

Saddam's new novel on underground struggle

IAN S, Baghdad

Deposed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had written a new novel but the US-led invasion of Iraq prevented its publication.

A copy of the manuscript called "The Great Awakening" has been obtained by the Iraq Press, which was also carried by Globalvision News.

In it, Saddam seems to be alluding to his humiliating defeat at the hands of the US, and his disappearance to mount underground struggle to regain former glory. If printed, the novel would be the fifth book, thought to be written by Saddam.

Officials at the now dissolved Ministry of Information say, Saddam was quite keen to have his new book printed before the start of the war. But he was not so lucky.

The plot is based on waging a secret war from a neighbouring Arab

state, following a decision by the novel's main character to step down as the President.

Turning into a fugitive, the hero, Bahloul, tries to recruit supporters and partisans in a bid to bounce back to limelight.

Reading the manuscript, one is tempted to believe that Saddam may have predicted his ouster from power and recourse to underground resistance.

Hundreds of thousands of copies of his fourth novel, "Leave Her, You the Devil" were printed and readied for distribution before the start of the US-led war to remove him from power.

But the quick fall of Baghdad to US troops on April 9 prevented the authorities from distributing them too.

Like his other books, the manuscript appears under a pseudonym.

But the books' widespread official promotion and reviews have left no doubt about their real author.

Saddam's fall from power has led to speculation inside and outside Iraq that certain Arab writers helped him with the plot and style.

"Zabiba and the King", thought to be Saddam's debut, tells the story of a monarch who avenges a woman's honour after she is raped the day US-led forces launched the 1991 Gulf War. The book was adapted for the stage and performed in Baghdad in 2003.

The Ministry of Education wanted to teach Saddam's first three novels in Iraqi schools from the start of the next academic year. The novels - "Zabiba and the King", "The Fortified Castle" and "Men and a City", would have been included in the school curriculum.

Donor-dictated policy

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The PDB distributes about 3,300MW power. The DESA consumes 1200MW and the REB 700MW. The rest is sold directly to consumers.

In 2001-2002, the PDB sold power worth Tk 1,540.85 crore to the DESA at the rate of Tk 1.96 and Tk 491 crore to the REB at Tk 1.84 a unit. It sold Tk 1,492.93 crore worth of power to direct consumers at Tk 3.15 a unit.

The previous year, a similar audit report on the PDB was filed with the energy ministry. But no action had since been taken to bring consistency to the sector. "It seems that no-one cares about virtual destruction of the PDB," said a source.

The DESA and the REB were formed on recommendations of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and are not complying with the principles that shaped their foundations.

The report on the period ending June 30 last year detected major inconsistencies in the affairs of REB-owned Rural Power Company Limited (RPCL). The government forced the PDB to buy RPCL power at the rate of Tk 4.67 a unit and to sell the same to the REB at Tk 1.84 in 2001-2002.

The DESA, DESCO (Dhaka Electricity Supply Company), and PGCB (Power Grid Company, Bangladesh) were all created upon donor prescriptions on grounds that the PDB was a losing concern with a high systems loss.

The REB was created to bring power to rural areas. And the RPCL was created with back-ups from the ADB when the government went for independent power generation to overcome investment crisis in the energy sector.

The investment crisis began in the early 1990s when the donors refused to invest in the sector because of a systems loss of over 42 per cent.

A PDB top official said, "Systems loss is no longer a problem. It is the donor-driven power sector governance policy that is ruining the PDB."

The power tariff has curved up under pressure from the donors. Again, the government has been forced to agree on principle to increase power tariff over 2 per cent within two months.

The PDB generated power worth Tk 2,889.63 crore in 2001-2002 at a cost of Tk 1.99 a unit or per kilowatt hour (kwh). But apart from the price of AES Haripur power, the PDB had to purchase power from IPPs at a higher rate

and swallow the loss.

The barge-mounted power plants sell power at following rates a unit -- Khulna Power Company at Tk 4.33, NEPC at Tk 3.93, and Westmont at Tk 2.96. The gas-fired AES Haripur plant sells power at Tk 1.66 a unit -- the rate lower than PDB's.

The report says: "The DESA is not purchasing energy from IPPs. The PDB has been selling energy to the DESA, since its formation as an independent body, at a rate far below its total average cost." By contrast, the barge-mounted plants and RPCL are selling power to the PDB at a much higher rate.

To 'eliminate' loss and ensure 'efficiency', the donors are constantly hammering on the government for gradual unbundling of PDB and constantly supporting other power organisations like DESCO and RPCL, terming them profit-making. But a closer look at the organisations shows that the organisations are demonstrating some performance only because of inconsistent power tariff structure and because the PDB is forced to swallow their losses.

OIC Secy-Gen

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OIC in that regard.

The prime minister noted that there is further scope to strengthen the existing excellent relations between the Bangladesh and Oman.

She said there is a great potential for enhancing bilateral trade and economic ties for the benefit of the two peoples.

The Omani ambassador, who is based in Islamabad, told the prime minister that process was on to establish a full-fledged embassy of Oman in Bangladesh.

He informed the prime minister that nearly two lakh Bangladeshis are engaged in various professions including teaching and banking in Oman. Some 24,000 of them have been recruited since the present government was elected in Bangladesh.

Khaleda said Bangladesh has a large number of skilled and semi-skilled workers who could make significant contributions to the economies of the two countries.

She suggested that Oman could possibly import such items like ceramics, pharmaceuticals, leather, melamine, and jute and wood products from Bangladesh.

Referring to the growing awareness regarding environment-friendly materials, the prime minister pointed out that Oman could also import more jute and jute goods from Bangladesh.

Khaleda also raised the possibility of exporting quality coal produced by Bangladesh.

She stressed the need to exchange delegations from the private sectors of the two countries and to set up a joint business council.

The ambassador informed the prime minister that Oman was keenly studying the draft of a proposed joint economic commission.

Khaleda conveyed her greetings and extended invitation to Qaboos Bin Said Al Said, the Sultan of Oman, to visit Bangladesh.

JS body

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In addition to the amount, Tk 1.27 crore, allocated in the 2001-02 financial year, had remained unspent as the bodies were not formed over the period.

The parliament secretariat has received Tk 1.77 crore for the purpose in the fiscal 2003-04.

The standing committees, that scrutinise bills, review activities of different ministries and ensure smooth functioning of parliament, are seen as vital institutions in a democracy.

Non-formation of the committees on different ministries drew fire from opposition lawmakers who questioned the legitimacy of some 50 bills passed by the current parliament so far.

16 top criminals

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Hannan is accused in 11 other cases.

Law-enforcement agencies have so far arrested only five of the criminals -- Killer Abbas, Freedom Sohel, Naim Ahmed Titon, Khorshed Alam Rashu and Pichchi Helal. Besides, a father turned his son Kamal Pasha over to police on May 20 last year, and Mohammad Alauddin died in mob beating in Khilgaon last August.

"Whenever we make a move, they flee to India," said Deputy Commissioner of the Detective Branch (DB) Farooq Ahmed yesterday.

"As we don't have any extradition pact with India, we had to give up manhunt after they sneaked into its territory," he said. "We know they are hiding in India but cannot do anything."

The official said the law enforcers would sit with the home minister soon to work out a plan.

'Kala' Jahangir, who tops the list of criminals, was staying in Bongaon, India, 15 to 20 days ago, said a high official of the DB. Jahangir was sentenced to death in absentia in the murder of Mondol and is accused in 18 other cases of murder, possession of explosives and other crimes.

The Indian police arrested Liakat Hossain and Arman with arms at a Kolkata market, but later they were freed on bail. Liakat, accused in one case, and Arman, in three cases, fled to India last year. Liakat's

brother Kamrul Hasan alias Hannan, another top criminal, also stays with him.

Detectives said Syed Imam Hossain is now staying in Germany. Former leader of the Titumir College unit of the Jatayatadhi Chhatra Dal and accused of murders and other crimes in three cases, he left Bangladesh last year.

Subrata Bain, ringleader of the Seven Star Group, crossed into India after the killing of his gang member Chanchal in Savar. He has 17 counts of crime against him.

Khondoker Tanvir Islam Joy with eight cases; Mollah Masud, a close associate of Subrata Bain and accused in nine cases; Prakash Kumar Biswas, accused of possessing illegal arms; and Zafar Ahmed Manik, accused in seven criminal cases -- all took shelter in India.

Accused in seven cases, Aminur Rasul Sagar nicknamed Tokai Sagar is living in the United States, and Shamim Ahmed alias Aga Shamim with three cases settled in Sweden with his family.

Police also failed to arrest those staying in Bangladesh. Moshir Rahman Kochi, accused in 14 cases, is learnt to be staying in Ibrahimpur, and Haris Ahmed alias Hares, with 18 cases, in Mohammadpur. The ruling BNP men allegedly give protection to Jabbar Munna, charged with nine cases, who is now staying in Keraniganj.

AL demands

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of being exempted from the cases, they added.

So, both the ministers have to bear responsibility for the killing, the opposition leaders said.

Abdus Samad Azad said the killers of Mamtaz Uddin must be brought to justice.

Syedra Sazeda Chowdhury alleged that the alliance rulers have given arms to party hoodlums to kill AL leaders and activists. They also killed two law enforcers recently, she mentioned.

Abdur Razzak said this government has withdrawn 9,000 cases and released 53,000 accused criminals so far to eliminate Awami League in a planned way.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jaill reiterated his party's demands that the alliance government quit power immediately to pave the way for mid-term polls.

He said the party would take up tough programmes shortly to resist killing of its leaders and workers and repression on them by the present rulers.

Chaired by city AL President Mohammad Hanif, the rally was also addressed by Matia Chowdhury, Mohammad Nasim, Mukul Bose, Abdul Mannan, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and Ahsanullah Master, MP.

The AL will stage demonstrations in the city today to press the demands made at the rally.

RAB

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the budget session of the parliament beginning today.

Earlier, the cabinet at its two previous meetings on April 28 and May 12 objected to the home ministry's RAB proposals that wanted to give "excessive" authority to the new force by passing a new legislation. The cabinet viewed that excessive authority of the force might lead to widespread abuse of power.

The proposal was sent to the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order to finalise formation of RAB by bringing major changes.

According to the proposal, RAB will be empowered to carry out investigation into crimes and prepare reports on related cases upon government instruction.

The officer-in-charge of the police station concerned will submit the report to a law court within 48 hours of submission of a report by RAB.

The service condition, allowances and other admissible facilities to the members of RAB would be fixed in line with their special type of work.

Meanwhile, the cabinet also emphasised uplifting the effectiveness and skills of the existing law enforcing agencies side by side with formation of RAB. It was informed that the home ministry is preparing a plan of action to enhance skills of police and other civil forces to fight crimes more effectively.

With Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair, the cabinet also approved amendments to the Bangladesh Flag Vessel (Protection) Ordinance 1982 providing that the foreign vessel operators would not require waiver certificate for the next two years.

The cabinet also approved a proposal for Bangladesh-France military training programme.

Ayodhya

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Law Board said on Monday no such assurance had been given.

"No prominent Muslim organisation has given assurance that the land can be given for the construction of a temple. The statement given by Shankaracharya is not correct,"

Sayed Oasim Rasool Ilyas, spokesperson of All India Muslim Personal Law Board, said in Hyderabad.

"There is no change in our stand that court verdict should be binding on all parties," Ilyas, who is here to participate in the three-day Jamaat-e-Islami Hind conference, said.

Referring to the Shankara-cahrya's remarks that the credit for installing Ram Lalla idol at the makeshift temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya should go to former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, Ilyas said, "such statements are given to gain political mileage for one political party. It is unfortunate."

"It does not suit a person of his stature to issue such a statement in an election year," he added.

Budget session

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Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting, slated for 5:30pm today.

"As we are not joining the Jatiya Sangsad tomorrow (Tuesday), we will not attend the BAC meeting also," Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the AL lawmakers did not get any assurance from the ruling coalition that they would change their attitude to them and let them speak in the House.

Explaining the reasons for the boycott of the session, Hamid told Akhtar that the ruling alliance did not give any assurance that they would not treat them as before.

"The way you switched off the microphone of the leader of the opposition in the last session was out of courtesy," Hamid said.

Akhtar told The Daily Star yesterday that he urged the opposition to join the session and expressed the hope that they would act accordingly.

He, however, dismissed the

allegation that the chair had denied the opposition floor.

"If they compare the statistics of the past era with the present, they would definitely be ashamed. Even the leader of the opposition addressed the House for two straight hours," he said.

Some top AL leaders yesterday hinted that the party legislators might participate in the session from June 15, a day after party chief Sheikh Hasina returns from abroad.

The AL boycotted the first sittings of the budget session last year, but returned to the House during the budget discussion.

Deputies from the Jatiya Party (JP) and the lone member of the Krishak Sramik Janata League are set to join the budget session today.

"Certainly we are joining the session," said Dr T I M Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury, presidium member of the JP.

The JS will appoint a panel of chairmen and take an obituary reference in the opening sitting today.

Israel starts evacuation

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ting unauthorised outposts immediately at a landmark summit in Aqaba, Jordan, on Wednesday with US President George W. Bush and Abbas.

The international community views all Jewish settlements, including the 145 established by Israeli governments on land seized in the 1967 Middle East war, as illegal. Israel disputes this.

Many of the unauthorised outposts are sparsely populated clusters of caravans on lonely hilltops in the West Bank, where settlers want to extend their hold over land the Palestinians claim for a state of their own.

In a bid to fulfil his own pledges at the Aqaba summit, Abbas denounced new attacks by militant groups that threaten the road map and vowed to press on with efforts to coax them back into ceasefire talks.

"We must exert all our efforts to stop this bloodbath and pursue a peaceful settlement," Abbas said after attacks on Sunday in which five Israeli soldiers were killed and troops shot dead five Palestinian gunmen.

The reformist premier, who took office in April, seemed intent on damage control in the face of

Palestinian criticism that he was too conciliatory toward Israel at the US-led summit last week.

He appealed to Hamas, the main militant group behind a campaign of suicide bombings, for a resumption of ceasefire talks that it broke off after the gathering in Aqaba.

But Hamas, angered by Abbas's summit speech in which he equated their attacks to terrorism and called on them to lay down their arms in a 32-month-old uprising for independence, quickly rebuffed his entreaty.

The White House on Monday denounced Hamas and other militant Islamic groups as "terrorists", but said it was "still a time for hope in the Middle East".

Israel has demanded Abbas crack down on militants, but he has preferred negotiation to avoid sparking civil war.

Condemning the latest attacks, Abbas said: "We reject these acts and if they continue they will complicate the situation and make the peace process difficult."

Hamas and other militant groups spearheading the revolt had accused Abbas of making too many concessions at the summit.

JEC meet in Dhaka

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The forthcoming JEC meeting between the two foreign ministers is a follow up to the Foreign Secretary-level meeting held in Dhaka on April 28.

Sinha came to Dhaka on a two-day official visit on August 24 last year while Khan dashed to Delhi on February 13 this year following a tense border situation in the wake of the push-in/push-back imbroglio.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan earlier said that the coming JEC meeting would take up all issues -- political and economic -- that awaited solution over the years.

Of late, Dhaka and New Delhi are faced with a number of irritants like demarcation of 6.5 km of common border, exchange of enclaves and adversely possessed of lands, border skirmishes over push-in, trade imbalance, multi-modal communications, transshipment facilities to India, export of natural gas and Free Trade Agreement.

Apart from bilateral irritants, the JEC headed by the foreign ministers may also discuss the time and venue of a possible summit between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan recently gave a broad hint about the planned summit meeting between the two premiers and said officials in Dhaka and Delhi are working on it.

Atug of war is apparent on the venue of the summit -- Dhaka or Delhi.

Dhaka feels that since incumbent Prime Minister Khaleda Zia already visited New Delhi during her first tenure (1991-96), Indian premier Vajpayee should come to Dhaka. But Delhi argues that Vajpayee had already been in Dhaka in 1999 on the eve of Dhaka-Kolkata bus service, so it is the turn of Khaleda Zia to be in the Indian capital.

A diplomatic source however said, "Protocol is not important, but the summit between the two prime ministers should be useful and productive in terms of resolving the issues."

After demarcating the 6.5-km of border, India was learnt to have been waiting for Dhaka's response to New Delhi's package proposal to settle the long-standing issue.

On the export of natural gas, India likes to see a quick decision by the Bangladesh government on utilisation of surplus gas as New Delhi is looking for importing gas from different sources.

On the question of reducing a huge

25,000 staff

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fiscal's. Such practices of staff transfer is taking toll on the government's efficiency and leading to administrative complexities, according to establishment ministry sources.

The figures also partially answer why the budget would always contain a huge and unexplained block allocation. During the last five years, Tk 399 crore has been paid in salary and wages to the absorbed employees from this allocation.

In the current fiscal, Tk 1,470 crore has been provided for block allocation. It was Tk 1,262 crore in the last fiscal. Finance ministry sources said the budget for the next fiscal may see around Tk 1,600 crore in block allocation.

Establishment ministry sources said there is usually a huge time lapse between completion of a development project and transfer of the staff to the current budget. A number of key issues like what would happen to the staff and equipment once the projects are complete or how

funds would be managed to pay the absorbed staff are never thought out in advance.

When proposals are floated for staff absorption, the list of equipment and vehicles are never drawn, leading to wastage and misuse, they pointed out.

Because of such misuse and mismanagement of funds and manpower, the government is currently working on an idea of formulating a unified budget. "This is a complicated task and it would take us some years before the idea is executed," said a finance ministry official.

The rationale behind the idea is that because of having two separate budgets -- development and current -- more departments, often overlapping, are created resulting in fund wastage. An opaque conception about budget also results in creation of unnecessary posts.

Moreover, inefficient people are often recruited for development projects and fiscal management gets sluggish, sources emphasised.

Democrats accuse Bush

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US Senator Bob Graham of Florida called the latest reports that the administration might have inflated its assessment of the threat from Iraq "the latest outrage."

"Don't you think the American people should have known that before we went to war?" he asked indignantly.

Graham said the White House had yet to tell the public about the costs of occupying Iraq in efforts to rebuild and stabilise the country, nor has the Bush administration revealed the human cost, in American lives, of the process.

"There has been a pattern of deception and unwillingness to share with the American people from the very beginning of this administration," he said. "Even if we should find weapons of mass destruction, that won't disguise the fact that they misled the American people."

Representative Dennis Kucinich, a fervent opponent of the war since

before the first bombs were dropped, urged fellow Democrats to challenge Bush on the weapons issue.

"First of all, because they lied to the American people, they've misrepresented the cause of war in Iraq," he said. "We need to stand up and demand that they provide proof, and demand that they come to an accounting, and demand that they come clean."

Former Vermont governor Howard Dean compared the present situation to the Watergate scandal, which broke out over charges of Republican political spying against Democrats and brought down president Richard Nixon in 1974.

"I never thought that in my lifetime I would hear this question again," Dean said. "But the American people are now faced with this question that we heard almost 30 years ago: 'What did the president know and when did he know it?'"

BNP blasts AL

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ready to form a judicial probe committee in this connection."

"Tell us whether you want a probe by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) or any other agency or by a judicial inquiry committee. We are ready to engage an investigating agency of the Awami League's choosing," he said.

Bhuiyan said hurling a baseless accusation on State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman Patal, or any other man for that matter, would rather hinder the investigation and help the real killers to escape. He also strongly criticised "the AL bid to implicate BNP ministers and leaders in the killing."

He said the government has taken necessary steps to find out the real culprits and has also included the case in the list of "sensational cases" to ensure proper investigation and speedy trial.

Bhuiyan said the AL accused Patal and Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Quddus Dulu with a political motive and requested the AL leadership to help identify the real killers. "Don't indulge in character assassination."

Replying to a question about withdrawal of certain cases, the LGRD minister said only the politically motivated cases filed against the then opposition activists by the previous AL government are being withdrawn on the basis of proper scrutiny by a committee.

"The question of withdrawing cases against the criminals does not arise. Withdrawal of false and politically motivated cases took

place in the past also," he added. Speaking at the press conference, Patal said the charges levelled against him by the AL are completely baseless.

"I did not touch any weapon since the Victory Day, December 16, 1971. I hate politics of killing and never patronised it," he said. The AL chief falsely implicated him in a case of firing in a train when he was a minister in the 1991-96 BNP government, he claimed. "But the AL after assuming power failed to prove my involvement in the firing incident."

Patal said he asked the home minister, the inspector general of police (IGP) and all others concerned to investigate the murder through a competent agency and take all-out steps so that the killers were brought to justice.

He said a brother of the victim filed a case after the killing and there was no mention of his name in the FIR.

Ruhul Quddus Dulu said no BNP activist was involved in the incident. "The person arrested in connection with the killing is the son of a local AL leader."

The arrested man, Arif, is not a member of the Jubo Dal or any front organisation of the BNP and his father was the UP chairman of Mamtaz Uddin's area for about 12 years, he added.