

Blitz spells hospital horror

Red Crescent maternity hospital, civilian buildings bombed killing children, women; Invaders within 19 miles of Baghdad, reported to have crossed 'Red Zone'

Victory within reach, says Saddam's message

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein said in a message read by a television announcer yesterday that he could scent victory, saying Iraq had so far launched less than a third of its forces against US-led invaders.

"Victory is within our reach... we have used only one third of our army or even less while the criminals have used up all of the forces they brought to commit aggression against Iraq," said the message read on Iraq's satellite channel.

In another message read out on Iraqi state television late on Tuesday by Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, Saddam told his people that jihad or holy war was a religious duty and he urged them to fight invading troops.

The fact that Saddam did not appear personally on Tuesday prompted financial markets to speculate that the Iraqi leader might have been killed. Asian stocks strengthened on the rumours in early trade yesterday and safe-haven gold fell.

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PHOTO: TV

As US troops reach 'Red Zone' within 19 miles south of Baghdad, Iraqi troops take sandbagged position inside the capital to resist the advance. For the Iraqis, urban combat is a preferred engagement option to inflict maximum loss on the invaders.

US, Turkey agree on supplies for coalition troops

REUTERS, Ankara

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said yesterday had agreed with NATO ally Turkey on measures to ship supplies through Turkish territory to US forces fighting in northern Iraq.

Powell, visiting to repair damage to relations wrought by Ankara's refusal to allow US troops to attack Iraq from Turkey, said US troops airlifted into Kurdish northern Iraq had stabilised the situation there. He saw no cause for Turkey to send its troops into the region.

The United States fears any fresh deployment of Turkish troops could lead to conflict with local Kurdish groups and disrupt the US war effort. The issue was central to Powell's talks in Ankara.

Powell repeated that Washington was disappointed by Turkey's refusal to allow some 62,000 troops to invade Iraq from its territory -- an operation military experts say could have shortened the war and reduced US casualties.

But he said Washington was now looking for help in supplying its forces in the north, estimated at a

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Pak senate deplores invasion

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's senate yesterday passed a unanimous resolution deploring the US-led invasion of Iraq and demanding the United Nations Security Council act to end it.

After five days of stormy speeches by more than 60 of the three-week old senate's 100 members, government and opposition parties joined hands to pass the resolution.

"The senate strongly deplores the military attack against Iraq by use of indiscriminate firepower against innocent Iraqi civilians, and demands that the UN Security Council take immediate initiative to stop hostilities and seek a peaceful and diplomatic solution," the resolution said.

The upper house of Pakistan's national parliament also expressed "shock and dismay" over the attack by US, British and allied forces, calling it a "clear violation of the UN Charter."

It expressed solidarity with Iraqi people.

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US admits checkpoints troops 'more aggressive'

THE GUARDIAN, Undated

US troops manning checkpoints have become more "aggressive" to deal with potential suicide bombers, central command admitted yesterday.

"These are young kids out there that are fighting for the UK, Australia and the US and if they feel that there is a threat out there they will fire," said Jim Wilkinson, the spokesman for General Tommy Franks, the US commander of the war.

He was speaking after a group of Iraqi civilians were shot dead on Monday night at Najaf when their car failed to stop at a checkpoint. According

to an eyewitness account from the Washington Post there were 10 dead. US military authorities initially said there were seven, but later said the number was unclear. "The incident was a tragedy. It was a shame it had to happen," Mr Wilkinson said.

Less than two weeks into the war American troops on the ground are becoming increasingly wary of Iraqi civilians. Soldiers guarding checkpoints were ordered to "stand off" further from approaching vehicles after a suicide car bomb killed four soldiers on Saturday. But the new approach is taking its toll of civilians.

Mr Wilkinson, who has been seconded from the White House to work at central command in Qatar, refused to detail the current US rules of engagement but he said troops had the right to protect themselves.

"Our checkpoints are being a little more aggressive out there," he said. "We will try to interdict potential suicide bombers earlier. Our kids can take the action they need to protect themselves." Brigadier General Vince Brooks, one of the senior American officers at central command, said his troops had an "inherent right to self-defence".

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PHOTO: TV

Part of a civilian building bombed by US planes yesterday lies ravaged in the Iraqi capital. The attack on civilian establishments came after President Saddam Hussein called for jihad against the Anglo-American forces.

No war scar on manpower export to Middle East

RAFIQ HASAN

Manpower export to the Middle East has remained unaffected since the US-led war on Iraq began on March 20.

Manpower export to all the Middle Eastern countries continues and 450 people went to Kuwait for employment after the war began, according to sources in the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment.

Few Bangladeshis went to Iraq for job since the Gulf war in 1991, the sources said.

The sources further said a total of 20,902 people went to different countries in the Middle East during the month of March this year, which is 25 per cent higher than the number of people (15,794) going to the region during the corresponding period last year.

The minister for expatriate welfare Quamrul Islam said the flow of remittance earning from those countries also remained unaffected.

He, however, could not give the actual figure of the remittance earning in the just concluded month. "It would take another few days to get the actual figure of remittance earning during the month," the minister said.

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Russia raps US over Iraq raids

BBC news

Russia has issued a formal diplomatic protest to the United States, saying that air strikes have targeted a residential quarter of Baghdad where its embassy is situated.

US Moscow ambassador Alexander Vershbow was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry to be told that the lives of Russian diplomats had been put in danger.

Such strikes were "unacceptable", a Russian Foreign Ministry statement said.

"The Russian side demanded that the American authorities take urgent and exhaustive measures so that such dangerous and unacceptable incidents are not repeated in the future," the statement said.

The ministry did not report any casualties at the embassy, which has been operating with a skeleton staff since non-essential personnel were evacuated.

The Russian ambassador in Washington, Yuri Ushakov, has made a similar protest.

Baghdad has been subjected to daily bombing raids since 20 March, when the US-led attack on Iraq began.

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US rescues POW, recovers two bodies

REUTERS, Nassiriya

US special forces rescued a female US Army soldier held captive for 10 days and recovered the bodies of two other soldiers in a midnight raid on an Iraqi hospital, officials said yesterday.

The rescued soldier was identified as Private First Class Jessica Lynch, 19, from Palestine, West Virginia. She was with a maintenance convoy ambushed by Iraqi forces on March 23.

Captain Jay La Rossa, spokesman for the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, said Lynch had two broken legs and one broken arm, but was stable and in good condition.

La Rossa said special forces also found the bodies of two US soldiers and eight Iraqis. He said the identities of the Americans were not known but they were thought to be among those ambushed with Lynch's group last month.

US defence officials in

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STAR DESK

Baghdad once again became a graveyard for civilians as US-led air raids hit a Red Crescent maternity hospital, an annual trade fair and other civilian buildings.

The attacks occurred at 9:30am (0630 BST) and caught motorists by surprise as they ventured out during a lull in the bombing.

At least five cars were crushed with drivers burned to death inside, Reuters correspondent Samia Nakhoul said.

Patients and at least three doctors and nurses working at the hospital were among those wounded.

The International Red Cross, meanwhile, said some of its staff members saw the bodies of dozens of people -- including women and children -- in a town south of Baghdad where Iraqi officials claim US helicopters attacked a residential neighbour-

hood. At least 280 injured people are being treated at a hospital in Hillah, about 60 miles south of Baghdad.

The missiles obliterated wings of Baghdad's trade fair building, next to a government security office that was apparently missed in the bombings.

Overnight bombings by US-led forces killed 24 civilians and injured 186 across the country in the last 24 hours, Iraq's Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf told a news conference yesterday. In Baghdad, he said, ten civilians had been killed and 90 wounded.

"No matter how many Iraqi civilians they kill, this will make us even stronger and even more determined to repel the invasion and to defeat them," a defiant Sahaf said.

As Baghdad shuddered under renewed bombardment fury, the invading forces made significant advance on the capital. One report

said they are now within 19 miles south of Baghdad within the "Red Zone". The US-led forces are poised for an "imminent" attack on Baghdad which according to senior military sources at the US Central Command in Qatar is likely to begin within 48 hours.

Faced with stiff resistance, the invaders are trying to keep clear of the elite Iraqi forces. Their aim is now fixed on Baghdad.

But Iraq is prepared too. Yesterday, Iraqi military high command said soldiers and Fedayeen are ready by all means and are waiting to take on the invaders and "tear them apart".

Iraqi forces killed 19 soldiers and shot down three helicopters around the southern city of Basra on Tuesday, Defence Minister Hashim Ahmad said yesterday.

Ten bodies -- at least two of them believed to be Americans --

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Arab volunteers head to Iraq to fight invasion

AFP/REUTERS, Beirut/Baghdad

Many young Arabs moved by what they see as an unjust US-led war on Iraq have volunteered to fight alongside Baghdad's troops, Arab and Iraqi officials said.

Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said Tuesday that more than 6,000 volunteers had reached Iraq from the Arab world, while senior Iraqi officials made similar statements over the weekend.

While it is difficult to confirm these figures, reports have come in from Cairo to Stockholm of Arabs volunteering to join the battle in Iraq.

While calling for Arab support, the

vice president took swipes at both Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal and neighbouring Kuwait, from which US and British forces launched their invasion on March 20.

"I say to this (US) agent: We would have preferred you didn't carry an Arab name and didn't have Arab blood," he said, in an angry tirade against Prince Saud for appearing to suggest Iraqi President Saddam Hussein step down.

The Saudi foreign minister, meanwhile, said Tuesday he had not called on Saddam to quit, but only advised him to make a "sacrifice" if that was the only way of ending the ongoing conflict.

In Lebanon over the past three

days, witnesses said hundreds of young people had headed to Iraq to fight. The Lebanese branch of Syria's ruling Baath party announced Monday that its offices were open for volunteers to come forward.

An Iraqi embassy official in Sweden, Jamal Abbulraka, told AFP that "more than 1,000" Iraqis living there, as well as in Denmark and Norway, had contacted the embassy to return to Iraq to fight.

And in Egypt, Iraq's Arab league representative Mohsen Khalil said a "large number" of volunteers were contacting the Iraqi embassy in the hope of going to Iraq.

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