

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Iraq closed its southern Shalamcheh border crossing with Iran to travelers from both countries on Saturday, an Iraqi security source and an Iranian diplomat said.

The security source said Tehran had demanded the closure because of ongoing public protests in Iraq. The border would remain shut until further notice but would not affect goods or trade, the security source and the diplomat said.



DUBAI (Dispatches) -- U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff David Goldfein said on Saturday he was hopeful a bitter dispute between Persian Gulf Arab states could soon end and urged them to unify military capabilities, apparently against Iran.

Washington sees an ongoing political rift that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and non-Persian Gulf state Egypt have with Qatar as a threat to its campaign to pressure Iran and has pushed for a united front.

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Deputy Defense Minister: Iran Acquires Laser Air Defense Technology



Notable Star Maadi Granted Stockholm Achievement Award



FIFA Fines Bahrain for Disrespecting Iranian Anthem



Zionist Regime Bombs Gaza for Second Day



Dozens of Casualties as Morales Supporters Attacked Massacre Under Promise of Democracy in Bolivia

SACABA, Bolivia (Dispatches) -- Bolivia's political crisis turned deadly after security forces opened fire on supporters of Evo Morales in a central town, killing at least five people, injuring dozens following the forced resignation of the former president which is being viewed by many Latin Americans as akin to a military coup.

Most of the dead and injured in Sacaba near the city of Cochabamba suffered bullet wounds, Guadalberto Lara, director of the town's Mexico Hospital, told The Associated Press. He called it the worst violence he's seen in his 30-year career.

Angry demonstrators and relatives of the victims gathered at the site of the shootings, chanting: "Civil war, now!"

Morales, who was granted asylum in Mexico after his forced resignation Sunday, said on Twitter that a "massacre" had occurred and he described Bolivia's new regime led by interim president Jeanine Áñez as a dictatorship.

"Now they are killing our brothers in Sacaba, Cochabamba," he said in another tweet.

Protesters said police fired when demonstrators, including many coca leaf growers who backed Bolivia's first indigenous president, tried to cross a military checkpoint. Emeterio Colque Sánchez, a 23-year-old university student, said he saw the dead bodies of several protesters and about two-dozen people rushed to hospitals, many covered in blood.

Earlier in the day, Áñez said Morales would face possible legal charges for election fraud if he returns home from Mexico City, even as the ousted leader contended he is still president since the country's legislature has not yet approved his resignation. Bolivia's interim leader also said Morales would not be allowed to participate in new presidential elections meant to heal the Andean nation's political standoff.

Morales stepped down on Sunday following riots over orchestrated claims of vote-rigging in an Oct. 20 election in which he won a fourth term in office. An audit by the U.S.-backed Organization of American States claimed widespread irregularities, but Morales has denied there was fraud.

Morales even declared his readiness for new elections but those behind the violent riots resorted to ferocious attacks on his residences, which forced him to leave Bolivia.

Families of the victims held a candlelight vigil late Friday

in Sacaba. A tearful woman put her hand on a wooden casket surrounded by flowers and asked: "Is this what you call democracy? Killing us like nothing?" Another woman cried and prayed in Quechua over the coffin of Omar Calle, which was draped in the Bolivian national flag and the multicolor "Wiphala" flag that represents indigenous peoples.

Bolivia's Ombudsman's Office said it regretted the deaths during the joint police-military operation and called on the interim government to investigate if the security forces had acted within the constitution and international protocols on human rights.

"We express our alarm and concern over the result of an attempt to stop a demonstration by coca leaf growers from entering the city of Cochabamba," it said.

Presidency Minister Jerjes Justiniano told reporters in La Paz that five people had been killed and an estimated 22 were injured. Lara, the hospital director, said that 75 people were injured.

"What we've been able to determine through preliminary information is that they used military weapons," he said.

On Thursday, Morales told The AP in Mexico that while he had submitted his resignation, it was never accepted by Congress. "I can say that I'm still president," he said.

Morales said he left because of military pressure -- the army chief had "suggested" he leave -- and threats of violence against his close collaborators.

Supporters of Morales, who had been Bolivia's president for almost 14 years, have been staging protests since his ouster, setting up blockades that forced closure of schools and caused shortages of gasoline in the capital.

In the capital, riot police fired tear gas at rock-throwing demonstrators. Long lines formed outside some gas stations in La Paz after blockades in the nearby city of El Alto, a major distribution point for fuel.

"There's no gas," said Efraín Mendoza, a taxi driver from El Alto, who was forced to buy gasoline on the black market at twice the regular price.

"Products are scarce. There's no meat, no chicken, people are making long lines. It's all because of the blockades," he said. "There's division in Bolivia. It's exasperating."

Áñez, the highest-ranking

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On First Anniversary of Movement:

Yellow Vest Protests Hit Cities Across France



Riot police officers are deployed during a demonstration to mark the first anniversary of the "yellow vests" movement in Paris, November 16, 2019.

PARIS (Dispatches) -- French police fired water cannon and tear gas in Paris on Saturday to drive back protesters marking the first anniversary of anti-government "yellow vest" demonstrations.

Demonstrators, many clad in black and hiding their faces, attacked an HSBC bank branch at the Place d'Italie. They set trash bins on fire and hurled cobblestones and bottles at riot police while building barricades.

Several cars were set ablaze. Police responded with tear gas and a water cannon.

"Our response will be very firm.

All those who are hiding their face, all those who are throwing stones are going to be called in for questioning," Paris police prefect Didier Lallement told a news conference.

Some 105 people had been taken in for questioning, he said.

Earlier, clashes broke out between demonstrators and police near the Porte de Champerret, close to the Arc de Triomphe, as protesters were preparing to march across town toward Gare d'Austerlitz.

Police also intervened to prevent a few hundred demonstrators from occupying the Paris ring road.

The yellow vest protests, named for the high-visibility jackets worn by demonstrators, erupted in November 2018 over fuel price hikes and the high cost of living. The demonstrations spiraled into a broader movement against President Emmanuel Macron and his economic reforms.

The movement's leaders called for people to turn out on Saturday to mark the first anniversary. They want the actions on Saturday -- their traditional day for protests -- and also Sunday -- the anniversary day -- to show Macron they remain a force to be reckoned with.

Prosecutor Warns Against Sinister Bid to Stir Unrest Top Economic Body Meets After Fuel Price Hike

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- The government's decision on Friday to triple fuel prices was discussed on Saturday in a meeting of the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination.

During the session, attended by President Hassan Rouhani, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi, Minister of Interior Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli presented a report on the fuel consumption management plan as well as the economic aid due to be paid to lower-income classes.

The council also agreed that all governmental bodies will fully cooperate in implementing the fuel consumption management plan and helping lower-income classes.

Promoting social justice, empowering 60 million Iranians with a focus on lower-income households, combating fuel trafficking, consumption management and strengthening the economy are

among the goals of the program.

The meeting came as sporadic protests erupted in a few cities. Several videos showed a number of individuals stopping their cars to block the roads and streets.

Iranian Prosecutor General Muhammad Jafar Montazeri said the agitation is being orchestrated from outside Iran, warning that any disorderly conduct would face legal action.

In an interview with national TV, Montazeri said the gasoline price hike has been proposed after elaborate discussions and carried out within the framework of law.

He said the legal increase in the fuel price would serve public interests, noting that a certain group seeks to take advantage of the situation, foment unrest and disrupt order in the country.

"The Iranian people will definitely separate themselves from a small group of rioters that proved

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Heavy Snowfall Disrupts Traffic in Tehran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Heavy snowfall blanketed the streets of north Tehran on Saturday, causing traffic chaos and forcing the closure of schools, authorities in the Iranian capital said.

Crews of municipal workers were battling to clear roads and pavements in parts of the capital, where snow began falling at the start of the morning rush hour and continued through the day.

"Snow started at a time when there is usually high traffic and now as you can imagine that snow has intensified this traffic," Tehran mayor Behrouz Hanachi told the ISNA news agency.

The backed-up traffic prevented the use of snowploughs and forced the municipality to deploy staff to clear the snow by hand, he said.

One commuter said his journey to work from east Tehran took

him twice as long as usual as traffic was backed up on major roads leading to northern districts.

There were only a few accidents, despite the driving conditions and the fact that many vehicles lacked tire chains, a city official said, according to state television's website.

Schools in some districts were ordered closed in the afternoon.

"Due to the coldness of the weather, snow and forecast of continuing snowfall, all schools will be closed this afternoon in districts one to five and district 22 of Tehran," deputy governor Muhammad Taghizadeh said, quoted by ISNA.

"Also all schools in Shemiranat county will be closed in the afternoon shift."

All elementary and junior high schools in Tehran province were announced closed on Sunday.

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