

Car bombing kills at least four in Saudi capital, al-Qaida implicated

By Abdullah Al-Shihri
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — A suicide attacker bombed a security police building in the Saudi capital Wednesday, killing at least four people and wounding 148. The attack had the hallmark of an al-Qaida operation, officials said.

The explosion, heard three miles away, shattered the glass facades of nearby buildings and ignited several fires. Smoke billowed from the seven-story General Security building, where workers issue drivers license renewals and do other administrative tasks.

The headquarters of the Saudi Security Forces used to be in the building. Some security forces still work in part of the building, a Saudi official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The bombing happened about 2 p.m., a time when staff would have been leaving their offices.

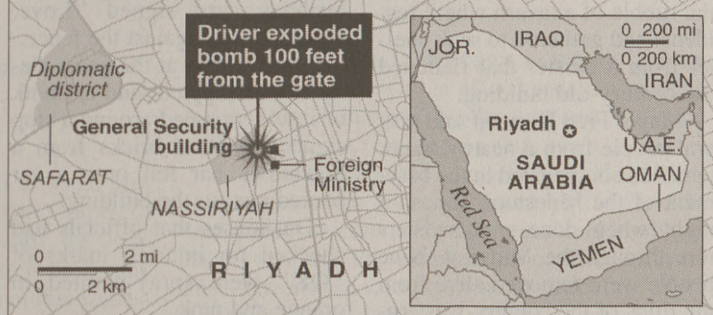
A woman who lives nearby, Hanan Bateesha, said that after the explosion, "We heard wails and cries, then saw our neighbors running down the stairs." She rushed out with her two children. "The fronts of the buildings around us were damaged. The air conditioners were mangled, and there was smoke everywhere," she said.

The Interior Ministry said the assailant tried to drive his vehicle into the General Security building.

"The driver exploded the car" 100 feet from the head-

Deadly bombing in capital city

A suicide car bomb blasted the General Security building in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Thursday, killing 4 people, wounding 148 others. The building houses traffic headquarters and some security officials.



SOURCE: Saudi Interior Ministry

quarters' gate, the ministry said in a terse statement.

Five other vehicles were apprehended with explosives, the Saudi official said.

No Americans were hurt in the bombing, said U.S. Embassy spokeswoman Carol Kalin. Half an hour after the attack, Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Richard Armitage met with Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal at the Foreign Ministry.

Crown Prince Abdullah and Interior Minister Prince Nayef visited the wounded in the hospital.

"I am sorry that those criminals are Muslims," Nayef told reporters. He said Saudis should not cooperate or sympathize with militants "because those who do will be considered criminals."

"The terrorists are not targeting foreigners; they are targeting the nation," Nayef said.

The General Security service has been heavily involved in the campaign against Islamic mili-

tants that followed the suicide attacks in May and November 2003 in Riyadh.

Those attacks, also vehicle bombs, killed 51 people including the assailants. They were blamed on al-Qaida, which carried out the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

A U.S. counterterrorism official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the attack has the hallmark of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network and appears to be related to the terrorist group. Al-Qaida, the official noted, has previously used car bombs in Riyadh.

The Saudi official agreed that Wednesday's attack fit al-Qaida's pattern.

The attack came days after the United States ordered the departure of nonessential U.S. government employees and family members from Saudi Arabia. The U.S. Embassy in Riyadh issued an advisory warn-

ing of "credible indications of terrorist threats aimed at American and Western interests in Saudi Arabia."

Last month, an Internet message purportedly from al-Qaida threatened Saudi security officers, saying that to attack them "in their homes, or workplace, is a very easy matter."

Saudi police said last weekend that they seized three booby-trapped Sport Utility Vehicles loaded with more than four tons of explosives. The vehicles had apparently been abandoned by militants involved in a shootout with security forces.

There were conflicting accounts on the death toll from Wednesday's attack.

The Interior Ministry said four were killed: two police officers, an adult and an 11-year-old Syrian girl. But the ministry's statement did not include the suicide bomber, whose death was reported to The Associated Press by a security official speaking on condition of anonymity.

Officials from the three hospitals that admitted casualties said at least nine people were killed.

The Interior Ministry said 148 people were wounded, three critically, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

The casualty tolls could rise as rescue workers were still going through the rubble late Wednesday. Most of the casualties at King Faisal Specialist Hospital were police, but there were also four children, said hospital spokesman Fahd al-Shaar.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pentagon: Iraq war running over budget, faces \$4 billion shortfall

WASHINGTON (AP) — Increased violence in Iraq is pushing the cost of the war over budget, possibly by as much as \$4 billion by late summer, the top U.S. military officer said Wednesday. And billions more will be needed for the rest of the year.

Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the recent decision to extend the stay of some 20,000 troops will cost roughly \$700 million more over three months. The White House is keeping open the possibility it will seek additional funds before the end of this election year.

The war is costing an estimated \$4.7 billion a month, officials said. Defense officials are studying their current budget, which runs through Sept. 30, to determine whether some money can be moved from purchase programs or other Pentagon accounts, Myers said.

Lawmakers expect to have a defense bill in place by the time the new budget year begins Oct. 1. But the version President Bush proposed had no money for U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, legislators say the Pentagon could use money from that bill until extra money for the war is provided.

White House officials have already said they would propose a separate bill after this fall's elections — costing up to \$50 billion — to pay for the two wars.

Support in Congress growing for lower-cost prescription drugs from Canada

WASHINGTON (AP) — Support for legalizing lower-cost prescription drugs from Canada is growing in Congress amid an election-year clamor from states, lawmakers and the elderly.

The White House and Republican congressional leaders remain opposed, saying there is no way to ensure safety.

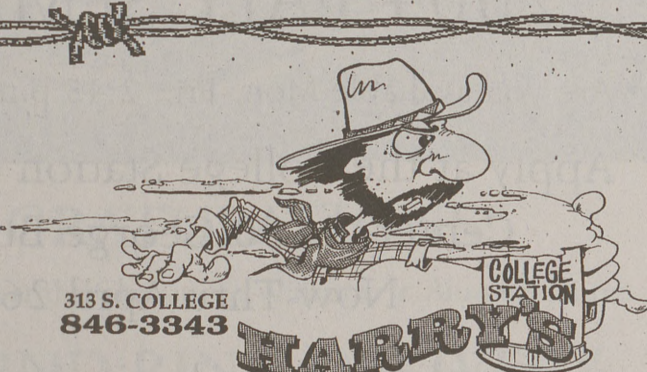
Nonetheless, proponents contend that public frustration with rising drug prices and growing defiance of a federal ban on prescription imports will force action before the November elections.

The latest legislation to allow Americans to fill their prescriptions in Canada was introduced Wednesday by a diverse group of Republican and Democratic senators.

It would eventually allow drugs to be imported from 20 industrialized countries, mainly Europe.

Several cities and states facing budget crises already have turned to Canada to buy prescription drugs for workers or made it easier for residents to hook up with Canadian Internet pharmacies.

Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed in a recent AP poll said the government should make it easier to buy cheaper drugs from Canada or other countries.



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