



IRAQ INVASION

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The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 2, 2003

Water, food trickle into Iraq

AP, Amman

The first wartime UN humanitarian aid, a few truckloads of food and water, trickled across Iraq's borders from Turkey and Kuwait, UN agencies reported Monday.

But officials said aid organisations and the US military remain wary of working together on relief operations for Iraq.

Three trucks carrying 84.7 tons of dried milk crossed from Turkey and were unloaded in the northern Iraqi city of Dohuk on Saturday, the UN World Food Program said in a delayed report.

Next, "we're preparing to move badly needed wheat flour later this week into the north," said Khaled Mansour, regional spokesman for the UN agency in Amman.

He said people in three autonomous Kurdish provinces of the north are believed to need food more urgently than people in the central government-controlled remainder of Iraq because they received only a month's rations before the 12-day-old war began, while Iraqis elsewhere got two months' rations.

Under UN economic sanctions against Iraq, the World Food Program itself ran a food-rationing program in the north, while the Baghdad government operated it for the rest of the country.

In far southern Iraq on Monday, the

first three vehicles carrying UN water - commissioned by the UN Children's Fund - managed to make deliveries from Kuwait to the captured city of Umm Qasr, UNICEF spokesman Geoff Keele reported.

But 10 other water vehicles did not cross from Kuwait, either because they had incorrect Kuwaiti paperwork or their privately contracted drivers decided it wasn't safe to travel into war-torn southern Iraq, Keele said.

Keele also said two UNICEF trucks carrying medical and other goods have been waiting at the northern border for Turkish permission to cross into Iraq. Mansour said Saturday's dried-milk delivery also had been held up for some days, pending Turkish permission.

The greatest obstacle, however, remained the danger of travelling war-torn Iraq's roads.

Few private aid convoys have ventured into Iraq, but on Monday a two-truck shipment from private Greek donors - carrying 33 tons of medicine, food, milk and blankets - headed for Baghdad from Amman, the Jordanian capital.

Convoy chief Dr. Demetrius Mognie, an Athens physiologist, said by mobile phone from the road that he hopes to remain in the Iraqi capital as the casualty toll mounts. "My speciality is an important one, and they may need my help there," said Mognie, a member of the aid group Doctors of the World.

A Jordanian government truck convoy and a private Algerian convoy crossed into Iraq on Sunday carrying 130 tons of medical supplies.

Yet another relief arm - the US and British military - also continued deliveries on Monday as they sought to "win hearts and minds" for their invasion force. British troops delivered water from a tanker to the people of Zubayr, south of besieged Basra.

Although UN aid agencies are in contact with the military commands in Kuwait, no major progress has been reported toward a UN takeover of relief operations.

"The international people don't want to be associated with the American invasion, and the military people want to be seen as the ones helping the Iraqis," one well-placed UN official said privately, reflecting what others also have reported.

The professional aid community has openly disparaged the military's "back-of-the-truck" aid distribution in southern Iraq, which ended in televised scenes of chaos and fighting over water and food.

"Lessons have been learned," US Army Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks said at Monday's daily US Central Command briefing in Qatar. "We certainly know how to distribute aid. It's going very well right now."



Iraqi men crush to try to get food packages handed out by British soldiers from the Tactical Supply Wing from the back of a lorry in the southern Iraqi town of Safwan, 31 March 2003. The British forces are giving local people humanitarian aid. PHOTO: AFP



Egyptian women protest as a Coca Cola advertisement is set ablaze, along with boxes of Ariel washing powder, during an anti-US demonstration in Cairo 31 March 2003. PHOTO: AFP

No PoWs will go to Cuba: Pentagon

AFP, Washington

The United States has no intention of sending Iraqi prisoners of war to the US base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a Pentagon spokesman said Monday.

"It is far too early in the conflict to make any decision regarding the future of those individuals who have come under the control of coalition forces," said navy Lieutenant Commander Barbara Burfeind.

"But the US does not intend sending these EPWs (enemy prisoners of war) to Guantanamo," she added.

The prisoners, whether uniformed soldiers or paramilitary combatants, "will be taken to the rear of the battlefield" for a "vetting process," she said, confirming only that if any of the captured fighters could be indicted for war crimes they will be transferred out of the country.

The Washington Post reported Monday that US troops were holding more than 300 Iraqis in civilian clothing suspected of having links to the Saddam

Fedayeen militia.

They want some of those detained sent to Guantanamo Bay, where the United States is accused of mistreating prisoners captured in Afghanistan.

The base holds 660 suspected Al Qaeda or Taliban fighters captured during the war to topple the Taliban regime in Kabul following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

Eighteen who were repatriated last week told how they were kept in tiny cages and subjected to interrogations for more than a year to prove their innocence.

The round ups are part of a shift to unconventional warfare by US commanders in response to the hit and run attacks launched by the Saddam's Fedayeen and Baath party militias on overstretched US supply lines. Americans have decided to emulate the British who have used commando raids to counter resistance in south-eastern Iraq.

US draws up secret plan to impose new regime

THE GUARDIAN, London

A disagreement has broken out at a senior level within the Bush administration over a new government that the US is secretly planning in Kuwait to rule Iraq in the immediate period after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Under the plan, the government will consist of 23 ministries, each headed by an American. Every ministry will also have four Iraqi advisers appointed by the Americans, the Guardian has learned.

The government will take over Iraq city by city. Areas declared "liberated" by General Tommy Franks will be transferred to the temporary government under the overall control of Jay Garner, the former US general appointed to head a military occupation of Iraq.

In anticipation of the Baghdad regime's fall, members of this interim government have begun arriving in Kuwait.

Decisions on the government's

composition appear to be entirely in US hands, particularly those of Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defence. This has annoyed Gen Garner, who is officially in charge but who, according to sources close to the planning of the government, has had to accept the inclusion of a number of controversial Iraqis in advisory roles.

The most controversial of Mr Wolfowitz's proposed appointees is Ahmed Chalabi, the head of the opposition Iraqi National Congress, together with his close associates, including his nephew.

During his years in exile, Mr Chalabi has cultivated links with Congress to raise funds, and has become the Pentagon's darling among the Iraqi opposition. The defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, is one of his strongest supporters.

The state department and CIA, on the other hand, regard him with deep suspicion.

Mr Chalabi had envisaged becoming

prime minister in an interim government, and is disappointed that he will be offered an advisory job at the finance ministry.

A senior INC official said last night that Mr Chalabi would not countenance a purely advisory position. The official added: "It is certainly not the INC's intention to advise any US ministers in Iraq. Our position is that no Americans should run Iraqi ministries. The US is talking about an interim Iraqi authority taking over, but we are calling for a provisional government."

The revelation about direct rule is likely to cause intense political discomfort for Tony Blair, who has been pressing for UN and international involvement in Iraq's reconstruction to overcome opposition in Britain as well as ahead divisions across Europe.

The Foreign Office said last night that a "relatively fluid" number of British officials had been seconded to the planning team.

Last week Colin Powell, the US secretary of state, told Congress that immediately after the fall of President Saddam's regime, the US military would take control of the Iraqi government.

His only concession was that this would be done with the "full understanding" of the international community and with "the UN presence in the form of a UN special coordinator".

By imposing Mr Chalabi and his clique on the official administration-in-waiting, Mr Wolfowitz seems to be trying to appease the INC leader, even at the risk of annoying Gen Garner and those in Washington who consider him unsuitable for a senior post.

Mr Chalabi is former chairman of the Petra Bank in Jordan which collapsed, bringing ruin to many of its depositors. He was eventually convicted of fraud in his absence by a Jordanian court, though he maintains he is innocent.

Still no sign of weapons of mass destruction!

REUTERS, Washington

Twelve days into the invasion of Iraq, there is no sign of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's suspected weapons of mass destruction, the primary rationale for the US-led war now pummeling the country.

US officials remain confident those arms will turn up. But if they do not, President Bush's reasons for war will be severely undercut.

Announcing the start of military action on March 19, Bush said, "At this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger."

Disarming Saddam of his chemical, biological, nuclear and missile capability was also the main motive behind more than a decade of UN sanctions on Iraq.

While US and British forces have discovered chemical protective gear and stocks of atropine used as an antidote to chemical poisoning, no major depots or production facilities for unconventional arms have been publicly identified.

"It's impossible to prove a negative, but Iraq maintained that its weapons were destroyed and the US maintained Iraq was lying. That's what this war was supposed to be about," said Jon Wolfsthal of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

At a time when opposition to the US attack on Iraq has drawn thousands of people into the streets of major world cities, "it basically casts American credibility in the worst possible light if we don't find these WMD," Wolfsthal said.

The Washington Post reported on Sunday that US special forces had already pursued their 10 best intelligence leads in Iraq but came up dry at each location.

Bush administration officials, prickly in the face of sniping at his war plans, insist critics are too impatient.

Speaking on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said US and British forces controlled areas in the south, west and north of Iraq but that the weapons of mass destruction had been dispersed elsewhere -- around Baghdad and Tikrit, Saddam's hometown.

Unfazed that none of those arms had yet been found, he expressed frustration anyone would think military forces could attack a site "and find out what's there in 15 minutes."

The CIA has argued that after UN inspectors left in 1998, Iraq maintained its chemical weapons effort, energised its missile program and invested more heavily in biological arms.

Before the current war, Iraq was believed to be reconstituting its nuclear weapons program and "if left unchecked, it probably will have a

nuclear weapon during this decade," the CIA said in an October 2002 report. The report also noted Baghdad "hides large portions" of its WMD efforts.

Prewar UN inspections found no "plausible indication" a nuclear program was revived, but questions persist about Iraq's chemical and biological capability.

Danielle Pletka said a decade as a US Senate aide with access to US intelligence left her persuaded "it is a physical impossibility that we will not find WMD in Iraq."

Even opponents of the US war believe the evidence exists. "Let's be cautious. Let's be patient. It's very possible that weapons will be found," said one European diplomat whose country has been at odds with Washington on Iraq.

But it will not be easy since Saddam used the past decade to conceal his arsenal more effectively, said Pletka, now a vice president at the American Enterprise Institute.

Even if WMD are found in Iraq, Bush could have a problem -- convincing a sceptical, often hostile world the United States did not "plant" the arms to justify its case against Saddam. For that reason, key European leaders have urged Washington to involve UN inspectors in the hunt, something US officials oppose.

