

Bahrain: Hundreds injured as pro-democracy protesters claim police use nerve gas

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Global Research, March 12, 2011

Irish Times 12 March 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Manama. March 11 2011. Bahraini police opened fire on thousands of anti-government protesters yesterday as they made their way to the Royal Court in Riffa, injuring over 100. There were unconfirmed reports of live rounds being used, with two injured, and the deployment of nerve gas by the state security forces. Dozens of the injured taken to a nearby hospital appeared to be unconscious, not showing the usual symptoms of exposure to teargas - coughing and streaming eyes.

At least 50,000 protesters set off earlier from the capital, Manama, to Riffa, about 20 kilometres away, where the ruling Al-Khalifa family has one of its main palaces.

The crowds were confronted at around 3pm by hundreds of assembled police before they could reach the Royal Court. On the police side were also up to 1,000 pro-government supporters whom local people claimed were plainclothes officers. The latter were armed with spears, knives, hatchets and clubs.

There were fearsome scenes an hour before the main body of anti-government protesters arrived when the pro-state faction surrounded cars that had become blocked at the roundabout approaching Riffa. Front and back windscreens were smashed by club-wielding pro-government supporters. The fate of the car occupants remains unknown. Police officers present did not intervene to halt the violence or aid the car occupants.

When the main section of the anti-government demonstration arrived at Riffa, police officers opened fire with tear gas. Medics at the nearby A'ali Health Centre said they were also treating people for gun shot injuries, believed to have been hit with "bird shot". Medics also indicated that many of the injured had suffered intoxication from nerve gas, which, if confirmed, represents a sinister development in the authorities' efforts to quell the nearly three-week uprising in the US-backed Persian Gulf state.

Elsewhere, there was a separate massive anti-government protest in Manama during yesterday afternoon, with up to 60,000 people participating. There were no reports of violence at that rally.

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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