Suicide bombers kill 7 in attack on Iraq plant

Samarra

Suicide bombers dressed as members of the Iraqi security forces killed seven people and wounded 12 in an attack on a power plant north of Baghdad on Saturday, officials and a survivor said. Wearing military uniforms and armed with grenades, the three attackers entered the facility in Samarra, about 100 kilometres (62 miles) north of the capital, said General Qassem al-Tamimi, head of a police unit in charge of protecting the vital installations.

A police officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said one of the bombers detonated his explosives belt while the two others were shot dead by security reinforcements who rushed to the scene.

He said seven people were killed and 12 wounded in the attack.

“At 2:00 am we were woken up by shots being fired,” Abdel Salam Ahmed, one of the employees who was hit by gunfire in the legs, told AFP from his hospital bed.

He recalled running with colleagues away from the shooting.

“We ran into one of them (the jihadists). Some of us hid while two others kept running towards the exit, shouting ‘we are employees’ but they (the attackers) shot them dead,” he said.

Prefabricated houses where employees were sleeping were destroyed as explosions rang out in the power plant, an AFP reporter said.

Several tanker trucks were also damaged and the remains of one of the suicide bombers lay on the ground, the reporter said.

The police official said security reinforcements evacuated the employees.

The attack comes as Iraqi Shiites mark the first day of the Eid al-Adha, the most important annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Iraq ready to retake last IS urban bastion

Baghdad

Iraqi government and paramilitary forces announced Friday plans to launch an assault to retake Hawija, the last Islamic State group’s urban bastion in the country, a day after recapturing Tal Afar.

Iraqi forces have now forced IS out of all its Iraqi territories except the town of Hawija, 360 kilometres (190 miles) north of Baghdad, and three pockets of territory near the border with Syria.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced the recapture of Tal Afar town and its surrounding areas, weeks after ousting the jihadists from Iraq’s second city Mosul, bringing all of Nineveh province under government control.

“After the Tal Afar mission was successfully accomplished, the troops will head to Hawija,” in oil-rich Kirkuk province, Iraq’s Joint Operations Centre (JOC) said in a statement. A spokesman for the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary group, dominated by Iran-backed Shiite militias, told AFP the offensive could be launched very soon.

“The operation to liberate Hawija will begin a few days after Eid al-Adha,” spokesman Ahmed al-Assadi, said referring to the Muslim holiday marking the end of the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, but the Islamic State jihadist group frequently carries out suicide bombings in Iraq.

In 2014, IS captured almost a third of Iraqi territory in a lightning offensive. It now only holds two pockets of territory in the country.

Iran to boost missile programme: Minister

Tehran

Iran’s new defence minister said yesterday the priority was to boost the country’s missile programme and export weapons to shore up neighbouring allies.

“In combat fields, especially in missiles, we have a specific plan to boost Iran’s missile power,” said General Amir Hatami, who was appointed defence minister earlier this month, in a speech carried by the ISNA news agency.

“God willing, the combat capabilities of Iran’s ballistic and cruise missiles will increase in this term,” he added.

Hatami also said Iran would look to export weapons “to prevent war and conflict”.

Hatami is the first defence minister to be selected from the regular army, rather than the elite Revolutionary Guards, in more than two decades.

Analysts say this reflects an increasing convergence between the two military arms as Iran increases its involvement in regional conflicts such as Syria and Iraq, which have been the Guard’s exclusive purview since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Thousands evacuated to tackle huge WWII bombs

Berlin

Bomb disposal experts defused an unexploded American World War II shell in the western German city of Koblenz yesterday, as a massive evacuation began in neighbouring Frankfurt to clear an even bigger bomb.

Around 21,000 people had to leave the area in Koblenz as the 500-kilogramme (1,100-pound) bomb was successfully defused, before the fire brigade allowed residents to return to their homes.

The operation came a day before three times as many people must leave their homes in Frankfurt to allow a ground effect weapon lying in a building in the west of the city to be neutralised, in the biggest evacuation of its kind in postwar Germany.

The British bomb found in central Frankfurt weighs 1.8 tons and its disposal, planned for Sunday, has prompted a much larger evacuation protocol, affecting more than 60,000 residents.

The city said police will enforce a 1,500-metre radius evacuation zone starting early Sunday and residents will probably need to stay away until 8:00 pm (1800 GMT).

Seven decades after the end of the Second World War, unexploded bombs from intense Allied raids on Nazi Germany are still occasionally found in building attics, fields and sometimes even in private gardens.