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Terror arrests in Brussels after reported plot to attack Euro 2016 football fans

Ian Wishart and Fabio Benedetti-Valentini

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Brussels: Belgian prosecutors charged three men with terrorism offences on Saturday after raids brought heightened security to Belgium and France and the Euro 2016 soccer tournament.



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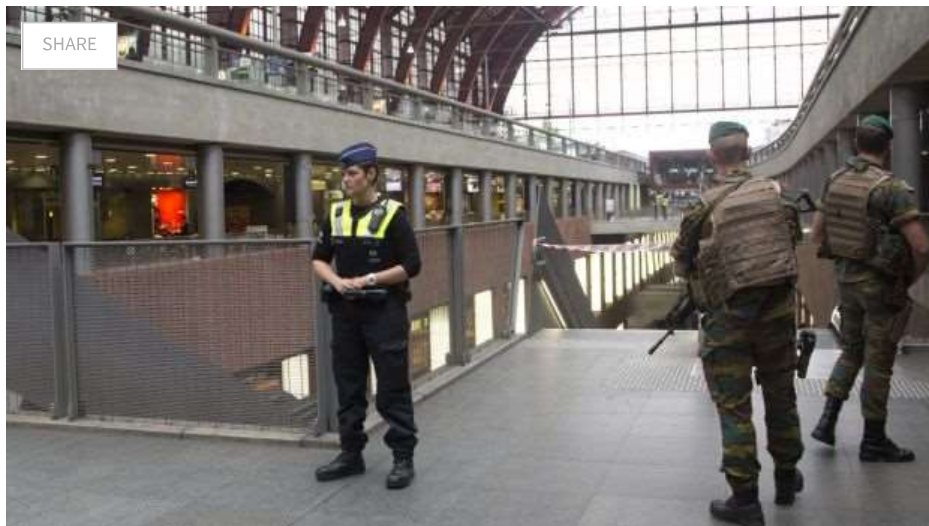
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Belgian authorities arrested 12 people after conducting anti-terror raids in Brussels and across the country amid press reports of a plot to attack fans gathering to watch the national football team.

Nine of them were released after questioning but three Belgian nationals identified as Samir C, aged 27, Moustapha B, 40, and Jawad B, 29, were charged with "having attempted to commit a terrorist murder and for participation in the activities of a terrorist group", the federal prosecutor's office said.



Heightened security at Antwerp Central train station on Saturday. Photo: Virginia Mayo/AP

Security forces raided a string of properties and 152 lock-up garages on Friday night and in the early hours of Saturday, according to Belgium's federal prosecutor.

Prime Minister Charles Michel called for calm and said public events would go ahead with a heightened level of security. The country's terror alert will remain at level 3 out of 4.



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"The security services have obviously been extremely vigilant," Mr Michel told reporters after an emergency meeting with cabinet members and counter-terrorism chiefs. "We will continue our fight against extremism, against radicalism, against terrorism."

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where the tournament is taking place until July 10.



Security was tight in Bordeaux, where Belgium played Ireland. Photo: Hassan Ammar/AP

Belgium v Ireland

The prosecutor would not confirm a report by broadcaster VTM that the terrorists were planning to attack fans – possibly on Saturday – where Belgium's football team defeated Ireland, 3-0, in Bordeaux in the Euro 2016 tournament.

Fans arriving at a big-screen showing of the game in downtown Brussels went through toughened security checks and face police scrutiny, the Belga news agency reported.

In total, police questioned 40 people during Friday's overnight raids. No arms or explosives were found, the prosecutor said.

Belgium has been on a high state of alert since terrorists allied to the Islamic State group killed 32 people in suicide bombings at Brussels airport and on the city's underground metro. The federal government has deployed soldiers on streets around prominent buildings and introduced increased security checks for travellers and commuters.

Security protection

Since Friday evening, several members of Belgium's federal government, including Mr Michel, have been subject to heightened security protection, broadcaster RTBF said. The overnight anti-terrorism raids were not linked to the threat to politicians, RTBF said.

A Belgian citizen, identified only as Youssef E.A., born on August 4, 1985, was arrested and detained in connection with the March attacks, the federal prosecutor said late on Friday.

Separately, a French probe is underway after Larossi Abballa, who swore allegiance to Islamic State, stabbed a policeman and his partner to death on Monday and may have planned similar attacks on rap stars, public figures and the media, according to investigators.

tournament, saying: "The Euros will be a graveyard."

Abballa was killed by police inside the couple's house near Paris.

The Paris prosecutor's office on Saturday said it is investigating and requesting detention of two other individuals, Charaf-Din Aberouz and Saad Rajraji, following the slaying. Aberouz, Rajraji and Abballa had been convicted in 2013 in a previous terror case.

Bloomberg, Reuters

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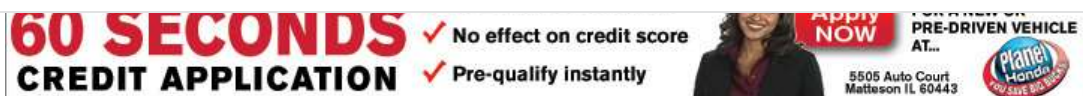


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