

Punk'd Show, Iraqi Style

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An Iraqi reality television program broadcast during Ramadan has been planting fake bombs in celebrities' cars, having an Iraqi army checkpoint find them and terrifying the celebrities into thinking that they are headed for maximum security prison.

The show "Put Him in [Camp] Bucca" has drawn numerous protests but has stayed on air throughout the fasting month, broadcasting its "stings" on well-known Iraqi personalities.

All of them were ensnared by being invited to the headquarters of the private television station Al Baghdadia to be interviewed, but en route to the station a fake bomb would be planted in their car while they were being searched by Iraqi soldiers, who were in on the deception.

The unwitting celebrities are then secretly filmed, Candid-Camera-style, as they reacted with shock, disbelief and anger as fake checkpoint guards shout abuse at them: "Why do you want to blow us up?" "You are a terrorist." "How much did they pay you to do it? You will be executed."

The celebrities protest that they know nothing about the supposed bomb, that they are innocent and honorable Iraqi citizens, only to be told, "We have caught you red-handed, with the bomb in your car."

How much of it is staged with the knowledge of the actors is unclear from the footage, which has been broadcast daily this month, with excerpts, reactions and comments on the channel's Web site.

One televised exchange ran:

Soldier : "Which group you are working for?"

Television Host: "Al Qaeda for sure."

Guest: "I am an actor. What are you saying? Is this a game or what?"

Soldier: "This a military checkpoint. What do you think we are playing here? You have got a bomb in your car."

Television Host: "Why are you doing this? Why are you putting me in such trouble?"

Guest: "I am a family man. I have two kids. How could I do this to my family? I am telling you the truth, it's not me who planted the bomb."

Nearly every Iraqi newspaper carried complaints about the idea of the show, with many well-known figures asking for it to be canceled. Some said it was simply too close to Iraq's daily reality.

The name of the show refers to Camp Bucca, the large American-built high-security prison near the Kuwaiti border in southern Iraq that held thousands of Iraqi detainees and was closed in September 2009.

Kifah al-Majeed, an official with the Baghdad Operations Command, which runs the Iraqi security forces in the capital, said: "Al-Baghdadia did it in an official way. They sent us a document asking us for permission to do this television show. We agreed, so al-Baghdadia did nothing wrong."

The producers of the show said that the show was entertainment, that it made people laugh and that no one had gotten hurt. The celebrities, they said, agreed for the episodes to be broadcast, and many were interviewed in the studio afterward.

Ali al-Khalidi, the show's host, who appears on screen in many of the setups, said: "The show will continue until the end of Ramadan. Yes, there have been a lot of things said about it in the newspapers and on radio and television, but it will go on."