



PHOTO: STAR

Anti-war demonstrations in city yesterday (from left) Diploma Nurse Association; teachers and students of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET); members of Dhaka Reporters' Unity; and the activists of Conscious Citizens' Forum.

War: Video game

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cially since southern California has been a bastion of anti-war sentiment. At least some people who believe in the war were quoted yesterday saying that casualties and setbacks were to be expected as part of the mission.

But it is also true that the Bush administration massively raised expectations regarding the speed and ease of the military operation to topple Saddam Hussein. Before the war started last week, the President himself talked -- in his televised statements, in his 6 March news conference and in his weekly radio addresses -- as though the fighting was already over and the reconstruction of Iraq had begun.

Earlier this month, with war already looking inevitable and dominating the news, 43 per cent of respondents in a New York Times/CBS poll said they expected a quick and successful campaign. By the end of last week, with the first bombs raining down on Baghdad and ground forces racing to secure the oilfields in the south, that number had risen to 63 per cent. More than half said they thought the war would end in a matter of weeks.

Now, however, the trend has been reversed. In another poll published in yesterday's Washington Post, 54 per cent now believe the United States will sustain "significant" casualties in Iraq, up from 37 per cent in a similar poll taken on the first day of the war last Thursday.

One respondent in the new Washington Post/ABC poll, Daphne Nugent, 40, from New York, commented: "I didn't expect there to be this much trouble. And I'm a little upset by what I'm hearing in terms of the casualties and the prisoners of war. I thought it would end pretty easily and quickly, the war part of it anyway, not the occupation part."

Other New Yorkers, including those who survived the destruction of the World Trade Centre, have also described their mixed feelings at seeing similar scenes of buildings under aerial bombardment in Baghdad.

Financial markets are also reacting. After eight straight days of gains, the Dow Jones index plunged 300 points by lunchtime yesterday, although it later recovered slightly. Crude oil prices are also rising in response to the prospect of a longer war.

Several things make this war very different from other recent US military campaigns. It is much less

dependent on air power alone, which has made the fighting and the dying much more immediate.

And it is much more overtly about taking territory. This is no quick in and out, as were the Nato campaigns in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999. As several soldiers at the front have come to appreciate, this is very different from 1991, when the US-led coalition concentrated on kicking Iraqi forces out of a country, Kuwait, that had invited it in to do so.

"People thought the Iraqis would be waving little American flags like it was occupied France in World War Two," Vincent Cannistraro, a retired CIA counter-terrorism expert, commented. "This is not an occupied country. It is Iraq and it is run by Iraqis, and for better or worse they are not welcoming Americans as liberators."

Both pro-war and anti-war voices agree, in fact, that this is likely to turn into the most in-your-face conflict that American troops and, just as significantly, American public opinion have faced since Vietnam.

"This kind of thing has not been seen on US television screens for more than 30 years," Sandy Cate, an anthropology professor from San Francisco, said. "You've got one, perhaps two, generations who have grown up with no idea of what war is really like, other than the cartoon violence they see at the movies. Well, now they are learning."

Part of the change in attitude is due to the media. Unlike the first Gulf War, when journalists were kept well away from the front, reporters are now "embedded" with army units and equipped with the technology to transmit words and images from the field.

Some media critics have worried about journalists over-identifying with their units, but they also concede that the arrangement is providing much more detailed and less sanitised coverage than in 1991.

These are very early days, and expert opinion is divided on the degree of public tolerance for casualties. One sociologist, James Burk, told The Washington Post he thought the public would accept casualties as long as they are incurred "in pursuit of a mission that they think is reasonable".

But others, including John Mueller of Ohio State University, believe tolerance will be very low. Nobody in government has so much as mentioned body bags, he observed.

Shadows in the night

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Soldiers who had been slumped over steering wheels, lying on the ground or on top of vehicles -- sleeping, or desperately trying to -- raced to man the artificial earth mounds, up to 15 feet high, that ring the desert camp.

A score of militants armed with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades were prowling the area less than half a mile away, scouts had reported.

Some of the 200 soldiers here have already seen the hit-and-run raids by small militia groups, some in civilian dress, which have emerged as a key Iraqi tactic in the 6-day-old war.

Danger now looms everywhere, not just in obvious armed formations. Troops are on edge and are taking no chances -- but that brings its own risk. Fear and nerves might wear them down, depriving them of sleep and dulling their responses.

For four hours, from midnight until before dawn, they waited, squinting in the hazy, faint moonlight to detect anything suspicious moving through the sand whipped up by strong winds.

In the end, it was a false alarm. Had someone panicked by calling out the whole camp?

"We have got to be careful and make sure we respond properly to our intelligence, that we don't overreact," Lt. Col. Paul Grosskruger, commander of the 94th Battalion of the 3rd Infantry Division, told his officers.

ANYTHING MOVING IS A THREAT

Scouts no longer look for obvious armed units but for a threat from any quarter, and anything

that moves in the desert scrub and the shabby irrigated fields is potentially hostile.

Soldiers were up much of the night and were left exhausted, meaning missions ended up being delayed the next day.

"This is the sort of thing that terrifies me. Your adrenaline starts pumping but you are tired and you are scared and you can't get back to sleep," soldier James Canaday, 22, from Oklahoma City, said as he returned from guard duty.

Commanders are trying to find the balance between complacency and being alert to a very real danger.

In the past 48 hours, US forces around Najaf, about 90 miles south of Baghdad, have faced sniper attacks, assaults by small militant bands using mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, and false surrenders that turn into attacks.

"It puts everyone on edge," Grosskruger said.

"It's a tactic that can take its toll on soldiers. You have to stay alert and awake all the time, and you're always worried that the threat is there," said Lt. Mark Pietrak of the 535th Engineers Company.

He said he and a group of soldiers went only a few miles from camp on Sunday evening to find water. A grenade was thrown at their vehicles and they had to take cover in the scrub. It was eight hours before they got back.

Farmers, goatherds and other civilians cautiously watch the invading forces from the fields or from brick hovels, sometimes crowding round their vehicles begging. That now scares soldiers, many of whom had expected a heroes' welcome.

Businessman shot in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some unidentified armed men shot and injured a businessman at his office at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday evening.

Syed Azharul Haque, 39, Country Manager of Oriental Buying Services, was shot in the left chest when he was working alone at his office near the Abahani ground.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Police said some persons went to the office on the second floor of a building at about 7:00pm and pressed the calling bell.

As soon as Haque opened the door, they shot him in the chest and left.

12 Al-Hiqma men chargesheeted in sedition case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Twelve members of Shahadat-e-Al-Hiqma were chargesheeted in a sedition case yesterday.

Local detective branch of police submitted the chargesheet before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate here and brought charges under Section 123 (Ka) and 124 (Ka) of Bangladesh Penal Code.

Of the chargesheeted accused, five are now in jail. They are Shamim Uddin, Abdus Subhan, Nazim Uddin, Rahmat Ali and Azhar.

The seven other absconding accused are Al-Hiqma commander Sayed Kawsar Hussain Siddiqui, Rabiul Islam Rabi, Ziaul Haq, Abdul Hannan, Nasim Akhtar, Sayed Md Sadek Ali and Majbur Rahman.

The sedition case was lodged by DB inspector Shamsuddin Ahmed on March 20.

Shrimp farm owner shot dead in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A shrimp farm owner was shot dead by extortionists at village Taeradanga in Assasuni upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

The victim was identified as Asadul Islam, 30, son of late Abul Hossain Sarder of the village.

Police said the extortionists belonging to outlawed Dakhkhin Bangla Chhinnamul Communist Party had earlier demanded Tk 50 thousand from Asadul, but he refused to oblige their demand.

The gang swooped on Asadul while he was asleep at a makeshift house at his shrimp enclosure at around 3 am. They shot him point blank and left the scene. Asadul died on the spot.

A case was filed with Assasuni police station.

New Colony

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movement of the local people.

Sources said that the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) would join the protest movement to provide legal back-up for cancellation of the whole project.

The BELA is taking preparation to file a writ next week to cancel construction works in spaces between the existing buildings and other parts of New Colony.

Local people have alleged that the hired men of the contractors are cutting down trees at night. In the last two nights the hired men chopped down more than 30 trees, they said.

There is an allegation that a minister's brother is patronising the contractors.

The protesters said that the contractors continued to threaten them. "But we would not abandon our movement in the face of any threat from the contractors and the unscrupulous government officials."

Independence Day today

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cultural organisations will observe the day with due solemnity through elaborate programmes. Streets of the capital are already decorated with National Flags, banners and fastoons.

The day is a public holiday. The National Flag will be hoisted atop all government and other prime buildings, to be illuminated with kaleidoscopic lights at sunset.

However, the government has cut short some of its programmes in view of the US invasion of Iraq.

President Iajuddin Ahmad and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will lead the nation in paying tributes to the martyrs of the War of Independence by placing floral wreaths at the National Mausoleum at Savar early morning today.

The President will take salute at the ceremonial march-past by contingents of freedom fighters, armed forces, BDR, police, BNCC and Ansar-VDP at the National Parade Ground at 9 in the morning. The Prime Minister will also attend the function.

The President, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament have given separate messages on the eve of the day.

The President in his message called upon the people to forge

unity and work selflessly from their respective positions to attain social progress and a self-reliant economy.

He also paid rich tributes to the martyrs and prayed for salvation of their souls.

The prime minister paid rich tributes to the valiant sons of the soil who made supreme sacrifice in the War of Independence, and to the memory of late president Ziaur Rahman who had made a call to the nation to jump into the War of Independence in 1971.

She called for unity and hard work by all irrespective of party affiliations to build a happy and prosperous society, upholding democratic values.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in her message called upon the people to fight all "evil forces", being inspired with the ideals and spirit of the War of Independence.

Special prayers will be offered at mosques, temples, churches and other places of worship seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country.

Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar will air special programme highlighting the significance of the day. Newspapers will bring out special supplements.

Battle for Baghdad looms

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declared a "military object".

A bigger disaster however looms over the two million inhabitants as the city has been without water or electricity since Friday.

The Unicef said lives of tens of thousands of people of the city are now at risk as they are forced to drink from the river where raw sewage is being dumped.

Iraqi civilians and troops are ready for a street fight in case the joint forces dare to enter.

Nassiriyah breakthrough

A big convoy of US Marines finally crossed the Euphrates river and Saddam Canal at the southern city of Nassiriyah yesterday, resuming an advance toward Baghdad after three days of fighting that cost them 10 dead, 12 wounded and 16 missing.

The convoy raced through the streets along a protective corridor of American armour, crossing first the river and then the canal, before leaving a still-hostile city behind. Their convoys often came under attacks both from civilians and the Iraqi Republican Guard.

A Reuters correspondent saw the Marines use Cobra attack helicopters, artillery and heavy machineguns to quell firing from Nassiriyah after trying since Sunday to seize its two vital bridges.

At least two Iraqis, apparently civilians, were killed in the latest fighting. Women wept over their corpses. Two Marines were slightly wounded and two wounded Iraqi soldiers were captured.

With the Marine now across the Euphrates at Nassiriyah, a separate military column was heading up the main Basra-Baghdad Highway, which crosses the river to the west of Nassiriyah.

Battle of Karbala

Troops from the US army 5th Corps have formed a frontline just north of Karbala, only 50 miles south of Baghdad. Vast convoys of tanks and ground forces are racing up from Kuwait to join them for the battle that will ultimately decide the war in Iraq.

"This is the start of the push towards Baghdad," a senior British military source said last night.

Ahead of them are 36,000 elite Iraqi soldiers, from three divisions, who represent half of the total Republican Guard force. Protected in sprawling bunkers 30 miles outside Baghdad, the armoured divisions are equipped with the best weapons in the Iraqi military, including Russian-built T-72 tanks

and heavy artillery.

US military said Umm Qasr is now "secure" after three days of severe fighting and that emergency aid will reach there within 48 hours.

Situation there is desperate as severe water and food crises have gripped dwellers. People are even approaching the invading forces for water.

"We have children, babies, and we are all so thirsty," Salman, a port worker, told AFP. "We don't know what will happen tomorrow, the day after tomorrow."

Kirkuk rocks

Iraq's northern oil capital of Kirkuk has been rocked by 24 hours of almost non-stop bombardment.

A resident in Kirkuk contacted by telephone told AFP that targets inside and around the city had been raided since late Sunday.

Casualties

Iraq said 200 of its civilians were killed in bombings in Baghdad. It also claimed eight US-British troops were killed in the battle of Nassiriyah and three choppers downed.

AFP reported more than 100 Iraqi bodies were seen littered outside Nassiriyah.

Humanitarian disaster

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waterport.

But five days after the military campaign began, neither is fully in the hands of alliance forces and aid deliveries have yet to start.

Getting aid flowing is vital for the US-British alliance to underline their message that their fight is with Saddam, who the allies accuse of having banned weapons of mass destruction, and not with ordinary Iraqis.

In Moscow, a Kremlin spokesman said Putin told President Bush by telephone that there was a risk of a humanitarian crisis in Iraq, where people have been weakened by two previous wars in two decades and years of international sanctions.

"In an exchange of views on the Iraq crisis, the Russian side emphasised the humanitarian consequences of military action," the spokesman said, adding that Putin had "confirmed Russia's stated position on Iraq...and stressed the need to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in the region."

Malnutrition already strikes 1.3 million Iraqi children under the age of five, or one in four, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

A United Nations run oil-for-food program, under which Iraq is allowed to sell oil to buy food and other civilian supplies, is suspended and it is not yet known when it will resume.

Around 60 per cent of Iraq's 26 million people rely on the program which was set up after economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq following its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

British International Development Secretary Clare Short said if it were not reinstated "it would be very difficult to avoid a serious humanitarian crisis."

Nevertheless, the World Food Program, which distributed much of the supplies under the UN scheme, estimates Iraqi families have stockpiled enough for some six weeks.

Despite heavy bombing raids on Baghdad, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Monday that electricity installations had not been damaged and hospitals and water treatment plants were working.

But the agency did report a growing shortage of drugs for ailments such as asthma.

Aid agencies have warned that

Shazneen case

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"At about 9:30 pm, the invitees were entertained. At about 10.15 pm, I heard a hue and cry downstairs. Latifur Rahman went there. I followed him and saw many people roaming.

"One of the persons there said some body wounded Shazneen seriously. I went to Shazneen's bedroom and saw her lying on the floor in a pool of blood. On the left side of her neck, there was a deep cut injury. One person said Shazneen was no more. Then I came out of the room.

"At about 11.00 pm, police came and opened the door on the northern side of Shazneen's room. Then they went to a tin-shed where some people were sleeping. Police woke them. Later, I came to know that they were carpenters.

"Later, I came near the stairs and saw two housemaids--Minu and Parvin--standing there. I asked Parvin what she saw. She said she entered Shazneen's room and saw a man with white shirt on her (Shazneen) body and went out of the room. In reply to a question by another guest,

US, Britain

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Blair, who will fly out today for talks with Bush at Camp David before meeting Annan in New York tomorrow said his discussions would not just concern the progress of the war but also relief projects and the future of Iraq.

"It is to discuss the humanitarian situation and the important and complex issues that have to be addressed in the post-Saddam era."

"I will see President Bush at Camp David to discuss not just the military campaign... (but) how we get America and Europe working together again as partners and not as rivals," he said.

Blair pledges

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In that brief time, coalition forces have penetrated twice as far into Iraq as they had gone by the end of the 1991 conflict, when ground operations followed five weeks of aerial bombardment, he said.

Addressing his first monthly press conference in Downing Street since the war began, Blair said coalition forces were advancing towards Baghdad in a two-pronged assault.

"Our aim remains as has been stated -- to remove Saddam as the route to dismantling Iraq of weapons of mass destruction -- so the progress towards Baghdad is of vital strategic importance.

"Coalition forces are therefore continuing what is effectively a two-pronged advance," Blair said.

Parvin said she saw a man with stripe shirt sitting on Shazneen's body. Parvin also said she saw Shahid sitting on her (Shazneen's) body with a knife in his hand. Later, she said that she saw nothing", Anisuzzaman told the court.

"I came to know on that night that Shahid, a domestic help at Latifur's house, was not found and that he left the house at about 2.30 am (on April 24)", the witness added.

Special Public prosecutors (PPs) Arfan Uddin Khan and Saima Khanam appeared for the state. Advocates MA Kamrul Hasan Khan Aslam and Mizanur Rahman defended the accused.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

UNHCR

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Janowski said they were "presumably Iraqi Kurds" who had "basically got themselves out of harm's way".

UNHCR added that although pockets of Iraqis were reported to have moved along the Iraqi side of the border with Iran, no Iraqi refugees had so far crossed the border.

ICRC also reported that more than 100 third country nationals are now on the Iraqi side of the Khosravi border crossing with Iran and are reportedly waiting permission from Iraq to cross, he said.

"We have been continuing to monitor the borders in Turkey, in Iran, Syria and Jordan," he said, stressing there had been no substantial Iraqi refugee movements so far.

Russian FM

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use of force to achieve the disarmament of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

"It is not by accident that we are now witnessing unprecedented anti-war demonstrations around the world," Ivanov wrote.

He said UN Resolution 1441, which called on Iraq to disarm or face "serious consequences," did not mandate the automatic use of force.

"The resolution of the Iraqi Council lies with the Security Council, which is responsible for ensuring peace and security in the world."

Russia, along with fellow Security Council permanent members China and France, led efforts to avoid the war, arguing that Iraq could be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction peacefully.

Independence award

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award.

Khaleda laid utmost importance on forging national consensus now than anytime before in the context of the uncertain world scenario, war on Iraq and its possible impact on the world economy.

She termed both late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman as assets of the nation and added, "So the awards conferred on them have also become national assets."

In view of this reality, the prime minister, installed their medals, citation and portraits at the National Museum for their preservation instead of handing over them to their heirs.

Director General of National Museum Dr Iftekharul Awal received the medals and citations on behalf of the Museum.

"I am paying rich tributes to them on behalf of the nation by conferring Swadhinata Puraskar on this two great national leaders," she said.

Recalling the contributions of Bangabandhu in the War of Independence and pre-independence struggle for realising the right to self-determination, the prime minister said that the March 7, 1971 speech of Sheikh Mujib at the then Racecourse Maidan had inspired the nation in the fight against Pakistani rule, exploitation and repression.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she

said, had established a constitutional government in the post-independence war-ravaged country and framed a constitution within a short span of time.

On the other hand, the prime minister said, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman had declared independence from Kalurghat Betar Kendra by revolting against the Pakistani regime and urged the people to build up resistance against the Pakistani forces.

She said late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman were two such personalities whose positions should be above all parties and opinions. She said the contributions of the two leaders should not be confined to any particular party or group as this would put obstacle on way to their true evaluation.

Cabinet Secretary Dr Sadaat Hoosain conducted the function which began with recitation from the holy Quran.

He read out the citation on late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late President Ziaur Rahman, recalling their contributions to the nation.

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar, ministers, former presidents, MPs, diplomats, judges, vice-chancellors, teachers, academicians and journalists, were among others, present on the occasion.