

Target locked on Baghdad

Saddam snubs exile ultimatum; Bush vows to oust "tyrant"

Ready to cross the line

AGENCIES, undated

US troops in the Kuwaiti desert packed their gear and made final preparations yesterday for an invasion of Iraq after President Bush handed Baghdad a 48-hour ultimatum.

Some soldiers were up as early as 1:30 a.m., packing tents and kit to move to new positions in readiness for an imminent assault. Bush said this will come unless Iraqi President Saddam Hussein flees his country by 4:15 a.m. (0115 GMT) on Thursday.

Troops in full battle gear were checking their rifles, machineguns and equipment. Some units dismantled their desert camps and loaded trucks with equipment, preparing to advance close to the Iraqi border, where they will sleep in the open.

James Mattis, commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, told his troops in a letter delivered to each of them that the time had come to go to war to remove Saddam from power.

"When I give you the word, together we will cross the line of departure, close with those forces who choose to fight, and destroy them," the letter said.

"Chemical attack, treachery, and use of the innocent as human shields can be expected, as can other unethical tactics. Take it all in stride."

Some 280,000 US and British troops are massed in the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



REUTERS, Baghdad/Washington

President Saddam Hussein rejected an ultimatum to quit Iraq and vowed yesterday to fight a US-led invasion that could start in little more than a day.

President Bush gave the Iraqi leader just 48 hours -- until early Thursday Baghdad time -- to flee or he would unleash the US and British forces massed on the frontier.

The response never seemed in doubt and 12 hours later state television showed Saddam making a rare appearance in military uniform. It quoted him telling his cabinet he would emerge the victor from a war that has opened a raw schism in world opinion.

"The meeting stressed that Iraq and all its sons were fully ready to confront the invading aggressors and repel them," the television announcer said, reading a cabinet statement.

"The wives and mothers of those Americans who will fight us will weep blood, not tears," Saddam's elder son Uday said.

"The tyrant will soon be gone," Bush said earlier in a brisk, 13-minute address from the White House on Monday night.

He urged Iraq's soldiers to surrender rather than be killed by the high-tech firepower of 280,000 US and British troops, who are making final preparations for an invasion.

UN weapons inspectors left Iraq yesterday, effectively ending a period of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Shipping links tops PM's Myanmar agenda

STAR REPORT

Coastal shipping links between Bangladesh and Myanmar will top the agenda when Prime Minister Khaleda Zia holds talks with her Myanmar counterpart today at Yangon.

A coastal shipping deal is likely to be signed linking Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Teknaf to the Myanmar ports of Yangon, Akyub and Maungdaw.

However, Dhaka is interested to make it a tripartite agreement by including Thailand. Thailand will be included later if Bangladesh and Myanmar signs the deal, foreign ministry sources said.

Talks on setting up of a road link between Dhaka and Yangon are also underway. During a trip of the Myanmar foreign minister here at the beginning of the month, the



two sides agreed form a taskforce on the issue.

Khaleda flies off to the Myanmar capital today on a three-day visit on an invitation from Chairman of the State Peace and Development

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

A different war brews in backyard

A tall order waits on the economic front

STAR REPORT

As war sabers rattle in the Gulf, Bangladesh has a war on its own economic front.

With some 200,000 workers about to be ejected from the Gulf and exports under threat of slump, economists fear the war could play havoc with the economy.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury has said the government has already formed a high-powered taskforce to tackle the situation.

He said exports are now under threat.

Bangladesh is a leading readymade garments exporter to

the US and Europe. The item also accounts for 75 per cent of its exports.

With the war looming in the horizon, orders are already on the wane.

"Buyers have become jittery and are unwilling to issue new letters of credit," said President of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association Kazi Moniruzzaman. Shipments are also being put on hold.

Annistul Huq, one of the largest garment exporters, said he was to fly to Canada to confirm orders for the next season. The buyer has asked him to stay put until the war

is over.

Should the war linger, it will have a devastating effect on garment exports, he said.

And if the war breeds more terrorism, as many fear, Bangladesh will be in for a prolonged downturn.

Already garment export is over 10 per cent short of the target and over three per cent behind last fiscal's performance.

Vegetable and shrimp exports are also on the rock.

"We had a small but growing vegetable market," says economist Mostafizur Rahman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, an independ-

ent think-tank.

But this export is now at risk, he says.

A top shrimp exporter and President of Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association Golam Mostafa said April is the month for shrimp export. With the war just a hairbreadth away, buyers have lost interest.

"Export price is depleting fast," said Mostafizur Rahman. It has already dropped over 10 per cent in the last six months.

With one-fifth of workers returning from the Gulf, remittance flow will take a serious beating. This has

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Ruthless Australia

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Defending champions Australia demonstrated their ruthless ambition to hang onto their title as they stormed into the World Cup final with a brutal execution of Sri Lanka at Port Elizabeth on Tuesday.

Defending just 212-7 at St George's Park, they had Sri Lanka struggling at 123-7 off 38.1 overs when torrential rain swept across the ground.

With a revised target of 172 under the Duckworth-Lewis

method, the Australians were declared the winners by 48 runs.

It was their 16th successive one-day victory and it gave them a place in Sunday's final at the Wanderers against either India or Kenya.

As soon as Brett Lee bowled Marvan Atapattu with the score on 21, Sri Lanka knew they were in for a hard afternoon. It got a lot tougher when Glenn McGrath sent back skipper Sanath Jayasuriya (17) and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Blair faces biggest test in Commons

INTERNET, undated

British Prime Minister Tony Blair yesterday appealed for MPs to back him in a key Commons vote last night by standing firm against Iraq as military action loomed.

Facing possibly the biggest backbench rebellion of his premiership, Blair admitted: "This is a tough choice indeed. But it is also a stark one: to stand British troops down now and turn back, or hold firm to the course we have set. I believe passionately that we must hold firm to that course."

In one of the most important speeches of his political career,

Blair told the Commons that what was at stake would determine the pattern of international politics for the next generation.

Opening the key full-day debate on Iraq, which is expected to last for around 10 hours, he repeatedly accused the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of failing to disclose full details of his weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

It was "palpably absurd" that President Saddam had got rid of his WMD, Blair said.

In a 45-minute address, the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1