

Beirut left reeling after online video sparks violent clashes

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Tue, 2019-12-17 12:15

BEIRUT: Lebanon's capital was rocked by a third night of violence after an online video containing sectarian insults sent hundreds of protesters onto the streets to vent their anger at police and security forces.

The protesters, supporters of the Hezbollah and Amal movements, set cars ablaze, and threw stones and fireworks at police, who used tear gas and water cannon to disperse them.

Angered by the video, protesters from Beirut's southern suburb of Khandak El Ghamik used social media platforms late on Monday to issue calls to gather in the capital's squares, where they again targeted anti-government demonstrators.

It was the third consecutive night of violence in the capital following clashes between anti-government protesters and police on Saturday and Sunday. Riot police and army personnel responded to the attacks by firing dozens of tear gas canisters, wounding several people, including security personnel. More than 20 people were rushed to hospital after the clashes.

Appeals for calm by Amal and Hezbollah leaders failed to stop supporters from confronting police and security forces.

A local religious leader, Sheikh Mohammed Kazem Ayyad, appeared on television from the Khandak El Ghamik mosque urging protesters to "leave the street."

Youssef Khayat, manager of the Central Monroe Hotel close to the site of the clashes, told Arab News: "Our occupancy rate has fallen to zero. In order to survive, we have to reduce salaries and cut the number of employees. When the confrontations begin in the evening, we lock the doors and stay inside."

Anger over the incident spread to the cities of Sidon and Nabatieh, where young men destroyed protesters' tents in Elia Square and attacked a number of people.

Safety fears forced most schools in Sidon to close on Tuesday while the army carried out patrols throughout the city.

Hezbollah and Amal supporters also destroyed anti-government protesters' tents in Nabatieh.

Nora Farhat, who runs a women's beauty salon, said the attacks were expected. "Targeting Hezbollah and Amal leaders all the time is bound to cause an explosion on the street. The protesters should accommodate other people, not provoke them. It is true that the protesters are not responsible for the inflammatory video, but everybody is tense."

In an attempt to calm the political situation, caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri visited Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri – the first meeting between the two since the deadlock over forming a replacement government.

A statement issued after the meeting said that "it is imperative that the Lebanese demonstrate awareness and vigilance at this stage, preserve civil

peace and national unity, and not be drawn into the strife that some are working hard to promote.”

Berri and Hariri said that “the need to accelerate the formation of the government has become more than urgent.”

Meanwhile, the Imam of Al-Basta mosque, Sheikh Ali Bitar, visited the Khandak El Ghamik mosque to meet Sheikh Ayyad. “We came to assure all Lebanese and the Muslim world that we are one body. We condemn the provocative video,” Sheikh Bitar said.

Beirut’s Public Prosecution Department planned to take action against the man who posted the online video but it later emerged he is living in Greece. The man’s uncle said on television: “The family has nothing to do with the words of my nephew.”

Later the man posted a second video apologizing for his actions.





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Lebanese leaders 'trying to buy time,' warns UN envoy Kubis
Technocratic government key to Lebanon's woes, former PM claims

[Egyptian officials unveil new archaeological finds](#)

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By ISABEL DEBRE | AP

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Tue, 2019-12-17 12:56

CAIRO: Archaeologists in Egypt have unveiled two new artifacts from antiquity, a rare statue of one of the country's most famous pharaohs and a diminutive ancient sphinx.

Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities announced that a pink granite statue of celebrated ancient ruler Ramses II was found last week, describing the artifact as "one of the rarest archaeological discoveries."

Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the three-and-a-half-foot statue was crafted in a style that ancient Egyptians used to portray and capture an individual's essential nature, adding that it was the first such statue to be found fashioned from granite. A hieroglyphic inscription found on the back of the stone bore the name "strong bull," a reference to the king's "strength and vitality," he added. The statue, caked in mud, was found on the property of a man arrested earlier this month for carrying out illegal excavations near the ancient pyramids of Giza, according to the ministry statement. It did not say how the statue came to be on the man's property.

"It's in very good condition," Niveen Al-Areef, a spokeswoman for the antiquities ministry, told The Associated Press on Tuesday. "We are now studying its importance and trying to determine its inscriptions."

Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great, ruled Egypt for around 60 years, from 1279 B.C. to 1213 B.C. He is credited with expanding ancient Egypt's reach as far as modern Syria to the east and modern Sudan to the south.

Over the weekend, Egyptian archaeologists also unearthed a dwarf limestone sphinx from a ditch in the southern desert province of Minya. At barely over one foot tall, the statue is no match for the towering Great Sphinx at the Pyramids of Giza, but the ministry said its finely carved face, which appears well-preserved, reflects impressive artistic skill and attention to detail. Egypt frequently touts its archaeological discoveries in hopes of spurring a vital tourism industry that has been reeling from political turmoil following the 2011 popular uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak.







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'The most beautiful place': Halima Aden wowed by Egyptian coast Egyptian civilian triggers discovery of ancient temple

[Regime bombardment kills 14 civilians in northwest Syria: monitor](#)

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Tue, 2019-12-17 12:49

BEIRUT: Syrian regime air strikes and artillery fire on Tuesday killed 14 civilians in the last major opposition bastion in the northwest of the

country, a war monitor said.

The militant-held region of Idlib is supposed to be protected by a months-old cease-fire deal to prevent a broad regime offensive, but deadly bombardment has continued.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said regime artillery fire killed six civilians from the same family – including a mother and her three children – in the village of Badama.

In the village of Maasaran, regime air strikes killed a further four civilians.

An AFP photographer on site saw a pool of red blood and clothes strewn on the pavement by a shop whose window had been shattered.

“That’s the regime for you,” a resident said, as he helped a shopkeeper pick up some items of clothing.

Pro-government bombardment also led to four other civilians losing their lives in other parts of the bastion, the Observatory said.

The Idlib region, which is home to some three million people including many displaced by Syria’s civil war, is controlled by the country’s former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The Damascus regime has repeatedly vowed to take back control of it.

Pro-government forces launched a blistering offensive against the region in April, killing around 1,000 civilians and displacing more than 400,000 people from their homes.

Moscow announced a cease-fire in late August, but the Observatory says deadly bombardment and skirmishes have persisted.

It says more than 200 civilians have been killed in the region since the deal.

Syria’s war has killed over 370,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since beginning in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.



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Syria hands oil exploration contracts to two Russian firms
Nearly 70 dead in Syria regime clashes with Idlib militants

[Algeria confirms Tebboune as new president, despite protests](#)

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Mon, 2019-12-16 18:40

ALGIERS: Algeria's Constitutional Council has confirmed Abdelkader Tebboune as the new president of Africa's largest country for the next five years – despite mass protests challenging his election last week.

Tebboune won the vote in the first round with 58% of the vote, the head of the Constitutional Council announced on state television Monday. The other four candidates didn't contest the result.

The constitutional body said the vote was carried out in a "good climate" – and didn't mention the protests that have filled the streets of Algiers and other cities every Friday since February.

The peaceful pro-democracy movement pushed out Tebboune's ailing predecessor, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, after 20 years in charge of this oil-rich country struggling with corruption. The protesters reject Tebboune because he served as prime minister in the old regime, and because the vote was organized by a power structure they want thrown out.

Tebboune vowed after his victory was announced Friday to reach out to the protesters and fight corruption.

The inauguration date has not been set but is expected before the end of the year.



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Morocco seeks to 'turn page' on tense ties with Algeria
New Algerian president faces tough challenge

[Iraqi state forces 'complicit' in massacre of Baghdad protesters](#)

Mon, 2019-12-16 20:43

RIYADH: The killing of dozens of Iraqi protesters in Baghdad earlier this month was carried out by unidentified armed forces in cooperation with Iraqi national and local security forces, Human Rights Watch said Monday.

Between 29 and 80 people were killed and 137 injured when gunmen opened fire on a crowd gathered in Al-Khilani Square on Dec. 6, the organization said in a report into the attack.

The killings came amid a brutal crackdown against widespread protests across southern Iraq that have left more than 500 dead.

The high death tolls have been blamed on a brutal response by government security forces but also the involvement of armed groups. Iran has also been blamed for playing a hand in organizing a response to the protests.

"Police and military forces withdrew as the unidentified militia, some in uniforms, began shooting," the Human Rights Watch report said.

Witnesses said about 1,000 people were gathered in the square and a nearby five-story parking garage that had been used as a hub for the protests when seven pickup trucks sped into the area.

"As the vehicles drove through the square slowly, gunmen in plain black uniforms and civilian dress opened fire with AK-47s and PK machine guns above the protesters, before lowering and firing directly at them," the report said.

The attackers then moved on to the building known as Al-Senak garage. Men carrying machetes and sticks stormed the building before more arrived with guns and opened fire inside.

"Five of my friends are still missing, and I don't know if they are dead or were detained," one of the witnesses said. "I saw the armed men loading bodies into their buses and trucks an hour before they drove away."

The witnesses said about two dozen Federal Police and Iraqi Security Forces, who were manning two checkpoints in the square leave as the gunmen arrived.

Nine hours later, at 4:30 a.m. on Dec. 7, the armed men left and the security forces returned within minutes.

"There's very strong evidence the Iraqi authorities outsourced their dirty work against protesters, leaving just as the killings commenced and returning

to assist with arrests,” Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said. “If they stood by and allowed these armed men to attack protesters or carried out the murders themselves, the Iraqi government forces will be responsible.”

“The authorities, it seems, even allowed the lights to go out, blanketing the protesters in darkness with only flying bullets to light up the sky.”

The report said that videos show some people detained during the violence being released and claiming they had been abused. A police officer tells them that they had been held by Kata’ib Hezbollah, an armed group in the Popular Mobilization Forces linked to Iran.

Human Rights Watch called on Iran, along with the US and UK, to stop providing military support to the Iraqi government until the killings of protesters stop.



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Pentagon chief urges Iraq to stop attacks on bases housing US forces
Backer of Iraq anti-government protests killed in Baghdad