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War in Iraq



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Pak Lah: We must be rational

Israel gets US assurance

Asian workers flee

PAGES 25-35

Air travel disrupted

Turkey to send troops

No oil flow disruption



Saddam Hussein has placed Iraqi troops and equipment in civilian areas, attempting to use innocent men, women and children as shields for his own military; a final atrocity against his people.

- US President George W. Bush

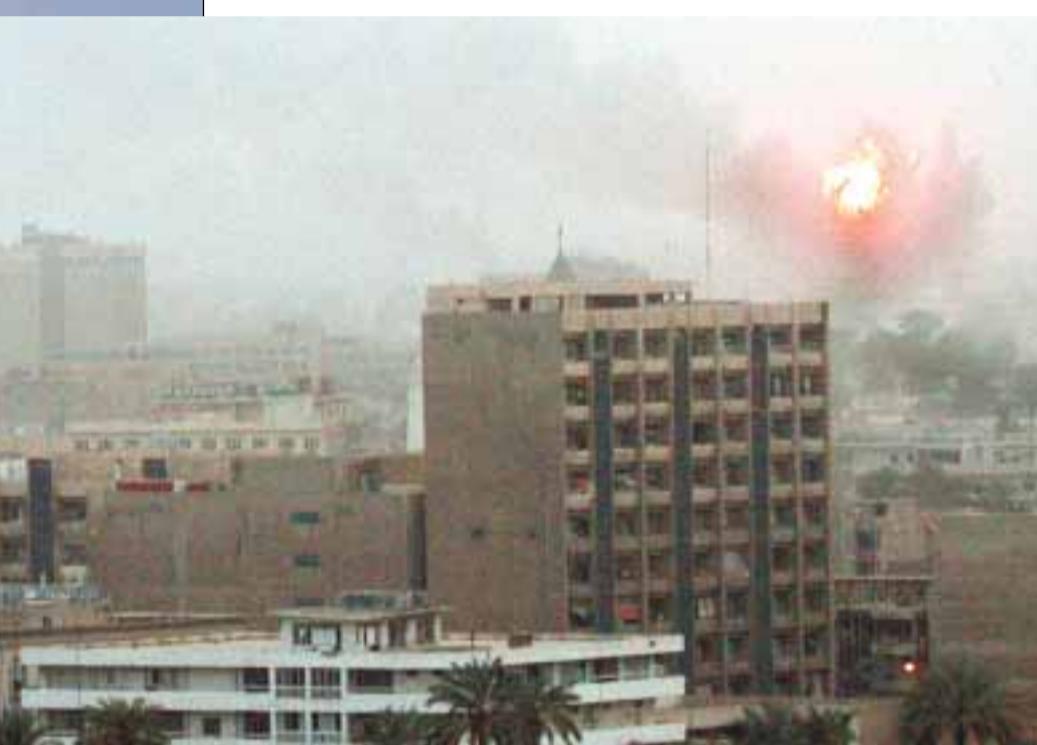


Now that you have seen how the reckless Bush belittled your positions and views against the war and your calls for peace, he has committed his ugly crime.

- Iraqi President Saddam Hussein

US attacks Iraq

FIRST STRIKE: The first Tomahawk missile to be fired into Iraq was launched from the *USS Bunker Hill* in the Gulf at 10.25am Malaysian time yesterday, according to the US Department of Defence. Four US navy warships and two submarines fired Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iraq and operations are continuing, a top admiral said. — *Reuterspic*



BATTLE SCENE: An explosion in Baghdad early yesterday as the US launched a war on Iraq with air strikes on the capital, making good on threats of military action to push President Saddam Hussein out of power. — *AFPpic*



BAGHDAD: US President George W. Bush unleashed a war on Iraq yesterday with dawn air raids to kill Saddam Hussein, but he survived and spat defiance at America.

The Iraqi leader appeared on television three hours after the strikes on Baghdad, denouncing the "criminal, reckless little Bush." Iraq responded to the US attack with several missile strikes on northern Kuwait, which caused no casualties.

US officials said the dawn attack by cruise missiles and stealth aircraft, which took even US ally Britain by surprise, was an opportunist hit, aimed to kill Saddam and his entourage.

Announcing the start of a campaign to oust Saddam and disarm Iraq, Bush said "selected targets" were hit. But US officials said an all-out air and ground onslaught might be days away.

"These are the opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign," Bush said in a televised address about two hours after the expiry of a US ultimatum to Iraq.

He said the US military would seek a swift victory while trying to avoid civilian casualties. But he warned the conflict could be "longer and more difficult than some predict."

British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon also said the war might not be won quickly.

But oil prices tumbled to three-month lows as dealers bet on a swift US victory with little disruption to supplies.

Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf said the US raids hit empty media and customs buildings and civilian districts. One civilian was killed and several wounded, he said.

"The rulers of America are announcing that they are assassins," Sahaf said of the US attempt to kill Saddam.

US officials said the aim of the raids was to "decapitate" the Iraqi government. They said Saddam and other key leaders had been pinpointed by US intelligence agencies, prompting them to request an immediate air attack that could have changed the course of the war.

Three hours after the raids began, a grim-faced Saddam appeared on state television in military uniform, black beret and thick-rimmed glasses, urging Iraqis to defend their country.

"The criminal little Bush has committed a crime against humanity," he said, reading from notes. It was not certain the broadcast was live but Saddam mentioned when the attack began.

Several hours after the US raids on Baghdad, a Kuwaiti defence ministry spokesman said an Iraqi Scud and two smaller missiles struck northern Kuwait.

Sahaf denied Iraq had any Scuds, which are banned under 1991 Gulf War ceasefire terms that also ordered Baghdad to scrap its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes.

US officers said two Scuds had hit Kuwait. The Kuwait News Agency said US Patriot anti-missile batteries shot down two incoming Scuds. The attacks prompted repeated air raid alerts in jittery Kuwait City and residents rushed into shelters.

Britain said last year Iraq had retained up to 20 of the Soviet-designed Scuds, which can fly up to 650km. Any confirmation that Iraq had used banned weapons might temper criticism of the US-British military action.

The war touched off a hail of international protest led by France, Russia and China — key UN Security Council members opposed to any military action not

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SEEKING SAFETY: US Marine Expeditionary Unit Fox Company 'Raiders' taking cover in a Scud bunker during an attack in an undisclosed location in the Kuwaiti desert yesterday.

Iraq fired missiles across the Kuwaiti border towards US troops, prompting soldiers to don gas masks and chemical protective gear. At least one of the rockets was intercepted by a Patriot missile, US officials said. — *Reuterspic*



MOUNTING UP: British troops preparing to move in their armoured vehicles lined up in Kuwait near the Iraqi border yesterday for possible military action in Iraq. After the first bombs and cruise missiles fell on Baghdad, reports said that at least three missiles were fired by Iraq into Kuwait. — *APpic*

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