

Baghdad bombing buries civilians

At least 15 killed as missiles strike market, residential buildings in Baghdad; two invading tanks destroyed in fierce battle in Najaf; elite Iraqi troops head south to face Baghdad-ward forces



PHOTO: BBC

Iraqis gather outside a building hit by two US-British missiles amid air raids on Baghdad yesterday, which killed at least 15 people. The missiles crashed into the building occupied by a car mechanic's garage on the ground floor and private apartments on the upper floors.

STAR DESK

For the first time, mass-scale civilian deaths littered Baghdad, as two much vaunted precision-guided missiles landed on a market and residential buildings, killing at least 15.

Iraqis said the number is 45 and many are still fighting for life in hospitals. Badly burnt bodies and several charred cars lay near damaged residential buildings.

Anger and anguish, hatred and horror electrified the people who frantically searched rubbles for bodies. It was an attack that many think would have a far-reaching impact on the war and an indication that in war civilian or no civilian, everyone is a sitting target.

Hundreds of people stood in front of a bombed-out building, some with their fists in the air and shouting: "There is no God but God."

The war information turned hazy with both sides embarking on a massive media propaganda.

Baghdad-ward advance of the US-British invading army was halted in many places by resilient Iraqi forces. The invading troops are now within 50km of the capital.

A large contingent of Iraq's elite forces have headed south in a convoy of at least 1,000 vehicles toward US marines in central Iraq -- an area that already has seen the heaviest fighting of the war.

US tanks engaged Iraqi troops in a ferocious overnight battle near the Shiite holy city of Najaf. The desert came alive with tanks rattling through sand and firing on Iraqis who retaliated with recoilless rifles.

Iraq said it has destroyed a number of invading tanks, the pictures of which will be shown later.

US claimed at least 300 Iraqi soldiers died in the combat. But Iraq said 19 US troops were killed.

Iraq claimed a US warplane was shot down yesterday and search for the pilots is on. Five missiles have also been intercepted.

Nassiriyah has become another flash point where the Iraqis have engaged the invaders and are giving them a tough time.

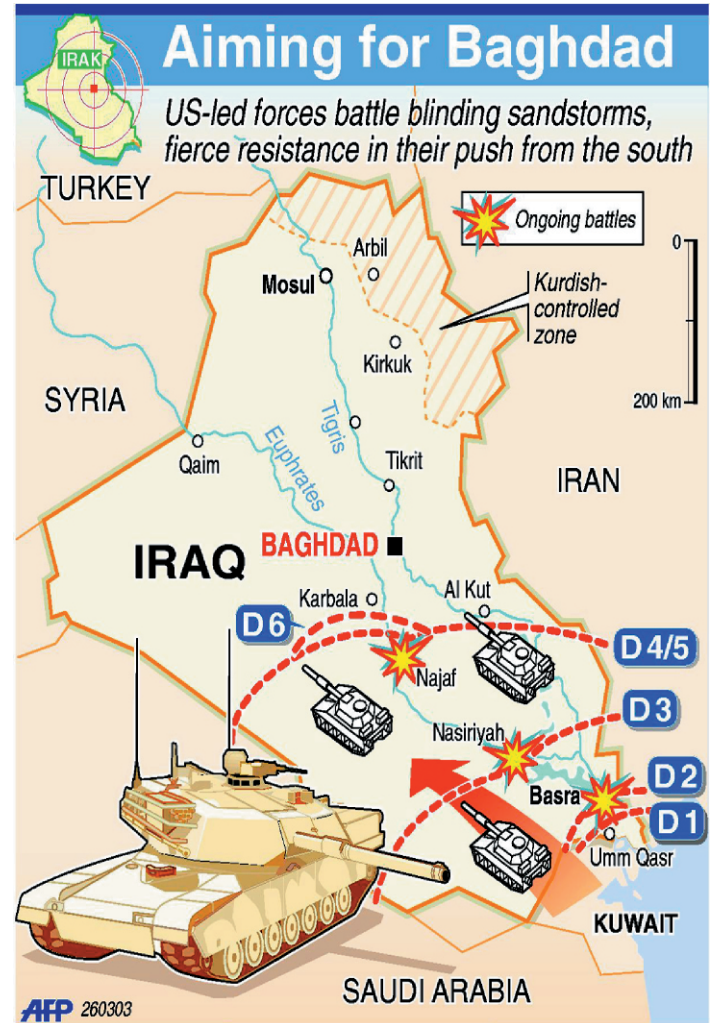
Fierce fights are going on in Basra too.

US Navy fearing suicide attacks have taken extra precautions. Navy officials said bombers in small high-speed boats are lurking in the Gulf waiting for opportunity to strike.

Meanwhile, Iraqi television resumed broadcasting in Iraq yesterday after a pre-dawn coalition missile strike hit its Baghdad headquarters.

Eerie sight in sandstorm

US troops pushed onward through a gritty haze yesterday after a fierce sand



AFP 260303

The struggle for survival

Despite the missiles, a dust storm and noxious fumes, the ebb and flow of life goes on

INTERNET, Undated

Ali Khalid racked up a small personal victory over the privations and uncertainties of war on Tuesday. He satisfied a food craving that recalled the few years he had spent in the US as a child.

"I don't know what came over me, but I really really wanted to eat spaghetti," he said. "So I went out and drove around until I found some shops that were open. I

bought some fresh meat and some pasta, and now we have already had our dinner."

It was one of the small accomplishments that are helping the people of Baghdad get through this war, hour by hour, day by day.

On Tuesday, the US army was barely 60 miles from the gates of the city. Iraqi officials assumed an air of panic, with vice-president Taha saying:

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In darkness, Baghdad shakes to the low rumble of B-52s

ROBERT FISK, WAR CORRESPONDENT, Independent, UK

All night, you could hear the carpet-bombing by the B-52s. It was a long, low rumble, sometimes for minutes. The targets, presumably the Republican Guards, must have been 30 miles away but, each time that ominous, dark sound began, the air pressure changed in the room where I'm staying near the Tigris river.

I've put some flowers in a vase near the window and the water in it was gently shaking all night as the vibrations came out of the ground and air. God spare anyone under that, I thought.

"When we have our soldiers at

the front," Tariq Aziz, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, had told us hours earlier, "you don't expect us to line them up for you to shoot at, do you?" We had laughed merrily but I didn't laugh now. Surely Saddam Hussein's praetorian guard could not be sitting this out in the desert, tanks abreast, soldiers out in the open? So what were the B-52s aiming at?

From time to time, I poked my head out of the window. Far away to the south-west, there would come a pale, dangerous red glow, sometimes for a second, sometimes for five seconds, a glow that would grow to perhaps a square mile then suddenly evaporate, its penumbra moving back into darkness. The

forward US Marines were, so the BBC told the world in the early hours Tuesday, only 60 miles from Baghdad. I could believe it.

The long hours of darkness are difficult for Iraqis. They play cards. They sleep when the silence between air raids allows. I'm reading by night a biography of Sir Thomas More that becomes more perilously appropriate to this fearful drama. Only a few hundred yards from my bedroom is a massive statue of

President Saddam, right arm upraised in greeting to his ghostly people, left hand smartly at his side, as if on parade. The young Thomas More would have understood its

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PHOTO: STAR

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia lay wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar early yesterday morning to observe the Independence Day.

Baghdad calls Saudi proposal a 'plot'

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad yesterday rejected what it called a Saudi "plot" to stop the onslaught on Iraq, vowing to "slaughter" US-led troops if they do not pull out immediately.

Reacting to Saudi claims that they had put forward a peace proposal to end the war, Iraqi Information Minister Mohamad Said al-Sahhaf told reporters: "Initiatives are based on different bases. These are not initiatives, but plots."

And he warned that coalition troops had a simple choice to

make. "They will be slaughtered if they do not pull out now," he said.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal issued a clarification earlier on the day that a proposal for Baghdad and Washington to stop the war contained "general ideas" rather than a peace initiative.

The proposal stresses "the need for an immediate halt of the war, resolving the unfortunate international divisions about how to deal with Iraqi affairs, and the need to return to peaceful efforts," he said.

He had told a press conference

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US has violated HR: Amnesty

STAR DESK

Amnesty International yesterday observed that the US has violated the Geneva Convention on human rights as much as Iraq did, according to a BBC World report.

Critics have been accusing the Americans of violating the human rights of the prisoners of Afghan war saying that they were being treated inhumanly in American custody.

Following the recent capture of American soldiers by Iraq and the subsequent televised interview of these soldiers triggered the US government to raise allegations that Iraq was violating human rights.

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Fear grips fatigued invading troops

INTERNET, Undated

The sky is the orange of a burning flame as the sun fights to pierce the sandstorm whipped up by 40mph winds. Visibility is cut to 10 yards. Three young soldiers stand on guard at the edge of an American encampment halfway along the road from Basra to Baghdad. Their military radio, the only contact with the world, has told them Iraqi paramilitaries are firing mortars again at the unit alongside them.

The clouds of dust bring with them the possibility of cover for a counter-attack.

The first of the soldiers draws on a cigarette and turns to his friend. "You bearing up?" he asks.

"I feel like we are getting our arse whipped," comes the reply. "Wherever I turn there is someone trying to kill me. Damn this country and damn these people."

"Roger that," the first says back. "Yesterday we were taking one of the soft top trucks and suddenly there are three Iraqis shooting at us. I was under that vehicle lying in the mud before I even knew it and

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Independence Day celebrated

UNB, Dhaka

The nation celebrated its 32nd anniversary of independence yesterday but some programmes were cut short in the wake of ongoing war in Iraq.

A 21-gun salute heralded the auspicious day.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia separately laid wreaths at the National Mausoleum at Savar early yesterday morning and paid homage to

the martyrs of the Liberation War.

Along with her party leaders, including former president Abdur Rahman Biswas, Khaleda Zia also laid wreaths at the chairman of Bangladesh Nationalists Party (BNP).

A smartly turned-out contingent of the armed forces presented a guard of honour during the ceremony.

Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury, Speaker Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar, freedom fight-

ers, ministers, diplomats, chiefs of the three services and senior civil and military officials were present.

The prime minister also laid a wreath at the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman. BNP leaders and workers were present.

A combined parade of the Army, Navy, Air Force, BDR, Police, NCC and freedom fighters was held at the National Parade Square in the morning.

President Iajuddin Ahmed

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PHOTO: AFP/BBC

(From left) Pope John Paul II is in anguish over the war in Iraq during a weekly prayer in Saint Peter's Square in Vatican; Iraqi soldiers put up resistance against coalition forces in Najaf; Iraqis carry a dead body after two US-British missiles crashed into a building killing at least 15 in Baghdad; and Iraqi tanks lie charred in Nassiriyah yesterday.