

# IS SUICIDE BOMBINGS KILL 21 IN BAGHDAD



**BAGHDAD:** Civilians inspect the aftermath of a suicide bomb attack. — AP

**BAGHDAD:** Two suicide attackers targeted Iraqi police checkpoints in commercial areas in central Baghdad during rush hour Thursday, killing at least 21 people, officials said. Both attacks were carried out by bombers on foot, wearing explosives-laden vests, two police officers said. One bomber struck in Baghdad's Bab Al-Sharji area, killing nine civilians and three police officers there. Forty-five people were wounded in that explosion.

The second bomber hit in Al-Wathba Square, killing nine people, including four policemen, and wounding 31. Two medical officials confirmed the casualty figures. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to talk to reporters.

Iraq is going through its worst crisis since the 2011 withdrawal of US troops. The Islamic State group controls large swaths of the country's north and west after capturing Iraq's second-largest city of Mosul and the majority of the western Anbar province last year. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks, which bore the hallmarks of the Islamic State group, a splinter of Iraq's Al-Qaeda branch. Following its blitz last year, the Islamic State now holds about a third of Iraq and neighboring Syria in its self-declared "caliphate." Since the emergence of IS extremists, Baghdad has seen near-daily attacks, with roadside bombs, suicide blasts and assassinations targeting Iraqi forces and government officials, with significant casualties among the civilian population. The violence has killed hundreds and displaced tens of thousands of Iraqis. — AP

## EGYPT OPENS RAFAH CROSSING TO RECEIVE PALESTINIAN PILGRIMS

**CAIRO:** Egyptian authorities have exceptionally opened on yesterday the Rafah land port to receive Palestinian pilgrims coming from Gaza Strip on their way to Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj through Cairo International Airport.

Vehicles are provided to transport pilgrims to Cairo International Airport, said a source to Middle East News Agency (MENA). The source noted that about 500 people are on their way to pilgrimage free of charge upon the order of Saudi King for the families of the martyrs, injured and prisoners.

In the past the Rafah land port was also opened to receive the pilgrims from the Gaza Strip, he added. Meanwhile, Egyptian authorities have closed the port due to last year's incident on October 24, although now the port is opened for aid and humanitarian cases. — KUNA

## FIRE EVACUATES 1,000 ASIAN PILGRIMS FROM MAKKAH HOTEL

**MECCA:** About 1,000 Asian pilgrims were evacuated early yesterday from their hotel in the Saudi city of Makkah, hit by a fire that injured two people, the civil defense agency said. Firefighters "rescued two pilgrims who were hurt" by the fire in an eighth-floor room of the unnamed hotel, the agency said.

More than one million faithful have already arrived in Mecca for this year's hajj, which begins Tuesday. The agency also did not give the nationality of the pilgrims, nor say what caused the blaze. The hajj is the world's biggest annual event. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, and every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it is expect to make the pilgrimage at least once. The hajj has been almost incident-free for the past decade, but at least 107 people, including some from Asia, died Friday when a construction crane collapsed on Makkah's Grand Mosque. — AFP

## SYRIAN TRIPPED BY REPORTER ARRIVES SAFELY IN MADRID

### HOPING TO REBUILD COACHING CAREER

**MADRID:** The Syrian refugee who was tripped at a border hotspot by a Hungarian journalist in an incident that generated global outrage arrived in Madrid early yesterday with hopes of rebuilding his career and giving his family a new life. Osama Abdul Mohsen stepped out of a train just a few minutes past midnight (2200 GMT) after a trip of more than 20 hours from Germany to Spain, then quickly began thanking everyone for giving him the opportunity for a fresh start. "Thank you all," Mohsen said, slowly, in broken English. "This is very, very important for my life. Thank you very much." His 7-year-old son, Zaid, looked tired but still had the strength to open a broad smile and declare his love for soccer and his greatest idol: "Cristiano Ronaldo."

Mohsen was captured on video carrying Zaid when camerawoman Petra Laszlo tripped him and sent him tumbling to the ground in a field full of other migrants running from authorities near the Hungarian village of Roszke. "Now I feel that I am (flying) in the sky," he told the several dozen journalists who waited for him as he arrived from Barcelona with Zaid and another son. "I am very happy."

#### Soccer academy

After the incident in Hungary, Mohsen ended up in Germany, where media reports revealed he had been a soccer coach in Syria. That prompted a Spanish soccer academy to offer to rebuild his life. The CENAFE school in the suburb off Getafe helped bring Mohsen to Spain and will give him a job and a place to live near its training facility.



**BARCELONA:** Syrian Osama Abdul Mohsen, (left) holds his son Zaid as they arrive at the Barcelona train station. — AP

"Hopefully this will serve as an example to the rest of Europe," said school president Miguel Galan. "We need to help these people." Galan will now try to bring Mohsen's wife and his other two children from a refugee camp in Turkey. Getafe authorities will also work to get the family legalized in Spain as soon as possible so Mohsen can start working as a coach. He and his family will also have to learn Spanish. "The first thing is to get him settled," said Luis Miguel Pedraza, of the CENAFE school. "First we're giving him a hand as a humanitarian gesture. Later we'll

look for something. He's interested in our school." Mohsen said he already knows one of the first things he wants to do with his sons in Spain: Go to a Real Madrid game. Galan said the club has already made an invitation to have them at the Santiago Bernabeu sometime soon. Spain last week agreed to take 17,680 refugees from Syria and other countries under a plan set up by the European Commission. Laszlo was fired from her job at the right-wing N1TV online channel after footage was aired of her tripping Mohsen and kicking other migrants. — AP