

US lawmakers agree to broaden WMD probe

AFP, Washington

Top US senators have agreed to broaden their probe into the fate of alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and whether intelligence information about them had been manipulated to justify the war against the government of Saddam Hussein.

But the Republican Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Pat Roberts, still succeeded Friday in blocking a full-fledged congressional investigation into the brewing controversy that could prove to be damaging to Republicans in the 2004 election campaign.

In fact, the chairman and the ranking committee Democrat, Senator Jay Rockefeller, appeared

to disagree even on what to call their joint work, with Roberts pointedly referring to it as a "review" and Rockefeller using the word "inquiry."

But a brief joint statement issued by the lawmakers made clear the probe would go far beyond a mere review of documents from the CIA and other US intelligence agencies that was initially envisaged by Roberts.

Under the accord, the committee would examine among other things "the quantity and quality" of US intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs -- and "the objectivity, reasonableness, independence, and accuracy of the judgments reached by the intelligence community."

The lawmakers will also try to

find out whether those conclusions "were properly disseminated to policy makers in the executive branch and Congress" and "whether any influence was brought to bear on anyone to shape their analysis to support policy objectives," the statement said.

The US-led invasion of Iraq was launched last March after President George W. Bush insisted that Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs represented an imminent threat.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told the UN Security Council in February that Iraq had failed to account for hundreds of tonnes of chemical and biological agents.

But nearly six weeks after the fall of Baghdad, the US military and

Central Intelligence Agency have failed to discover so much as an ounce of the banned weapons, prompting speculation that in making its case for the war and getting Congress to authorize it, the Bush administration had either used intelligence selectively, or pressured the intelligence community into turning a blind eye on questionable sources.

Critics cite a September 2002 Defense Intelligence Agency report, in which the DIA stated that there was "no reliable information" that Iraq was producing chemical weapons.

They insist the secret assessment was issued as Defense Secretary

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Pottermania grips globe

REUTERS, London

Pottermania encircled the globe yesterday as millions of young fans rushed to buy the latest Harry Potter saga with author JK Rowling overjoyed that the plot had not leaked out.

"I don't think anything crucial has got out so I am happy," she said after visiting an Edinburgh bookshop at midnight, the witching hour when "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" was finally released.

With children brought to fever pitch by a meticulously orchestrated marketing campaign, the weighty tome looks set to become the fastest-selling book of all time.

Rowling, thrilled that her plot twists had stayed secret, said: "I think it is miraculous, given the number of books that have been produced and the number of people who have been involved, that everything hasn't been revealed."

"I am really happy. I think most kids are going to find out what hap

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PHOTO: STAR

Children buy JK Rowling's latest book, Harry Potter & the Order of the Phoenix, after its launch at Etcetera Bangladesh in Dhaka yesterday.

SHAZNEEN CASE

Cross-exam of Dr Belayet, fingerprint expert ends

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Defence lawyers in the Shazneen case yesterday completed cross-examination of Dr. Belayet Hossain, who conducted Shazneen's autopsy, and Faridul Islam, fingerprint expert of police department.

The Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka, so far recorded deposition of 18 prosecution witnesses.

Earlier on June 14, the tribunal had recorded Dr. Belayet's deposition. But he was not cross-examined on the next day due to sickness of a defence lawyer. Instead, deposition of Faridul Islam was recorded.

During cross-examination yes

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Dy speaker censures AL walkouts as pre-planned

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqi has criticised the Awami League (AL) for its repeated walkouts in the parliament, saying that these were pre-planned and parts of party's policy.

"They (AL lawmakers) come to the parliament deciding beforehand how many times they would walk out on that very day. They create disorder in the House in a planned way," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The deputy speaker conducts the current session of the parliament as Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar is in the UK for treatment.

Akhtar Hamid said AL members walk out of the parliament alleging that the ruling party does not give them opportunity to speak, which is



Akhtar Hamid Siddiqi

not at all true. He noted that people in general do not know parliamentary rules. Taking advantage of this, AL lawmakers want to show the people that their microphones are switched

off and that they are not allowed to speak.

"We switch off their microphones only when they try to speak in violation of rules," he said.

Akhtar Hamid said although members do not follow the Rules of Procedure while speaking on points of order, they are given opportunity to speak. And it was the opposition who got more slots to speak on points of order, he added.

He mentioned that opposition members even asked for allowing them to speak twice on a point of order, knowing that rules did not permit it.

Akhtar Hamid said opposition members sought floor even after a statement made under Section 300 of the Rules of Procedure, but they

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Truck collision kills five in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Five cattle traders were killed and six others injured in truck collision on the Jhenidah-Magura Highway yesterday morning.

The dead were identified as Sona Mia, 40, of Bhupalipur and Maznu, 35, of Kanchannagar villages under Jhenidah police station and Tariqul Islam, 42, of Moheshpur and Amir Hossain, 38, of Banaripara in Barisal and Sanaullah, 22, of village Nepa in Kushtia. All the five died on the spot.

According to police and witnesses, the accident occurred when a cow loaded truck bound for Jhenidah collided head on with another truck at Madhupur at around 6am.

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JS body to review MiG 29s, frigate purchase deals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Standing Committee on the Defence Ministry is going to review previous irregularities, corruption and dubious dealings in this sector.

The parliamentary body will also look into the controversial purchase of the MiG-29s and frigate during the Awami League (AL) regime.

The standing committee had a preliminary discussion on these issues in its maiden meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, sources said.

"We want to ensure transparency and accountability in the armed forces in the interest of the people," the committee president

and ruling BNP lawmaker Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star after the meeting. "That's why the committee must check whether any previous dealings were smeared with irregularity and corruption."

Chiefs of the three armed forces have been asked to inform the committee about any such shady affairs in the next meeting, likely to be held on July 6. The next meeting will also determine the agenda of the committee.

Chaired by Mahbubur Rahman, the meeting was attended by all members but Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who also holds the defence portfolio.

The meeting however took place without the participation of the AL, as the main opposition party had not yet nominated its representatives.

The other committee members at the meeting were Minister for Water Resources Hafizuddin Ahmed, Bir Bikram, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Whip Rezaul Bari Deena, Abdul Mannan and Saeed Iskander. Chiefs of army, air force and navy, secretary of the Defence Ministry and other top officials were also present.

Skilled manpower a must to deal with new global challenges: PM

UNB, Chittagong

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday stressed the need to develop human resources in the science and technology sector in order to face the challenges of the new millennium.

"We need skilled human resources to take control of all branches of science and technology ... and devote themselves to the improvement and application of scientific technologies to raise productivity," she said while addressing the second convocation of Bangladesh Institute of Technology (BIT) in Chittagong.

A total of 783 graduates and five post-graduates from BIT's civil, mechanical and electrical departments were awarded certificates.

Khaleda Zia handed over gold medals to five brilliant students for their outstanding academic feat in five sessions from 1993-94 to 1998-99.

Education Minister Dr Osman Farouk also addressed the convocation ceremony while chairman of the BIT Board of Governors Dr Jamilur Reza Chowdhury presided.

Congratulating the newly graduated engineers, the prime minister said, "We want to see you as engineers of the new millennium. You must be forward looking and have clear vision and new ideas."

She also called on industrial and business entrepreneurs to employ and utilise the expertise of the new graduates.

Admittedly, she said, a lot of

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NCB loans over Tk 1cr to come under WB lens

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

The World Bank (WB) proposes to scrutinise loans above Tk 1 crore sanctioned by the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs).

It will be part of the nationalised banks restructuring programme now in the final stage of negotiation between the WB and the central bank and the finance ministry.

The process will help get to know why a huge portion of loans given by the NCBs turned classified.

Seventy per cent of the NCB loans is above Tk 1 crore and 65 per cent of them has turned classified. As of December 2002, the NCBs had distributed Tk 36,111 crore in loans of which the loans over Tk 1 crore in value add up to Tk 25,000 crore. Some 3,000 borrowers had taken these loans.

The restructuring programme will be taken up under a WB technical assistance. Consultants will be appointed to scrutinise the accounts of the banks and the draft terms of reference of the consultants has also been prepared.

During scrutiny, the WB consultants will look into the internal control of the banks, credit appraisal and collateral system and process of loan sanctioning, among other things.

The scrutiny has been planned as the NCBs made little progress

vis-à-vis the private commercial banks (PCBs) in reducing their classified portfolio.

The PCBs reduced their classified portfolio to 16 per cent in December 2002 from a highest of 44.52 per cent in 1994. But the NCBs could reduce their classified loans to 33.73 per cent in December 2002 from a high of 45.62 per cent in 1999.

The Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management in a study in 1999 titled "Bank loan default problem in Bangladesh: A dialogue between borrowers and lenders" said out of 125 key persons of the business units, 97 were directly maintaining connections with political personalities to get bank loans. Most business units had mentioned that ministers had a key role in approaching banks for loans.

'Thief' beaten to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged thief was beaten dead at Islambagh in Lalbagh Friday night.

Quoting family members police said Mizan, 20, an alleged thief and addict, left their rented home at southeast Islambagh on June 11 and did not return.

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Govt urged not to follow donors' dev model

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A non-government organisation (NGO) yesterday urged development models given by donor agencies.

Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy (IDPAA), an advocacy cell of Proshika, an NGO, held a press conference titled, "Budget for Poverty Reduction" at the Jatiya Press Club in the city.

Omar Tareq Chowdhury, policy communication department chief of IDPAA, read out the written statement.

The statement said government should avoid one sided and stubborn decision of donor agencies in the name of reformation.

Due to pressure from donor agencies, government is shutting down mills and industries in the name of privatisation without pro

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
June 22		6-49 pm
June 23	5-12 am	

Prayer Timings		
June 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	5-55	6-00
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

A puller, aided by the passenger, manoeuvres his rickshaw through a ruptured road in Sipahibagh in the city yesterday. The road, dug and left un-cared-for by a utility service provider, caused people to suffer.

ntv goes on air July 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fourth private television channel, ntv, will make its debut on July 3, an official said.

"Viewers will love our programmes as ntv is going to keep their choices in mind," Managing Director of ntv (National Television) M Enayet Rahman told reporters at a briefing held at a city hotel yesterday.

President Iajuddin Ahmed will press the button to open the channel on July 3, which will be aired live. The programmes of ntv will begin at 7:30pm on the first day.

The earth station, the telecasting system of ntv, has been set up by the local and American experts. "We hope people will also love the technical excellence of our programmes," Enayet said.

The television channel has already signed a contract with Cable News Network (CNN) and it will be able to update information even eight times a day through the satel

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