

Suicide attack, car bombs kill 53 in Iraq



The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq

A suicide bomber struck a funeral for a Shiite politician's nephew Wednesday, killing at least 32 mourners, wounding dozens and splattering tombstones with blood, part of a surge of violence as Iraqi leaders try to form a coalition government.

Altogether, 53 people died in the day's attacks, which included two car bombings in Baghdad

and a militant ambush on a convoy of 60 oil tanker trucks. No one was injured in the attack on the truck drivers.

The funeral bombing in Muqadadiyah, 60 miles north of Baghdad, bore hallmarks of Islamic extremist groups such as al-Qaida in Iraq. Politicians said the attack was an attempt to either hinder a broad-based government or force the dominant Shiite alliance into further compromises. Shiites were said to be close to a

deal on a coalition with Sunni Arabs and Kurds nearly three weeks after the Dec. 15 elections.

The bomber struck as more than 100 mourners chanted a ritual Islamic prayer, "There is no god but God." They were at the cemetery to bury a 14-year-old boy a day after he was killed in a failed assassination attempt on his uncle, Ahmed al-Bakka, the director of the local hospital.

"We were walking in the funeral procession when a strange person joined the crowd," said

Amer Khazim, 37. "Suddenly, there was a strong sound and we were turned upside down . . . I saw many legs and hands flying all over the place."

Al-Bakka, who was not at the funeral, is the head of the local branch of the Dawa party. Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari leads the party, which is a partner in the country's largest Shiite political coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance.

In other violence:
• A car bomb exploded near an

outdoor market in Baghdad's southern Dora district, killing seven people and wounding 15, police said.

• Another car bomb in northern Baghdad killed three civilians and a policeman, and wounded 13, said Maj. Mosa Abdelkareem.

• A roadside bomb targeting a U.S. patrol in Kirkuk, 180 miles north of Baghdad, hit a civilian car instead, killing three passengers, said police Col. Polla Mohammed.

BRIEFS NATION

WASHINGTON Bush, GOP lawmakers dump Abramoff donations

President Bush and several lawmakers hastily jettisoned campaign donations linked to lobbyist Jack Abramoff on Wednesday as Republican Party officials pondered the impact of a spreading scandal on their 2006 election prospects.

"I wish it hadn't happened because it's not going to help us keep our majority," conceded Rep. Ralph Regula, R-Ohio.

As Abramoff pleaded guilty to a second set of felony charges in as many days, this time in Florida, officials said Bush's 2004 re-election campaign intended to give up \$6,000 in donations from the lobbyist, his wife and a client.

Former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of Texas, facing his own legal problems, took similar steps, as did his successor, Rep. Roy Blunt of Missouri, and Rep. Eric Cantor of Virginia, another member of the GOP leadership.

In all, three dozen lawmakers, three-fourths of them Republicans, have announced plans this week to return donations, mostly funds that came from Abramoff or Indian tribes he represented. Among the Democrats is Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York.

WASHINGTON Alito gets 'well qualified' rating from lawyers group

Judge Samuel Alito on Wednesday gained the American Bar Association's highest rating for a Supreme Court nominee, giving him a boost before next week's Senate confirmation hearings.

Interest groups now will try to help or hinder Alito's chances by spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on television, radio and Internet ads nationwide and in the states of key senators, before and during the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearings.

This is the second time the ABA, the nation's largest lawyers' organization, has rated Alito, who was nominated by President Bush on Oct. 31 as the replacement for retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

The "well qualified" rating, the highest, is the same one that Alito earned in 1990 when George H.W. Bush, nominated him to the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

BRIEF WORLD

ANKARA, Turkey Turkey reports first two human cases of bird flu

A 14-year-old farm boy who died after developing pneumonia-like symptoms has tested positive for bird flu, Turkey's health minister said Wednesday. If confirmed, it would be the first human death from the flu outside of east Asia.

A sister of the boy who is hospitalized and in serious condition also tested positive for bird flu, Health Minister Recep Akdag said. Another sister also is suspected of having bird flu, he said.

Akdag did not say if the boy had died of the deadly H5N1 strain, but he said samples were being sent to European labs for further tests.

Families go from triumph to tears



Above left: Crystina Neeling and Darlene Groves, right, celebrate at Sago Baptist Church in Tallmansville, W.Va., on Tuesday night after hearing a report that 12 of 13 trapped coal miners were alive. Above



right: Unidentified family members react early Wednesday to the news that only one of the trapped coal miners survived, three hours after they began celebrating news that 12 of the 13 were alive.

'We allowed the jubilation to go on longer than it should have'

By VICKI SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLMANSVILLE, W.Va.

With their escape routes blocked by heavy smoke, most of the 13 miners caught in an explosion did what they were trained to do: They retreated deeper into the mine and hung a curtain-like barrier to keep out toxic gases while they waited for rescuers to find them, officials said Wednesday.

All but one were found dead more than a day and half after the blast.

The miners' families learned of the 12 deaths during a torturous night in which

they were mistakenly told at first that 12 of the men were alive. It took three hours before the families were told the truth, and their joy turned instantly to fury, with one man lunging at coal company officials.

It was the nation's deadliest coal mining accident in more than four years. The sole survivor, 27-year-old Randal McCloy, lay in critical condition with a collapsed lung and dehydration but no sign of brain damage or carbon monoxide poisoning after being trapped for more than 42 hours, a doctor said. McCloy was the youngest miner in the group.

Ben Hatfield, chief executive of mine owner International Coal Group Inc., said that the company did the best it

could under extreme stress and exhaustion, and that officials "sincerely regret" the families were left to believe for so long that their loved ones were alive.

"In the process of being cautious, we allowed the jubilation to go on longer than it should have," a choked-up Hatfield said.

He said the initial mistake resulted from a miscommunication among the rescue crews. Another ICG executive, vice president Gene Kitts, suggested the misunderstanding resulted because the rescuers who reached the victims were wearing full-face oxygen masks and used radios to report their findings to their base.

The last of the 12 bodies were taken out of the mine at midmorning.

Who's to blame for the inaccurate news coverage?



Front-page newspaper headlines varied Wednesday morning after it was first, and incorrectly, reported that 12 trapped coal miners in West Virginia were alive. Only one miner survived.

The Associated Press

NEW YORK

"12 Alive." "MIRACLE IN THE MINE." "They're Alive!"

Those were just a few of the newspaper headlines that greeted Americans on their doorsteps Wednesday morning. Joyful, dramatic — and of course, flat-out wrong.

As the painful truth emerged that all but one of the West Virginia miners was dead, news organizations were forced to ask themselves: Had they gone too far in reporting the original, much happier ending?

The answer, like the story itself, is murky.

Undoubtedly, the timing was bad and the circumstances challenging. It was just before midnight Eastern time when news, or what seemed to be news, came from family members that the remaining 12 miners had been found alive. (One body had been found earlier.) The gover-

nor appeared to confirm it, saying: "They told us they have 12 alive."

On cable news channels, late-night viewers saw euphoria erupt in the black West Virginia night. Family members whooped. Anchors such as Anderson Cooper and Geraldo Rivera were swept up in the joyful scene. Papers across the country rushed to update their front pages.

Three hours later came the terrible truth: Only one man had survived, the mining company said. It was 3 a.m., too late for many papers to change their front pages.

Were the media at fault in the miners' story?

"I'm not sure there's much of an issue here," said Martin Baron, editor of The Boston Globe.

His editors worked throughout the night, adjusting the story as more information came in. The final edition was "Jubilation, Then Horror," but it reached only 145,000 of the paper's 400,000-plus readers.

"At some point you have to pub-

lish," Baron said.

"(The Associated Press) was reporting accurately the information that we were provided by credible sources: family members and the governor," said Mike Silverman, the news agency's managing editor.

Melanie Sill, executive editor of The News & Observer of Raleigh, N.C., wrote an editor's blog to readers Wednesday explaining her paper's coverage and their erroneous headline: "Miracles Happen in West Virginia."

Her message, she said, was that "there's a difference between journalistic failure and getting bad information, which I call an honest mistake."

No such regrets were felt at CNN. "Our coverage was outstanding on every level," said Jonathan Klein, the network's president. "Unlike print, which has to live with its mistakes etched in stone, TV is able to correct itself immediately," he said. "I think the audience accepts that."

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