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Paris attacks: Belgium charges 2 new suspects



Belgian soldiers on patrol at Zaventem international airport near Brussels last month, as security was tightened after the Nov 13 Paris attacks. One of the two new suspects who were arrested on Sunday was a 20-year-old Frenchman who was caught at the airport as he prepared to board a flight to Morocco, Flemish broadcaster VRT reported. PHOTO: REUTERS

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Arrests bring total number held to 8; France says massacre cost no more than \$45k to organise

BRUSSELS • Belgium has charged two new suspects in connection with the Paris massacre last month, bringing to eight the number of people it is holding in the case.

The charges came as France yesterday said that the Paris attacks that have cost so many lives cost no more than €30,000 (S\$45,000) to organise.

In Belgium, a spokesman for the prosecutor's office yesterday confirmed reports that the two new suspects in the Paris attacks had been arrested on Sunday.

"Two other suspects have been charged... in the framework of the Paris attacks," said Flemish public television VRT, adding that one of the suspects knew suicide bomber Bilal Hadfi, who blew himself up outside the French national stadium.

The suspect, a 20-year-old Frenchman, was arrested for questioning at Zaventem airport, north-west of Brussels, as he prepared to board a flight to Morocco, the broadcaster said.

The second suspect, a 28-year-old Belgian, was arrested in the Brussels district of Molenbeek, where several of the Paris attackers lived, including suspected ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud who was killed in a raid by French police.

Since the investigation opened, six others have been charged in connection with the Nov 13 attacks at the stadium, in a concert hall and restaurants and cafes across the French capital, which left 130 people dead.

Among those held are Mohammed Amri and Hamza Attou who are suspected of having brought Salah Abdeslam back to Brussels. Investigators think Abdeslam played a key logistical role in the massacre.

Another of those charged, Ali Oulkadi, allegedly drove the key suspects around the Belgian capital. Traces of blood and two handguns were found inside a vehicle of a fourth suspect, Lazez Abraimi.

The fifth suspect's identity has not been revealed but Belgian media said the person is Abdeilah Chouaa, whose link with the attacks remains unknown.

Belgian media have named the sixth suspect as Mohamed Bakkali, believed to be the owner of a home in the southern town of Auvelais that served as a hideout until it was raided on Nov 26. He was charged the following day "with terrorist murder and with participating in the activities of a terrorist group".

Yesterday, French Finance Minister Michel Sapin told a news conference that the attackers financed the assault by amassing several "tiny sums" which are hard to track, notably by using prepaid credit cards.

"The cost of these latest attacks, the financing of the attacks, represents a sum not exceeding €30,000," he said, adding that this meant the attackers did not need to move any large sums of money.

The French Finance Ministry's intelligence unit Tracfin said prepaid cards, some bought in Belgium, were used to pay for cars and apartments used by the assailants in the 48 hours preceding the attacks.

Mr Sapin said tracking even small sums could turn out to be "crucial" in the fight against terror, if such data were cross-referenced with other parts of any investigation.

As part of efforts to improve the surveillance of funds which could potentially be used in future attacks, France is to give Tracfin easier access to suspects' files.

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