

Bomb rocks Bahrain hotel; Islamic group takes blame

MANAMA, Bahrain — A bomb exploded in the lobby of a luxury seafont hotel in Bahrain on Sunday, injuring at least four people. An Islamic organization claimed responsibility for the attack.

The blast followed weeks of anti-government unrest in the Persian Gulf island state, a financial hub in the region and a key U.S. Navy base.

A government source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a bomb exploded at 9 p.m. (1 p.m. EST) at the 15-story downtown Diplomat Hotel, which overlooks the Gulf.

Two security sources, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said at least four people were injured and that the bomb was placed in the lobby, between the reception desk and the elevators.

Witnesses said several employees of the hotel were rushed to hospitals in ambulances. A Pentagon spokesman said he had no reports of American casualties.

A man claiming to speak for the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the most militant of the groups opposing the government, claimed responsibility for the blast in a telephone call to The Associated Press.

"This was our last day here, and we carry sweet memories of this country, though the bad one will always remain with us."

CAROL MASON

American guest at bombed hotel

"We put a bomb in the Diplomat Hotel 20 minutes ago," the man said, speaking in Arabic-accented English. "Tell the government, which has arrested 2,000 people, that after the feast, we will destroy every place."

He was referring to the three-day feast ending the current Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. The feast begins Feb. 19 or 20, depending on the sighting of the crescent moon.

Guests at the Diplomat said they heard a deafening blast, then were showered with glass and ceiling tiles as the lobby filled with smoke.

Guests streamed out of the hotel, crying and hugging each other.

Carol Mason, an American guest,

said she and her husband just "grabbed our luggage and ran" as the lobby filled with smoke.

"This was our last day here, and we carry sweet memories of this country, though the bad one will always remain with us," she said.

Police have arrested hundreds of people in the current wave of unrest that flared in January. On Jan. 17, a small bomb exploded in a ground-floor toilet at the plush Royal Meridien Hotel, but there were no casualties.

Opposition leaders say the protesters want the restoration of parliament, suspended in 1975 for criticizing the government. They also want freedom of speech, more job opportunities and the release of all political prisoners.

Bahraini authorities accuse Iran of inciting the violence, which has largely involved the emirate's Shiite Muslim majority. Iran, whose population is overwhelmingly Shiite, denies that.

The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, a Shiite group, is the only one of the opposition groups that regularly calls for the overthrow of the royal family. Believed to be Iranian-backed, it regularly issues statements from its London and Beirut offices that lambast the ruling Al Khalifa dynasty.

Mandela celebrates six years of freedom

ROBBEN ISLAND, South Africa — Celebrating the sixth anniversary of his freedom, President Nelson Mandela returned Sunday to the island prison where he spent most of his 27 years as a prisoner of the former apartheid government.

"This was my home for 18 years," Mandela told the visiting Norwegian prime minister, stopping in front of one of the 6-by-8 cells on Robben Island.

Mandela used the occasion to thank Norway — as well as Cuba and Libya — for supporting his African National Congress while he was detained or imprisoned from 1962 to 1990.

Mandela walked out of prison on Feb. 11, 1990, to launch the negotiations with apartheid leaders that eventually made him South Africa's first black president.

Speaking from the quarry where

he smashed limestone for years, damaging his eyes, Mandela said Cuban leader Fidel Castro, Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, the former Soviet Union and Scandinavian, African and Asian nations "rallied around the liberation movement in this country."

"It is through that support that we are in power today," Mandela said. "We will never renounce our friends, no matter how unpopular they may be."

Mandela said he was thinking of inviting a visit from Gadhafi, whom the United States accuses of harboring terrorists. Mandela already has invited Castro to come to South Africa this year.

Strong ties with Cuba and Libya could strain relations with the United States, though no serious dispute seems likely. South Africa and the United States have set up a joint Cabinet-level committee to facilitate cooperation.

Iowa

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from former President Reagan.

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad, a Dole supporter, predicted "a huge turnout" at Monday's precinct caucuses — predicting up to 150,000 voters, up from 110,000 in 1988. Good weather was forecast across the state.

Forbes told a luncheon crowd in suburban Des Moines he was under "vigorous, vicious" attacks from his rivals as aides worked to play down expectations for his showing.

Asked what would be an acceptable finish, campaign manager Bill Dal Col

said: "Anywhere in the top four." Forbes himself said, "All I want is a credible showing."

A new poll by the Des Moines Sunday Register showed that 46 percent of likely GOP caucus voters now view Forbes in generally unfavorable terms — an increase in 20 points since the question was first asked in a poll published Dec. 3.

A day earlier, the paper published a poll showing Dole with a 28 percent lead, with Forbes second at 16 percent, conservative commentator Pat Buchanan with 11 percent, Alexander at 10 percent and Gramm at 8 percent.

That same poll showed 19 percent of likely GOP caucus voters were undecided.

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(A lonely week at home with your parents.)

You think that final exam in Advanced Calculus is misery? Try spending Spring Break at home while all your friends cavort in some tropical paradise. But there's an easy escape - come to our H&R Block location right here on campus. Have us complete and electronically file your taxes, and our people can get you your refund in as little as three weeks - in plenty of time for Spring Break. And, as a special offer for college students, we'll prepare and electronically file both your state and Federal taxes for just \$49.00. Even better, we have an option where you don't have to pay up front -- your fee can come automatically out of your refund when your return is electronically filed. Other than hitchhiking and staying in some dive, this is your best shot at getting a Spring Break.

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