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RUSSIA MOURNS CONCERT ATTACK VICTIMS

Putin vows to track down, punish those behind music hall massacre

MOSCOW

Russia lowered flags to half-mast yesterday for a day of mourning after scores of people were gunned down with automatic weapons at a rock concert outside Moscow in the deadliest attack inside Russia for two decades.

President Vladimir Putin declared a national day of mourning after pledging to track down and punish all those behind the attack, in which 137 people were killed, including three children, and more than 150 injured. "I express my deep, sincere condolences to all those who lost their loved ones," Putin said in an address to the nation on Saturday, his first public comments on the attack. "The whole country and our entire people are grieving with you." The Daesh group claimed responsibility for Friday's attack, but Putin has not publicly mentioned the militant group in connection with the attackers, who he said had been trying to escape to Ukraine.

People laid flowers at Crocus City Hall, the 6,200-seat concert hall outside Moscow where four armed men burst in on Friday just before Soviet-era rock group Picnic was to perform its hit *Afraid of Nothing*.

The men fired their automatic weapons in short bursts at terrified civilians who fell screaming in a hail of bullets.



Reuters

People lay flowers at a makeshift memorial to the victims of a shooting attack set up outside the Crocus City Hall concert venue in the Moscow Region, Russia, yesterday. In addition to the fatalities, the attack also left more than 150 people injured.

Deadliest attack since 2004

It was the deadliest attack on Russian territory since the 2004 Beslan school siege, when Islamist militants took more than 1,000 people, including

hundreds of children, hostage. Across Moscow, billboards carried a picture of a single candle, the date of the attack and the words "We mourn". In other cities, people laid flowers.

Countries around the world have expressed horror at the attack and sent their condolences to the Russian people.

Putin said 11 people had been detained, including the four

gunmen, who fled the concert hall and made their way to the Bryansk region, about 340km southwest of Moscow.

—Agencies
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Expect big cuts in travel time on key Dubai roads

DUBAI

BY SHARMILA DHAL
UAE Editor

Imagine covering Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Road to Al Yalays Street (in the direction of Jebel Ali Port) in just seven minutes? Or Garn Al Sabkha Street to Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Road towards Al Qusais and Deira in 12 minutes?

Well, this will soon be a reality.

Giving an update on its ambitious project to ease congestion in one of the busiest traffic corridors of Dubai, the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) announced yesterday that the Intersection of Garn Al Sabkha-Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Roads Improvement Project is 75 per cent complete, and when ready by the second quarter of the year, will cut journey time by 40-70 per cent on these roads.

Mattar Al Tayer, Director-General, Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors, RTA, said: "This is part of a plan to upgrade Garn Al Sabkha Street. It aims to ensure seamless traffic flow between Shaikh Zayed Road, Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Road, First Al Khail Road and Al Asayel Street."

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Unified GCC biometric fingerprint link soon

Database will help establish security with other countries

CAIRO

BY RAMADAN AL SHERBINI
Correspondent

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state members have embarked on a plan to have a unified fingerprint system, according to a Kuwaiti newspaper.

Kuwait has already started with mandatory biometric fingerprinting for its citizens and expatriates as part of the plan. The country's Interior Ministry has given a three-month deadline, which began on March 1, for mandatory biometric fingerprinting. Failing to comply will result in restricted access to the ministry's services, including the renewals of residency permits (iqama) and driver's licenses, the paper added quoting sources.

"Kuwait's expedited conducting of the fingerprinting for the eligible ones and the setting of a three-month deadline came upon Gulf co-ordination in this respect," said the sources. "Setting up

a biometric fingerprint data base will remarkably contribute to establishing security linkage with other countries, the Interpol, the Arab state and the Gulf countries in particular," the sources said.

Eye on wanted persons

They explained the step will provide security data on the wanted persons in connection to security cases and limit the numbers of people attempting to enter a country with forged passports.

Coordination is also under way among the GCC countries to resolve the issue of dual nationality that places financial and social burdens. Fingerprinting data will help expose dual nationality holders who may use different identity documents while travelling.

Kuwait has already started with mandatory biometric fingerprinting for its citizens and expatriates as part of the plan.



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