

Baghdad defiant despite UN ultimatum

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq remained defiant against UN orders to destroy banned al-Samoud 2 missiles, asserting yesterday that it was left with no choice but to take up arms against an imminent US-led war.

As Washington and its allies introduced a tough draft UN resolution that would open the way to military action, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein insisted in a rare US television interview that the missiles did not breach regulations.

Iraq's state-controlled press took up the charge against UN President George W Bush.

"The insistence of the administration of little Bush to ignore the will of the international community ... only leaves the Iraqis the choice

of defending their lands," said Ath Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath party.

"Iraq has made up its mind on confronting the aggression and the aggressors and is confident in achieving victory," charged the government al-Jumhuriya daily.

Saddam responded to a UN demand to destroy his al-Samoud 2 stockpile by denying that even the most advanced missiles violated UN restrictions.

"We do not have missiles that go beyond the proscribed range," he insisted in a CBS television interview, his first with a US journalist in a decade.

Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix has given Iraq until Saturday to begin destroying the missiles, which can carry a war-

head of 300 kilograms (660 pounds), as well as its component parts and manufacturing systems.

It came after a panel of weapons experts concluded that they exceeded the allowed range of 150 kilometres (93 miles).

On Monday, Saddam's top scientific advisor, General Amer al-Saadi, promised that Iraq would respond "quite soon" to the destruction request.

In Baghdad, South African experts were expected yesterday to hold a morning round of meetings at the foreign ministry with officials liaising with UN arms inspectors, including Saadi.

South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad, leading a team of nuclear and chemical-biological arms experts who worked on their country's disarmament

in the 1990s, said Monday that "the objective of our visit is to work seriously to stop war and spread peace."

Pahad visited Baghdad earlier this month to urge Saddam to cooperate fully with UN inspections. South Africa is the only country in the world to have voluntarily dismantled its weapons of mass destruction.

The UN demand for the destruction of the missiles is widely seen as a last chance to avoid the UN Security Council approving the use of force against Saddam's regime.

In the CBS interview, Saddam also challenged Bush to join him in a live radio and television satellite linkup to debate the need for war before the world.



PHOTO: STAR

Members of the Projonmer Chetona (spirit of the generation) hold posters, placards and banners during a human chain at Shahbagh yesterday, urging the Dhaka mayor for immediate anti-mosquito drive.

N'ganj in crime grip

SHAMEEM MAHMUD

Narayanganj is now in the grip of a new set of criminals allegedly under patronisation of some Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders.

With disappearance of Awami League (AL) leaders from the town, they have targeted knitting and garment factories, allege local businessmen.

Factory owners are intimidated into selling 'waste fabrics' cheap to the extortionists, they say.

They also extorted money from transport owners with the help of armed men and clashed among themselves over share of the money.

The extortionists pay police officials monthly kickbacks to continue their activities, the businessmen alleged.

The rise in extortion was blamed on Zakir Khan, who is one of the in the killing of a top businessman in Narayanganj.

The killing of Sabbir Alam Khondokar on February 18 is linked to extortion, says a senior police officer. Sabbir, vice-president of the Bangladesh Knitting Manufacturers and Exporters Association, who took a public stand against extortion.

The businessmen also accused a local minister of giving protection to Zakir, former convenor of the district Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

Zakir controls the knitting and garment factories in Deobhog, Baburyle, Fatullah and Mazdair with an armed gang.

It is estimated he earns up to Tk 30 lakh a month from the sales of 'waste fabrics' of the knitting factories in Fatullah alone, said a businessman.

Momin Ullah David, convenor of the district Jubo Dal, allegedly controls Chashara, Mission Para, Talla, Zamtala and Godanali. His group is alleged to launder money from tender bids of the Bangladesh

Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), headquartered in Khanpur.

Sources allege that cadres of BNP lawmaker Giasuddin Ahmed extort tolls from truck drivers and owners at the Shimrail intersection, said sources.

Giasuddin also set up 'stone-crush factories' illegally on the Shitalakhya river embankment. His cadres allegedly captured dozens of lime factories in Siddhirganj, said the sources.

Monirul Alam Sentu, president of the Fatullah Jubo Dal, has control of dyeing, re-rolling and spinning mills and the Aliganj Truck Stand. Iftekhar Ahmed Farid dominates business firms in Panchoboti area.

Superintendent of Police Noor Mohammad said police could not take action against the extortionists, as no victim complained so far.

"The businessmen fear back-

Khaleda to attend informal meeting of OIC today

BSS, Kuala Lumpur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will attend the informal meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) here today.

The meeting will be held at the Putra World Trade Centre, venue of the 13th Non-aligned Movement (NAM) summit.

More than 40 members of the OIC are expected to attend the meeting which will discuss prevailing situation in Iraq and Palestine.

Malaysia initiated the informal consultation, taking advantage of the presence of many OIC leaders at the NAM summit.

Khaleda Zia is expected to return home today.

Five to die for murder in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Five people were sentenced to death in a murder case here yesterday.

The convicts are Safar Uddin, son of Abdul Berek, Nasir Uddin, son of late Asad Ali, Jamir, son of Iskandar, Shahabuddin, son of Sonu Mia and Kacha Mia, son of Fajil.

They all hail from village Barofound under Sylhet Sadar upazila. According to the prosecution, the accused attacked Rais Mia, son of late Anju Mia at village Umirgaon on November 7, 1996 and snatched Tk 5000 from him.

As Rais cried for help, the members of the gang stabbed him. He died on the spot.

Abdul Ahad, brother of the victim, filed a murder case with Kotwali thana the following day, accusing the five.

Detention of Suvra Dev legal: SC

BSS, Dhaka

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday dismissed the leave to appeal filed by singer Suvra Dev challenging the High Court judgement which declared his detention legal.

The court also cancelled Suvra's bail and asked him to surrender before the lower court within seven days.

Suvra Dev was arrested on December 5, 2002 in connection with a criminal case filed with Ramna police station. He was given detention under the Special Powers Act on December 10, 2002.

A writ petition was filed with the High Court challenging the detention order and the court issued rule in this regard.

After hearing, a division bench of the High Court discharged the rule and declared his detention legal.

Later, a leave to appeal was filed before the Appellate Division challenging the verdict.

Senior Advocate Mahbubey Alam appeared before the court for Suvra while Attorney General A F Hasan Arif and Assistant Attorney General Zaman Akhter Bulbul for the state.

Indemnity law passed to save PM: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The indemnity law has been passed to save the head of the government from trial for 'killing people' rather than to save the armed forces, Awami League President Sheikh Hasina said yesterday.

"The person who ordered the Operation Clean Heart will be safe, but the army men (involved in the killings) would not be spared because of the amendment to the law," she said. "The armed forces must understand this reality."

Hasina was talking to journalists at the Zia International Airport on her return from Saudi Arabia after performing Hajj.

"The head of the government used the armed forces to kill people. Yet, nothing will happen to her," the opposition leader said.

She termed the indemnity law an 'assault on humanity' and 'violation of the constitution' that disgraced Bangladesh abroad.

"There is no such law in the world," she said.

The amendment to the law has provided for disciplinary actions against the joint forces for offences during the countrywide Operation Clean Heart, she said.

The Joint Drive Indemnity Bill 2003 was passed on Sunday that gave the joint-forces immunity to legal proceedings in civil courts for their activities during the countrywide Operation Clean Heart between October 16 last year and January 9 this year.

The government violated rules of procedures of parliament while passing the law, as amending a bill after it "entered the third reading" is

unprecedented, Hasina said.

The indemnity law would deprive people from their constitutional rights to seek justice. At least 58 people were killed and hundreds injured during the drive, she said, quoting newspaper reports.

The people are yet to know under which law the prime minister deployed the armed forces in the Operation Clean Heart, the AL chief said.

She criticised Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for joining the Non-alignment Movement (NAM) conference at Kuala Lumpur, which the latter once termed a 'dead horse'.

"Had the summit been held in Dhaka, Bangladesh could have led the NAM, a big and powerful international forum," she said.

She censured cancellation of the

Moudud makes a mystery out of judges appointment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said the opposition should not comment on confirmation of judges without knowing what the chief justice had recommended.

"No one knows what the chief justice has recommended," he told the Jatiya Sangsad in response to a query from an Awami League lawmaker.

"Therefore, how can one say for sure whether the government has ignored the recommendation or not?"

Meanwhile, Ozaer Faruk, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, exchanged views at his office with the senior lawyers on the issue.

The Bar Association had earlier announced that it would go for a movement against the government action.

The lawyers noted that since 1980 there had been no instance of the government ignoring the chief justice's recommendations on confirmation of the services of additional judges.

"Exceptions to the rules began to take place after the present government came to power," former Bar Association president Abdul Baset Majumder told The Daily Star quoting the discussions.

The senior lawyers noted that

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Terror-risk list

2 Congressmen ask US attorney general to drop Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two US Congressmen have recently differed with the Department of Justice (DOJ) decision to place Bangladesh on the list of countries under the National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS).

The system requires male Bangladeshi nationals aged 16 years or older to undergo a special registration procedure through the Immigration and Naturalisation Services (INS).

"We have not seen any evidence to support the decision and are troubled the DOJ would add Bangladesh to this list," Congressman Joseph Crowley and Frank Pallone, Jr said in a letter to the US Attorney General John Ashcroft.

They urged the DOJ to remove Bangladesh if it failed to produce evidence supporting the decision to include Bangladesh in the NSEERS list.

They said Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim nation that has not been known to harbour any known group of terrorists.

In fact, American ambassador in Bangladesh told Time Magazine on October 20 last year that the US Embassy in Dhaka follows terrorism issues closely and has no evidence to

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JS passes two bills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad last night passed two bills -- one seeking to introduce 'alternative dispute resolution (ADR)' and the other proposing imposition of travel tax on foreigners.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed piloted the bill for ADR--Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2003 aimed at settlement of disputes through mediation if contesting parties agree to it.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman proposed passage of the other bill--Travel Tax Act, 2003.

The House passed both the bills through voice vote, rejecting opposition lawmakers' proposals for seeking public opinion on both the bills.

Speaking in support of the bill, Moudud hoped introduction of the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) would help ease the huge backlog of cases in courts.

"There are about five lakh civil cases pending with courts in the country now. Even if 20 per cent of these cases are resolved through alternative dispute resolution, it will make a great difference in justice delivery system in the country," the law minister said.

The 'Travel Tax Act, 2003' seeks to bring foreign visitors under tax-net, requiring them to pay travel tax while leaving Bangladesh.

The Act allows the authorities to impose and realise travel tax of up to

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PHOTO: STAR

UN Assistant Secretary General Hafiz Pasha (R) speaks at a press briefing on how the region is faring in its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

45-50m Bangladeshis extremely poor, says top UN official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 45-50 million people in Bangladesh are extremely poor despite a "fairly well" progress in poverty alleviation in the last decade, UN Assistant Secretary General Hafiz Pasha told a briefing yesterday.

People who live on less than a dollar a day are extremely poor, according to the United Nations. However, the standard varies from region to region.

Global combat against poverty would need more resources, Pasha said. "Improved governance is key to check leakage of resources."

The UN official called for enhanced trade opportunities for poorer nations, saying abolition of quota system in 2004 will be a

challenge as well as an opportunity for least developed countries like Bangladesh.

Pasha praised the readymade garment sector's growth under the quota regime. "I have seen some competitive readymade garment units in the past few days. I think these will do well in competitive environment."

The UNDP will form a taskforce with the government to devise a plan to help Bangladesh overcome initial inconvenience of the quota-free regime, he said.

The UN official leaves today after attending a three-day meeting on consolidation of plans to help Asian countries meet the millennium development goals (MDG).

The United Nations

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12 CPA officials sacked for links with pilferers

ABDULLAH AL-MAHMUD, Ctg

Twelve officials of the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) have been sacked for their alleged involvement with a racket engaged in pilferage of imported goods and containers from the restricted area of Chittagong port.

The termination order of the officials including Assistant Director of Security Tariqul Islam was effective from yesterday.

Eight of the officials who were terminated were from the security department, while the rest are from the traffic department.

CPA Chairman Commodore (ret'd) Zulfiqar Ali signed the termination order yesterday.

It was the first such large-scale termination at the Chittagong port, sources said.

The CPA said the termination followed a one-year inquiry that proved their involvement with the

racket engaged in pilferage of goods and containers.

He said there were allegations that 25 officials and staffs of the CPA are engaged in the pilferage of goods and containers. They were kept off-duty for last one year and during this period no remarkable incident of pilferage of goods or container took place inside the restricted area.

Actions would also be taken against the others also, he added.

The terminated officials include Assistant Commissioner Tariqul Islam, Assistant Sub Inspector Abdul Quader, gate sergeants Auran Chandra Das and Abdul Gani, security guards Nurul Afser, Jahangir Arefin, Fazlul Quader and Kamal Uddin, Traffic Inspector Samiran Kanti Barua, assistant traffic inspectors Babul Chandra Mukharjee and Abdus Salam and Junior Outdoor Assistant Monabbar Hossain.