



(From left) Reporters gather yesterday in Baghdad's al-Azamiya neighborhood, hit two days ago by US missiles, to view the destruction during a tour organised by the Iraqi information ministry; an Iraqi woman wipes a tear as she stands amid the ruins of her house; view of Iraq's central TV and radio station building in Baghdad after the US-British bombardment on it; and an Indonesian boy points a mock machine gun at the US embassy as protesters gather in anger over the US-led war in Iraq in front of the US embassy in Jakarta.

SSC, Dakhil exams begin today

BSS, Dhaka
The Secondary School Certificate (SSC), SSC (Vocational) and Dakhil examinations under nine education boards begin today.
A total of 11,34,049 students across the country will sit for the examinations this year. Of them, 9,33,652 including 4,15,035 female students will appear in the SSC examinations under Dhaka, Rajshahi, Jessore, Barisal, Comilla, Sylhet and Chittagong boards.
Under Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board, 1,68,769 including 64,407 female examinees will appear in the Dakhil examinations while 31,628 including 9,964 female students will sit for the SSC (Vocational) examinations under Bangladesh Technical Education Board.
About 846 centres have been set up for the SSC examinations, 395 for the Dakhil examinations and 415 for the SSC (vocational) examinations.

Exports in war chill

RAFIQ HASAN
Exporters feel the pinch of the Iraq war, as most foreign buyers are reluctant to follow up on previous orders or place new ones.
"The buyers are now following a go-slow policy in placing new orders and following up on previous ones because they are worried about the developments in Iraq," said Quazi Moniruzzaman, president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).
"If the war is prolonged, it would have an adverse impact on the garments sector -- the country's largest export earner," Moniruzzaman said.
The sector earns over US\$ 5 billion a year. However, the BGMEA president does not yet see any significant change in export earnings. The effect would be felt after a few months, he observed.
Explaining the reason behind the go-slow policy adopted by the American and European buyers, a garment exporter said, the buyers had thought that the war would be

short-lived, but the latest developments have forced them to rethink.
"The buyers have stopped giving new orders and issuing letters of credit (L/Cs) against previous orders," said Monjurul Huq, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Exporters Association.
"If the crisis persists, export earnings would decline drastically and the target would not be met," Huq added. He is, however, yet to assess the percentage of fall in export earnings because of the war.
"We would have to wait for some more days to draw any conclusion in this regard."
The knitwear sector has an export target of \$1,550 million for the current fiscal. Its performance in the first half was very encouraging, but the exporters are worried about the future.
"Export orders worth around Tk 200 crore for finished leather have already been stuck since the war began," said Rezaul Karim Ansari, chairman of Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters

Association.
"The buyers are asking us to stop production and they are not opening L/Cs for import of goods which we have already manufactured for them," he said. The buyers, however, are yet to cancel the orders and are observing the situation, Ansari added.
"Export of frozen shrimps to America has come to a halt and prices of shrimps in the international market have declined by 10 to 15 per cent," said Azizur Rahman, managing director of Asian Sea Foods Limited at Khulna.
Buyers in Europe are watching the developments, he said. More than 40 per cent of the country's shrimp export goes to America and 45 per cent to European countries.
The exporters are now looking for new markets in China and India, Aziz said.
"We had been feeling the pressure of war since before it started as the buyers were not giving orders," said Golam Mostafa, owner of

Tremor jolts north, northeast regions

UNB, Dhaka
Country's north and northeastern regions experienced a moderate earthquake in the early hours of yesterday.
The tremor measuring 5.43 on the Richter Scale occurred at 12:51am and lasted for 49 seconds, meteorological department said.
The distance of the epicentre was 473 kms from Chittagong Seismic Observatory.
In Sylhet, a mild earthquake was felt at different parts in the city Tuesday night.
The tremor occurred at about 12:58 am and lasted five seconds, city dwellers said.
In Panchagarh, a moderate earthquake jolted the district at 12:50am and lasted for 40 seconds.
The tremor created panic among the people but there was no report of

Arab states struggle to quell anti-US protests

INTERNET, UNDATED
Popular fury over the war and continuing noisy street protests are threatening the stability of many autocratic governments in the Gulf region that rely on US support.
Protests also swept across Muslim countries in Asia on Tuesday. Bangladesh cut short its annual independence celebrations because of the war, while in Indonesia a small Islamist political party with admittedly limited means was deluged with volunteers after it advertised for fighters to go to Iraq to join the anti-American resistance.
Amid rising tensions in Saudi Arabia, the authorities floated a proposal to bring an early end to the war, saying it was in both sides' interests to stop the fighting and try to find another solution to their problems.
The initiative, being coordinated by the Saudis, the

Jordanians, the Egyptians and the Bahrainis, comes at a time when anti-American and anti-government sentiment has been simmering for years. It risks reaching boiling point if the war becomes protracted.
Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal refused to divulge the details of his peace proposal, but said his country had been in touch with both the United States and Iraq and was waiting for a response.
"I don't want to say we were rebuffed because we were not rebuffed, but nor were we given authorisation that they're going with it," he said in Riyadh.
The initiative came as Iraq appeared helpless to stop British and US troops racing towards Baghdad for a decisive final battle, while the invaders were realising that their presence was far from welcome and that guerrilla fighting could suck them into an indefinite

military quagmire.
"Both sides know now what this war is going to bring them," the minister said. "Perhaps this is a good time instead of continuing on the line that will only add to the boiling situation in the Middle East and create hatreds that perhaps will remain for a long time, that this is a good time to stop, take a breather, see what diplomacy can bring about."
The initiative seemed unlikely to get far, but it was nevertheless an indication of the extreme sensitivity of the Saudis' position.
Until the last minute, Saudi Arabia tossed out compromise proposals to avert war, negotiating in vain for Saddam Hussein to go into exile and suggesting an amnesty for all but the most senior Iraqi government officials in an effort to provoke a last-minute



Accompanied by party leaders, Chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party Khaleda Zia, left, and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, right, place wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar in observance of the Independence Day yesterday.

Wheat drive follows Aman

REAZ AHMAD, back from Rangpur
The government's wheat procurement drive made little headway in the first week in the northern region with the public food grain silos yet to start buying wheat from the growers.
Silo officials attributed this to 'late harvesting' of wheat but many growers said there is a lack of vigorous efforts by the authorities to implement the procurement drive.
A visit to granaries in Bogra, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts revealed that no wheat was procured although the drive officially began on March 15.
The failure to achieve the government's procurement target in the last Aman season and drying up of food aid have made the

current wheat procurement drive all the more important, food officials noted.
About 20,000 tonnes of Aman were procured as against the target of two lakh tonnes in the last season. The government now has a food stock of barely five lakh tonnes as the US diverted some of its previously committed food aid to drought-prone Africa.
Against this backdrop, sources stressed that the wheat procurement drive must be geared up immediately.
A staff at Taraganj food granary in Rangpur said they have a target of procuring 750 tonnes of wheat this season but not a single farmer turned up to sell wheat to the granary. Late harvesting of wheat is the reason for this, he added.
In the last Aman procurement

season, Taraganj granary could procure only 12 tonnes while the target was 132 tonnes.
Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami also admitted at a press briefing in Dhaka recently that Aman procurement drive did not succeed as the government made delay in procuring the grain from the farmers.
Farmers in Parbatipur upazila in Dinajpur said the local Ambari food granary was yet to start procuring wheat.
Wheat growers in different areas alleged that food officials usually do not make serious efforts for procuring grains at the beginning of the season and then rush for achieving

Accolades at last for women warriors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Thirty-nine women freedom fighters (FFs) received awards yesterday in recognition of their significant role in liberating the motherland.
The FFs, many of them injured during the liberation war, were given crests and certificates.
A non-government organisation (NGO) -- Proshika -- found out these FFs from different areas of the country in the last few months. It gave the awards at a function held at the Engineers Institution of Bangladesh in the city.
Recalling their memories of the independence war, many of the FFs burst into tears. They regretted that they were still being looked down upon by society for their participation in the war.

UN to seek \$1bn in aid operation

INTERNET, UNDATED
The UN is to launch a US\$1 billion appeal to cover the cost of feeding Iraq for six months after the war ends, in what officials predicted would be the largest humanitarian aid operation in history.
Amid mounting international concern at the crisis inside Basra, the UN's World Food Programme warned that Iraq had only five weeks of food supplies left. It was scheduled to make the request for aid yesterday at the UN headquarters in New York.
About 16 million people, 60 per cent of Iraq's population, are completely dependent on the UN for food rations.
Trevor Rowe, the programme's spokesman, said Tuesday: "We expect that we will be asking for over \$1bn... We're going to need that the money be given with unprecedented speed, because the window of opportunity is shrinking every day."
"For a single operation, this is definitely the biggest, both in dollar terms and in terms of beneficiaries."
In Iraq, engineers from the International Committee of the Red Cross are struggling to restore power

Hasina blasts govt for its 'silence' on Iraq war

UNB, Dhaka
Opposition leader and Awami League president Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed her strong commitment to build the country with the spirit of the Liberation War to materialise the dreams of Bangabandhu.
"Let's take a fresh vow on this day of our independence -- we'll build our country as dreamt by father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," she said while addressing a gathering at the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday before leading a huge procession marking the Independence Day.
She castigated the BNP-Jamaat alliance government for tarnishing the image of the country through "terrorist activities".
"The government has totally failed to run the country. They could not fulfill the aspirations of the people and has unleashed a reign of terror," she said.
Hasina reiterated her stand against the war in Iraq and said the military strike bypassing the UN would only escalate arms race rather than help disarmament.
"The war in Iraq has no legal basis and it will fuel terrorism", Hasina said and bitterly criticised the BNP-Jamaat coalition government for its "silence" on the issue.

Iraq says more than 500 hurt, 200 houses destroyed at Nassiriyah

AFP, Baghdad
More than 500 civilians were wounded and 200 homes destroyed in US and British bombardment of the southern Iraqi city of Nassiriyah, Information Minister Mohammed Said al-Sahhaf said Wednesday.
Sahhaf, in a briefing for foreign journalists, also denied that the country's sole deep-water port of Umm Qasr had fallen to British and US troops.
Coalition forces control only one

wharf of the port, he said, although journalists on the scene reported that Umm Qasr appeared since Tuesday to be under the full control of US and British troops after several days of fighting.
"Resistance continues," insisted Sahhaf.
The minister also said Saddam's Fedayeen militia had shot down a helicopter to the south of the central town of Najaf. But he did not give the model or specify if it was a US aircraft.

In Nassiriyah, more than 200 homes were destroyed and 500 civilians wounded in "hysterical" bombardment, Sahhaf said.
He accused the coalition of using cluster bombs that killed nine people and left 19 wounded in the province of Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, and another four dead and 18 hurt in the central province of Babylon.
Three Predator drones were shot down in Diyala, Sahhaf said, adding they would be shown to the media.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 27		6-12 pm
Mar 28	5-55 am	

Prayer Timings		
Mar 27		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-00	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-15
Maghrib	6-18	6-23
Esha	7-35	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation