



# IRAQ INVASION

DAY  
19

13  
The Daily Star  
DHAKA MONDAY APRIL 7, 2003



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi militiaman and tribesman stand yesterday on a US Abrams tank shown to journalists by Iraqi officials, who say the tank was destroyed during a fierce battle the day before, some 25 km (15 miles) south of Baghdad city center.

## Baghdad hospitals stretched to limits: Red Cross

AP, Geneva

Baghdad hospitals are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the almost continuous influx of war wounded, the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Saturday.

The ICRC - virtually the only international aid organisation in Iraq - said that four hospitals visited by its staff in the capital reported "several hundred war wounded patients as well as dozens of fatalities" from fighting Friday. Hospital staff is stretched to the limits by the pretty much uninterrupted flow of wounded at the hospitals, said ICRC spokesman Florian Westphal.

"We can't say to what extent they are civilian or military casualties," Westphal said the four main hospitals in the capital still had sufficient supplies, having stocked up in preparation before the war. The ICRC has been delivering surgical material, as well as body bags. Although much of Baghdad is without electricity, the hospitals have backup systems such as generators to operate. Red Cross workers managed to check on the hospitals early Saturday but were now confined to base because of the

approaching fighting.

"The situation is too dangerous for them to move around," said Westphal, adding that a new security assessment would be made Sunday. He said ICRC staff - six foreign workers in Baghdad and dozens of local staff - were "exhausted." "The last few nights it has been difficult to sleep because of the noise and explosions and sheer tension."

Westphal said the Red Cross had no word on two doctors with the charity Medecins Sans Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders) who have been missing in Baghdad since the middle of the week. Westphal said the first ICRC aid convoy sent to the southern city of Basrah had returned safely to Kuwait.

In addition to its aid work, the ICRC has visited more than 3,000 Iraqi prisoners of war held by coalition forces. It has not yet access to any American troops held by the Iraqis. Westphal said there was no immediate prospect of such visits, not least because the fighting would make it impossible for ICRC delegates to move to gain access to the detainees.

## Putin, Bush agree on dialogue

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart George W. Bush agreed Saturday by telephone on the need to continue Russian-American political dialog on the Iraq war.

The two emphasised "the importance of pursuing intensive political dialog between the two countries, despite the known differences between their positions in order to search for solutions in the interests of the international community," said a Kremlin statement.

Russia has joined France and Germany among leading European nations opposing military intervention in Iraq.

Putin said Thursday Russia had no wish to see American defeat in Iraq, and sought continued cooperation with Washington to resolve global crises.

Putin also made a fresh effort to mend ties Saturday with an appeal to parliament to ratify a major nuclear disarmament treaty signed with Washington last year.

"Our position and that of the United States on the Iraq problem do not coincide. And this of course creates a

difficult environment for further work on ratification of this accord," he said.

"But Russia wants to see this document ratified. We will work with deputies of the chambers of parliament and I hope that we will move to ratification," Putin said in on television.

Russian ratification of the so-called "Moscow treaty" had been scheduled for late last month, but the State Duma lower house of parliament called off the vote in protest at the US-led war in Iraq.

On Saturday Putin also discussed the war in Iraq with French President Jacques Chirac in a telephone conversation, the two leaders confirming their wish to see the United Nations play a leading role, a Russian statement said.

It expressed satisfaction at three-way talks in Paris Friday between the foreign ministers of Russia, France and Germany.

The three urged an early end to hostilities and stressed the need for humanitarian aid and the UN role.

However they did not reach a common position on the exact role the UN would play in post-war Iraq.

## Surrounded by guns, but without water

# S Iraqis lose faith in invaders

AFP, Al-Zubair

With persistent fighting, a lack of drinkable water and only a slow trickle of humanitarian relief, the better life promised by US-led troops is appearing more distant by the day for the people of southern Iraq.

While US forces entered Baghdad for the first time Saturday, down south the ground campaign is trudging into its second week. British forces are besieging the country's second city Basra, where they say hundreds of militiamen loyal to Saddam Hussein are holed up.

Many people feel deeply disillusioned with the war, codenamed by the United States "Operation Iraqi Freedom".

"Do you really think that they came here to bring us freedom? Certainly not. They're just here for our oil," fumed Mohammad, an engineer from Basra's suburbs.

He insisted Iraqis already knew British forces "very well".

"They already came to Basra during World War I and what happened? They killed us and stole from us. Our elderly haven't forgotten that."

A few kilometres from the city, a US army patrol meticulously takes down information from a group of Iraqi women, who in the most conservative Islamic tradition are draped in black cloth.

The troops explain that they are concerned about suicide attacks. Iraq has warned that it has thousands of people ready to blow themselves up to slow down the coalition advance.

But here such security checks are seen as intrusions on personal dignity, with the women complaining that they get written up when all they want to do is go to their homes.

"We want the war to finish as quickly

as possible and for the foreign armies to go home. The Iraqi people won't accept a foreign government and in the end will confront them. So this is our peace," said Talib, a Koran scholar at al-Zubair's mosque.

But he urged the people of southern Iraq to be "more patient," as the good life they want could yet come after the war.

"Their (the troops') role is only to fight. But after that the UN and the Red Cross will come in to help us," he said.

But so far only a few humanitarian workers have headed into southern Iraq. The International Committee of the Red Cross still does not have an office in the area, with officials crossing the nearby border each day from Kuwait on specific missions.

Water has also come from Kuwait, the only Arab country openly to support the war to oust Saddam Hussein. The

nearby emirate's seven-month occupation by Iraq was ended by a US-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf war.

Some resent living off Kuwaiti charity. But, like the services offered by the troops here, there is not much option.

At a small clinic set up at the outskirts of al-Zubair, British soldiers tend to dozens of ill Iraqis. Many suffer from diarrhoea caused by polluted water or suffer headaches and respiratory problems.

But a few kilometres away, on the highway between Safwan and Basra, a family on a donkey-pulled wagon stops near a soldiers' position behind the sandbags and asks for water. The troops quickly shoo them away pointing their automatic guns.

"Before they came at least we had water," grumbled the family's father before heading back on the road.

## US begins process of 'regime change'

THE OBSERVER, London

The United States has said it would install the first leg of an interim government in Iraq as early as Tuesday even as American forces struggle to capture Baghdad.

America's readiness to establish the first stages of a civil administration to run post-war Iraq comes at lightning speed and constitutes a rebuff to European ambitions to stall the process until some kind of role for the United Nations is agreed upon, The Observer said.

The decision to proceed with an embryonic government comes in response to memoranda written by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last week, urging that the US begin to entrench its authority in areas under its control before the war is over.

Describing the international body as

being "irrelevant", Pentagon officials said that the administration is determined to impose the Rumsfeld plan and sees no use for a UN role.

Elements of an embryonic new government will be established in the southern port of Umm Qasr, taken by coalition forces during the first days of the war, according to US officials in Doha.

It will be installed by the Pentagon's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, under the former US army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, and will be answerable to the Pentagon.

"What we are going to start trying to do, even before the fighting is over in Iraq, is to move to the areas in Iraq that are relatively peaceful like Umm Qasr, and to start moving (the office of reconstruction) into Iraq," the official said.

## Street battles in Kerbala

REUTERS, Kerbala

US troops fought street-to-street with paramilitaries in the central Iraqi city of Kerbala on Saturday in a fierce assault aimed at protecting supply lines of US forces moving into Baghdad.

US officers said the American troops had killed about 75 Fedayeen paramilitaries loyal to President Saddam Hussein and said six or seven US soldiers had been wounded in the battle. Others had slight burns but continued to fight.

The Iraqi fighters took up positions on rooftops in the narrow streets of this Shi'ite shrine city, firing rocket propelled grenades and assault rifles. US planes unleashed laser-guided bombs, artillery and heavy arms fire.

"It's freaky in there. Lots of bullets flying around. It's pretty scary," said one young US soldier who was evacuated after being hit by fragments from a hand grenade.

The fighting raged all Saturday afternoon as the US forces progressed slowly toward the city's centre. It flared again in the evening. Helicopters continued buzzing overhead looking for Iraqi fighters and the US soldiers dug in for the night.

"They gave us a pretty good fight. It

wasn't that well organised -- they were spread out all over the place -- but they really went at it," another soldier said.

American forces attacked Kerbala as advance US forces pushed into Baghdad, 110 km to the north, on the 17th day of a war to overthrow Saddam.

It followed a similar US sweep two days earlier through Najaf, another holy Shi'ite Muslim city in central Iraq, to root out paramilitaries and other fighters loyal to Saddam who could threaten long US supply lines stretching up from the south.

Lieutenant-Colonel Chris Holden said US forces could not make a sustained push into Baghdad until the cities around capital were secured.

"It would have to be raids and destruction missions, but it couldn't be long-term effective as long as Kerbala and other towns can serve as a Fedayeen base to attack our forces," said Holden, a battalion commander of the 101st Airborne.

Troops from the "Screaming Eagles" 101st Airborne Division landed in helicopters on the western edge of Kerbala, moving in beside a tank battalion with Apache attack helicopters overhead.

## The saddest story

THE MIRROR, Baghdad

An old man cries over the coffin of his daughter. His wife and younger daughter sit in the dirt outside the mortuary in shock and abject sadness.

It is only an hour and 20 minutes since Nadia Khalaf died, too early for total grief to set in. But time enough to know their lives have been shattered forever.

We discovered them during a random visit to Al Kindhi Hospital in North East Baghdad at 1pm. The doctors did not know we were coming - we had an official guide and we were free to choose which hospital.

Nadia was lying on a stretcher beside the stone mortuary slab. Her heart lay on her chest, ripped from her body by a missile which smashed through the bedroom window of the family's flat nearby in Palestine Street.

Her father Najem Khalaf stood beside her corpse. And I shall try to write what he and his family said in exactly the order they said it. I shall try because I hope it will better convey the bewilderment and horror that broke on one Iraqi household yesterday.

"A shell came down into the room as she was standing by the dressing-table," Najem says. "My daughter had just completed her PhD in Psychology and was waiting for her first job. She was born in 1970. She was 33. She was very clever."

"Everyone said I have a fabulous daughter. She spent all her time studying. Her head buried in books. She didn't have a care about going out enjoying herself. My other daughter is the same. She has a Master's degree in English and teaches at the university. Me? I'm just a lorry driver. A simple man."

He holds out his dead daughter's identity card for us to see. His fingers are covered in her blood.

I go to offer my condolence to his other daughter Alia, who is 35.

"I don't know what humanity Bush is calling for," she says in English. "Is this the humanity which lost my sister?"

"We are a working class family which made two academics. It was never easy for my parents or for us. We struggled to get where we are. Our flat is rented, not owned. I receive 75,000 dinars a month as a university teacher, my main subject

Shakespeare. The flat costs 35,000 monthly - about \$12. We were hoping to get ourselves a proper home when Nadia started working. Now look."

Her mother Fawzia raises her hand as if beseeching me. But words fail her and she begins to sob again.

"We have been looking only for peace and security," Alia says. "We were not interested in collecting money, buying costly clothes. We didn't care about dresses. Just peace and security. Not this."

Both women were still in their nightclothes, dressing gowns loose around them. They said they had risen late because of all the shelling overnight. Like everyone else, they were talking about the electricity being cut off on Thursday night.

Nadia was joking about going for a shower. Alia told her she'd probably be away for three hours... just waiting for someone.

They were laughing. "I didn't hear any sound," Alia says. "Suddenly a shell or bomb or something came through the room. I fell to the floor. My mouth was full of dust. I was swallowing dust. Then I looked at her.

"The missile, something big and unexploded, had come through her chest and her heart. She was covered in blood, unconscious. I ran down to the street, Daddy and Mummy behind me, screaming for an ambulance. There wasn't any. A neighbour said he would drive us here to the hospital."

"We all knew it was too late. But we hoped, we hoped."

"Believe me. We have no enmity for foreign people. We never will. We just want to live our lives."

A group of men help to put the corpse in a simple wooden coffin. Najem weeps as he kneels before his daughter. His wife and daughter climb into the back of the blue car. The other men place the coffin on the roof rack, put on the lid and secure it with bindings.

And so they leave. Three people driven by a neighbour with their precious daughter strapped to the roof.

It has been one of the saddest episodes I have ever witnessed in my 26 years reporting for this newspaper.

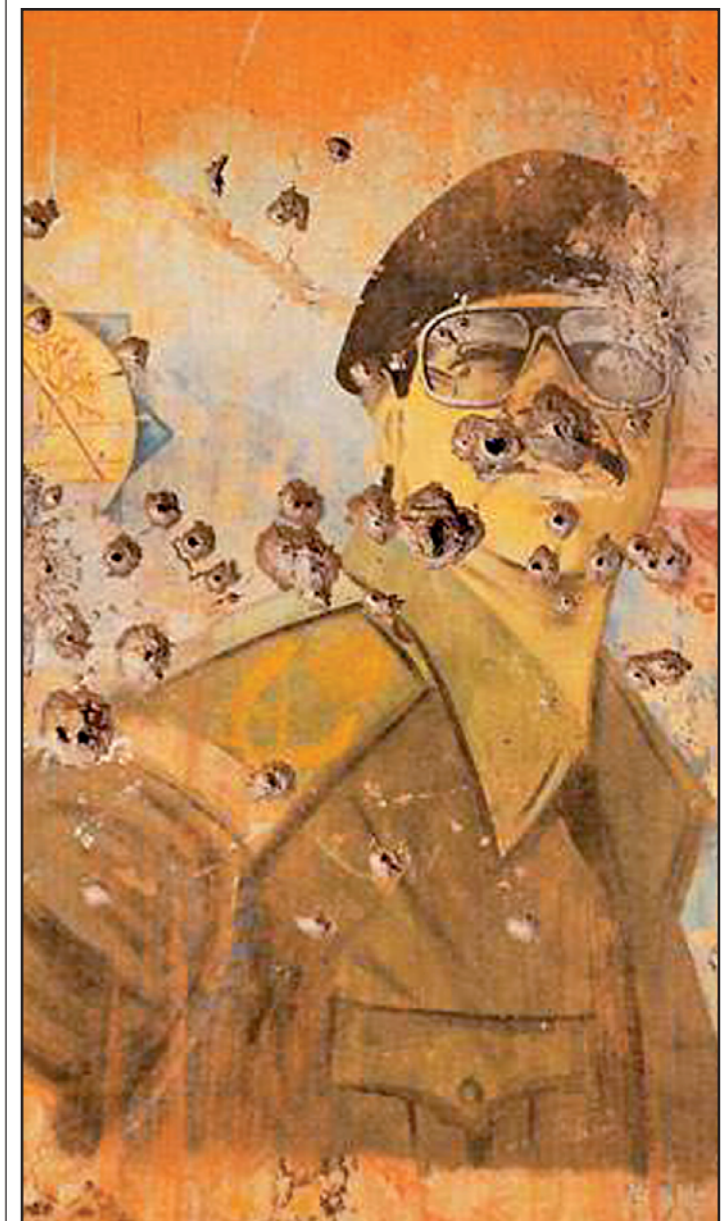


PHOTO: INTERNET

A mural of Saddam Hussein on the outskirts of Baghdad was peppered by bullet holes as US forces continued their drive into the Iraqi capital.