

Human disaster hangs over as war deadline draws near



PHOTO: AFP

COUNTDOWN TO WAR: An Iraqi family, left, waits to leave Baghdad to a safer area yesterday, as a defiant Iraq braced for war after rejecting a US ultimatum for President Saddam Hussein to flee. An Iraqi woman, right, passes by closed shops in Baghdad that has become a virtual ghost city.

'City of peace' turns into a ghost town

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad, cherished by its residents as the "city of peace", has become a virtual ghost town bracing for imminent war as time runs out on a US ultimatum to President Saddam Hussein to quit the country.

The pace of city life has sharply slowed down as traffic jams in the usually vibrant capital have disappeared, except near gas stations where cars were queuing for hours to avoid shortages in the event war breaks out after Thursday's deadline expires.

Most shops not only locked their metal shutters, but also

emptied their shelves and put their precious inventory in safe storage from possible bombings or looting.

One shopowner near the historic al-Mustansiriya College on the Tigris river is even hiding at his own home more than 3,000 carpets, including many rare oriental treasures.

Many Baghdadis have moved to other regions, or at least taken their wives, children and elderly relatives to areas outside the capital where the US says Saddam Hussein has retrenched his elite troops. Even schools remained closed on Tuesday.

For those who stayed behind,

life was a mission to secure stocks for long-term survival in case of prolonged food, medicine, fuel, electricity and even cash shortages.

Cars and trucks were parking at petrol stations for hours, until past midnight, to fill up their tanks and other containers for newly-bought generators at home.

Prices for all commodities have doubled, even tripled in some cases, in the last few days.

Some foreign journalists heeding evacuation calls by their

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Govt 'ready to tackle Iraq war fallout'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday discussed its preparedness to face the fallout of the possible US-led war on Iraq.

"We are prepared to tackle the impact of the war and confident of facing any eventualities," said Local Government and Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told an emergency meeting of ministers and high civil and military officials.

Briefing reporters, Bhuiyan said the meeting was convened to discuss the preparedness for any situation in Bangladesh as the US ultimatum to Iraq is about to expire.

Meeting sources said the army already deployed in divisional headquarters has been asked to

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Iraqi press conference cancelled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Iraqi Chargé d'affaires in Dhaka could not attend a scheduled press conference yesterday due to 'complications' regarding 'prior approval' from the foreign ministry.

Adnan M Hatab Sultan was scheduled to attend the programme, organised by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB), at the National Press Club at 11.30am.

Iraqi embassy officials said he did not turn up as they could not get 'approval' from the foreign ministry.

The foreign office said the Iraqi mission did not ask for approval for any press conference.

Rather, the embassy asked the foreign ministry to arrange security for the Chargé d'affaires as he was invited to attend a programme at the Press Club.

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Diplomats want more security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some foreign diplomats in Dhaka yesterday expressed concerns over the security of their missions and personnel.

They asked the government 'not to take any chance' as the war on Iraq nears.

The envoys met Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury at the foreign office and were briefed about the security measures the government has taken.

Ambassadors of the US, Saudi Arabia, Japan, high commissioners

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Dhaka, Yangon to establish road link

UNB, Yangon

Bangladesh and Myanmar yesterday agreed to establish road-link between Dhaka and Yangon for easy communication and to strengthen people-to-people contact in a landmark development in relations between the two next-door neighbours.

The road will be called "Myanmar-Bangladesh Friendship Road".

A taskforce will be formed soon to implement the proposed direct road communications, seen as a milestone in bilateral relations.

The major decision was reached at the official talks between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Myanmar Prime Minister and State

Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Chairman Than Shwe here yesterday afternoon.

The two sides also approved the signing of two MOUs on Account Trade and establishment of Joint Trade Commission aimed at bolstering bilateral economic cooperation.

The MOUs were signed by Bangladesh Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Myanmar's Commerce Minister Brigadier General Pyi Sone in presence of the two premiers at Parliament Building Pyithu Huttaw. Another MOU on Coastal Shipping will be signed today.

The talks lasting about 90 min-

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Barisal, Sylhet city corp'n polls today

Troops withdrawn from election duty in Barisal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Barisal and Sylhet city corporations go to polls today amid tight security.

Polls are being held in the two city corporations for the first time after they were commissioned as corporations two years ago.

Tension mounted in Barisal last

night as a last moment government order asked the district administration to withdraw the army from election duties, according to election officials.

As per the earlier decision, the army was supposed to assist the civil administration in maintaining law

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STAR FILE PHOTO

(From top left) Barisal mayor candidates -- Mujibur Rahman Sarwar, Enayet Pir Khan and Ahsan Habib Kamal (bottom) Sylhet candidates -- Badar Uddin Kamran, AFM Kamal and MA Haque.

Kenya plot fresh coup

STAR REPORT

Kenya will be bidding for their third victory over India and a shock place in the World Cup final when the two sides meet at Kingsmead in Durban today.

The Kenyans have previously defeated the Indians at Gwalior in May 1998 and later at Port Elizabeth in October 2001.

And coach Sandeep Patil is confident his side's tag as overwhelming underdogs, which has already seen them defeat Test-playing nations Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, will

help their cause once more.

He said: "We are playing with nothing to lose and it does help. We've beaten India in India and, in one-day cricket, the team that plays well stands a good chance of winning."

Patil, who was part of India's World Cup-winning side in 1983, added: "We are confident of doing well if we stick to the basics."

"Every batsman, even Sachin Tendulkar, is weak around the off-stump. If our bowlers show discipline and field well, anything can

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