

US to start war with attacks on Saddam's palaces

War plan relies on precision bombing

AFP, REUTERS, London/ New York

Military action against Iraq would begin with US-led bombing raids on President Saddam Hussein's palaces and other symbols of his regime, a British Sunday paper said.

In a bid to convince ordinary Iraqis that the war is not with them but with the Baath regime itself, other initial targets would be Saddam's home town of Tikrit, key ministries, and homes and properties owned by Saddam's family and senior officials, The Observer said.

"The war will start with an extremely large bang. You can expect Saddam's home base of Tikrit to get a clobbering," one official told the paper.

The aim of the first air raids would be to "deliver a message to ordinary Iraqis, including the majority of Iraq's armed forces, that we are not at war with them, but with the structures that keep Saddam Hussein in power," the official told the paper.

"The point of the exercise is to avoid fighting in Iraq's cities and persuade Iraqi forces very quickly that there is no point fighting to defend the regime," the official said.

Other targets would also include formations of Saddam's elite Republican Guard, the Special Republican Guard and police and intelligence services, the paper said.

Reuters adds: In the US war plan for Iraq, more than 3,000 precision-guided bombs and missiles would pound the Iraqi military in the first 48 hours, paving the way for a two-pronged ground invasion to topple President Saddam Hussein's government, The New York Times said on Sunday.

In a lengthy article on weapons, units and tactics to be deployed in an assault on Iraq, citing military and other Pentagon officials, the paper said the military would rely far more on precision-guided weapons than in the 1991 Gulf War to minimize civilian casualties and limit damage to Iraq's infrastructure.

It said the air campaign would be carried out by about 500 Air Force

attack, radar-jamming and support planes flying from bases in the Gulf region and elsewhere, as well as by Navy planes from four or five aircraft carriers. A ground offensive would follow quickly.

"Military planners said the immediate goals would be to break the Iraqi army's will to fight, driving large numbers of troops to surrender or defect -- and offering them guarded sanctuary if they do -- while cutting off the leadership in Baghdad in hopes of causing a rapid collapse of the government of President Saddam Hussein," the Times said.

The air campaign could be over in a week, it said.

President Bush, calling for disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, says he is ready to use military force against Saddam, with or without UN backing. Analysts say the United States will have enough forces in the region by mid-February to launch an attack.

The New York Times said the ground war would be carried out by two Army divisions and an expanded Marine Expeditionary Force.

"The Army's Third Infantry Division and a sizable contingent of Marines would be assigned to punch north from Kuwait, while a force spearheaded by the Fourth Infantry Division, whose tanks and armored fighting vehicles are equipped with the service's most sophisticated digital communications and target-acquisition systems, would move south from Turkey," the paper said.

Special Operations forces, including a large number of Rangers, and airborne troops are expected to seize airfields and other targets deep inside Iraq, it said.

Remotely piloted aircraft, widely used in the war in Afghanistan, would play an important role in these missions, the paper said.

British forces would probably join American forces in Kuwait, it said.

The Air Force has already stockpiled 6,700 satellite-guided bombs, called Joint Direct Attack Munitions, in the Gulf region, as well as more than 3,000 laser-guided bombs, the paper said, citing Air Force officials.



PHOTO: AFP

Some 10,000 protesters holding torches demonstrate against war in Iraq on Saturday in Dusseldorf, Germany. The demonstration to mark the 'day of peace' was organised by Christian organisations.

Pakistan, North Korea excluded from anti-terror meeting

PTI, New Delhi

In a fresh rebuff to Pakistan, the government has asked the BJP's youth wing not to invite Islamabad to an international youth conference on terrorism beginning here on February 10, which aims to focus on exposing the neighbouring country's "double standards" on the issue.

"We were told by the external affairs ministry not to invite Pakistan and North Korea for the conference in which over 200 delegates from about 50 countries including the US and several Islamic countries are participating," G Kishan Reddy, president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the organisers of the two-day meet, said here.

New Delhi is also unhappy with Pyongyang over its clandestine nuclear and missile technology relationship with Islamabad.

'CIA, FBI split over Iraqi ties to al-Qaeda'

AFP, Washington

The White House's efforts to build a case for war against Iraq by linking it to the al-Qaeda terror network have split the country's state intelligence agencies, the New York Times reported on Sunday.

Several analysts at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have complained that the US administration had overblown scant evidence linking Iraq with al-Qaeda, the paper quoted officials as saying.

Some CIA analysts have complained that senior administration officials have exaggerated the significance of some intelligence reports about Iraq, particularly about its possible links to terror-

ism, in order to strengthen their political argument for war, the report quoted officials as saying.

At the FBI, several investigators said they were "baffled" by the White House's "insistence on a solid link between Iraq and Osama bin Laden's network," the report, based on interviews with administration officials, said.

"We've been looking at this hard for more than a year and you know what, we just don't think it's there," the report quoted a government official as saying.

The report of friction within the intelligence agencies comes as Secretary of State Colin Powell prepares to go before the United Nations on Wednesday to offer new evidence that Iraq is not disarming.

Pyongyang threatens to scrap inter-Korean projects

US slammed for trying to refer N-issue to UN

AFP, Seoul

North Korea threatened Sunday to scrap inter-Korean reconciliation projects if South Korea took action over an alleged secret cash payoff to the Stalinist country ahead of an historic summit in 2000.

The threat from a North Korean government organ in charge of inter-Korean joint ventures followed allegations that South Korea's Hyundai group acted as a middleman to bribe the North to stage the summit.

The Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee accused South Korea's opposition politicians and "conservative anti-reunification forces" of a "sinister" bid to fault economic cooperation between Pyongyang and Hyundai.

"If even normal economic cooperation and deals between compatriots should be called into question... (reconciliation projects) should not be allowed and the nation cannot but be exposed only to confrontation, conflict and war," a spokesman warned in a statement on the North's official Korean Central News Agency.

"If the sinister moves of a handful of forces going against cooperation, exchange and reunification are allowed, the inter-Korean relations ... will be brought back to what they were before and it will be impossible to ensure peace and security on the Korean peninsula."

Hyundai has led cross-border tours and other projects between the two Koreas since North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung signed a peace accord on June 15, 2000.

The accord prompted a series of reconciliation events including reunions of families kept apart by the 1950-1953 Korean War, helping Kim Dae-Jung win a Nobel Peace Prize.

But Kim came under fire last week after a stunning revelation by government auditors that Hyundai Merchant Marine Co. had funnelled some 200 million dollars to the North.

Hyundai Merchant claimed the money, part of a loan extended by a state-run bank a week before the summit, was used to finance its



PHOTO: AFP

File photo dated January 16 shows US mission specialist Kalpana Chawla, Indian born American, waving to well-wishers as she leaves Kennedy Space Center's crew quarters with other crewmembers to board the shuttle Columbia for launch. Chawla was onboard Columbia, carrying seven astronauts, which broke apart in flames on Saturday as it returned to Earth from a 16-day mission. Columbia disappeared from radar screens at 9:00 am (1400 GMT), 16 minutes before it was due to land. Several white trails were seen coming from bits of the shuttle over Texas, according to television images.

REUTERS, London

A stunned world watched the dramatic breakup of the US space shuttle Columbia in the clear blue skies over Texas and sent their words of sorrow to grieving Americans.

The world's other major space power, Russia, sent its condolences to Washington, but said Saturday's disaster would not affect the launch of a supply rocket to the orbiting International Space Station (ISS) on Sunday.

The seven members of Columbia's crew had "given their lives to conquering the dangers of space in the name of peace, science and progress of civilization," Russia's President Vladimir Putin said.

A spokesman for Russia's space mission control center said a Progress M-47 rocket would go ahead as scheduled to take supplies to the International Space Station (ISS), where one Russian and two Americans are in orbit.

A wave of sorrow engulfed Israelis who had tuned in to watch what was expected to be the triumphal return of Israel's first astronaut, former combat pilot Colonel Ilan Ramon.

Ramon's five-year-old daughter Noa, who was in Houston hoping to welcome her father home, was reported to have asked her mother: "How can you die in space? People are supposed to die only on earth."

The launch of Ramon's space flight had

virtually erased news of the country's woes, spreading space fever among Israelis embittered by a Palestinian uprising for statehood, a scandal-plagued national election and a domestic recession.

Shocked Israelis wondered if fate could have anything worse in store for them as they saw the disaster live on television.

Their disbelief deepened as newscasters reported the shuttle's breakup was first witnessed over a town in Texas named Palestine, a bitter irony lost on no one.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority Israel wants disbanded expressed condolences to the families of all seven astronauts.

India was also especially shocked: the first Indian-born astronaut and a symbol of national pride, aerospace engineer Kalpana Chawla, was among the dead. She had already made a previous shuttle flight.

Thousands of people braved a cold winter's night to ring temple bells and pray for Chawla and her six crew mates in her home town of Karnal just outside the capital New Delhi. She had moved to the United States in 1982 and joined the US space agency NASA in 1988.

At the Vatican, Pope John Paul prayed for the dead astronauts during a mass at St Peter's Basilica. He had received the news of the

Indians mourn Kalpana's death

AFP, Karnal

A small town in Haryana on Saturday went into mourning and prayer for Kalpana Chawla the Indian-born astronaut feared dead along with six others after the US space shuttle Columbia broke into pieces seven minutes before landing.

Hundreds of people poured onto the streets in Karnal on hearing of the tragedy.

It was there that Chawla began her journey into space and first dreamt her dream to one day walk on the moon.

"She said she could see a new world from space. She also said she wanted to go to the moon," former Indian prime minister I.K. Gujral told a television channel, speaking of his conversation with Chawla on her first mission in space on November 19, 1997 aboard the same Columbia shuttle.

Reports also said Chawla sent an email to her friends in Karnal while on the current mission.

"Shortly before this mission, she sent me an invitation to come to NASA," Chawla's friend Inderjit Singh told the Hindi Aajtak channel. "We feel very sad. People don't believe it."

In her school in Karnal, dozens of people, among them young

girls, lined up along the corridors, hands folded, praying for the impossible.

Chawla's immediate family -- mother and father -- were reportedly in Texas, awaiting her safe return.

Most of the debris of the shuttle fell in the Texas area.

In New Delhi, friends and relatives flocked to her parents' Asian Games Village home, looking for brother Sanjay Chawla to offer support.

"We are not in a position to say anything. We are too shocked," one of the relatives told the Press Trust of India when asked about Sanjay.

In India's space activity hub, Bangalore, scientists expressed dismay.

"I am shocked. At this moment I am at a loss for words. I hope everything is OK. Even at this moment I am hoping," K. Kasturirangan, chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), told AFP.

"It is a terrible incident," said R. Narasimha, a member of India's Space Commission.

"Kalpana Chawla is the first Indian to be involved in such a tragedy. It is very sad. Looking at the pictures I think there is not much hope left."

disaster with great pain, Vatican sources said.

Japan, which had been due to send up its fifth astronaut on a US shuttle next month, said the disaster would deal a blow to its space program.

Officials said astronaut Soichi Noguchi's mission would be postponed. Japanese plans to build a module for the ISS would also be affected.

"The accident not only poses a serious situation for the U.S. manned space program but also for the ISS project which our nation is also taking part in," Science Minister Atsuko Toyama said in a statement.

Two Canadian astronauts due to fly to the space station later this year will also likely be grounded. NASA has put all shuttle flights on hold while it investigates the breakup.

The station is being built by Russia and the United States with the help of space agencies from Europe, Canada and Japan.

China, which hopes to become the world's third nation to launch a manned spacecraft -- possibly later this year, also sent condolences to the United States and Israel.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin told President Bush China deeply regretted the loss of Colombia's seven crew but he believed the exploration of space would continue.

Kalpana's brother traumatised

THE STATESMAN/ANN, New Delhi

A pall of gloom descended at the house of Sanjay Chawla Kalpana Chawla's brother at 295, Ganpat Andakar Block, Khel Gaon, in south Delhi.

Sanjay Chawla, Kalpana's only family member in Delhi, was not able to share his grief. "He is very traumatised. We are very sorry, he is not in a condition to talk to you," Anil Nagpal, his brother-in-law, said.

Sanjay Chawla, brother of Indian-born astronaut Kalpana Chawla, was preparing with his family members and friends at his house here to celebrate the return of his sister from the space when the news about the loss of US space shuttle Columbia left him shocked.



PHOTO: AFP

This photo shows what officials are speculating is possibly a piece of door from the space shuttle Columbia that was found on Mt. Hope Road, outside of Rusk, Texas on Saturday. The shuttle disintegrated in a fireball earlier as it returned to Earth, killing all seven crew and scattering wreckage over a wide area.