alliance, before going its own way in 2012. Observers say if Bouteflika runs again he is set to win, as the opposition is divided into Islamists and secular parties.

Bouteflika, 81, who uses a wheelchair and has rarely been seen in public since a stroke in 2013, is due to complete a fourth term in office on April 28. The election is set for April 18. By law, would-be candidates now have until March 4 to register with the constitutional court.

Despite his advanced age and poor health, some of Bouteflika's supporters have called for him to stand again. But the president himself is yet to make his plans clear.

Ahead of the last presidential election in 2014, Bouteflika only declared his intention to run a few days ahead of the deadline.

Despite his advanced age and poor health, there have been calls from his supporters for him to stand for a fifth term.

Frozen politics

Uncertainty over whether Bouteflika will stand for re-election has frozen Algerian politics for months. No candidate of note has thrown their hat into the ring.

Algerian politics is notoriously opaque with the winner of every multiparty presidential election pre-selected by a shadowy elite, beginning in 1995 with victory by retired Gen. Liamine Zeroual.

For this year's election, the membership of the kingmaking elite has changed.

Bouteflika has proved himself a wily political survivor, navigating Arab Spring-inspired riots in 2011 by promising reforms that were never enacted and by playing on fears of a repeat of Algeria's 1991-2002 civil war.

Bouteflika's stewardship was key to the country's emergence from that conflict, as he introduced a civil reconciliation program that offered partial amnesty to extremists.

Analysts said Bouteflika's announcement of the election date will ease concerns that the vote might get postponed.

In 1991, the army cancelled elections which an Islamist party was set to win, triggering almost a decade of civil war that killed some 200,000 people.

Flooding kills five

Five people died after being swept away by flood waters as a cold snap in the Maghreb brought snow to several of the country's regions, Algeria's civil protection unit said on Saturday.

"All the victims have been retrieved over the last 48 hours after being swept away by waters in Annaba, El-Tarf, Tizi Ouzou and Tipaza," the civil protection body said.

Salvage operations took place in more than 17 areas and around 100 people have been rescued in the last 24 hours.

A total of 33 roads remain blocked in over 10 regions because of snow, the civil protection unit said, adding "snow clearing operations are progressing."

Elsewhere in North Africa, neighboring Tunisia's interior ministry said on Friday two people were killed by flooding and cold weather, after heavy snowfall.



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[Abderrazak Makri](#)

Algeria sets April election, no word on Bouteflika candidacy
Algeria's ancient pyramid tombs still shrouded in mystery

Palestinian killed by Israeli fire in West Bank clashes

Author:

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Sat, 2019-01-26 16:15

RAMALLAH: Israeli settlers shot and killed a Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, Palestinian officials and the Israeli military said. The incident followed a confrontation between settlers and Palestinians near the city of Ramallah in which a settler was lightly injured, the military said.

“Initial details suggest that shortly thereafter, a conflict erupted between Israeli civilians and Palestinians in the area, in which live rounds were fired by the civilians. One Palestinian died and several others are injured,” the military said in a statement, adding that an investigation has begun. The Palestinians said the settlers had entered the village of al-Mughayer and that its residents tried to fend them off. The Israeli military said its forces dispersed the crowds. The Palestinian Health Ministry said that the man killed was 38 years old and that nine other people were wounded by gunfire.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the killing.

“The Israeli Government is continuing its policy of escalation,” Abbas said in a statement published by the official Wafa news agency. “This will lead to serious consequences, further tension and the creation of a dangerous and uncontrollable atmosphere.”

Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians broke down in 2014, and a bid by U.S. President Donald Trump to restart negotiations has so far shown little progress.

The Palestinians want to establish a state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with a capital in east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move unrecognized abroad and in 2005 pulled its settlers and army out of Gaza. It maintains a blockade of the territory, which is controlled by the Islamist Hamas movement. Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by Israel and the West.

In the West Bank, the Palestinians have limited self-rule and most of the territory is controlled by Israel. Most countries view the settlements Israel has built there as illegal – a view that Israel disputes, citing biblical, historical and political ties to the land.



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Israeli troops kill 2 Palestinians

[Tunisia, Russia call for Arab League to readmit Syria](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2019-01-26 11:09

TUNIS: Syria's "natural place" is within the Arab League, Tunisia's foreign minister said Saturday, ahead of the organization's annual summit in Tunis in March.

"Syria is an Arab state, and its natural place is within the Arab League," Khemaies Jhinaoui said during a news conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who is on a tour of North African countries.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011 as the death toll in the country's civil war mounted.

"The question of Syria returning to the Arab League does not depend on Tunisia but on the Arab League," Jhinaoui said.

"The foreign ministers (of member states) will decide on this subject," he added. "What interests us is Syria's stability and security."

Persistent divisions between the Arab League's member states have worked against Syria's readmission.

Russia's intervention in Syria's war since 2015 in favor of President Bashar Assad has turned the tide of the conflict in the regime's favor.

The United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in Damascus in December, the same month Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir made the first visit of any Arab leader to the Syrian capital since the start of the war.

But Qatar earlier this month rejected normalizing ties with Assad.

Lavrov backed overtures to readmit Syria.

"As we have discussed in Algeria and Morocco over the past few days, we would like Tunis to also support Syria's return to the Arab family, the Arab League," he said in Tunis.

Lavrov, who has also visited Morocco on his tour, said that Tunisia and Russia agreed to ramp up "anti-terror cooperation."

In reference to Franco-Italian differences on Libya, he said: "We must harmonize the efforts of outside mediators seeking a settlement to the Libyan conflict.

"This must be done under the sponsorship of the United Nations and taking into account the points of view of neighbors such as Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt."

Russia's foreign minister, winding up his North Africa visit, also met Tunisia's president and prime minister on Saturday.



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Arab states snub Syria over summit Iraq says it supports Syria's return to Arab League

[Protesters storm Turkish base in north Iraq, teenager killed](#)

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Sat, 2019-01-26 10:33

ERBIL/SULAYMANIYAH, Iraq: Angry protesters stormed a Turkish military base in northern Iraq on Saturday, burning Turkish military vehicles and leading to a confrontation that left one teenager killed and 10 injured, according to

officials in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region.

The protesters were demonstrating against a recent Turkish air raid that killed six civilians, the officials said.

A video obtained by The Associated Press showed a crowd of protesters who appeared to be mostly in their 20s inside the base in the town of Shaladze. Some tried to smash the door of what appeared to be a warehouse at the base with a rock while another tried to destroy a Turkish tank with a hammer. Fire and smoke could be seen rising from military vehicles.

A statement by the Kurdish Regional Government, or KRG, expressed regret for the loss of life and extended sympathy to the families of the victims. The statement said it will investigate the incident and punish those behind the chaos and sabotage.

Turkey's Defense Ministry said that a Turkish military base in northern Iraq came under attack by Kurdish militants and that some vehicles and equipment were damaged. In a tweet, the ministry blamed the attack on a "provocation" by the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK. The far-left group is considered a terror organization by Turkey and its NATO allies.

The PKK has waged an insurgency within Turkey since 1984 and is based in camps in northern Iraq near the Turkish border. Tens of thousands of people have died in the conflict, which resumed in 2015 after a fragile two-year cease-fire.

Eyewitnesses said Hassan Rekan Hussein, a 13-year-old from Shaladze, was killed in the incident Saturday, and 10 were injured. They were shot at by the Turkish soldiers at the beginning of as protesters broke into the base, the eyewitnesses said.

Vyan Sabri, a lawmaker who heads the bloc representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party, or PYD, in the Iraqi Parliament, blamed the PKK for "exploiting" Saturday's peaceful protest.

She called on the PKK to end its "illegitimate" presence in the region and on Turkey to cease its airstrikes.

A PKK politician, Kawa Sheikh Moussa, rejected the Turkish accusations.

"We do not have any office or representative in Shaladze," he said. He added that the demonstration was an angry reaction to the Turkish killing of civilians.

Turkish jets regularly bomb the camps and Turkey has a military presence in Iraq as part of a mandate that allows it to fight security threats in Iraq and Syria. The incident, the first of its kind, poses an embarrassment to Kurdistan's regional government, which is allied with Turkey.

Speaking in southeastern Gaziantep province Saturday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkish jets and armed drones flew into Iraq on Saturday. "Today they tried to do something wrong in Iraq again," he said, referring to Kurdish militants.

The PKK is believed to have fighters near villages inside the Kurdistan region, mainly in the mountainous areas near the Turkish border.

Also on Saturday, Turkey resumed flights to the Iraqi city of Sulaimaniyah for the first time after a 16-month boycott, the director-general of Iraq's Civil Aviation Authority said.

Ali Khalil Ibrahim said a Turkish Airlines flight landed at the airport Saturday morning, coming from Ankara. Turkey stopped flights to the Kurdish airport in September 2017 after the Iraqi region held a controversial independence referendum.

Earlier on Saturday, flights resumed between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah, according to aviation authorities, after a 16-month air blockade imposed by Ankara over an independence referendum. Kurds in the administratively autonomous northern region overwhelmingly voted for independence in a non-binding referendum in September 2017 that infuriated Baghdad as well as Iraq's neighbors, Turkey and Iran. In retaliation, Baghdad and Ankara blocked international flights from the two main Iraqi Kurdish cities of Irbil and Sulaimaniyah.



The first Turkish Airlines aircraft landed early Saturday morning at Sulaimaniyah airport after a 16-month suspension of flights. (AFP)

Almost all those restrictions were lifted last year but Turkey – which fears its own Kurdish minority could be inspired to push for independence – had maintained its blockade on Sulaimaniyah until Saturday.

“Implementing the Turkish government’s decision to lift the air blockade on international flights from Sulaimaniyah, the first Turkish Airlines flight landed early this morning and returned to Turkey,” said Sulaimaniyah airport chief Taher Abdallah.

He said the blockade cost the airport more than \$5 million in 2018.

Iraqi Airways would resume flights between Sulaimaniyah and Istanbul in the coming days, civil air authorities said.

That brings air traffic to and from the Iraqi Kurdish region back to its status before the 2017 referendum.

At the time, the federal government rejected the poll as “illegal,” imposed economic penalties and seized the disputed Kirkuk oil fields, halting exports.

But ties have improved markedly in recent months.

Authorities announced the resumption of oil exports from Kirkuk in November and last week, parliamentarians passed a 2019 budget guaranteeing Baghdad would pay the salaries of the Kurdish region’s public workers and peshmerga armed forces.



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Turkey partially permits flights to Iraqi Kurd region
Iraq extends air blockade of Kurdistan by 3 months