

Hasina: AL gives pen

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Turning to gas export, she reiterated her party's stand that gas can be exported only after meeting domestic demands. Only 3-4 per cent people now can utilise gas.

BNP-Jamaat alliance has come to power through conspiracy and giving undertaking to a foreign company to sell gas as Meer Jafar did in 1757 with East India Company."

She also unveiled the revised constitution and declaration of BCL at the function.

BCL President Liaqat Sikder presided over the function, conducted by its general secretary Nazrul Islam Babu. It was attended by, among others, AL leaders Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP and Obaidul Kader.

At the two-day workshop, eminent educationists have been invited to deliver lectures on politics, economics, history, rule of law, judiciary, democracy, Bengali nationalism, the War of Liberation, human rights, communalism, good governance, information technology and the life and activities of Bangabandhu.

On the first day yesterday, Prof Shamsul Huda Harun, Prof Abdul Bayes, Prof Syed Manjurul Islam, Prof Muntasir Mamoon and Dr Shireen Sharmin Chowdhury delivered lectures in their respective fields.

Syed Shamsul Huq, journalist Shariar Kabir, Dr Harun-or-Rashid,

Akram Hossain Chowdhury, Mostafa Zabbar and former BCL leaders will deliver lectures today.

Occupiers

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of the Embassy said.

It said that "justification of the military campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime could be only the disarmament of Iraq. However, until now no weapons of mass destruction have been found in the country, and the question arises, what goals of the anti-Iraq coalition were." The release said that the meeting of the top leaders of France, Germany and Russia was "not aimed at splitting the international community, but at finding solution to the Iraqi issue, which would be acceptable for everybody."

It said "the gathering of the three leaders at Saint-Petersburg was "not meant to criticise the action taken by the occupation forces," but it was stressed that under the Geneva Convention, it is the anti-Iraq coalition forces that must bear all responsibilities about the solution of humanitarian issues.

It said Russia is ready to consider the matter of cancelling Iraq's debt, but only by means of negotiation.

Russian Federation said it is the Iraqi people who should choose the destiny of their country. There are some known ways to do it. It cited example of Afghanistan where an international conference under UN aegis was held, then a transitional administration was appointed which in turn prepared the generalelection.



President Iajuddin Ahmed poses for photograph with a South Korean cultural troupe at Bangabhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Treasures looted from Baghdad museum feared lost

REUTERS, Washington

Antiquities experts, dismayed that US officials failed to heed their warnings to protect Baghdad's historic artifacts during the war, said on Monday they were concerned the priceless treasures looted from Iraq's main museum may never be recovered.

US archeological organizations and the UN's cultural agency UNESCO said they had provided US officials with information about Iraq's cultural heritage and archeological sites months before the war began.

University of Chicago Professor McGuire Gibson was among a group that met Pentagon officials several times and presented them with a list of archeological and other sites that should be protected, particularly the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad.

"We warned them about looting at the very beginning," said the archeologist

who has worked extensively in the region. "I was assured it would be secured."

Now, he said, the loss was immeasurable.

"The Baghdad museum is the equivalent of the Cairo Museum. It would be like having American soldiers 200 feet outside the Cairo museum watching people carry away treasures from King Tut's tomb or carting away mummies," said Gibson.

The museum, which housed key artifacts of ancient Mesopotamia, was ransacked and its contents taken or destroyed in a wave of looting that has swept the Iraqi capital since the collapse of President Saddam Hussein's rule last week.

UNESCO's deputy director, Munir Bouchenaki, said on Monday leading archeologists will meet in Paris on Thursday to seek ways to rescue Iraq's cultural heritage. They also plan a fact-finding mission to Iraq.

The US State Department said in a statement on Monday that people handling the looted artifacts would be liable to prosecution under Iraqi and US laws.

The US military in Iraq has instructions to protect antiquities and a US official, John Limbert, will take the lead in efforts to recover the objects, the statement said.

Sumer in southern Iraq was the home of the first known civilisation and the first writing, in the late 4th millennium BCE. Subsequent Mesopotamian civilisations built the major cities of Nineveh, Nimrud and Babylon.

Gibson likened the museum's destruction to that of the famed library founded by Alexander the Great in Egypt that was destroyed more than two thousand years ago.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told reporters the United States was concerned about the looting at the museum

and was working to secure the facility.

"The United States understands its obligations and will be taking a leading role with respect to antiquities in general but this museum in particular," he said.

Powell said the US would work with UNESCO, which earlier urged the US and Britain to take immediate steps to protect and preserve a heritage considered to be "one of the richest in the world."

A 1954 Hague Convention mandates protection of cultural property during conflict, an international group of archeologists and antiquities experts warned before the war. While Iraq had ratified the convention, the United States and Britain, both partners in the war in Iraq, have not.

Of the more than 170,000 objects in the museum were treasures like an alabaster Uruk Vase that dates back to 3500 BC, Gibson said.

Give up conflict, Tareque asks political leaders

ABUL KALAM AZAD,
from Cox's Bazar

BNP joint secretary general Tareque Rahman yesterday appealed to political leaders of all hues to give up conflict and muddling for greater national interest.

He said although Bangladesh was liberated 30 years ago, the majority of people remained poor as the political leaders and parties were still engaged in "unnecessary debates" on various issues.

"We all must stop the debate and should devote ourselves to developing the nation as well as improving the fate of the common man," he said.

Addressing a series of public gathering and wayside rallies during his day-long tour of different parts of Cox's Bazar district, he said: "There is no alternative to continued united efforts for bringing changes in the lifestyle of the vast majority."

Many countries in the world that were poorer than Bangladesh, have made massive development through tireless, collective efforts.

"It's time we worked together for national development," he said.

Tareque, the elder son of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the late President Ziaur Rahman, has recently launched motivational campaign to involve poor people in economic uplift activities.

As part of the campaign the poor will be provided with poultry and cattle from the newly founded Ziaur Rahman Foundation.

Tareque addressed rallies at Khurulia High School playground and Eidgha High School in Cox's Bazar, Sadar, Ukhia Primary School ground, Charamohoni Bazar under Ramu thana, teknaf Hoikon High School and Teknaf KG School ground besides gatherings in different parts of the district.

He distributed 100 goats among 100 families, 2,000 chickens among 200 families and 1,600 ducks among 200 families.

He asked the families to try to change their fate with the small things.

He also addressed a joint meeting of BNP and its different front organisations at Cox's Bazar Circuit House.

RU launches 2 new buses

BSS, Rajshahi

Two new buses for Rajshahi University (RU) were launched at the premises of administrative bhavan yesterday.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Faisal Islam Faruqi launched the buses as chief guest while Dean of Science Faculty Prof Nurul Ahsan and Director of Transport Department Prof, Zahidul Islam were present.

The university purchased the new TATA buses at the cost of Tk 45 lakhs.

Dhaka for govt by Iraqi people

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Replying to a volley of questions on Iraq, the foreign minister appeared very cautious about the fluid situation there, particularly about the installation of a new regime in post-Saddam Baghdad.

He said Bangladesh would be happy to see a legally constituted regime in Iraq and hoped that the process would be completed as early as possible.

"Bangladesh would like to see the new government set up by the Iraqi people," he said, adding that the new administration should be inclusive, not exclusive.

Asked about the US-sponsored meeting of Iraqi tribal and ethnic leaders at Nasiriyah aimed at formation of an interim authority to fill in the vacuum, Khan termed it a "good sign" when many views and ideas would come up about the future administration of Iraq.

"We will wait to see the outcome of the meeting," he told the reporters, adding that there are many thoughts going on about the formation of the post-Saddam government.

The foreign minister said the government would be waiting to see the

decision of OIC, NAM and UN about the government in the post-war Iraq, who have not taken any position or started thought process on the matter.

About the new US allegation against Syria, Khan said anybody could bring allegation, but "it has to be substantiated." He referred to British PM Tony Blair's remarks that they had no idea of chemical weapons in the arsenals of Syria.

In reply to a question about US Secretary of State Colin Powell's letters handed over to him by US Ambassador Mary Ann Peters, Khan said this is routine contact keeping Bangladesh posted about US policy and programme in Iraq.

Asked about Dhaka-Washington relations in the wake of US-led invasion of Iraq, he said, "We always have proper relation between the two countries."

Khan expressed concern about the destruction of the ancient Iraqi national museum--a repository of artefacts dating back to thousands of years. A museum does not belong to an individual but a nation as well as the world, he said.

US snarls sanctions on Syria

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"We have intelligence that shows that Syria has allowed Syrians and others to come across the border into Iraq, people armed and people carrying leaflets indicating that they'll be rewarded if they kill Americans and members of the coalition," Rumsfeld said.

U.S. officials stopped short of threatening to extend the Iraq war into Syria but insisted all options remain on the table. Analysts doubted Washington would launch military action, and expect it to use diplomatic pressure to try to persuade Assad to change course.

The Syrian cabinet said in a statement that the "escalated language of threats and accusations by some American officials against Syria are aimed at damaging its steadfastness and influencing its national decisions and (Arab) national stances."

"The cabinet rejected these accusations and allegations and saw them as a response to Israeli stimulus and a service to its (Israel's) goals and expansive greed..." it said, and demanded an end of the "American-British occupation of Iraq."

In Madrid, Syria's ambassador to Spain said earlier that US accusations that Syria was harbouring terrorists were an insult.

"It's an insult to my country, an

insult to a country that is a member of the UN Security Council and an insult to a peaceful country that is struggling and working for a lasting peace in the Middle East," the ambassador, Mohsen Bilal, told Spain's Cadena Ser radio.

Asked about a White House spokesman's description of Syria as a terrorist state harbouring terrorists, he replied "We reject this accusation categorically because it is baseless."

Bilal also denied Syria had granted protection to senior Iraqi leaders who may have fled across the border.

Syrian official daily Ath-Thawra also denied the US accusations, saying they were a smokescreen to pave the way for the Americans to keep Iraq occupied at will.

"America wants to occupy Iraq without encountering any opposition," the paper said, painting a picture of the US insuring its domination of the country "by means of a murderous civil war or tribal conflicts."

"The unfounded accusations and the provocative threats against Arab countries are in the same vein," the paper added.

Meanwhile, a UN spokesman said: "The secretary-general is concerned that recent statements directed at Syria should not contribute to a wider destabilisation in a

region already affected heavily by the war in Iraq."

Annan "reiterated his strongly held view that any claim of threats to international peace and security should be addressed in conformity with the provisions of the (UN) charter," the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon described Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as "dangerous" in a newspaper interview yesterday because he could misjudge the balance of power between their countries.

"Bashar Assad is dangerous because he is capable of making the same error over the balance of forces with Israel as he made with the Americans, and he has a force which obeys his orders: Hezbollah, Lebanon's Shiite Muslim militia, Sharon told Yedioth Aharonot.

"He is dangerous because his judgement is defective. During the war in Iraq, he proved he does not have the ability to reach the right conclusions from relatively obvious facts," he said.

The threatened US action on Syria includes a ban on sales of dual-use items to Syria; a ban on US exports to Syria; prohibiting U.S. businesses from operating in Syria; restricting Syrian diplomats; blocking Syrian airline flights, reducing diplomatic contacts with Syria; or

Bid to form govt

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London-based umbrella Iraqi National Congress, did not attend the meeting but sent a representative. Chalabi, whose background is littered with a number of financial scandals, will travel to Baghdad within the next three days.

Iraqi opposition leaders, meanwhile, fear the US administration is using the meeting to try to force Chalabi on them as a leader of a new Iraqi administration.

"We will press for any Iraqi civilian administration regardless of what the Americans say. An administration by Garner is not acceptable," said Mowaffak al-Rubaie, an Iraqi physician and opposition activist.

He said the Americans have outlined what Garner's administration would look like: Each ministry would be headed by an American, either military or civilian. Each minister would have two American deputies and eight American advisers, plus four Iraqi advisers from inside the country and four Iraqi exiles.

"It is not for the benefit of the Iraqi nation," said Abdul Aziz Hakim, a leader of the largest Shia group, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. "Iraq needs an Iraqi interim government. Anything other than this tramples the rights of the Iraqi people and will be a return to the era of colonisation."

"We don't accept a US umbrella or anybody else's," he said.

US and British officials say they hope Garner's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance can be up and running in Baghdad in as little as two weeks and that elections can be held within a year.

"It's critical that the world understand that this is only the fledgling first meeting of what will hopefully be a much larger series of meetings across Iraq," said Jim Wilkinson, spokesman at U.S. Central Command.

A national conference is planned ultimately to select the interim administration, perhaps within weeks, said a senior U.S. government official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Nassiriyah talks moderated by Zalmay Khalilzad, the White House envoy to Iraq, take place with the United States insisting that the looting and lawlessness that marked the first days after Saddam's overthrow on Wednesday are subsiding.

Kurdish groups appear unwilling to compromise on expanding their borders to include the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and the Kurdish parts of Mosul. That could pose a problem for the US because Turkey worries that Kurdish control of Kirkuk could lead one day to aspirations for independence, which could also encourage separatist Kurds in Turkey.

Wall collapse kills 4

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recorded at 57 kph at 5:00am. Met office recorded 44 mm rainfall at Dhaka during the storm, 33 mm at Tangail and 24 mm at Ishwardi.

Much of the capital plunged into darkness as the power supply was disrupted due to the storm. In many areas power supply was disrupted for an hour to 12 hours.

Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) said power supply was disrupted for nearly an hour at Mirpur, Satmasjid Road, Lalbagh, Kalabagan, Paltan and other parts of the city after insulators at 132-KV substation at Kalyanpur broke down during the storm.

Many residents of Shewrapara said power supply was restored after 14 hours at 12:00pm yesterday. It was restored at Kalyanpur at 10:00am, at Mirpur section-2 at 7:00am and at Kazipara at 5:00am.

Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) said in many places electric wires were torn and fuses of the transformer burnt during the storm.

US calls Saddam's men into action

US troops recalled thousands of police who previously worked for Saddam to help maintain order in Baghdad.

But US commanders said they were still on the alert for hit-and-run attacks by diehard Saddam loyalists and anti-American volunteers from other Arab countries.

Saddam himself has disappeared as have most of his aides. Only two out of 55 officials on a US "most wanted" list have so far been caught.

Baghdad was slowly returning to a semblance of normality after three weeks of air raids and four days of near-anarchy. Some food stores opened and traffic jams again clogged the streets, but water and power supplies remained cut.

The legacy of days of chaos includes the loss and destruction of thousands of treasures from the National Museum and Library and the ransacking of many government offices.

Anger rose in Tikrit, about 90 miles north of Baghdad, yesterday as Marines tightened their hold over Saddam's hometown. Tanks barred people from crossing over a Tigris River bridge that was heavily damaged in an air strike, and many helicopters flew overhead.

As looters ransacked a government agriculture building in Tikrit, infuriated residents complained to a reporter that the bridge into town had been blocked for days. Many said they were hungry and sick, but US forces would not let them go to hospital across the river.

With fighting on the wane in much of Iraq, US defence officials said Monday they soon would recall two of five aircraft carrier battle groups stationed in the Persian Gulf.

In Baghdad, Marines handed out flyers yesterday, appealing to people to stay inside between evening and morning prayers, "to avoid placing coalition forces in a position where we must make a distinction between you and terrorist or criminal elements during a time of limited visibility."

The message stopped short of imposing a formal curfew, though Marines had discussed putting one in place during the weekend's rampant looting. The flyer advised people not to carry anything resembling a weapon, suggested drivers pull over to let military convoys pass, and called on public service workers to contact Marines at the Palestine Hotel.

It also asked for tips on potential threats to coalition forces.

Hundreds of Iraqis gathered outside the Palestine Hotel on yesterday morning, pleading for law and order. Marines trying to placate the crowd moved out in front of the barbed wire they have laid in front of the hotel, but wound up struggling not to be thrust into it themselves as people pushed forward.

DESA said the electricity supply in the city last night was normal.

Acute water crisis hit many parts of the city including Mirpur and Mohammadpur yesterday due to the power disruption.

The nor'wester damaged tin-sheds, uprooted trees and blew away billboards and sign boards in many areas. Thousands of jubilant people, including women and children who were celebrating the New Year on Dhaka University campus, ran for safety.

The power supply at the university was snapped and cultural programmes at the Teachers-Students Centre were stopped abruptly. Many trees on the campus were uprooted. Several shops were damaged by fire stemming from electric short circuit at Tejoa, Karwan Bazar and Malibagh.

Flights of Malaysian Airlines, Singapore Airlines and Bangladesh Biman touched down at Bangkok after they failed to land at Dhaka due to the storm.

Launch owners

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in Kishoreganj in a launch capsized after it was hit by nor'wester.

Marine safety experts of the BIWTA said incompetence of the masters in driving launches is one of the major reasons behind big mishaps every year.

The tendency to ignore traffic rules and weather forecast contributes to fatal accidents.

The experts said accidents at night causes more losses of life compared to those in daytime. Launches lack safety instruments, especially lights.

The BIWTA asked launch owners to take additional safety precautions to avoid disaster at night.

Officials of the Meteorological Department said during this summer, nor'wester can strike any time anywhere. That's why, launch owners need to take extra measures, said officials at the Port and Traffic Department of the BIWTA.

Referring to the Kishoreganj capsized, officials said such accidents would be taking place if the owners and launch masters are not careful.

According to a BIWTA estimate, about 140 launches leave the Sadarghat terminal for nearly 40 destinations across the country while 100 launches anchor at the terminal everyday.

Allegations are there that officials of the Port and Traffic Department do not enforce the rules properly. The department is responsible for keeping an eye on loading of goods and boarding of passengers at the launch terminal.

A traffic department official at Sadarghat terminal however refuted the allegation.

"We do our best before the launches leave the terminal. Once it is on the way, the responsibility lies on the launch operators, that is, masters and drivers to see that safety measures are in place," he added.

Bangladesh Betar, prime source of weather forecasts for launches, broadcasts stale weather forecasts, an official at the Meteorological Department said.

He suggested such forecasts be updated every hour to give the launch masters a chance to sail to safety.

SARS 'patient'

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normally. Roughly four per cent of the cases turn fatal. WHO will hold a clinical teleconference on Wednesday next to gather international experiences in the management of SARS patients and pool data on the results of various therapeutic regimens.

Reports say that all infected with SARS virus may not develop the disease. Severity of SARS depends on the count of the virus and immunity of the host fighting the infection. So many infected people actually do not show any symptoms and that is the reason SARS is so puzzling to scientists.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday afternoon, SM Abul Khair, who had earlier shown symptoms of SARS, said, "I was sick while in Hong Kong and when I wanted to fly the airlines refused. However, after recovery I left the country and on arrival I was asked if I was feeling sick. Since I was not sick I left the airport

and drove straight to my home."

Khair continued, "Two days after arrival my body temperature suddenly rose to 105 degree Fahrenheit and I felt very uneasy. My worried wife took me to Millennium Hospital in Lalmatia where doctors after checking my pulse and temperature referred me to another hospital requesting me and my family members to put on protective masks."

Khair was admitted to the ICDH in Mahakhali where all SARS patients are supposed to be kept in isolation, according to a recent decision of the government.

Khair from Mollahat Police Station of Bagerhat district said that he had been travelling to Hong Kong for the past few years on business purposes and said none in his family were sick.

"If I was carrying SARS virus I am sure my family members would also be sick. But there is no symptom of SARS in me, but doctors have made a mess of it," he said.