

Death toll increases in Iraq as protests spread through southern cities

Wed, 2019-10-02 18:29

BAGHDAD: Three people were killed and at least 115 wounded on Wednesday in renewed nationwide clashes between demonstrators and Iraqi security forces, the largest display of public anger against Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's year-old government.

Domestic instability coupled with regional tensions could prove to be the final nail in the coffin of Abdul Mahdi's fragile coalition government, sworn in last year as a compromise between rival factions after an inconclusive election.

The protests, which started on Tuesday over unemployment, corruption, and poor public services, have escalated, with many chanting for the "fall of the regime."

#WATCH: Protests in Iraq escalated on Monday with at least more people killed and clashes spreading to other cities in the south. Here in Najaf, Iraqi security forces confront protesters. (Video: AFP)

More details here: <https://t.co/nbaFyaVjtg>
pic.twitter.com/s3Yqo8V7F8

– Arab News (@arabnews) [October 2, 2019](#)

"We are demanding a change, we want the downfall of the whole government," said one protester in Baghdad who declined to identify himself for fear of reprisal.

Three more people were killed or died from their wounds on Wednesday, taking the toll to at least five after at least two people were killed and 200 wounded on Tuesday.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said one child was killed on Wednesday when a protester threw a bottle filled with gasoline at a vehicle carrying civilian passengers in Zafaraniya district of southeast Baghdad.

A protester was shot dead in the southern city of Nassiriya when police opened fire to disperse demonstrators, local health sources told Reuters.

Another protester died of their wounds, police and health sources said.

Police and the army opened fire and launched tear gas canisters to disperse hundreds of protesters all over Baghdad.



Protests also erupted all over southern Iraq – heartland of the Shiite Muslim majority who after years of voting along sectarian lines are turning on their political leaders for failing to deliver jobs and basic services.

Protesters set fire near the municipality building in Nassiriya and police used live fire to disperse them. In Kut, protesters tried to break into the municipality building, and hundreds were out on the streets of Hilla and Diwaniya while dozens gathered in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

Thousands gathered in the oil-rich city of Basra in front of the provincial administration building but so far protests there were peaceful. There were peaceful protests in Samawa.

Small protests also took place in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Tikrit, as well as the eastern province of Diyala.

Abdul Mahdi on Wednesday chaired an emergency meeting of the national security council, which later issued a statement regretting deaths and injuries on both sides during Tuesday's protests and affirming the right to protest and freedom of expression. It made no mention of Wednesday's protests.



"The council affirms the right to protest, freedom of expression, and the protesters' legitimate demands, but at the same time condemns the acts of vandalism that accompanied the protests," it said.

Appropriate measures to protect citizens, public, and private property would be taken, it added.

Security forces blocked several roads in Baghdad, including a bridge that leads to the fortified Green Zone, which houses government buildings and foreign embassies, as part of tightened security measures, a security source said.

"Our demands? We want work, we want to work. If they do not want to treat us as Iraqis, then tell us we are not Iraqi and we will find other nationalities and migrate to other countries," said one protester in eastern Baghdad.

In a bid to cool tempers, Abdul Mahdi on Tuesday promised jobs for graduates. He instructed the Oil Ministry and other government bodies to include a 50% quota for local workers in subsequent contracts with foreign companies.

Oil-rich Iraq has suffered hardships for decades, from rule by Saddam Hussein including years subject to UN sanctions, to the 2003 US invasion and civil war it unleashed, and then the battle against Islamic State, which was declared won in 2017.

Graft is widespread and basic services such as power and water are lacking. A government statement on Tuesday said 40 members of the security forces were among those injured and blamed "groups of inciting riots" for the violence. At least six members of security forces were injured in Baghdad on Wednesday and five in Nassiriya.

The United Nations on Wednesday expressed concern over the violence and urged calm, with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert reaffirming in a statement the right to protest.

The US Embassy in Baghdad urged all sides to avoid violence.







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Third person dies as protests continue in Baghdad
Iraq's removal of counterterrorism chief sparks controversy

[Tunisia sets presidential election runoff for October 13](#)

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Wed, 2019-10-02 14:19

TUNIS: Tunisia's electoral commission said Wednesday the country's presidential election runoff would take place on October 13 despite calls to postpone the vote by the party of a jailed frontrunner.

ISIE said campaigning would kick off Thursday for the second and final round of voting, which will see imprisoned media mogul Nabil Karoui face off against independent law professor Kais Saied.

"ISIE can neither advance nor postpone the date of the elections under the constitution," commission head Nabil Baffoun said.

The spokesman for Karoui, who has been detained since August 23 on charges of money laundering and tax evasion, had called Tuesday night for a suspension of the vote as long as the candidate remains behind bars.

That came as Tunisia's court of appeal rejected a fresh request for Karoui's release.

ISIE, international observers and political leaders have called for Karoui to be allowed to campaign fairly.

"We have made every effort to ensure equal opportunities," Baffoun said.

"We sent letters to the justice ministry, the prosecutor general and even the judge in charge of the case to give Nabil Karoui the opportunity to speak in the media, or even to release him."

The timing of Karoui's arrest, 10 days before the start of campaigning, raised questions about the politicization of the judicial process.

Despite the legal proceedings, Karoui's candidacy was approved by ISIE and he campaigned by proxy via the Nessma television channel he founded and through his wife.

After the first round of voting on September 15, Saied led with 18.4 percent of votes, according to ISIE, with Karoui in second with 15.6 percent.



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Anti-party Aich Tounsi shakes up Tunisian election
Jailed Tunisia presidential candidate to remain in prison

[Ruling to end nationwide teachers' strike still applies: Jordanian court](#)

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Wed, 2019-10-02 17:07

AMMAN: Jordan's Supreme Administrative Court said Wednesday that a ruling to end a nationwide teachers' strike still applies and is in accordance with the law, Jordan News Agency (Petra) reported.

The court ruled to end the four-week strike on Sunday, after the Jordanian Teachers' Syndicate on Saturday rejected as "bread crumbs" modest pay

increases offered by Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz in a bid to end it. The strike comes as Jordan struggles to implement tough IMF-backed fiscal reforms.

Only a quarter of Jordan's 4,000 public schools opened on Tuesday and a fraction of its 1.5 million or so students turned up for lessons, in what economists said was a blow to the Razzaz government, which came to power in 2018 after street protests over IMF-backed austerity measures.

The teachers' union, which has 100,000 members, is demanding a 50 percent pay hike. Razzaz says pay increases that took effect this month averaging \$35 per month were the most Jordan could afford.



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Jordanian teachers' dispute with govt continues Jordan king says Israeli annexation would be a disaster

[Syria's Kurds protest exclusion from](#)

constitutional committee

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Wed, 2019-10-02 13:37

QAMISHLI: Hundreds of Kurds demonstrated in northeast Syria on Wednesday in protest at their minority community's "exclusion" from a United Nations-backed committee tasked with drafting a new constitution for the war-devastated country.

Carrying placards, demonstrators gathered in front of UN offices in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli.

"It's our right to participate in the drafting of the constitution," read one sign.

The United Nations on September 23 announced the long-awaited formation of the committee to include 150 members, split evenly between Syria's government, the opposition and Syrian civil society.

Individual Kurdish representatives linked to the Syrian opposition or civil society groups are part of the constitutional committee.

But the Kurdish administration in northeast Syria that controls nearly 30 percent of the country has said its exclusion was "unjust."

Talaat Younes, a Kurdish administration official, stressed the need to include "all components of Syrian society."

Around him, men and women carried portraits of Kurdish fighters who had died battling the Daesh group in Syria.

Syria's Kurds led the US-backed fight against IS in northern and eastern Syria, expelling the jihadist group from their last major redoubt in the country in March.

"Our military force has achieved significant success. We must have representatives on this committee," said Hashem Shawish, one of the protesters.

Long marginalized, Syria's Kurds have largely stayed out of Syria's eight-year civil war, instead setting up their own institutions in areas under their control.

They have been sidelined from UN-led peace talks as well as a parallel Russian-backed negotiation track, mainly due to objections by Turkey, which considers them to be terrorists.

The war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since erupting in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.



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Syria Kurds hand over four Daesh-linked children to Germany

[Jailed Tunisia presidential candidate to remain in prison](#)

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Tue, 2019-10-01 17:11

TUNIS: A Tunisian court has ordered that jailed presidential candidate Nabil Karoui stay in prison as he competes in the country's presidential runoff. One of Karoui's lawyers, Ined Ben Halima, told The Associated Press that a

Tunis court on Tuesday rejected the candidate's appeal to be released. The runoff vote is being held on Oct. 13.

The 56-year-old Karoui, co-owner of the private TV station Nessma TV, is facing off against 61-year-old conservative law professor Kais Saied to become the North African nation's next leader.

Karoui was jailed on Aug. 23 pending an investigation into alleged money laundering and tax evasion charges. He was allowed to remain in the race because he has not been convicted. He says the charges are politically motivated.

The election was held early due to the death in office in July of President Beji Caid Essebsi.



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Tunisia's presidential vote pits professor vs. prisoner
Tunisia presidential runner calls for rival to be freed