

Shiite pilgrims killed in shooting

U.S. will bring 700 more troops to Iraq for reinforcement

By BUSHRA JUHI
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BAGHDAD, Iraq

The Muslim pilgrims' road to the holy city of Karbala, Iraq, was a highway of bullets and bombs for Shiites on Friday. Drive-by shootings and roadside and bus bombs killed or wounded 19 people, ratcheting up the sectarian tensions gripping Iraq.

Security forces, including U.S. armored reinforcements, girded for more bloodshed leading up to Monday's Shiite holiday. And north of Baghdad, in the Sunni Triangle, a two-day-old operation involving 1,500 U.S. and Iraqi troops swept through an area near Samarra in search of insurgents.

It was in Samarra that the insurgent bombing of a Shiite shrine last month ignited days of violence between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. More than 500 people died.

Authorities had feared new attacks as tens of thousands of Shiites, many dressed in black and carrying religious banners, converge on Karbala, 50 miles south of the capital, for Monday's final day of mourning for Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

The U.S. military announced this week it was dispatching a fresh battalion of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, about 700 troops, to Iraq from its base in Kuwait to provide extra security for Shiite holy cities and Baghdad during this period.

Friday's bloodshed in Baghdad began as groups of faithful, many of them parents with children in tow, headed for the southbound highway to Karbala.



An Iraqi soldier stands guard on the broken wall of a Shiite Mosque damaged by insurgents outside Samarra, Iraq, on Friday. U.S. and Iraqi troops continued Operation Swarmer to break up insurgent resistance.

At about 7:30 a.m., a BMW sedan driving alongside pilgrims in the western district of Adil opened fire, killing three young men and wounding two other people, police Lt. Thair Mahmoud said.

Police later reported a second shooting, also in western Baghdad, in which men riding in a car fired on pilgrims near Um al-Tuboul Square, wounding three.

Then, about midday, a bomb left in a plastic bag of vegetables exploded on a minibus, killing two passengers and wounding four in Baghdad, police reported.

Later in the day, a roadside bomb went off as a crowd of pilgrims passed in Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad, wounding five people.

Elsewhere, police in a Shiite area of east Baghdad late Thurs-

day found the bodies of four Sunni men who had been seized from a taxi by masked gunmen the day before in western Baghdad. And police reported that six mortar rounds landed on six houses Friday in a mixed Sunni-Shiite area of Khan Bani Saad, 10 miles north of Baghdad, killing one person and wounding three.

In the big helicopter-borne operation north of Baghdad, only light resistance was reported as some 1,500 troops from the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and Iraq's 4th Division swept through a 100-square-mile area in search of

insurgents and weapons.

Lt. Col. Edward Loomis, 101st Airborne Division spokesman, said about 40 suspects were detained, 10 of whom were later released, and six weapons caches were found.

The only casualty reported was a 101st Airborne soldier shot and killed Thursday while manning an observation post in Samarra.

Operation Swarmer, described as the largest air assault operation in three years, was focused on an area of Salahuddin province that was a stronghold of Sunni support for Saddam Hussein's ousted regime.

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