

Militant group admits attack on Iranian police station

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-29 23:19

TEHRAN: A double-bombing lightly wounded three police in the southeastern city of Zahedan on Tuesday.

Gen. Mohammad Ghanbari, the provincial police chief, told the official IRNA news agency that the second bomb went off as police raced to the scene of the first explosion. He says the bombs were handmade and that police are investigating.

Jaish Al-Adl, a militant group, claimed responsibility for the explosions. The group said it had targeted a police station with "two strong bombs", damaging a police car and a police motorcycle.

Iranian officials said the explosions were caused by percussion grenades, and left three police officers with minor injuries.

Zahedan is the capital of Sistan-Baluchistan province, which has seen past attacks by Baluch separatists and drug traffickers.

Last month a suicide car bomber struck a police headquarters in the port city of Chabahar, also in Sistan -Baluchistan, killing at least two police and wounding 42 other people.

*With AP and Reuters



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Iran holds infantry drill involving 12,000 troops
US sanctions Iranian militias for turning refugees into 'cannon fodder'

[Daesh fighters pinned in tiny Syria enclave with families](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-29 22:00

QAMISHLI, SYRIA: Daesh fighters in eastern Syria are pinned down in a final tiny pocket with their wives and children, forcing a US-backed militia to slow its advance to protect civilians, the militia said on Tuesday.

An aid agency said separately that 10,000 civilians had fled the enclave since last week and were arriving hungry and desperate at a camp.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which have been backed by 2,000 US troops and air support, are preparing for a final showdown with Daesh in eastern Syria after helping to drive the fighters from the towns and cities that once formed the group's self-proclaimed caliphate.

SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali said Daesh fighters were now confined to a pocket of just 5-6 square km (around 2 square miles) by the Euphrates River. The presence of their wives and children meant the US-backed militia could not launch an all-out storm of it, and was using slower, more precise tactics instead.

"There are thousands of Daesh families there. They are civilians at the end of the day," Bali told Reuters. "We cannot storm the area or put any child's life in danger."

The SDF had refused an offer from the militants via mediators to surrender the territory in return for safe passage out, Bali said.

Clashes had slowed because of the presence of the civilians, and "precise operations" were taking more time. "Calm prevails on the frontlines but there is a state of caution and waiting."

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) charity said it was helping tend to a sudden influx of more than 10,000 people, almost all women, children and elderly, who had arrived at a camp in northeast Syria since last week.

Most were exhausted, extremely hungry, and thirsty as they fled Daesh territory, the global aid agency said. Many arrived barefoot. The UN confirmed that 12 young children had died after reaching the Al-Hol camp or on the dangerous journey there, the IRC added on Tuesday.

The SDF, spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG militia, has seized much of north and east Syria with US help. It has been battling Daesh remnants near the Iraqi border for months.

Last month, US President Donald Trump declared that Daesh had been defeated and announced the abrupt withdrawal of the US troops, over objections of top advisers including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis who quit in protest.

The SDF vowed to escalate its operations against Daesh this month after a bomb attack killed several people including two US soldiers in northern Syria. SDF officials have warned of a Daesh revival if Washington withdraws.

Kurdish leaders also fear a US pullout would give Turkey, which sees the YPG as a threat on its border, the chance to mount a new assault. Washington has since said it will make sure its allies are protected when it leaves.



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Scores of civilians, fighters depart Daesh stronghold in Syria
Daesh in Syria boxed in to shrinking pocket

Macron calls for inter-religious dialogue at end of Egypt visit

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-29 21:39

CAIRO: French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday held a surprise second meeting with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah El-Sisi after talks with the country's top clerics, ending a three-day visit aimed at boosting ties while raising human rights concerns.

Before traveling on to Cyprus for a summit of southern EU countries, Macron and El-Sisi held an unscheduled 45-minute meeting at Cairo airport.

Earlier, Macron met with Pope Tawadros II at St. Mark's Cathedral, the seat of Egypt's ancient Coptic Orthodox Church. They both stressed the need for "dialogue between religions."

"I decided that a new conference will be held in Paris to see how to act more effectively," he said, without giving details.

A diplomatic source said the French capital would host a forum on religious minorities in the Middle East, but without giving a date.

Macron visited the church adjacent to the cathedral that was the site of a December 2016 jihadist attack, which killed 29 people.

He also met in Cairo with Ahmed Al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, the most prestigious seat of Sunni Islamic learning in Egypt.

Their talks centered on "the training of imams (prayer leaders) in France and the fight against the misguided vision of religion," the French presidency said.

Also on Tuesday, Macron lunched with civil society members "active in the areas of judicial protection of detainees, press freedom, gender equality and children's defense," the presidency said.

During the visit, Macron and El-Sisi oversaw the signing of some 30 deals in various sectors. No arms deals were signed.



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France to provide Egypt with €1bn for development: Macron
French president heads to Egypt on mission to reinforce ties

[Sudan security chief orders release of detained protesters](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-29 21:28

KHARTOUM: Sudan's security chief has ordered the release of people detained during weeks of anti-government protests, the Information Ministry said on Tuesday, as demonstrations continued in several cities.

The ministry was confirming reports by activists that Salah Abdallah Mohamed Saleh, the head of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), visited a prison in the capital Khartoum and said arrested protesters would be freed.

No further details were available. Hundreds of protesters, activists and opposition figures have been arrested since protests began to spread across Sudan on Dec. 19.

The demonstrations, triggered by a worsening economic crisis, have called for an end to the rule of President Omar Bashir who has been in power since 1989.

Police used tear gas on Tuesday to disperse dozens of demonstrators in Khartoum's Burri neighborhood and hundreds who gathered in its twin city of Omdurman, witnesses said.

"It may take months, but I'm confident we will succeed," said Reem, a 25-year-old housewife facing off against clouds of tear gas in Omdurman. Hundreds also demonstrated in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan and chanted anti-government slogans.

Tuesday's demonstrations, called by unions and opposition activists, fell on the anniversary of the 2005 killing of protesters in Port Sudan during an earlier period of demonstrations against Bashir's long rule. Protests also took place there.

The latest rallies were the largest in several days, as Sudanese have taken to demonstrating in local squares and neighborhoods sometimes blocked off with cars or makeshift barricades.

The current wave of protests began on Dec. 19 in opposition to surging prices and a failing economy, but quickly shifted to calls for an end to Bashir's nearly three-decade rule.

A devaluation of the currency in October pushed up prices, but lifting state subsidies on bread last month proved to be the final stroke, sparking the unrest. A cash crunch also led to long lines at ATMs and limits on cash withdrawals. Similarly, a fuel shortage meant hours-long waits at gas stations.

Bashir, who seized power in a military coup in 1989, insists that only elections, which he intends to run in, could bring change.



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Al-Bashir vows to bring peace as demos called in Sudan's war zones
South Sudanese fear leaving UN protected camps despite peace

[Tunisian president accuses PM of secret pact for power](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-01-29 17:01

TUNIS: Tunisia's president on Tuesday accused the prime minister of seeking power through a secret deal with an Islamist party, the latest sign of tension at the top ahead of elections.

Prime Minister Youssef Chahed had gained the backing of the Ennahdha party to stand in the presidential polls, President Beji Caid Essebsi said, quoted by Al Arab newspaper.

"Chahed wants to stay in power... Ennahdha has understood his ambition... They

have pushed him to create a new party which divides power between them after the 2019 elections,” said Essebsi, whose comments were verified by the presidency.

Chahed was appointed by Essebsi in 2016 but relations between the pair have strained in recent months, fueling speculation the prime minister will run in this year’s presidential election.

For his part, 92-year-old Essebsi indicated he would not seek a second term. “My ambition is not to stay president for life. I am not in favor of a president for life,” he said.

Essebsi’s claim of a private pact by Chahed comes as the premier prepares for elections with a progressive platform – the Tahia Tounes movement – described as being in opposition to Ennahdha.

Its political stance is similar to that of Essebsi’s secularist Nidaa Tounes, which won the 2014 elections and formed a coalition with Ennahdha that lasted four years.

Nidaa Tounes has since split and its leader, Essebsi’s son Hafedh, has been battling to oust the prime minister for months.



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