

Allies win battle but Saddam master of war

DAHRAN, Feb 3: Iraq's probing attacks into Saudi Arabia showed Saddam Hussein to be a master of basic principles of warfare: taking offensive action, achieving surprise, and maintaining troop morale, defense analysts say, reports AP.

Although the Iraqi leader probably sacrificed at least one full battalion in holding the Saudi town of Khafji for 36 hours, the action scored a psychological victory before allied air and artillery forced the soldiers out.

"I think it's been a jolt of the coalition," said Edward Foster, a researcher at the London-based Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies.

"It's been a real jolt to public opinion in America and this country (Britain)," he said. "I think the assumption was we were setting the timetable. It's bound to open questions of intelligence."

US Generals briefing the media insisted the allies were not surprised. But analysts said if that were the case, the Iraqis should have been stopped at the border.

"They're saying nothing

went wrong with intelligence, but then they must know the effect of Saddam Hussein coming across the border and attacking Saudi Arabia," said Francis Tusa, European Editor of Armed Forces Journal International.

"You don't let a couple of battalions-plus of Iraqi troops wander over the border and not do something about it. It was very politically embarrassing," he said.

With nearly 4,000 Iraqi troops involved, Foster said, "You'd have thought someone would have seen them concentrating for an attack 12 hours in advance."

The allies initially played down the incursion but are now touting it as a major victory.

US commander Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf on Wednesday called it "a mosquito on an elephant" and "militarily insignificant." The US military then had trouble explaining why it took 350 air strikers to beat back an insignificant foray which resulted in more than 500 Iraqi prisoners.

By the time Saudi and

Qatari troops retook Khafji on Thursday, backed by US Marine artillery and helicopters, allied commanders were calling it a decisive victory in the war.

US commanders were also buoyed by the sudden exposure of Saddam's dug-in troops and armoured columns, which allied air power then pounded.

US President George Bush and the US Generals in Saudi Arabia insist the Iraqi attacks will have no effect on the planning or timing of the allied ground offensive, expected sometime in the next few weeks.

The defense analysts agreed that the border incursions weren't going to be the spark that started the ground war.

Nonetheless, in a war where television has a dominant role and perceptions are all-important, the unexpected Iraqi forays had an impact.

For one thing, the attacks destroyed the illusion that 30,000 allied air sorties had stunned the Iraqis into immobility. They also showed that rank and file Iraqi soldiers appeared to be highly motivated and fought tenaciously.

"Three of the principles of war... are offensive action, surprise and the maintenance of morale. It seems to me the Iraqi attack on Khafji and around Wafra to the west can be justified on all three of those," Foster said.

By standing up to the allies, he said, Saddam's attack on Khafji "can be trumpeted as a victory."

Even if the total Iraqi casualties were 1,000 soldiers, Tusa said, "bear in mind the Iraqis do not mind losing men, so what's the problem?"

"Saddam Hussein dictated to the Western world and on that score it was important."

"The worst case I can think of is that the Iraqis are able to do this another couple of times — very basic, embarrassing little ground attacks — and they would then say, 'We've now been able to do this to the forces of Satan and now we're leaving.'"

"That's the worst case, that they can leave without anybody touching them," Tusa said. "He just walks off, with most of his forces still intact... leaving the allies looking silly with all their ground forces."

Quake razes Kitawar to ground

KITAWAR (Pakistan), Feb 3: Kitawar is one of the poor mountain villages which bore the brunt of the earthquake that rocked northern Pakistan on Friday. Not one of its mud-and-stone houses escaped damage, reports Reuter.

A mother and her 10-year-old son died as their house collapsed around them after she had rushed two younger children to safety. Her ailing father-in-law died in a neighbouring house when the heavy mud roof fell in.

"Everybody was asleep when the earthquake came," Omar Sadiq said on Saturday.

"We came out and we heard shrieks and crying. When we came over here we found the people were buried in the debris. They were dead."

It will take years for the poverty-stricken farm labourers of Kitawar, in Buner district of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, to recover from the remote region's strongest quake in living memory.

"Everything is finished. We are poor people, what can we do?" Ghulam Khalim said.

"I don't expect we'll get anything from the government."

Officials in the provincial capital Peshawar said they expected the death toll to exceed 200 and it could go much higher. The quake measured 6.8 on the richterscale.

Seventy-five deaths were reported from Swat and the Chitral and Dir districts of Northwest Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan. Two villages in Swat's Kohistan area were said to be completely destroyed.

An unknown number of casualties were reported in Afghanistan where the quake, which also jolted parts of India and Soviet Central Asia, hit 16 provinces.

In Pakistan, at least 350 people were injured. Rescue

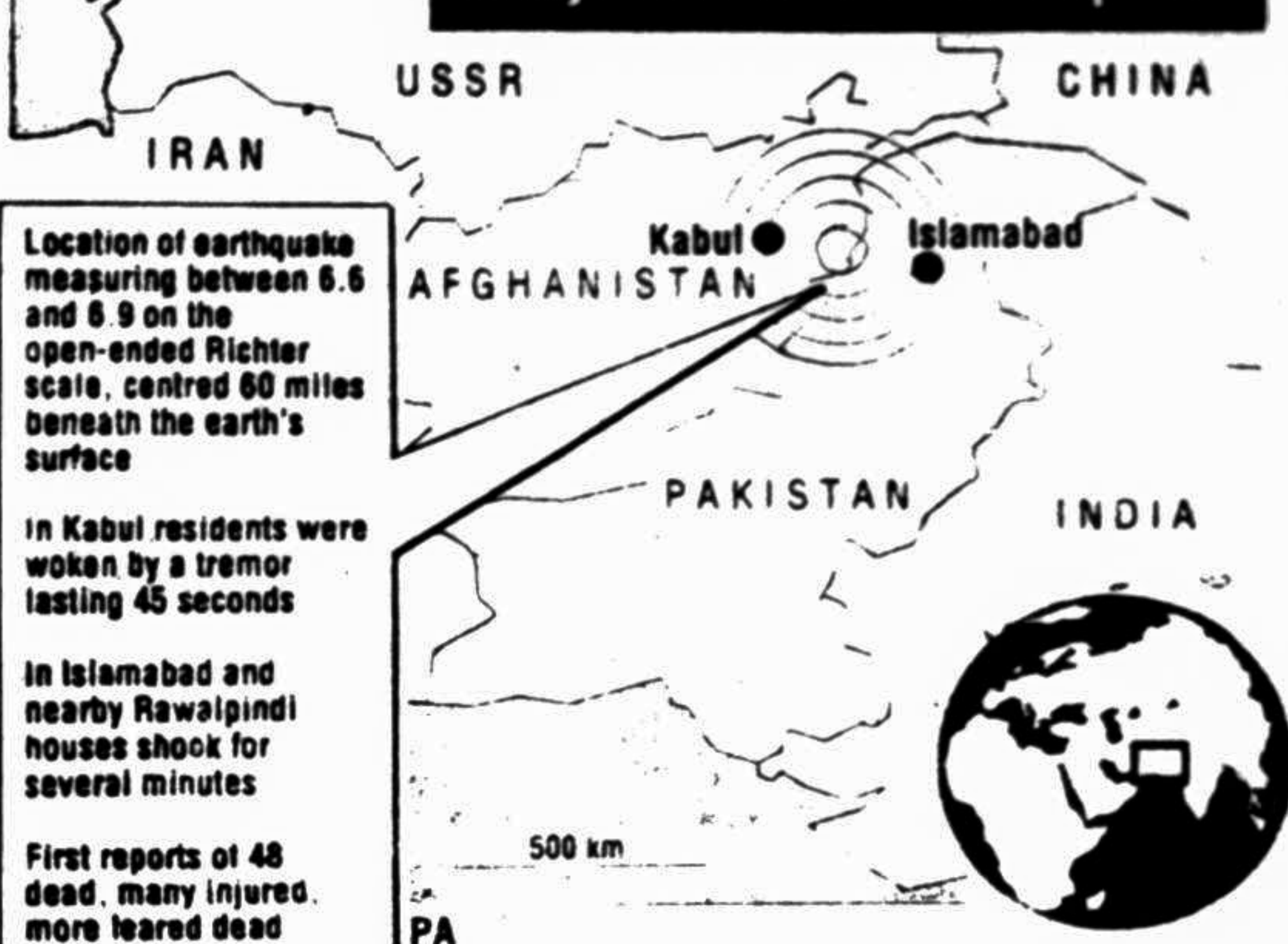
remote settlements in the higher mountains where there are no roads and winter snows are unusually deep.

A weaker quake killed 5,200 people in the region in 1974.

Sharif, visiting Chitral, said the government would pay 20,000 rupees (900 dollars) for every person killed and give each family affected 25,000 rupees (1,136 dollars) to rebuild their houses.

a week of rains. The shock was particularly strong in Buner, where at least 32 people were killed and 544 houses destroyed. More than 200 cattle perished. In Mingora, the main town

Many die in Pakistan earthquake



Location of earthquake measuring between 6.5 and 6.9 on the open-ended Richter scale, centred 60 miles beneath the earth's surface

In Kabul residents were woken by a tremor lasting 45 seconds

In Islamabad and nearby Rawalpindi houses shook for several minutes

First reports of 48 dead, many injured, more feared dead

Last October, 13 people were killed by a strong tremor in the same area of the Hindu Kush mountains. A 1981 quake killed 220.

Pakistan's northernmost Chitral district, where there were many casualties, is effectively cut off each winter as snow closes a high pass. The only alternative to flying in is by going through a rebel-held area of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Nawaz

Cattle brought inside to shelter from the winter cold teams were trying to reach lay dead in the rubble on Saturday, skinned for the small amount of money a hide can bring.

Concrete and brick houses mostly survived without serious damage. But crude village homes made of wood, stone and mud were vulnerable after

of the Swat valley, people rushed from their beds when the first of two shocks struck. Five people were killed and more than 50 badly hurt.

In all my 45 years I have never felt such a tremor," said Ghulamullah as he chipped mortar off a brick to be used again to rebuild his home in Mingora.

"I was very afraid, I thought it was the end of the world."

Israel may retaliate chemical attack from Iraq: Cheney

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney warned Saturday that Israel might retaliate with unconventional weapons if it came under chemical attack from Iraq, reports AFP.

Mr Cheney's warning, in an interview with Cable News Network, came amid renewed threats by Iraq that it was prepared to use weapons of mass destruction in a ground war against the United States and its allies.

Mr Cheney said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein might "attempt to use it (chemical warfare) down the road."

But he added that "the possibility would then exist, certainly with respect to the is-

raelis for example, that they might retaliate with unconventional weapons as well."

Asked what the US response would be, he said, "we don't rule options out or in."

Interviewed on CNN earlier Saturday, Vice-President Dan Quayle however said he could not imagine President George Bush ever ordering chemical or nuclear retaliation for any Iraqi use of such weapons of mass destruction.

I just can't imagine President Bush making the decision to use chemical or nuclear weapons under any circumstances, Mr Quayle said.

You never rule any options out but I can't imagine him doing it because you have a

proper response if in fact Saddam Hussein escalates, he said.

That response would be to continue our very devastating campaign with conventional weapons.

We can overwhelm Saddam Hussein and his forces with our conventional capability and our conventional superiority, Mr Quayle said.

Earlier Friday the Iraqi Defence Ministry newspaper Al-Qadisiya warned, we will use all force and arm in our possession beginning with the knife and bullets, arms of annihilation and ending with the weapons of mass destruction because nothing deserves to live after Iraq.

Both Mr Cheney and Mr

Quayle said the 17-day old drive to force Iraq out of Kuwait was going well.

Mr Cheney stressed that in addition to ejecting Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the US-led multinational force aimed to "eliminate his (Saddam Hussein) offensive military capabilities, weapons of mass destruction, his Ballistic Missile capability... to restore stability and security in the region."

Asked whether it would be enough for Iraq to announce a troop pull-out, the Defence Secretary said "I would be happy with a situation in which the forces begin to walk back to Baghdad, and they left their tanks and their artillery and their armoured personnel.

No ceasefire before pullout, says Bush

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: President George Bush told U.S. Jewish leaders Thursday that the air war against Iraq would continue and that he was not anxious to order a ground offensive to dislodge Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait, reports AFP.

The President also said there would be no ceasefire until Iraq left Kuwait, the Jewish leaders said.

"There will be no intermittent ceasefire," said Shoshana Cardin, who heads the conference of the Presidents of the major American Jewish organization, quoted Mr. Bush as saying.

There will be "more aerial work before there is a ground war. He is not anxious, at this point, to enter into a ground war," she said.

After hour-long talks at the White House, the Jewish leaders emerged also reassured that there had been no change in U.S. policy after a surprise joint U.S.-Soviet statement on the Gulf was issued Wednesday.

'Bombing on Iraq having devastating effect'

LONDON, Feb 3: A reporter for Britain's independent television news reporter said on Sunday the allied bombardment of Baghdad was having devastating effect, reports Reuter.

Speaking in Amman after being asked to leave the Iraqi capital, Brent Sadler said: "Day by day, more and more of Baghdad's infrastructure is being reduced to rubble."

"Very simply the attacks are having a devastating effect."

The allied plane are going for secondary targets power stations, energy power facilities.

"The suffering is now beginning to tell. Iraqis are feeling that this is not a war that is any way like the Iran-Iraq conflict. They have no water, no electricity, virtually no sanitation facilities and petrol is very, very hard to find. Most people were below ground in air-raid shelters."



LOS ANGELES: Investigators stand around the nose section of the US Air 737 that crashed at Los Angeles International Airport late February 1 after hitting another commuter aircraft on landing. 18 people were confirmed dead with at least 14 others still unaccounted for.

35,000 Egyptian troops in Gulf

CAIRO, Feb 3: Defence Minister Youssef Sabri Abu Taleb disclosed on Saturday that Egypt has sent 35,000 troops decided by the high command, reports Reuter.

"They are prepared to meet any possibilities," he told a parliamentary committee. "They have not been subjected to any aggression until now and are carrying out their military tasks... of preparation and precaution."

The 454-member People's Assembly earlier declared that it "backs the dispatch of Egyptian forces to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates."

"The assembly declares its full support to President Hosni Mubarak in all efforts and steps he has taken to face the crisis and whatever steps or measures he will take" it said.

Some opposition parties have protested that Egypt sent troops to the Gulf without the approval of elected deputies. Three leftist members in the house criticised the statement for not calling for an end to the war or more efforts of a peaceful solution.

The Defence Minister's figure for Egypt's strength - the first released by the government - was lower than unofficial estimates of about 45,000 men.

Abu Taleb said Egyptian, Syrian, Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti troops had taken up defensive positions in the southern Kuwait-Saudi border area. Egyptian forces would work under Saudi command.

He said the decision to send Egyptian troops to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates was in accord with the 1951 joint Arab Defence Pact.

"There is no doubt that being committed to it, particularly in this instance, is in the interest of Arab and Egyptian national security," Abu Taleb said.

"We are fighters, we are aware of the fighting mission we are assigned to, we carry our souls in our hands in response to our country's call and the call of the highest command," Abu Taleb told the committee.

When fighting is to defend rightness, it is then considered a holy war (Jihad). Responding to fears that Iraq might launch missiles against Cairo, Abu Taleb said Egyptians should not worry.

Threats against Egypt do not constitute great danger as the range of missiles which Iraq possesses is not long enough to hit any principal targets," Abu Taleb said.

80 p.c. Iraqi oil refining capacity destroyed

EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA, Feb 3: Allied forces have destroyed 75 to 80 per cent of Iraq's oil refining capacity, the commander of British forces in the Middle East said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Lieutenant-General Peter De La Billiere gave the estimate, the highest ever, during a visit to British airmen at an air base in eastern Saudi Arabia.

British Armed Forces Minister Archie Hamilton told a weekend news conference 50 per cent of Iraqi refining capacity was out of action.

U.S. and British pilots have since reported hitting oil installations at the southern port of Basra and elsewhere.

Iraq's eastern neighbour Iran reported on Tuesday that huge clouds of smoke were rising from a petro-chemical plant in Basra.

Allied military spokesman said the aim is to weaken Iraq's war machine by depriving it of fuel for its planes and vehicles.

De La Billiere said the air strikes of the past 13 days had knocked out 80 per cent of Iraq's ability to produce chemical weapons.

"His ability to produce and research his nuclear capability has been pretty well removed," he added.

Bush asks Americans to pray for Allied troops

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: President George Bush on Saturday asked Americans to pray for Allied troops battling Iraq in the Gulf war, as Allied commanders sought to downplay unintended deaths caused by the US-led bombing campaign and misdirected fire in ground battles, reports Reuter.

"Let us pray for the safety of the troops. These men and women who have put their lives and dreams on hold because they understand the threat our world faces," Bush said in his Weekly National Radio address. In declaring Sunday a "National Day of Prayer," he said, "America-- the finest, most loving nation on earth -- is at war."

In a proclamation issued by the White House, Bush called the allies' cause in the war "moral and just".

Bush in the past week increasingly sought to claim the moral and religious high ground for the Allied campaign to expel Iraq from Kuwait -- even as Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein proclaimed again that God is on Baghdad's side in a "holy war" against invading Western infidels.

In recent military briefings in Riyadh and at the Pentagon, US officials reiterated warnings that instances of unintended casualties -- including Iraqi civilians.

It's a big chill for US women troops

DAHRAN (Saudi Arabia), Feb 3: The disappearance of a US woman soldier in the Gulf has brought starkly home to thousands of female troops there how closely war can strike them despite their non-combat status, reports Reuter.

US Law and Military Regulations Bar American women from engaging in combat. Military spokesmen say the woman who vanished was in a transport unit away from the battle area in the Saudi town of Khafji. A male soldier also disappeared.

Iraq says US women were among prisoners captured during the fighting in the town. It has pledged they will be held in accordance with Islamic Sharia (law) and the Geneva Convention. "It was a big chill, a very big chill," said US air force technical sergeant Shirley Glaze, talking about the news of the missing woman. "It just went to cry every time I think about what she may go through," said Glaze, 43, who is based at Robins Air Force base Georgia.

The US military says the missing woman soldier-- the first of the Gulf war-- disappeared near the Tapline

road, which runs across Saudi Arabia parallel to the Iraqi border.

US officials said the unidentified woman was not known to be missing in action or a prisoner of war. Even so, some women in uniform quickly identified closely with the missing soldier.

"As a woman, to me it hits a little closer to home... I realise that we are well protected here but you just never know, war's very unpredictable," said Air Force 1st Lieutenant Melissa Watson, 25, of Phoenix, Arizona, who works at the huge base in Dhahran. Navy Senior Chief Evelyn Jutte feels women have been fully integrated into the US military and the disappearance of a woman is no more disturbing than the news that any soldier was missing.

"One should certainly be prepared for this to happen," said Jutte, 36, of St Mary's, Ohio.

Jutte said she hoped military men would ponder the missing woman's fate in an enlightened way: "I'd like to think that they think of it as 'a soldier in lost'-- not a female soldier."

US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Virginia Pribyla, based in Riyadh, also felt the sex of the missing soldier made no difference. "Human life is human life," Pribyla said. "I'm concerned and the risk is known to all of us."

"We expected stuff like this to happen," said Navy Petty Officer 1st class Sue Drummond of Prudenville, Michigan.

But 18-year Veteran Drummond stated directly a fear that many military women only intimated: The fear of sexual assault during imprisonment.

"I don't think a female can take being raped as well as a man could," Drummond said.

Tributes to Saudi troops killed in battle

RIYADH, Feb 3: Saudi King Fahd Saturday paid tribute to Saudi soldiers killed in the battle to recapture the northern town of Khafji from Iraqi forces saying they had accomplished a sacred duty, reports AFP.

Nawaz Sharif isolated, keen to visit Baghdad Pakistanis want Saddam to give allies a bloody nose

ISLAMABAD, Feb 3: Three months after sweeping election victory, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is isolated and badly out of step with the nation over the Gulf war, reports Reuter.

He decided to back Saudi Arabia against Iraq, but finds virtually everyone else from the Army Chief down praying that Iraq leader Saddam Hussein gives the American-led allies a bloody nose.

Sharif told Iraqi Ambassador Ismail Hamoudi Hussain on Wednesday he was willing to go to Iraq to meet Saddam to promote a peace initiative among Islamic Nations.

"It is high time to mount serious efforts to bring an end to the hostilities in the Gulf region," a government statement quoted him as telling the ambassador in their first meeting.

Sharif arrived back in Islamabad on Monday from a Six Nation Middle East Peace Mission publicly hopeful he could

persuade Islamic Foreign Ministers to talk peace in Pakistan.

But he discovered himself upstaged by Army Chief General Mirza Aslam Beg telling his senior commanders the war was Zionist plot to destroy Iraq and neutralise the Muslim world.

Beg followed on Tuesday with a declaration that Pakistan was neutral like Iran in the war despite sending troops to defend Saudi Arabia.

Here has long been a battle between the foreign office and army headquarters over who runs the country's foreign policy, and Beg has made it clear where he thinks power lies, a European diplomat said.

"This is Beg and the army seeking to make sure that their views have a bearing on government policy," he said.

Speaking at his first news conference since taking office last November Sharif had no doubt who was in charge.

Government policy was

made by the government he declared, and the 11,000 Pakistani soldiers sent to Saudi Arabia would remain while Islamic Shrines there remained in danger.

Political analysts questioned how long Sharif could maintain his stand against overwhelming public sentiment in favour of Saddam.

His own Islamic Democratic Party (IDA) passed resolutions on Tuesday night condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait but calling for the Muslim World to unite to frustrate the "evil designs" of anti-Islamic forces.

"It will be impossible for the government to continue the present policy. We have to make some concession to public opinion," former Foreign Minister Agha Shahi said in an interview.

"Already there is such pressure for the withdrawal of troops, but if Israel enters the war it would be impossible."

Sharif predecessor as Prime Minister, Ghulam Mustapha Jatoi, was quoted as praising

Beg's assessment of the war and said he reflected the true sentiments of the nation.

When Saddam sent his troops into Kuwait on August 2 he was widely condemned in Pakistan. But in the build-up to war sentiment shifted decisively in favour of Iraq.

Thousands of people who lionise Saddam as a Muslim warrior standing up to the infidels have joined rallies in the major cities, many of them carrying posters of Saddam and chanting anti-American slogans.

Anti-American feelings were already running high because Washington suspended all aid last October over concerns about Pakistan's nuclear programme, and many people doubt whether ties will be restored.

"There is a general feeling that the Gulf has been a catalyst for the unravelling of the entire U.S. relationship" commentator Mushahid Hussain said.