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**Michael Bluth**

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BAGHDAD, Iraq - Several loud explosions rocked Baghdad again late Saturday and early Sunday, many around the southern fringes of the city where the Republican Guard, Saddam Hussein's best trained fighters, are thought to be dug in. As a heavy string of blasts lighted up the horizon, buildings downtown shook over and over. At one point, an orange fireball illuminated the sky, followed by columns of white smoke.

Three-quarters of the allied air strikes are now going after Republican Guard forces ringing Baghdad, Air Force Brig. Gen. Daniel Darnell told The Associated Press.

Despite the fires and intermittent explosions, Saturday saw the heaviest traffic on the streets of Baghdad since the war broke out. Many shops were open in the commercial districts and thousands of residents were on the streets.

Meanwhile, wailing and sobbing, black-clad mourners gathered for a funeral procession amid the wreckage of a Baghdad marketplace where Iraqi officials say dozens of civilians died in a coalition bombing.

Elsewhere, Iraq's Information Ministry building was damaged but not destroyed in a U.S. missile attack before dawn Saturday. Planes were heard over the capital, drawing anti-aircraft fire, and the oil blazes started by authorities to conceal targets seemed to be burning furiously, sending darker-than-usual clouds over the city on an otherwise clear day.

During daylight operations Saturday, U.S. warplanes dropped six 500-pound laser-guided bombs and nine 500-pound unguided bombs on military vehicles and a command bunker south of Baghdad, said Lt. j.g. Nicole Kratzer, spokeswoman for the USS Kitty Hawk's air wing.

At the Al-Nasr market in the working-class district of al-Shoala, crowds of mourners wailed amid bloodstains and piles of wreckage. Blood-soaked children's slippers sat on the street not far from a crater blasted into the ground.

At the scene of the Friday bombing, women in black chadors were sobbing outside homes where some of the victims lived. Men cried and hugged each other as a funeral procession passed through the market.

Down the road, residents gathered at a Shiite Muslim mosque, crowded around seven wooden coffins draped in blankets. Some of the men stood silently. Others sobbed into trembling hands. In the background, women cried, "Oh God! Oh God!"

Information Minister Mohammed Saeed Sahhaf had said earlier that 58 people were killed — and many others wounded — in the market explosion Friday evening. There were conflicting reports, however, on the number of casualties.

Haqi Ismail Razouq, director of al-Nour Hospital, where the dead and injured were taken, put the death toll at 30 and the number of injured at 47; surgeon Issa Ali Ilwan said 47 were killed and 50 injured. Witnesses said they counted as many as 50 bodies.

There was no explanation for the discrepancy.

Witnesses said the bombing took place around 6 p.m., when the market was at its busiest. They said they saw an aircraft flying high overhead just before the blast.

"Why do they make mistakes like these if they have the technology?" asked Abdel-Hadi Adai, who said he lost his 27-year-old brother-in-law. "There are no military installations anywhere near here."

The U.S. Central Command in Qatar, which has denied that coalition forces target civilian neighborhoods, said it was looking into the incident.

Elsewhere Saturday, the Information Ministry remained standing after a Tomahawk cruise missile attack that the U.S. military command said was aimed at the ministry building. But many of the satellite dishes on the roof — used by foreign TV crews — were destroyed, and glass from broken windows was strewn in the hallways.

Information Ministry officials said the 10th floor, which housed the ministry's Internet server, was gutted.

Most of the ministry's satellite dishes have been destroyed and there was no sign of the two anti-aircraft guns that had been placed on the roof. Several foreign TV journalists were able to use their dishes on a lower roof of the building that seems to have sustained little damage. But most continued to work at a parking area opposite the building where they had moved for fear of attacks on the ministry.

Sahhaf told reporters on Saturday that 68 people were killed and 107 wounded in Baghdad alone between Friday evening and Saturday morning. In addition, 74 people were killed and 244 wounded across the rest of the country, he said.

"These are cowardly air raids," he told Lebanon's Al-Hayat LBC satellite television.

In one incident, Sahhaf said coalition forces fired a cluster bomb at an ambulance carrying a wounded man to hospital. The wounded man, the driver and a nurse were killed.

"We thank the superpower (America) and we congratulate this hated (Tony) Blair. Now they are bombing ambulances," he said. "We are encouraging several groups, lawyers, professors of international law in order to present a lawsuit against those war criminals."

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**yamiyuuki**

03-30-2003, 02:25 AM

That's sad, but there are costs to freedom.

**TheOverlord**

03-30-2003, 02:30 AM

I think there have been more injured from other air raids.... It's plain stupid.