

world

Explosion rocks central Paris

● Explosion followed a gas leak at the site

● Two firefighters killed, 47 people were injured in the blast

● Around 200 firefighters are at the scene

AFP | Paris, France

A powerful explosion tore through a building in central Paris yesterday, killing two firefighters, injuring dozens of people and causing extensive damage to nearby buildings, officials said.

Around 200 firefighters were mobilised to battle the fire that broke out after the blast and evacuate victims and residents in the area, Interior Minister Christophe Castaner told reporters at the scene.

The explosion came with the city on edge during the latest “yellow vest” anti-government demonstrations, which have often degenerated into violence and vandalism in Paris and other cities in recent weeks.

“It happened when there were people in the street, and firefighters inside,” Castaner said.

Around 100 police officers blocked off several streets in the area, home to restaurants and tourist attractions including the Musee Grevin wax museum and the popular Rue des Martyrs.

Police also closed off streets in front of the Garnier Opera house as emergency services landed two helicopters in front of the historic building to evacuate victims.

Besides the two dead firefighters, 47 people were injured in the blast, 10 of them seriously, the Paris prosecutor’s office said.

The explosion occurred shortly after 9:00 am (0800 GMT) in building that housed a bakery as well as a restaurant on the ground floor in the Ninth Arrondissement.

The shockwave was felt as far as four blocks away, Commander Eric Moulin of the Paris fire service said, adding that rescuers



Firefighters extinguish a fire after the explosion of a bakery on the corner of the streets Saint-Cecile and Rue de Trevisé in central Paris

were still searching for other victims.

“I was sleeping and woke up by the blast wave,” Claire Salavard, who lives on the Rue de Trevisé where the explosion occurred, told AFP.

“All the windows in the apartment exploded, doors were blown off their hinges, I had to

walk on the door to leave the room, all the kids were panicking, they couldn’t get out of their room,” she said.

“Firefighters advised us to leave but the elevator shaft had been blown out, there was no railing, nothing, and there was too much smoke,” she added.

Rescuers eventually used a

ladder to evacuate the family, who lived on the first floor.

‘Like an earthquake’

Firefighters had been responding to an alert of a gas leak at the site when the explosion occurred, Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said at the scene.

“First there was a gas leak and



A fire engine is damaged in the middle of debris



An helicopter of the emergency services (secrute civile) is seen



Firefighters evacuate an injured person

the firefighters arrived, then there was an explosion that caused the fire,” Heitz said.

Cars were overturned by the blast and glass and rubble was strewn across large swathes of the street as dozens of residents were treated by rescue workers.

Dozens of tourists, suitcases in hand, were evacuated from the many nearby hotels in the

area, a popular weekend shopping destination for locals and visitors alike.

Other residents were in bathrobes or quickly dressing in the street as police helicopters circled overhead.

“We were sleeping when we heard the noise, it sounded like an earthquake,” a teenager who lives on a nearby street told AFP.

Malaysian state choses new sultan, expected to be elected king

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Malaysian state announced it had a new sultan yesterday, who is expected to be elected king after the former monarch abdicated following his reported marriage to a Russian former beauty queen.

Tengku Abdullah Shah has replaced his father, Sultan Ahmad Shah as the ruler of Pahang state, the official *Bernama* news agency said, citing a senior palace official.

Local reports said the move was designed to pave the way

for Sultan Abdullah to be chosen as the next king of Malaysia by the Council of Rulers, who will chose a new king on January 24.

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy with a unique arrangement where the national throne changes hands every five years between rulers of the country’s nine states. Pahang state is due to provide the next ruler.

The country was thrown into shock Sunday when reigning king Sultan Muhammad V abdicated unexpectedly after



Tengku Abdullah Shah (C) walking after a meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

just two years of rule, following reports that he married an ex-beauty queen in Russia in November during a purported two-month medical leave.

The abdication was the first for the country since its independence from British rule in 1957.

Royal officials have not commented on the reported wedding, or said what condition prompted the former king to take the leave.

Sultan Abdullah Shah, 59, is a popular figure in the sports

scene and is currently president of the Asian Hockey Federation and a council member of football’s world governing body, FIFA. While their role is ceremonial, Malaysia’s royalty command great respect, especially from Malaysia’s predominantly Muslim Malays, and criticising them is regarded as offensive.

Malaysia’s sultans trace a lineage back to the Malay sultanates of the 15th century. The king is referred to as Yang di-Pertuan Agong, or “He Who Is Made Lord”.