

Kerry arrives in Baghdad for talks with Iraqi leaders



Baghdad, June 23, (RHC), -- U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on Monday for talks with Iraqi leaders on the Iraqi crisis as the country is trying to curb a Sunni blitzkrieg, an official television reported.

While in Baghdad, Kerry will meet with the outgoing Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, and discuss with him the political and security situations in the country, the state-run channel of Iraqiya said.

Kerry is also expected to meet with the Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, a Sunni, and the leading Shiite cleric Ammar al-Hakim, as well as other Iraqi officials, including Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani.

Kerry's visit is part of a tour in the Middle East to consult with U.S. partners and allies on measures to support security, stability, and the formation of an inclusive government in Iraq.

The top U.S. diplomat's visit to the country came amid a worsening security conditions that began less than two weeks ago when armed Sunni insurgents, spearheaded by an al-Qaida splinter group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, launched a surprise offensive that led to the debacle of Iraqi security forces, and the fallen of a large part of the country's northern and western territories.

Also on Monday, up to 71 detainees were killed in a militant attack while being transferred to another jail in Iraq's central province of Babil.

Police sources say the incident occurred early in the day when gunmen attacked a convoy of buses carrying dozens of inmates, transferred from a prison in the provincial capital of Hilla, some 100 km south of Baghdad, to the one in the town of al-Qasim.

The attack occurred in an area known as the Triangle of Death, a cluster of Sunni towns scattered north of the predominantly Shiite province of Babil.

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