

Sunnis negotiate to resume coalition talks



A Shiite cleric, front, leads a prayer by Iraqi Shiite and Sunni Muslims in the Shiite district of Sadr City in Baghdad, Iraq, Saturday. Sunni Arabs boycotted coalition

talks on a unified Iraqi government following widespread violence throughout Iraq in the past week, but could be ready to resume coalition talks.

Leader believes American journalist is still alive

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Sunni Arabs are ready to end their boycott of talks to form a new Iraqi government if rival Shiites return mosques seized in last week's sectarian attacks and meet other unspecified demands, a top Sunni figure said Monday.

That prompted the U.S. State Department to praise the Sunni leadership for "looking to get back into the game, full strength."

"That's to be welcomed," deputy spokesman Adam Ereli said.

The Sunnis boycotted talks Thursday after the Askariya shrine bombing sparked attacks against Sunni mosques in Baghdad, Basra and elsewhere.

The walkout and Sunni-Shiite clashes threatened U.S. plans to establish a unity government capable of luring Sunnis away from the insurgency and raised

doubts about U.S. plans to begin withdrawing some of its 138,000 soldiers this year.

Adnan al-Dulaimi, whose Iraqi Accordance Front spearheaded the Sunni boycott, said the Sunnis have not decided to return to the talks but are intent on participating in a new government.

"The situation is tense and within the next two days, we expect the situation to improve and then we will have talks," he said. "We haven't ended our suspension completely but we are on the way to end it."

He said there were some conditions that must be met first, chief among them the return of mosques still occupied by Shiite militants in Baghdad and Salman Pak.

Al-Dulaimi did not mention the other demands, but some Sunni politicians have insisted on replacing Shiite police with Sunni soldiers in heavily Sunni areas.

Meanwhile, Iraq's interior minister

told ABC News that he believes American journalist Jill Carroll is alive and will be released, even though the Sunday deadline set by her kidnappers had passed.

Interior Minister Bayan Jabr said he knew who abducted the 28-year-old journalist last month. "We know his name and address, and we are following up on him as well as the Americans," he said. "I think she is still alive."

U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad told Fox News Channel's "Fox and Friends" Monday that he spoke with Jabr about Carroll's plight.

"We are doing all that we can to help bring about a release and will persist with that," Khalilzad said.

Carroll, a freelancer working for The Christian Science Monitor, was abducted Jan. 7 in Baghdad and was last seen on a videotape broadcast Feb. 10 by a Kuwaiti television station, Al-Rai.

Saudi forces kill five linked to oil attack

By ABDULLAH AL-SHIHRI
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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia

Saudi security forces shot and killed five militants who were suspects in last week's foiled suicide bombing of a huge oil processing complex in the kingdom's east, the Saudi government said Monday.

Security forces detained a sixth militant who was not harmed in the raid in the capital, Riyadh, the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

"We think all the men involved had something to do with the Abqaiq attempt," said the ministry's chief spokesman, Lt. Gen. Mansour al-Turki, referring to Friday's attempt to detonate car bombs inside the world's biggest oil stabilization plant.

The ministry's statement said security forces swooped on a rest stop in the eastern Riyadh suburb

of Yarmouk where the militants met to plan their operations.

"After a heavy exchange of gunfire, security forces were able to control the situation in a short time, killing all five at the scene," the ministry statement said.

The security forces suffered no casualties, al-Turki added.

"We will interrogate the arrested man," he said.

Friday's attack, the first ever on Saudi Arabia's vital oil infrastructure, was claimed by the Saudi branch of al-Qaida.

Two suicide bombers were killed in the attack outside the plant, which processes about two-thirds of the country's oil before export.

Two guards were also killed during the attack.

On Sunday, the Interior Ministry identified the two dead assailants as Abdullah Abdul-Aziz al-Twejri and Mohammed Saleh al-Gheith and said both were on a list of the kingdom's 15 most-wanted terrorists issued in June.

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