

Saddam's exile to be an option, says Annan

AFP, Dubai

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's exile would be "an option" to avoid a US-led strike against Iraq, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in an interview published Friday in the Arab newspaper Al-Hayat.

Annan also told the London-based daily that, while he wanted to resolve the crisis through peaceful means, he saw little point in travelling to Baghdad at this stage.

Exile "is one of the available options, but I am not sure whether President Saddam Hussein will abandon power ... or go into exile in another country."

Asked if he intended going to the Iraqi capital, Annan said: "I believe in the need to do everything I can to find a peaceful solution to the crisis ... but I don't see the usefulness (of a visit) at the present stage."

More than 200,000 US and British forces are poised to attack Iraq over its alleged programme of weapons of mass destruction, and US President George W Bush warned late Thursday that there was little time left for diplomacy.

Annan said that in case of war, the

Bhokra

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says Majumdar.

Not many travellers prefer the 60-kilometre road between Bashirhat and Kolkata because of its bad shape. Moreover, bus services with Bhokra are not good enough, say the officials.

All set for EU enlargement treaty to be signed Apr 16

AFP, Ljubljana

Everything is on schedule for the 10 European Union candidate countries to sign the accession treaty on April 16, EU enlargement commissioner Gunter Verheugen said Thursday on a visit to Slovenia, one of the new entrants.

"The accession treaty strategy and timetable are unchanged. I am very optimistic that the treaty will be signed on April 16 in Athens," Verheugen told journalists in Ljubljana as he began a two-day visit to Slovenia.

The former Yugoslav republic is one of 10 mainly former communist states due to sign the 6,000-

United Nations would have the task of ensuring emergency food supplies reach some 10 million Iraqi people.

"We will then have to take care of two million refugees," the UN chief warned. "The situation (in Iraq) is precarious."

According to UN figures, five million Iraqis already have no access to clean drinking water and nearly one million children in the country suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Defeated chairman candidates call hartal in Khagrachhari

UNB, Khagrachhari

Two defeated chairman candidates of Boalkhali and Merung unions yesterday brought out processions in their areas, urging the people to observe hartal.

Meanwhile, the winning chairman and their supporters also staged demonstrations in protest against the hartal.

The election was held on Thursday.

BSF hands over 232 fishermen to BDR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two hundred thirty-two out of the 256 Bangladeshi fishermen detained in Indian jails since last December were yesterday handed over to the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) by the Indian Border Security Forces (BSF), a BBC report said yesterday.

The report said these fishermen were in violation of the Foreigner's Act by trespassing into Indian waters and were turned over to police by Indian fishermen.

The fishermen had been under judicial custody and were acquitted on March 4.

The report quoting officials of the West Bengal state government said 180 more male and female Bangladeshis are in jail at different districts of the state and could be released if Bangladesh wants them back.

Ring leader of criminal gang arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged ringleader of a criminal gang was arrested from Badamtali in the city Thursday night.

The arrested, identified as Mafizul Islam alias Dud Mian, is said to be the godfather of nine-shooter Ziku Babul. A team of Kotwali police raided some areas in Badamtali and arrested him.

Police said Dud Mian had foiled a BNP meeting by exploding bombs and firing shots during hartal hours on January 26, 1996.

A case was filed in this regard.

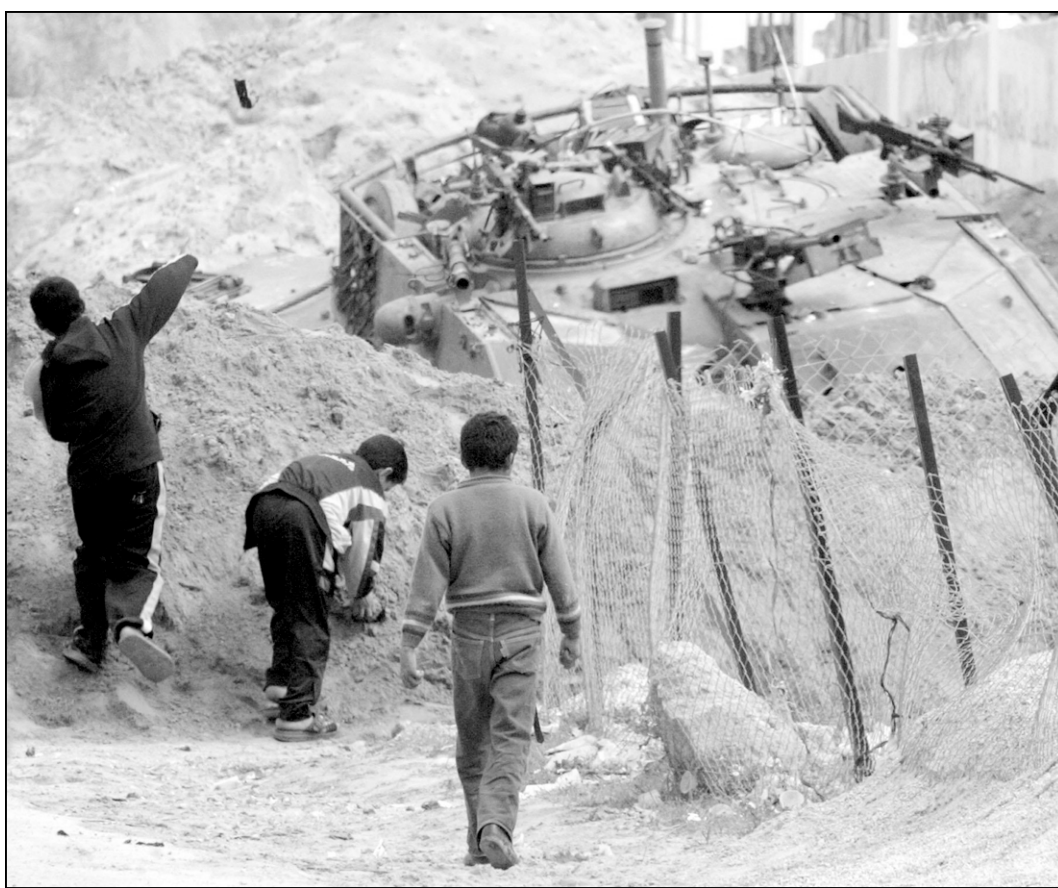


PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian youths run for cover after throwing stones at an Israeli tank in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Lahia yesterday. Israeli army units with dozens of tanks continued to occupy the area after advancing overnight in an "open-ended operation".

President may be requested

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feel that the CEC has lost his ability to run the EC.

"Since the President can take steps on the basis of the Supreme Judicial Council's report, we will request him to look into his (CEC's) ability to run the office," one of the lawmakers aggrieved by Syed's comments told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the party deputies demanding his resignation may sit tomorrow to discuss the matter.

As per the Constitution, the provision for removal of a CEC and a Supreme Court judge is the same. The President, upon any information from the Council or any other source, can ask the Council to probe it.

The government, irked by the CEC's actions in the last couple of months, is considering a constitutional amendment regarding the age limit of Election Commissioners. The amendment proposal is likely to be placed in the next parliament session.

The Constitution says a member of the Election Commission (EC) will hold office for five years. The government may opt to slash

the CEC by fixing the age limit for an EC member, sources said.

Ruling party insiders say, its policymakers have been observing that Syed's comments on the Union Parishad (UP) polls and his plea for troops deployment damaged the government's image.

Two ruling party lawmakers Helaluzzaman Talukder Lahu and Shahidul Huq Jamal claimed in parliament that the CEC had made derogatory comments about them and demanded his removal. These alleged comments seriously angered the government.

It all started late last year when the EC announced UP polls schedule and the government differed with it. The EC was finally forced to defer the election by three weeks.

Then, in December, the EC demanded troops deployment in aid of the civil administration to maintain law and order during the January 25-March 16 polls.

But, the government turned down his request, saying the atmosphere was conducive to holding of a peaceful election. The CEC repeated his demand

but the government rejected his plea on all occasions.

His request came at a time when the government was winding up the army-led Operation Clean Heart and the indemnity ordinance was in the offing.

On several occasions, Syed told newsmen that he would continue demanding army deployment for holding of a free and fair election. At one stage he said widespread rigging and violence took place during polls that claimed more than 50 lives and injured several thousands.

Giving these accounts, the CEC told newsmen on February 3 that the UP polls was more or less a futile exercise. This greatly embarrassed the government and led to the buildup of sentiment against him.

BNP leader

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deployed at Bagmara and Rupsha busstand.

The attempt on the life of Mohiuddin Shaikh is a sequel to intra-party rivalry for capturing leadership of Rupsha-Bagherhat Bus Owners' Association, police said.



PHOTO: AFP

General Sir Mike Jackson (R), Britain's armed forces chief, talks to the press during his visit to Camp Eagle 4 in the northern Kuwaiti desert yesterday. The general said British forces in the Gulf are not fully ready for a potential attack on Iraq but could fight if necessary.

Blix set to submit report

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would boost the efforts of France, Germany and Russia to avoid conflict by launching a personal political initiative to give Iraq more time.

The chief arms inspector planned to tell the UN Security Council that Iraq has demonstrated substantive cooperation in a number of areas, such as destroying its al-Samoud 2 missiles and allowing private interviews with scientists, The Times said, without indicating its sources.

Blix would also publish a list of previously classified questions for Iraq that formed the basis of an alternative proposal by France, Germany and Russia to give inspections more time, the paper said.

Meanwhile, in a reminder of just how close Iraq could be to invasion, the head of the British armed forces said in Kuwait his troops were now ready to join any US-led attack.

US and British planes yesterday bombed a mobile radar system in southern Iraq, the US military said. UN observers on the Iraq-Kuwait

frontier said parts of a fence along the border had been cut down, in apparent preparation for war.

With opposition to war hardening among France, Russia, China and Germany, foreign ministers gather in the 15-member Security Council on Friday to hear reports from UN inspectors on Iraq's weapons likely to change few minds. The session opens at 10:30 a.m. EST.

Speeches from undecided members, including Chile, Mexico, Pakistan, Guinea, Angola and Cameroon, will be carefully watched for an indication of support or rejection of a draft US-British-Spanish resolution that declares Iraq has failed to take its last chance to disarm peacefully.

A resolution in the Security Council needs a minimum of nine votes and there must be no veto from its five permanent members - which include France, Russia and China, who have declared they will not let a war resolution pass, as well as Britain and the United States.

So far the draft resolution sponsored by the United States, Britain

and Spain appears to fall short of the nine votes.

Bush dismissed Iraq's destruction of some banned missiles in recent days as a charade and reiterated he could launch a war without UN approval.

"When it comes to our security, we really don't need anybody's permission," he told a news conference on Thursday. "Yes we will call for a vote, no matter what the whip counts."

"If we need to act we will act and we really don't need United Nations approval to do so," he said. "It's time for people to show their cards, to let the world know where they stand when it comes to Saddam."

Asian and European stock markets fell as Bush's remarks were interpreted to mean war was virtually certain.

US and British diplomats expect a vote on the resolution next week. But reports from Blix and his colleague Mohamed ElBaradei, in charge of nuclear arms teams, are expected to be more positive than Washington would like.

Australians

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Adam Gilchrist were content to work the ball for ones and twos and wait for the bad ball.

The ball did not turn as much as it did in September but the more measured approach ensured the Sri Lanka spinners were never able to establish a stranglehold on Australia.

Only time will tell what harm Australia's performance has done for Sri Lanka's World Cup chances as, above all, it proved that the threat posed by their spinners was by no means insurmountable.

For Australia, it was a day when another piece of the plan to retain the trophy they won in England in 1999 fell into place.

Before the match, Ponting had said a major issue that needed to be addressed was the lack of a major score or partnerships between the side's top four batsmen.

The captain looked like a man on a mission on Friday as he moved to his 12th one-day international hundred from only 96 balls, the second fifty occupying just 30 deliveries.

After Matthew Hayden (22) and Adam Gilchrist added 75 for the first wicket, Ponting then shared a second wicket stand of 106 with Gilchrist. That partnership only ended when the latter was run out by a direct hit for 99, the first man to fall for that score in World Cup history.

If Sri Lanka were hoping Gilchrist's dismissal would offer some respite, they were wrong. Damien Martyn (52) joined Ponting to add a further 112 for the third

Transport strike on Cox's Bazar-Ctg & Cox's Bazar-Teknaf routes

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Local transport owners and workers enforced an indefinite strike on Cox's Bazar-Teknaf and Cox's Bazar-Chittagong routes yesterday.

The strike forced hundreds of tourists to remain stranded in the resort town.

They called the strike protesting damage to some buses allegedly by the students of Cox's Bazar College following the death of two students under the wheels of a bus five days ago.

The students alleged that transport workers intentionally pushed the students from the running bus, causing death of two students of the college on March 2.

Tripura CM for enhanced trade with Bangladesh

PTI, Agartala

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar said yesterday that his government wanted cordial relations with Bangladesh for enhanced border trade.

Talking to reporters after he was sworn in for the second consecutive term to head a Left Front government, Sarkar said the federal government should adopt a liberal attitude towards trade with Bangladesh.

He also renewed his appeal to insurgents in the state to give up violence and sit across the table for negotiations.

"I once again appeal to insurgents to give up violence and come to the negotiating table to solve their problems within the framework of the Constitution," he said.

On the so-called existence of 100 camps of insurgents on Bangladesh soil, he said the federal government has taken up the matter with Bangladesh.

wicket and, although only 66 came from the final 10 overs, Australia still had a commanding score of 319 for five.

To complete the good news for Australia, the results of a scan on all-rounder Andrew Symonds' injured groin revealed no major damage and he could come into contention for next Tuesday's Super Six match against New Zealand in Port Elizabeth.

Even without Shane Warne and Jason Gillespie, and before Sri Lanka had the chance to reply with batting of their own, Australia's claim on the World Cup looked even stronger.

Rumours of Laden's arrest go round in Pakistan

IANS, Quetta

A top al-Qaeda member has been arrested in Pakistan, and some reports speculate it could be Osama bin Laden or his son.

According to Online news agency, the mystery man was among nine al-Qaeda suspects arrested on Thursday near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border by American and Pakistani security agencies.

Unnamed sources were quoted as saying that security forces had stepped up operations in the area and the arrests were probably a result of leads given by al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Khalid Mohammed, who was arrested last week.

Mohammed is suspected to be one of the brains behind the 9/11 attacks. He was handed over to the US after his arrest in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

Mohammed had reportedly told US investigators that he met bin Laden last month in a mountainous border region in the province of Balochistan.

When Pakistani Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed was asked about the latest arrests, he said: "I don't have any information on this. I can't say anything."

Presidential spokesman Rashid Qureshi said he too had no knowledge about the reported arrests.

India sweat

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SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Kenya innings against India in their World Cup Super Six day-night match at Newlands on Friday.

| KENYA | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|-----|
| Otieno b Harbhajan | | | | | 79 |
| Shahrunout | | | | | 34 |
| Tikolo c Zaheer b Harbhajan | | | | | 3 |
| Odoyo lb w b Mongia | | | | | 32 |
| Odumbe not out | | | | | 34 |
| Obuya c Mongia b Srinath | | | | | 8 |
| Ongondo c Tendulkar b Srinath | | | | | 8 |
| MSujinot out | | | | | 11 |
| Extras: (b-4, lb-8, w-4) | | | | | 16 |
| Total: (For 6 wickets in 50 overs) | | | | | 225 |

Fall of wickets: 1-75, 2-81, 3-157, 4-165, 5-191, 6-206

| Did not bat: B Patel, H Modi, T Suji | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| Bowler | O | M | R | W | |

INDIA: Saurav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Mohammad Kaif, Rahul Dravid, Yuvraj Singh, Dinesh Mongia, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Jagval Srinath, Ashish Nehra.

Toss: Kenya

Umpires: Daryl Harper (Aus) and Peter Willey (Eng)

TV umpire: Simon Taufel (Aus)

Match referee: Wasim Raja (Pak)

Aerial spray

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ment and install those in an Air Force helicopter to minimise the cost.

A pilot will be sent abroad in a day or two for one week's training.

The equipment will cost Tk 62 lakh and those will be DCC's assets for future use also, he said.

The equipment will be supplied by King Air Company, a private concern, which will also hire a pilot to install the equipment in the helicopter, DCC officials said.

Khoka, who is also minister for fisheries and livestock, said the city dwellers will soon get rid of the mosquito menace.

Effective steps are also being taken to eradicate Aedes mosquito that carry the deadly Dengue virus.

"I can assure you that the corporation will eradicate Aedes mosquito at any cost and will not allow its breeding anymore. Larvacide, which kills Aedes mosquito, is in stock and a huge quantity is on way," he said.

Asked about the delay, he said the DCC needed clearance from the ministries of health, environment and agriculture and there were lengthy debates and discussions to get their approval. There was also delay in disbursement of funds to buy medicine and equipment.

There was debate on whether to purchase or hire an aeroplane. Even

when decision was taken to procure equipment and install those in a helicopter, then technical persons debated on whether to install the spray machine inside the helicopter or at its bottom. Finally, Air Force men decided to install the machine inside a chopper.

The prime minister had to intervene several times in the whole process.

The mayor said a comprehensive programme should be taken up to eradicate mosquito from the country.

Mosquito is a problem not only in the capital but also in all other cities and even in remote district towns, he said.

He said the Narayananj Poursahava chairman telephoned him requesting for aerial spray in the town.

Several ministers and parliament members also told him about the mosquito menace in their districts and constituencies, he said.

Aerial spray was first done in the city in 1979 and the last time in 1990.

Mosquito eradication was the job of the health ministry from 1948 to 1980 and then the department concerned was placed under the local government ministry. Finally the staff and equipment were placed under the DCC.

Cartoon festival
The inaugural ceremony of the first-ever feminist cartoon festival, organised by Oxfam-GB and Drik on the occasion of the International Women's Day, will be held. Venue: Drik Gallery, Dhanmondi. Time: 4.30pm. The festival will continue till March 15 from 3.00pm to 8.00pm daily.

Drama
Prachyanat, a theatre group, will stage a drama titled 'Koinya' marking the International Women's Day. Venue: Public Library auditorium, Shahbagh. Time: 7.00pm.

Film show
In observance of the International Women's Day, Academy Film Society will screen a Dutch film titled 'Antonia's Line', winner of the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. Venue: 21/C Jigatola. Time: 6.00pm.

Symposium
The inaugural function of a two-day symposium titled 'Technology and Industries based Higher Education', organised by Information Science and Technology Solution Ltd, will be held. Venue: BRAC Centre Inn, Mohakhali. Time: 4.30pm.

Discussion
Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) will organise a discussion and hold a rally on the occasion of International Women's Day with Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman as chief guest. Venue: Mohanagar Natyamancha. Time: 9.30am.

ASF rally
In observance of International Women's Day, Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) will arrange a gathering of around 200 women acid survivors from all over the country. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 9.30am.

ADAB procession
Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) will take out a procession marking the International Women's Day. Venue: National Museum. Time: 10.00am.

Seminar
People's Welfare and Information Centre (PWIC) and Centre for

Development Research, Bangladesh (CDBR), jointly organise a seminar on 'Library and Information Services in Bangladesh: Challenge for 21st Century'. Venue: Women's Voluntary Association auditorium, Dhanmondi. Time: 5.00pm.

Programming contest
The 5th Intra University Programming Contest, organised by the Computer Education and Training Centre of International University of Business, Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT), will be held. Venue: IUBAT campus, Dhanmondi. Time: 2.00pm.

Human chain
The Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) will form a human chain and hold a discussion on the occasion of International Women's Day. Venue: National Museum. Time: 10.00am.

Launching ceremony
The launching ceremony of computer aided education software titled 'Virtual Biggan O Ganit Shikikhoron' will be held with Education Minister Dr Osman Faruk as chief guest. Venue: BRAC University, Mohakhali. Time: 3.00pm.

Women's Day rally
The Social Committee to Resist Oppression on Women and Children, will hold a rally in observance of the International Women's Day. Venue: Central Shaheed Minar. Time: 3.00pm.

Science festival
The inauguration of a day-long science festival, organised by the mobile science and technology museum, will be held. Venue: Ahmed Bawani Academy, Armanitola. Time: 9.00am.

Rotary meeting
Regular weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka Central will be held. Venue: Dhaka Club. Time: 1.30pm.

ULC rally
In observance of International Women's Day, Uttara Ladies Club (ULC) organises a rally. Venue: Club premises. Time: 4.30pm.

Hasina
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Mohammad Nasim, Mohammad Hanif, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Obaidul Kader and Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Bir Bikram.

Asaduzzaman Noor MP conducted the rally, which was addressed by leaders of different front organisations of Awami League.

Apart from the high prices of essentials, Sheikh Hasina also criticised the enactment of the Joint Operation Indemnity Act, 2003.

She also criticised the leakage of question papers of BCS examination and alleged that it was done to accommodate cadres of the government by depriving deserving candidates.

A large number of people came in processions to attend the rally and carried colourful posters, banners, festoons and portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sheikh Hasina.

Kamal expelled
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the party did not issue any show-cause notice before expulsion.

"I am now people's candidate -- an independent candidate. I hope I would win the polls with people's support," he said.

However, another rebel candidate from the BNP for the same polls Ebaudul Haq Chan has not yet been expelled as he was admitted to hospital with heart attack.

Earlier, the BNP expelled its rebel candidate for the Sylhet City Corporation polls Advocate AFM Kamal on a similar charge.

Women's Day
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women represents a new way of doing development business.

Different organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes to observe the day.

Some 50 women's associations and development agencies under the banner of International Women's Day Observation Committee will hold rallies, processions and cultural programmes in the city to mark the day.

Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra and Shishu o Nari Nirajatan Protirodh Committee will hold rallies at different places in the city.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh National Co-ordination Council of Textile Garments and Leather Workers and 'A Stand for Self Reliance' will hold discussions in the city.