

# Another 120,000 US troops ready for Iraq invasion



PHOTO: AFP

Public life goes on despite the brutal reality in Baghdad. Al-Zawraa football club in white of the Iraqi capital plays Tikrit's al-Samara during a championship at the al-Shaab stadium yesterday, with plumes of smoke billowing outside. Residents spent a night of terror as their capital witnessed its worst coalition bombing campaign, only falling asleep in morning hours from fatigue or sleeping pills.

**"Bunker busting" bombs on communications tower; Iraq vows "living hell" for coalition in case of street battle; 26 civilians die in Najaf fighting; and Iraqi forces kill four US-British soldiers**

**STAR DESK**

With sandstorms subsiding and visibility improving, bombs and missiles crashed into Baghdad again yesterday with vengeance, as the US-British forces kept up a relentless bombardment.

Iraq promised "living hell" for the Americans and their British allies during a possible fierce street-to-street fighting in Baghdad.

Hours after the defiant remarks by Defence Minister Sultan Hashem Ahmed, a US B-2 stealth bomber dropped two 4,700-pound, satellite-guided "bunker busting" bombs on a major communications tower on the east bank of the Tigris River.

Meanwhile, Pentagon officials said the US poured 90,000 troops into Iraq and readied another 120,000 for deployment from the US and European bases. The new plan came amid mounting criticism that the invasion force is inadequate to take Baghdad.

As the attack on Iraq went into its ninth day, air assaults zeroed in on one of President Saddam Hussein's presidential compounds in the heart of the capital, and Republican Guard positions around the city. Powerful

explosions continued through the night.

One large building had been struck at its base. A tangled pile of smoldering rubble was all that was left of a smaller facility. Many telephone lines were knocked out.

A large fire blazed on the west bank of the River Tigris and thick smoke billowed on the horizon after dozens of blasts in the eastern and southern fringes of the Iraqi capital.

Anti-aircraft fire rattled above the rooftops as US missiles hit an area close to government buildings including the ministries of information, planning and foreign affairs.

A Reuters correspondent said it had been one of the heaviest nights of bombing so far. Orange fireballs bloomed into the night sky as explosions erupted from all sides.

The attack gutted a seven-storey telephone exchange building in an area called Al-Alwya, leaving the street strewn with slabs of concrete, iron

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## US Congress for seeking divine protection of US troops

AFP, Washington

Lawmakers on Thursday passed a resolution urging the president to set aside a day of fasting and prayer for divine protection of US troops in Iraq and a population threatened by terrorists.

"A day of fasting and prayer is needed to secure the blessings and protection of Providence for the people of the United States and our Armed Forces during the conflict in Iraq and under the threat of terrorism at home," read the text of the resolution.

The House of Representatives passed the resolution by a vote of 346 for, 49 against and 23 abstentions. The Senate passed a similar measure on March 17.

The two chambers of the US Congress both noted in their resolutions that similar appeals had been launched during difficult

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## Perle resigns from Pentagon panel

AFP, Washington

Richard Perle, a leading advocate of the war in Iraq, has resigned as chairman of a top Pentagon advisory panel because of a conflict-of-interest controversy over his dealings with Global Crossings, a bankrupt telecommunications company, the Pentagon said Thursday.

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in a statement he had accepted Perle's resignation as chairman of the Defense Policy Board but asked him to stay on as a member.

In a resignation letter, Perle said he abided by the board's rules but wanted to step down as chairman so as not to burden Rumsfeld with a controversy at a time when the country was at war.

"I have seen controversies like this before and I know that this one will inevitably distract from the urgent challenge in which you are now engaged," Perle wrote. "I would not wish to cause even a moment's distraction from that

challenge."

The controversy arose after Global Crossings disclosed in court documents that it had promised Perle a fee of 725,000 dollars for helping it win Pentagon permission to sell itself to investors in Asia.

The Pentagon objected to the deal on national security grounds because ownership of the telecommunications company would fall to Hutchison Whampoa Ltd, a Hong Kong firm with ties to China.

"As I cannot quickly or easily quell criticism of me based on errors of fact concerning my activities, the least I can do under these circumstances is to ask you to accept my resignation as chairman of the Defense Policy Board," Perle wrote.

He said he had abided by the rules that apply to members of the board, and was advising Global Crossing that any compensation that resulted from the acquisition

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## Armed Iraqi imam urges holy war

AFP, Baghdad

A leading Iraqi imam, holding a rifle as he led emotionally charged weekly prayers here yesterday, called on Muslims worldwide to launch a "jihad" or holy war to protest the US-led onslaught against Iraq.

"We address our appeal to all Muslims and Arabs everywhere to tell them this is the day of the jihad which has become the duty of every Muslim," said Abdul Ghaffur al-Qaissi.

"Failing to join the jihad would be disobeying the orders of God," the imam of the Abdul Qader al-Gilani mosque in central Baghdad thundered, as the worshippers chanted "Allah Akbar," or "God is Greatest."

The bearded cleric said failing to join the jihad "would be a sin, and no faithful Muslim accepts to disobey God."

"Raise the banner of Islam, raise the banner of jihad, the battlefield

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## 'US, Britain heading to a disaster'

AFP, Cairo

Washington and London "have lost the war politically" and their campaign in Iraq is "heading to a disaster," British Middle East expert and journalist Patrick Seale wrote in an article published yesterday.

"Whatever the military outcome of the battle of Baghdad, the Americans and the British have lost the war politically and morally," he said in an opinion column in the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper.

"The invasion has not filled the hearts (of the Iraqis) with joy... the US and the British forces are now facing the nightmare of urban warfare," he added in the article entitled "US, Britain heading to disaster."

"As they prepare to attack Baghdad, military planners are surely asking: would it be possible to capture the city at a reasonable cost in US and British lives," he said.

Seale also mentioned the "Pressure exerted" on the coalition by

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## Cong grills Rumsfeld on war spending

REUTERS, Washington

The US Congress grilled Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other top Bush administration officials on Thursday on their plans for a \$75 billion Iraq war emergency spending package amid concerns that the conflict may last months instead of weeks.

"No one has any question that you will get the money for the troops in the field," Sen. Patrick Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, told Rumsfeld. "What we want to know

is this going to go on a lot longer than may have been expected, and are you coming back in weeks and months ahead for more...money."

"We're still closer to the beginning that we are to the end" of the war, Rumsfeld said, adding that "the campaign could well grow more dangerous in coming days and weeks" as forces face Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard near Baghdad.

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PHOTO: AFP

(From left) Smoke rises from an explosion in the presidential compound in Baghdad following a US-British air raid; an Iraqi passes the bombed-out telecommunication centre in the Iraqi capital which was rocked by fresh explosions yesterday; and a video grab from Qatar-based al-Jazeera satellite television shows an Iraqi officer proudly posing in front of an Apache attack helicopter said to have been shot down by anti-aircraft fire in the mid-Euphrates region.

## UN to ask govts for \$2b in Iraq aid

REUTERS, United Nations

The United Nations planned to ask governments around the world yesterday to pitch in and quickly dish out a record \$2.1 billion for urgently needed emergency humanitarian aid for war-torn Iraq.

UN officials said the world body's largest "flash appeal" in its history for money to buy relief supplies would include \$1.2 billion for food purchases by the Rome-based World Food Programme.

Set to launch the appeal at a noon (1700 GMT) news conference were Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette, UN Development Programme Administrator Mark Malloch Brown, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Carol Bellamy and Kenzo Oshima, the UN emergency relief coordinator.

UN officials also planned to

meet during the day with representatives of UN member-nations to deliver their initial fund-raising pitch, officials said.

Among the biggest donors in response to past appeals have been the United States, the European Union, Japan, Canada and Australia, UN officials said.

But UN diplomats cautioned some donor nations might be less generous than they had been in the past, bitter that the United States and Britain launched their invasion of Iraq without UN Security Council authorisation.

Under international humanitarian law, the occupying power bears full responsibility for humanitarian aid, although the United Nations is eager to also play a role.

UN officials expressed optimism that governments would help

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