



**Iraq parliament adopts law legalizing Shiite militias**

‘MILLION’ RALLY TO DEMAND S KOREA PRESIDENT’S OUSTER

**CAR BOMB HITS MOGADISHU MARKET**

AT LEAST 8 KILLED, BUT DEATH TOLL EXPECTED TO RISE



**MOGADISHU:** Security officers and military personnel secure yesterday the scene of a suicide car bomb attack in Somalia's restive capital. —AFP

**MOGADISHU:** A car bomb exploded near a busy market in Somalia's capital Mogadishu yesterday, killing at least eight people, police said, as medical sources warned the toll could be far higher. "We have counted about eight civilians so far who were killed in the blast and more than 10 others wounded but the death toll could be higher because the area is a market and it was so densely populated when the blast occurred, most people who were wounded have serious injuries," said police official Ibrahim Mohamed.

Medical sources suggested nearly 30 people had been killed, but this was not confirmed by authorities. "Our ambulances have collected 13 wounded civilians and 28 dead bodies, the toll could be higher because of the density of the location where the blast occurred," Dr Abdulkadir Abdirahman Adem, director of the AMIN ambulance service, told AFP. The blast took place in the densely populated Afisiyone area in southern Mogadishu.

"There was chaos and severed dead bodies strewn around the street, the market was so busy with people shopping when the blast ripped through the area. I saw many dead bodies but I could not count, I have helped collect more than 10 of them," said Abdulahi Osman, who witnessed the blast.

**'Both Dead and Injured'**

Another witness, Ismail Mohamad told AFP: "I can't count all, but, I can tell that I have collected about 20 dead people with my hands, also, there have been other people collecting with me both dead and injured persons." No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, but immediate suspicion fell on the Al-Qaeda linked Islamist Shabaab group, which is locked in battle with the Somali government and regularly mounts attacks in the city.

Its most deadly recent attack was in August when a car bomb outside a popular hotel close to the presidential palace left 15 dead. Despite being driven out of the capital in 2011 by an African Union force deployed in 2007, the group still controls vast swathes of outlying rural areas from which it launches guerrilla operations. Somalia is currently holding a drawn-out, limited election in which some 14,000 specially selected voters are picking 275 members of parliament who will later join senators in electing a president.

The country had been promised a one-person, one-vote election, however political infighting and insecurity led leaders to ditch the plan in favor of the current process. After the 1991 fall of strongman president Mohamed Siad Barre, warring clan militia plunged the country into decades of civil war and humanitarian crises, leaving it without a central government and the label of the world's foremost failed state. An even more limited election in 2012 - when MPs were nominated by 135 clan elders - gave Somalia the first central government based in the country since the fall of Barre. —AFP

**ISRAELI SETTLERS FLEE AS W BANK FIRES SPREAD**

**JERUSALEM:** Wildfires near Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank have forced hundreds to flee their homes, after mass evacuations in Israel and more than a dozen arrests, police said yesterday. Israeli and Palestinian firefighters, helped by foreign aircraft, have been battling dozens of bush blazes fed by drought and high winds that have seen tens of thousands of people evacuated. Around 1,000 residents had to leave

the Halamish settlement near Ramallah as 45 homes were damaged or destroyed by fire, a police spokeswoman said.

Blazes were also reported near the West Bank settlements of Dolev, Alfei Menashe and Karnei Shomron, although there were no evacuations there. Firefighting planes from Israel and countries including Russia, Turkey, Greece, France, Spain and Canada continued to dump tonnes of

water and retardants on fires at locations including the village of Nataf close to Jerusalem. A police spokeswoman said the large-scale effort managed to bring the Nataf blaze under control by Saturday afternoon, allowing residents to return.

A newly arrived US Supertanker, considered the largest firefighting aircraft in the world, joined the emergency operation yesterday. Police said they had arrested 14 people on suspicion of negligence or deliberately starting fires, without providing details about their identities. In the country's third city Haifa, where tens of thousands of people had been evacuated Thursday from the path of towering flames which threatened entire neighborhoods, residents have begun returning home to assess the damage.

The Israeli authorities suspect that some of the fires may have been of criminal origin and linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday there was "no doubt" that some of the fires had been deliberate. "There is a price to pay for the crimes committed, there is a price to pay for arson terrorism," he said. Arab Israeli leaders have argued that their community, which makes up about 17.5 percent of the country's population, is as much affected by the fires as Jews.

The Palestinians joined the efforts overnight to extinguish the blazes, sending 41 firefighters and eight trucks to Haifa where around 200 families have been left homeless, the municipality said. Israel's Nature and Parks Authority issued a statement saying that 13,000 hectares of forest and shrubland have been burned in recent days. Local media quoted authorities as saying an estimated 700 homes have so far been damaged or destroyed by the fires. —AFP



**NATAF:** The American 747 supertanker helps extinguish a fire over this village close to Jerusalem yesterday. —AFP

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