

Saddam bans production of mass destruction weapons

AFP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein issued a decree yesterday banning the production and trade of weapons of mass destruction, just hours before a key compliance report to the Security Council by chief UN arms experts.

"All individuals and companies in the private and public sector are banned from producing, manufacturing and importing nuclear, chemical and biological arms and substances," the Iraqi president said in the decree.

"All ministries have received the order to start this step and punish those who contravene it," said the decree, cited by an information ministry spokesman.

Saddam said that his country is free of weapons of mass destruction.

"Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological," Saddam told a meeting with Iraq's number two, Ezzat Ibrahim, and Vice President Tahya Yasin Ramadan.

"The aggressors do not have any hope at all in using this cover as a pretext and a justification for aggression in the UN Security Council," he said quoted by the official INA news agency.

"If, after all this, the aggressors stage an attack, the Iraqi people and armed forces will fight them ... in a way that will please friends and annoy enemies," he warned.

Reuters adds: Top UN arms inspectors are likely to tell the Security Council on Friday that Iraq has not fully cooperated with disarmament demands but refrain from saying it has failed to comply as the

United States wants, diplomats in the United Nations said.

The language used by chief inspector Hans Blix and his colleague in charge of nuclear arms, Mohamed El Baradei, will be key in determining if wavering council members call for more inspections or back US-British plans for possible war.

"We're expecting a mixed bag," said a senior official in the administration of US President George W Bush.

A Security Council diplomat told reporters the crucial question was no longer whether Iraq was cooperating.

"The question is whether there is continued value to the inspections or whether inspections are for the birds against the criterion of complete disarmament of weapons of

mass destruction," said the envoy who did not want to be identified.

El Baradei told Reuters on Thursday he believed inspections should continue for a few more months providing Iraq cooperates. Blix, responsible for Iraq's chemical, biological and missile programs, has refrained from giving any time estimate.

"Iraq still has a chance to exonerate itself but time is critical," said El Baradei, head of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency. "They can't afford but to have 100 per cent cooperation."

At issue is whether the United States and Britain can follow up Friday's meeting with a resolution

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BSF kidnaps Bangladeshi in Rangpur

UNB, Rangpur

A Bangladeshi national was kidnapped and his son shot and injured by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on the Uttar Dhalbhanga Kaziarchar frontier in Bhurungamari upazila yesterday.

Local sources said the Indian border guards of Natakhol camp entered the Bangladesh territory and kidnapped Abdul Motaleb, 50, who was working in his field at about 2 pm.

The BSF personnel fired shots on Lutfor, 28, son of Motaleb, as he came to rescue his father. He was admitted to Bhurungamari Health Complex.

2 Saudi pilots barred from flying in US

AFP, Washington

The US government has quietly barred two Saudi Arabian Airlines pilots from flying in the United States on the grounds that they "pose a security threat," The Wall Street Journal reported yesterday.

The report said the case was the first test of a controversial new rule that allows US authorities to take away flying licenses without disclosing any evidence.

The cases against Maan Hassan Zarie and Tarek Hassan Jifry stem from the Transportation Security Administration's new responsibility to conduct threat assessments of all pilots, mechanics and flight instructors authorized to work or fly in the United States, the Journal said.

The Saudi men are appealing the ruling.

The 2001 Aviation and Transportation Security Act, which

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DCC wakes up timely

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) took some special measures to clean up the leftovers of the sacrificial animals following Eid-ul-Azha.

DCC workers sprayed bleaching powder on roads and footpaths in different areas of the city. They were seen in action in localities like Jatrabari, Syedabad, Gopibagh and Mirpur.

The rain on Eid day also helped to clean up the roads and lanes.

But some narrow lanes and by-lanes remained unclean, which resulted in bad smell.

"People sacrificed animals here at the Syedabad khal (canal) but did not remove the wastes of animals", a grocer in front of the canal said to this correspondent.

The environment and forest ministry in a notification urged the city people to dig a hole before sacrificing an animal, but people did not follow the instruction.

This correspondent found the leftovers of sacrificial animals in Jatrabari and Syedabad area.

The DCC deployed 600 workers with 120 additional trucks to clean up the leftovers of the sacrificial animals, DCC sources said.

It allocated two bags of bleaching powder for every ward to protect the environment from the wastes of sacrificial animals.



PHOTO: STAR

Ruplal House, one of Dhaka's most historic buildings, has been left to its own fate, with encroachment and neglect wreaking havoc on the archaeologically-protected site.

Next door to oblivion

PINAKI ROY

One of Dhaka's most historic buildings is facing potentially disastrous neglect, although it is an archaeologically-protected site.

The 60-room Ruplal House in Farashganj once boasted a conference hall, a dance floor and a playhouse. It is fronted by six Doric columns mimicking classical Greek building style. But its beauty has faded, because of neglect.

The river engineering corps of the armed forces uses it as quarters.

A wholesale spice market and Zaker Party activists have taken over the ground floor and corridors.

A ground floor corridor has been converted to a bathroom. Garbage is dumped in another corner. A tubewell has been set up in the yard.

Images carved on the pillars have been defaced with cement and mud. Graffiti covers almost every wall and pillar.

Doors, windows and iron grilles are all falling apart and two of the four wooden staircases are run-down.

Ruplal House was built 400 years ago, says Samsul Waresh, an architecture professor.

"Lost heritage is lost forever. We have to remember the present is extension of the past," Waresh said.

The Department of Public Works took charge in 1976 but showed total indifference to protection. It was declared an archaeologically protected site in

1989, but the Department of Archaeology has also been indifferent to its fate.

Dewan Delwar Hossain, director of the archaeology department, admitted that he had not visited the site since taking office 18 months ago.

"We repair historical mosques and people go there to offer prayers," Hossain said. "People are allowed to visit some archaeological sites. I cannot say why the river engineering corps uses it as quarters."

The only reminder of the building's archaeological significance is the signboard. "The Ruplal House is an archaeological site. Any change to the building is prohibited. Violators of the instructions may be sentenced to a one-year imprisonment," the board reads.

The house may have belonged to a well-known Armenian landlord, Aratun, says historian Muntasir Mamun. History records that a zamindar, Ruplal Das, bought the house and hired the Martin Company in Kolkata to do repairs.

Mamun suggested that the Buriganga protection taskforce should take charge of conservation as the site is close to the Buriganga river.

The archaeology department has 346 protected monuments and only 93 staff to look after them, said Mohammed Ali, a department official. "How can we protect these sites with so little manpower?"

Nazmul Ahsan Chowdhury, secretary of the cultural affairs ministry, admitted that he did not know anything about the situation and promised to look into the matter.

'Rajpunnah' festival begins at Rangamati tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A three-day traditional "Rajpunnah" festival of the Chakma tribe will begin at Rangamati tomorrow.

Fanfare and tribal cultural programmes will mark the festival when 173 Chakma tribal headmen will deposit land revenues to their 'king' Raja Debasysh Roy, officially designated as Chakma Circle Chief. Roy is the 51st chief of the Chakma Circle.

This year, declaration of Trivhubon Aryodeve Roy, son of the Chakma Circle Chief, as the crown prince will add colour and enthusiasm to the festivities.

Sources said about 500 distinguished guests from home and

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PHOTO: STAR

A woman decorates another woman's hair with flowers to celebrate the Pahela Falgun, the first day of spring in Bangla calendar, at the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, on Thursday.

Dhaka to relocate citizens at-risk in Gulf region

Japanese asked to leave Iraq, wider ME

AFP, Tokyo

Japan became the latest Asian nation yesterday to advise its nationals to pull out of Iraq and the wider Middle East as the clouds of war intensified over the Gulf.

Tokyo's announcement followed a spate of official warnings from Asian governments urging their nationals to leave ahead of an imminent attack on Baghdad.

"Today, we issued the highest-level evacuation advisory as we received information that it is getting difficult to secure departure means from Iraq," the Japanese foreign ministry said.

Only 36 Japanese, including 19 journalists and photographers, are still in Iraq, but about 80 people working for non-government organi-

sations and anti-war groups plan to visit Baghdad soon, the official said.

Tokyo followed the lead of nations including China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India, which have all announced contingency plans to evacuate diplomatic staff and nationals in the event of a conflict.

Bangladeshi officials in Dhaka said they were putting together plans to relocate at-risk citizens in the region to Jordan. About 1.7 million Bangladeshis work in the Gulf, including one million in Saudi Arabia, 300,000 in the United Arab Emirates and more than 150,000 in both Kuwait and Oman, according to the expatriate ministry.

On Monday, state media announced that Beijing was cutting its embassy staff in Baghdad and drawing up plans to relocate its

citizens living in Iraq.

China, which is advocating a political solution to the crisis, said it was calling home all but essential consular staff from Baghdad and was making arrangements to move Chinese nationals to neighbouring Jordan once hostilities broke out.

Jakarta on Tuesday said it had formed a team to coordinate the removal of its citizens from danger zones in the Middle East to the relative safety of Syria, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

The team, made up of officials from various ministries, had been due to leave Indonesia on Thursday to lay the groundwork for the evacuation plans.

An estimated 50,000

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Obituary

Noted social worker M Shahidullah Khan Selim died of heart attack in the USA on Wednesday, the Eid day. He was 67, said a press release.

He is survived by one son, two daughters, four brothers, three sisters and a host of friends and admirers.

The namaj-e-janaja of Shahidullah Khan was held at the Garden-groove Islamic Center in Los Angeles on Friday and later he

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Hindu hardliners hit lovers

AFP, Bombay

The residents of India's largest city celebrated Valentine's Day yesterday without their usual greetings cards as leading stores refused to stock cards explicitly associated with the holiday, which is violently opposed by Hindu hardliners.

Bombay shop owners said they were selling only generic "love" or "friendship" cards this Valentine's Day as they feared attacks by Shiv Sena, a right-wing Hindu movement that has denounced the festival as "a bad Western influence on Indian culture."

"Those who do not want violence will not celebrate Valentine's Day," Shiv Sena's working president Udhav Thackeray warned last week.

Militants of Shiv Sena, a Bombay-based group which is allied with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP party, on Thursday smashed up two shops in the Indian capital that were selling Valentine cards.

"It happened in Delhi yesterday.

It can happen here, too. We do not want any violence and so are not selling Valentine cards," said Omer Attarwala, owner of Ally's Gift Gallery, a popular Bombay greeting card shop.

"Why take a risk when you know that every year there is some type of violence in the city on Valentine Day?"

Instead, retailers in Bombay are marketing "love cards" or "friendship cards" that can suit the holiday without an explicit mention of Valentine's Day.

"We are now promoting these cards, which we anyway sell throughout the year," Attarwala said.

Satyam Collections, one of the largest chain of greeting card shops in Bombay, did not promote Valentine's Day this year or last, said Rinesh Cheda, manager at a Satyam outlet in south Bombay.

Shiv Sena has long opposed Valentine's Day, citing its Christian origin and blaming it for such ills as AIDS and sexual harassment.

But its aggressive campaign has not dented Indian enthusiasm for

the festival of love, which is now celebrated, particularly among the young, with a zeal and commercialisation once seen only for Hindu festivals.

Attarwala sold more than 2,000 cards in the first two hours Friday, while Satyam Collections sold more than 3,000 just at the south Bombay store.

And Valentine's Day cards -- including those that explicitly mention the holiday -- are also popular outside of Shiv Sena's main hub of Bombay.

Archies, the country's largest chain for cards and gifts, said it had printed around two million cards for the holiday, a 10 per cent rise on the previous year.

"The profile of buyers is mixed. I have sold cards to college boys and girls, youngsters and even elderly people. The feeling of love is very much evident in the city today," said Cheda of Satyam Collections.

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PHOTO: STAR

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) ran a cleanup drive (left) on the Nayabazar Road yesterday. However, dung and offal are still dumped on the Bangshal Road after the Eid-ul-Azha. This year, DCC workers have sprayed bleaching powder on roads and sidewalks in different areas of the capital.