

Double bombings in Iraqi town kill at least 35

By Erica Goode and Stephen Farrell
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BAGHDAD: Two thunderous blasts set off by suicide bombers ripped through a crowded shopping street in the town of Beladrouz in Diyala Province on Thursday, and Iraqi security officials said the explosions killed at least 35 people and wounded 75 others, many of them seriously.

The first bomb was aimed at a wedding caravan that was driving through the neighborhood, said a security official in Beladrouz, a town known for its restaurants and stores. The second bomb went off after the police and medical teams had rushed to the scene of the first explosion.

One of the suicide bombers was a woman wearing an explosives-filled vest, the official said, and the second bombing was carried out by a man.

The bombings, which took place in the early evening, when many people were shopping for food and other supplies before the start of the weekend on Friday, came only hours after a car bomb in eastern Baghdad killed a U.S. soldier and nine Iraqi civilians.

Clashes also continued on Thursday in the Sadr City section of Baghdad, where U.S. forces conducted air strikes on areas that military officials say are being used to fire rockets at the fortified Green Zone by "special groups," Shiite militia groups trained and supplied by Iran.

On Wednesday, a delegation of senior Shiite leaders left for Tehran to express Iraq's concerns about Iran's role in arming and financing militia fighters. Haider al-Ibadi, a member of Parliament from Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's Dawa party, said that the delegation was carrying with it hard evidence "and it is a lot, concerning Iran's involvement in our inner affairs."

He said that the Shiite leaders had an appointment to meet with Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and would present the evidence to him. The bombings in Baladrouz were the latest in a series of major attacks in Diyala Province, a region that U.S. officials said is far safer as a result of the local forces, known as Awakening councils, that have joined with U.S. and Iraqi forces to fight insurgents.

On April 16, a suicide car bombing in Baquba killed at least 40 and on April 18, another suicide bombing at the northeastern edge of Diyala province killed at least 30 mourners gathered at a funeral.

In the Baghdad car bombing, the force of the explosion incinerated more than a dozen cars, including an American Humvee, and damaged auto repair shops during Baghdad's morning rush hour. The highway used to be called "Death Road" because it was attacked so frequently, witnesses said, but it had been quieter over the past three months.

Iraqi police officers at the scene said they believed that the bomb was set off by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, a Sunni insurgent group that American military officials say is foreign-led. The insurgents, the police said were taking advantage of fighting between Shiite groups in nearby Sadr City to sneak through an attack.

Sadr City is the scene of daily clashes between Mahdi army fighters loyal to Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr and Iraqi Army forces loyal to the Shiite-led government of Maliki.

Interviewed at the site of the Baghdad car bombing, a lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi national police pointed northeast toward the troubled Sadr City district and said: "Al Qaeda took advantage of the militia conflict across there to infiltrate the security in this area, and make it weak."

The colonel, who refused to be identified because he said he was not authorized to speak, said that a suspect carrying a remote control detonator was arrested minutes after the blast on a neighboring street.