

Iraq bomb attacks against Shiite pilgrims, security forces kill 78

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- 78 people and some 300 wounded in a series of bomb attacks in several Iraqi cities Wednesday.
- Attacks are seen as an attempt by insurgent groups to stir up sectarian strife among Iraqis.
- The apparently coordinated bombings came ahead of a Shiite religious festival on Friday.

by Jamal Hashim, Mustafa Sabah



Vehicles wait in line to pass a security checkpoint in Iraqi capital Baghdad on June 13, 2012.
(Xinhua/Wang Hongbin)

BAGHDAD, June 13 (Xinhua) -- A wave of coordinated bombings and gunfire struck the Iraqi cities on Wednesday, mainly targeting Shiite pilgrims and security forces ahead of a major Shiite ritual, killing at least 78 people and wounding some 300.

Such deadly attacks apparently are seen as an attempt by the insurgent groups to stir up sectarian strife among Iraqis to push the country to the brink of civil war, amid persistent political divisions that have already paralyzed the country's government.

The first explosions occurred in the early hours of Wednesday in downtown Hilla, some 100 km south of Baghdad, when two car bombs detonated almost simultaneously near a restaurant in central the city and killed 20 people and wounded 38 others.

In Baghdad, a total of 30 people were killed and 62 wounded in four car bomb explosions and a gunmen attack during the day. One of the car bombings ripped through the commercial compound of Mission in southern Baghdad, killing nine and wounding 21 others.

The second car bombing struck the holy Shiite neighborhood of Kadhmiah in northern Baghdad, killing seven people and wounding a score of others.

The third one detonated near Uqba Bin-Nafie Square in Baghdad's central district of Karrada, killing seven people and wounding 11 others, while the fourth exploded near a Shiite mosque in the

predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Grei'at in northern the capital, killing a civilian and wounding ten.

Among other attacks in the capital, three policemen were gunned down by unidentified armed men in two attacks in Saidiyah district in southern Baghdad.

Near Baghdad, another car bomb ripped through a marketplace in the town of Aziziyah, some 70 km southeast of Baghdad, wounding 14 people.

Separately, two people were killed and 10 wounded in separate roadside bomb and gunfire attacks against the Iraqi police in the city of Fallujah, some 50 km west of Baghdad.

In addition, three people were killed and 11 wounded in four bomb attacks against the police and Iraqi army patrols in Abu Ghraib area, some 20 km west of Baghdad.

Also near Baghdad, two car bombs separately ripped through the town of al-Madain, some 30 km south of Baghdad, and Nahrawan area in south of the capital, killed a total of five people and wounding 18 others.

Meanwhile, two car bombs went off separately in the central and at the entrance of the city of Balad, some 80 km north of Baghdad, killing four people and wounding 18 others.

Two more car bombs went off in the holy Shiite city of Karbala, some 110 km south of Baghdad, killed a total of three people and wounded 24 other.

In the eastern province of Diyala, a total of eight people were killed and 62 wounded in a series of gunfire and bomb attacks against the Shiite pilgrims and Iraqi security forces.

One of the attacks was carried by a suicide bomber who blew up his explosive-laden car at a police checkpoint in the village of al-Juba, near the provincial capital city of Baquba, some 65 km northeast of Baghdad, killing a policeman and a passer-by and wounding seven people.

Diyala's attacks also included an explosion of a booby-trapped car parked near a civil defense center in the city of Baquba, wounding up to 37 people, including seven officers and 15 of the defense members.

Iraqi officials frequently blamed Qaida militant group and some insurgent groups for carrying out attacks against Shiite pilgrims who perform communal rituals, killing and wounding hundreds of them in attempts to provoke sectarian strife in the violence- shattered country.

The attacks came ahead of a Shiite religious ritual on Friday as tens of thousands of pilgrims march to Baghdad to commemorate the death of Imam Mosa al-Kadhum the seventh of the twelve most revered Shiites' Imams at his shrine in Kadhmiyah district.

Violence during the day also extended to northern Iraq when three car bomb explosions ripped through the city Kirkuk, some 250 km north of Baghdad, targeted two offices of Kurdish parties and a convoy of a security officer on Wednesday, killing a civilian and wounding some 27 others.

The two Kurdish offices are affiliated to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), headed by Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish semi-autonomous region.

The KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, are the two major parties which control the three provinces of Sulaimaniyah, Arbil and Duhuk in the northern

Kurdish region.

The two Kurdish parties keep presence for their offices in the so-called disputed areas claimed both by the semi-autonomous Kurdish region and Baghdad central government.

Elsewhere, a series of bomb and gunfire attack, including three car bombs, ripped through the Iraqi northern province of Nineveh, targeting an office of the Kurdish KDP party and Iraqi security forces, killing five people and wounding 12 others.

For his part, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, as the Commander in Chief of Iraqi Armed Forces, held a meeting with his top security officers to discuss the security situation in the country, urging them to take strict measures against the security members who neglect their duties.

The attacks also came amid a political row between Maliki and his political rivals in the Sunni-backed Iraqia bloc, Kurdish coalition and al-Ahrar movement loyal to radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Maliki rivals frequently accused Maliki's Shiite-dominated government of killing the democratic process in the country by Baghdad's bids to gain more power. They also accused Maliki of evading his commitments in implementing the terms of power-sharing deal that he earlier signed with rival political parties.

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