



Turkey signs military deal with Libya govt

Pak court strikes down 3-year extension for army chief

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NAJAF: Iraqi demonstrators gesture as flames start consuming Iran's consulate in this southern Iraqi Shiite holy city late Wednesday. — AFP

Iraqi forces kill 25 after Iran mission torched

PM deploys military chiefs to 'impose security and restore order'

NASIRIYAH, Iraq: Iraq's southern hotspot of Nasiriyah was in bloody upheaval yesterday after a government crackdown killed 25 protesters and thousands defied a curfew to march in their funerals, following the dramatic torching of an Iranian consulate. Iraq's capital and south have been torn by the worst street unrest since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein, as a protest movement has vented their fury at their government and its backers in neighboring Iran.

Late Wednesday, protesters outraged at Tehran's political influence in Iraq burned down the Iranian consulate in the shrine city of Najaf, yelling "Victory to Iraq!" and "Iran out!" In response, Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi early yesterday ordered military chiefs to deploy in several restive provinces to "impose security and restore order", the army said. But by the afternoon, after the protesters' deaths, the premier had already removed one of the commanders, General Jamil Shummary. Shummary had been dispatched to the premier's birthplace of Nasiriyah, a southern city that has been a protest hotspot for weeks.

The ensuing crackdown was particularly bloody, with at least 25 protesters killed and more than 200 wounded as security forces cleared sit-ins with live fire, medics and security sources said. The provincial governor in Nasiriyah, Adel Al-

Dakhili, blamed the crackdown on Shummary, who was the military commander of the southern port city of Basra when demonstrations there were brutally suppressed in 2018. Dakhili demanded the premier sack him, and hours later, state television announced Abdel Mahdi had ordered Shummary removed from the post.

Tribes deploy

The latest violence brought the death toll since early October to over 370, with more than 15,000 wounded according to an AFP tally, as authorities are not releasing updated or precise figures. Thousands of Nasiriyah's residents took to the streets to mourn the city's dead in funeral processions, defying a curfew announced there earlier in the day. "We're staying until the regime falls and our demand are met!" they chanted.

Demonstrators who had been dispersed by security forces regrouped at Nasiriyah's police station, setting it on fire. They then encircled its main military headquarters as armed members of the area's influential tribes deployed along main highways to blockade military reinforcements trying to reach the city. Events in southern Iraq have unfolded dramatically since late Wednesday, when protesters stormed the Iranian consulate in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

They set tyres and other items ablaze around the consulate, sending tall flames and thick clouds of smoke into the night sky, an AFP correspondent witnessed. They also broke into the building itself, which had been apparently evacuated by its Iranian staff. Demonstrators across Iraq have blamed powerful eastern neighbor Iran for propping up the Baghdad government which

they are seeking to topple.

Tehran demanded Iraq take decisive action against the protesters, with foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi condemning the attack. "Iran has officially communicated its disgust to the Iraq ambassador in Tehran," he said in comments carried by Iran's state news agency IRNA. —AFP

Houthi prisoners freed in Saudi, flown to Yemen

SANAA: Some 128 Houthi rebels detained in Saudi Arabia were flown to the Yemeni city of Sanaa and released yesterday, as efforts to end the five-year conflict gain momentum. The prisoners arrived on three International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) planes and were met inside the airport by rebel commanders and some family members, an AFP correspondent saw. The Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen said earlier this week that

it would release 200 Houthi prisoners and also allow patients needing medical care to be flown out of Sanaa airport, which has been closed to commercial flights since 2016.

Riyadh and its allies intervened in the Yemen war in March 2015 to back the internationally recognized government, shortly after the Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized Sanaa. "The ICRC sees the release as a positive step and hopes that it will spur further releases and repatriations of conflict-related detainees," it said in a statement. It said the Yemen Red Crescent transferred some of the released prisoners to a medical facility for check-ups. As they alighted from the plane, some of the detainees had to be helped down the steps and put in wheelchairs. —AFP