

Prosecutors in France investigate man's death in Marseille riots

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Paris, July 6 (RHC)-- French prosecutors have opened an investigation into the death of a 27-year-old man who was hit by a projectile during riots. The likely cause of death was a violent shock to the chest from a "flash-ball" projectile as used by riot police, their office said on Tuesday, without specifying who fired or owned the gun.

Flash-balls are described as "less-lethal" projectiles made of rubber or condensed foam that are fired during crowd-control measures. The impact led to cardiac arrest and sudden death in the night between early Sunday. Prosecutors said it was not possible to determine where the man was when he was shot or

whether the victim had taken part in the riots.

Marseille was engulfed in riots and looting following the funeral of a teenager of North African descent, Nahel M, who was shot and killed by police on June 27 during a traffic stop. The incident set off nationwide unrest and rekindled longstanding accusations among Black and North African-origin communities of systemic racism among security forces, discrimination and poor public services.

Police fired tear gas and fought street battles with mostly young people around the city centre late into the night on Saturday.

Flash-ball guns are designed to be non-lethal riot control weapons that do not penetrate the skin, but their use by police in France is disputed as the projectiles have led to the loss of eyes, head injuries and other trauma.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday met hundreds of French officials to begin exploring the “deeper reasons” for the country’s plunge into riots, which were the biggest in France’s multi-ethnic high-rise estates in nearly two decades.

A total of 3,486 protesters were arrested, according to interior ministry figures. Of these, 374 people have already been brought to court and tried, according to the justice ministry.

The policeman who fired the lethal shot that killed Nahel M remains in custody charged with homicide.

Seven nights of rioting in 2023 led to almost as many arrests as over three-and-a-half weeks in November 2005, when two teenagers, one Black and one of Arab origin, were killed while fleeing a police identity check in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois.

Critics pointed out how schools, mayors’ offices, public buildings, and security forces were targeted as symbols of a country where the non-white children of immigrants often feel like second-class citizens.

France’s Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who is of working-class and Algerian origin, denied the existence of a “a social excuse” for the riots. “There’s no link between the death of this young driver and attacking a social centre, a school, a mayor’s office, police officers or attacking elected figures,” he said on Monday.

Macron suggested some rioters were copying video games “that have intoxicated them.”

On the far-right, politicians blamed the violence on mass immigration to the suburbs where waves of families, mostly from former French colonies, have settled since the 1950s. “Forty years of immigration have ruined this country,” the head of veteran far-right leader Marine Le Pen’s party, Jordan Bardella, said on Sunday. “There’s a contagion of savageness in our society linked to a completely insane immigration policy.”

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