

# Human bombs gather in Iraq

4,000 Arab suicide bombers cross into Iraq; attacker drives truck into US soldiers in Kuwait wounding five; 2 Apache gunships, 1 Harrier shot down, claims Iraq

STAR DESK

Baghdad brandished mass-scale suicide attacks as more than 4,000 Arabs have reportedly arrived in Iraq ready to martyr themselves in the fight against the Anglo-American invaders.

"The martyrdom attacks by the sons of Iraq and by the armed forces have just begun," Iraqi military spokesman Hazim al-Rawi told a news conference one day after a suicide bombing at a US checkpoint.

"These are the first on the glorious path of Jihad (holy war) against the invaders," he said. He added that the suicide attack near the central city of Najaf on Saturday had killed 11 US soldiers, rather than four as reported by Washington.

Meanwhile, an attacker drove a truck into a group of soldiers lined up

outside a military PX shop at a US base in Kuwait yesterday apparently in a suicide attack, a US military source said.

The source had no further details about the incident at Udairi Camp north of Kuwait City, but a worker in the camp told Reuters he had heard the sound of shooting at the time of the incident and ambulances had been called to the scene.

On the 11th day of the invasion, Iraq claimed to have shot down two Apache helicopters, one in Basra and the other in southern Iraq, and a Harrier jump-jet.

And casualties piled up on the Anglo-American side as two US marines were killed in vehicle accidents in southern-central Iraq: one was hit by a Humvee jeep during a firefight with Iraqi soldiers and the other drowned

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PHOTO: TV

Iraqi soldiers take positions beside sandbag emplacements in Baghdad as US-led air raids on the Iraqi capital continued yesterday. With coalition forces closing in on Baghdad, Iraq threatened to carry out more suicide attacks.

## The endless tide

(In an extraordinary report from the outskirts of the besieged Basra, Andrew Buncombe of The Independent, UK watches the British Army attempt to stem the flow of thousands of Iraqis that have been attempting to leave their hometown and -- more bizarrely -- to return to it.)

On the Al Zubayr bridge on the outskirts of Basra the endless human traffic flowed both ways thousands of people desperate to get into the city, and thousands desperate to leave.

At both ends they milled in crowds, either weighed down with luggage or carrying just a few possessions. Some had thrown their belongings on to battered trucks, others were riding on donkey-drawn carts. There were few faces that were not etched with anxiety or fear. "People are leaving because they want to see their families. They are afraid," said Kadhim

Johad, 40, a teacher, as he made his way out of the city.

The British Army had set up roadblocks on either side of the Shatt Al Basra, the dirty green canal that skirts the south-western edge of Iraq's second city. They were looking for young Iraqi men of fighting age. Anyone who looked like he might be persuaded to pick up a rifle and fight was not going anywhere.

"We are not trying to disrupt normal life," said Lieutenant Angus Watson, an officer with the Black Watch, who was sitting on top of an

armoured vehicle yesterday morning at the road-block, checking people going in. "But our concern is that if we let young men into the city they could be coerced into fighting." Some way behind him towards the dense, black smoke that appeared to be pouring from the centre of the city or from a nearby oil well the occasional rattle of gunfire and boom of artillery could be heard.

All around was the detritus of battle burned out Iraqi armour along the edge of the road, shiny, spent cartridge shells scattered

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### Living on the edge

AFP, Baghdad

Smoke was still rising from the rubble of what was the Al-Salhiya communications centre yesterday, where a sign bore the message: "Dear citizen: in case of telephone problems, please call the complaints office."

Ahmad Shakar, a neighbour of the communications node in the central Al-Aadhamiya district, is learning to adjust to the new realities of wartime Baghdad, where the line between a telephone exchange and a military target can seem as blurry as the blackened sky over the capital.

Shakar just moved his 24-member family to an underground shelter after coalition missiles destroyed his house while pummeling Baghdad's city centre.

"But how can we avoid living next to such places? These are civilian services sites that are located in all residential neighbourhoods, like

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PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis carry an injured employee at the al-Salhiya Telecommunications Centre after it was hit by a missile during a coalition air raid on Baghdad yesterday. The raid took place as journalists were on a tour to see for themselves the damage caused by overnight bombing.

## Donors may cut assistance Saifur for increased revenue collection

BSS, Dhaka

Finance minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said the Gulf war posed a threat to the country's future economy, making it crucial for the government to strengthen internal resource mobilisation drive through increased revenue collection.

"The Iraq war will affect several donors forcing them to cut assistance for countries like Bangladesh," the minister told reporters after a lengthy meeting with the Revenue Reforms Commission at his office here.

He said the situation is prompting Bangladesh to strengthen its efforts to intensify internal resource mobilisation through efficient and increased collection of revenue.

The meeting of the Commission, comprising leading economists and experts, was held after more than a month it had submitted its initial report to the ministry suggesting a

number of measures for improvement in revenue collection mechanism.

Without elaborating, Saifur said the commission highlighted administrative and legal reforms to improve efficiency in revenue collection.

"We will try to reflect the substantial points of their recommendations in the coming budget," he said.

Replying to a question, the finance minister, however, said the commission did not recommend tax increase, rather suggested measures for efficient realisation of increased revenue.

He acknowledged corruption as the major hindrance in tax collection mechanism but added that efforts were underway to minimise the corrupt practices.

The Revenue Reforms Commission is expected to submit its final report in June.

## 'S Asian states should go for bilateral free trade deals'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

South Asian countries should strike bilateral free trade deals among themselves as SAARC has failed to make progress in becoming a regional trade block, former Indian diplomat Muchkund Dubey said yesterday.

Although South Asia is one of the ideal places for regional cooperation, Dubey said, "because of political reasons all regional cooperation has come to naught."

"South Asia is the only region where regionalism does not exist in real terms," he said.

"Countries should move as fast as possible for bilateral free trade

agreements and include as many products as possible in the arrangement," he said while giving a talk on "New Regionalism and South Asia" in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) organised the programme with its director Waliur Rahman in the chair.

Dubey, the former Indian foreign secretary, believes that free trade arrangements would be of immense benefit to all the countries.

He also said a package of free trade arrangement can be devised with concessions to weaker nations

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