

Suicide car bombing kills at least 22 civilians in Iraqi capital, Islamic State claims responsibility

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Baghdad: At least 22 civilians were killed and 70 others were injured when a suicide car bomb rocked through a commercial area of a majority Shiite neighbourhood in Baghdad today.

According to Xinhua news agency, the attack took place in the morning when a suicide bomber detonated his car bomb at a crowded commercial area near a cinema building in Baghdad's southern district, al-Jadida.

The explosion in the capital's New Baghdad area also wounded up to 70 civilians, a police officer said. The explosives-laden car was parked in a crowded area and casualty figures could be higher, he added.

A medical official confirmed the casualty figures. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to brief the press.

In an online statement, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it targeted Shiite militia members. The Associated Press could not verify the authenticity of the statement, but it was posted on a militant website commonly used by the extremists.

IS, a Sunni extremist group, often targets Iraq's Shiite majority. Baghdad has seen near-daily attacks in recent weeks, though the mainly Shiite area of southern Iraq has been spared much of the violence.

The deadly attacks in Baghdad and beyond are seen by Iraqi officials as an attempt by the militants to distract the security forces' attention from the front lines.

The attacks came a day after Iraqi special forces pushed into the IS-held city of Fallujah in a large-scale military operation launched last month.

Fallujah, which is about 65 kilometers west of Baghdad, is one of the last major IS strongholds in western Iraq. The extremist group still controls territory in the country's north and west, as well as Mosul, Iraq's second largest city.

- (With inputs from AP)