

# I'd do it again

Blair tells Iraq war critics

REUTERS, Bournemouth (England)

British Prime Minister Tony Blair told anti-war critics in his ruling Labor Party yesterday he would "take the same decision again" to join the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Blair, whose trust ratings have plunged since the overthrow of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, conceded his decision to join the war had hurt, angered and disappointed many of his supporters.

"Iraq has divided the international community. It has divided the party, the country, families, friends," he told delegates at the annual Labor Party conference.

"I know many people profoundly believe the action we took was wrong," Blair said. "I ask just one thing: attack my decision but at least

understand why I took it and why I would take the same decision again."

Blair faces the most testing period of his six-year rule. Doubts over his case for war have been



Tony Blair

fueled by the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq -- Britain's main justification for military action.

A judicial inquiry into the suicide of a weapons expert who questioned parts of Britain's dossier on Iraqi weapons has further undermined the prime minister.

Blair said letters he received from parents of British soldiers who died in Iraq -- both supportive and critical -- offered him plenty to reflect on.

"Don't believe anyone who tells you when they receive letters like that they don't suffer any doubt."

But he insisted the danger from weapons of mass destruction represented the "security threat of the twenty-first century."

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at the opening ceremony of Bangladesh Inter-university Information Technology National Conference at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

# Over 1,000 raped in last 9 months

Odhikar survey says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first nine months of the year saw 1,021 women and children raped, with 106 of them subsequently murdered, according to a report by Odhikar, a coalition for human rights.

Twelve traumatised rape victims committed suicide, said the report released yesterday.

The report based press reports and Odhikar's own sources also said 278 women were victims of dowry during the same period. Of them, 184 were killed, 20 committed suicide, 67 were physically tortured, 11 sustained injuries from acid attack and two were divorced.

During nine months from January to September, law enforcers killed 56 people while 61 others

died in their custody.

Casualties from political violence included 306 dead and 4,779 injured, said the report, adding that 1,885 were arrested on political grounds.

Incidents of human rights violation in the hill tracts accounted for 28 cases of murder and 85 abductions. Twenty women and children were also raped and 84 people sustained injuries in different incidents.

Child victims of violence numbered 1,212 -- 339 were killed, 257 injured, 383 raped, 85 committed suicide, 49 sustained acid burns and 99 fell victims of trafficking.

The Institute of Democratic Rights (IDR) said in a report the daily average of people killed in

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## Meet domestic demand first

AL roundtable on gas export told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Domestic use of natural gas must get preference over export of it both in the interest of the national economy and environment of the country.

A political consensus is now needed most to ensure this, ignoring the 'double standard' of some donors advocating export of gas.

This was the unanimous view of the leaders political parties, experts, lawyers and other professionals taking part in a roundtable in the city yesterday, organised by the main opposition party Awami League (AL).

AL leaders including party General Secretary Abdul Jalil and leaders of some other parties were among the participants at the roundtable held at the CIRDAP auditorium.

Jalil said his party prefers domestic use of natural gas for development. The government should seek people's verdict before taking any

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## HC stays graft case against Ershad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) Division yesterday stayed further proceedings of a corruption case against former president HM Ershad till October 19.

The case is now pending with the Special Court for Dhaka Division and awaiting delivery of judgement.

The HC also issued a rule asking the government to explain why the corruption case filed against Ershad will not be transferred to any other competent court for trial.

The government was asked to reply on the issue by three weeks.

The order came upon a petition filed by Ershad, seeking transfer of the case to another court for ends of justice.

The HC vacation bench comprising Justice Ali Asgar Khan and Justice Md Mashuque Hosain Ahmed heard the petition and issued the rule.

According to the prosecution, Ershad, while in power, paid Tk 7,43,416 as income tax for six years (1983-89). Later, he withdrew Tk 2,76,324 from the income tax money on the plea that he had deposited it as donation.

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud and advocates Abdul Malek and Sheikh Sirajul Islam defended the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Helaluddin Mollah appeared for the state.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Oct 01		5-47 pm
Oct 02	5-50 am	

Prayer Timings		
October 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	5-57	6-02
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		

# Development of IT sector gets highest priority

PM tells professionals at a nat'l conference

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said the government has been implementing programmes to honour its election pledges for the development of information technology (IT).

"We have attached the highest priority to the IT sector for its development and expansion. Our goal is to strengthen our economy by entering the expanded IT market," said the PM while inaugurating a two-day national conference of inter-university IT professionals.

The opening of the conference at the Bangladesh-China Friendship

Conference Centre was also addressed by Science and Information and Communications Technology Minister Abdul Moyeen Khan, State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Huq Milon, Education Secretary Shahidul Alam, and member of University Grants Commission (UGC) Munirul Huq, with UGC Chairman M Asaduzzaman in the chair.

The prime minister outlined the move already taken for the development of IT sector and the upcoming programmes for further progress.

Referring to the fast growing software industries and business

across the world, she called for private investment in the ICT sector.

She termed the world a realm of information technology and said her government has launched a project to install the submarine cable and formulate an IT act. She also emphasised the need for standard IT education and more computer professionals in the country.

Jointly organised by the UGC and Bangladesh National UNESCO Commission, the opening function was attended by ministers, lawmakers, vice-chancellors of different universities, academicians, IT experts and professionals among others.



PHOTO: AFP

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan greets Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan at the UN after he addressed the 58 General Assembly Monday.

# WB finally to fund gas sector after a decade

UNB, Dhaka

The World Bank (WB) has agreed for the first time in a decade to finance the fund-hungry energy sector that needs billions of dollars in investment to tap natural gas.

Officials at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) said the response from the major donor came when its IDA (International Development Association) follow-up mission visited Bangladesh last week to hold a series of meetings with the government functionaries.

The assurance of assistance came after Petrobangla had explained that the country has been facing gas shortage lately on account of insufficient investment in the sector in recent years.

The state-run oil and gas corporation informed the mission from

IDA, the World Bank's soft-lending window, that the demand for gas was growing fast, at 7-8 per cent a year.

The gas demand presently stands at 1.25 billion cubic feet per day (BCFD) and is expected to rise to 1.6 BCFD by 2007, said the Petrobangla officials.

According to a draft aide-memoire, the WB-assisted investment programme covers 3-D (dimensional) seismic survey to delineate producing fields and reservoir studies to improve output.

It also includes appraisal and development of wells to increase production, fractionation plants for LPG and natural gasoline and pipelines from producing fields to consumers for optimum usage of gas.

Petrobangla proposed to have

three fractionation plants, each costing \$ 25 million, built by the private sector, and the plants would operate on the basis of a processing fee.

With respect to the petroleum downstream market (PDM), consideration has also been given to building a white-product pipeline from Chittagong to capital Dhaka.

"Such a project, subject to further analysis, could have significant merits from an economic and environmental standpoint," says the aide-memoire, adding, "it could be designed as a private-public sector partnership".

Both for the potential gas and PDM projects, the mission asked the authorities to provide the preparatory studies currently available, said the officials at the ERD.

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## President, PM, Hasina send greetings on Durga Puja

BSS, Dhaka

The president, prime minister and leader of the opposition yesterday sent separate messages greeting the Hindu community on the eve of Durga Puja, the greatest Hindu religious festival that begins today amid festivities.

In his message greeting all on the occasion of Durga Puja, President Iajuddin Ahmed said people of different communities have been living in Bangladesh peacefully for a long time. "The communal harmony is one of the glorious aspects of our national life," the president said.

"It is possible to ensure national progress and prosperity through establishing harmony and amity among people, irrespective of cast, creed and religion," he observed.

President Iajuddin said religious festivals give people the opportunity to establish communal harmony and amity and the Durga Puja teaches all to expand the bond of friendship and unity.

The president wished every success of the Durga Puja celebrations.

In another message yesterday, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia greeted members of the Hindu community on the occasion of Durga Puja.

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## CPC Ordinance promulgated

BSS, Dhaka

The Civil Procedure Code (Second Amendment) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2003 was promulgated yesterday.

President Iajuddin Ahmed promulgated the ordinance as per the power of the president enshrined in the constitution of the country, said a gazette notification.

## JS body seeks career policy for civil servants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on the establishment ministry has recommended introduction of a career policy for the government officials.

A four-member committee comprising officials of the establishment ministry was formed at its yesterday's meeting to prepare a draft within three months.

The government officials are frustrated as the competent ones are not getting the opportunity for career development, the committee observed. This is happening due to the absence of a proper career planning and development policy.

The four-member committee, headed by a joint secretary of the establishment ministry, will submit the draft to the parliamentary standing committee by year-end.

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# Four of a family electrocuted in Siddhirganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Four members of a family were electrocuted yesterday at Siddhirganj in Narayanganj district.

It occurred when lightning struck a pole balancing wire that was tied to an adjacent post in a pond and killed all the fish in it. Naim, an eight-year old, got into the pond for the dead fish and was electrocuted.

Seeing her son in distress, his mother, Nasima Akhtar, 28, rushed into the pond to save the boy and she, too, was electrocuted. Brothers of Nasima, Shahidullah, 35, and Shafiqul Islam, 22, were

also electrocuted as they jumped into the pond to rescue their sister and nephew.

Naim died on the spot, while the three others died when they were being taken to hospital.

Naim was a student of class three at a local madrassah. His mother Nasima Akhtar lived at her father's house with her two sons and a daughter.

Locals organised a rally to protest Desa's negligence, which, they said, led to the deaths. They complained that Desa did nothing to e l i m i n a t e

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# Saifur slams TIB report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday rejected the just released Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report on corruption, saying it was based on newspaper stories, most of which are allegations rather than facts.

"Most newspaper reports are mostly based on allegations, not facts," he said, bashing the TIB report, which portrayed a pitiable situation of corruption at different government departments.

Saifur was speaking at the opening of a 10-day training programme for bank officials organised by the Bangladesh Bank at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed

Khan, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Deputy Governor Muhammad A Ali and managing directors of all commercial banks were present at the function.

"Such reports will seriously damage the country's image and ultimately hinder foreign investment," he observed.

The finance minister also came down heavily on those foreigners who "come here for a few days, participate in seminars and make general comments on corruption in Bangladesh".

Terming such people 'strangers', Saifur said mountainous corruption in their countries are often overlooked.

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## Two killed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants killed two persons in the city while a hotel employee who suffered assault injuries died at a hospital yesterday.

Three youths called Mehedi Hasan alias Saiful out of his Senpara Parbata residence in Mirpur in the morning. Taking him to Monipur, they shot and stabbed him at about 11:45am, this relative Shajahan said.

Hasan was taken to Suhrawardi hospital where the doctors declared him dead. Police sent his body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy.

Reason behind the killing could not be known immediately. The victim's brother Mahub Hasan filed a case with Mirpur Police Station but police failed to make any arrest.

Meanwhile, Tejgaon police

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## 8-hr hartal on Oct 16 in Sylhet Division

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

An eight-hour hartal from 6am has been called in Sylhet Division on October 16 by the Arpita Sampatti Ain Protirodh Andolan (vested property law resistance movement). The announcement came at the divisional convention of the forum held at the city's Central Shahid Minar premises yesterday.

However, the hartal declared earlier for October 9 has been called off.

Vice-Chairman of the Bangladesh Bar Council Barrister Amir-UI Islam, addressing the convention, said the Awami League government had passed the Vested Property (Return) Act in parliament. But the present government stayed its execution with an ill-motive, putting the minority community in trouble.

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PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Visually challenged girls make handicrafts for sale at Mirpur Baptist Blind Girls' School. Run by the Baptist Mission entirely on foreign funds, this is the only school in Bangladesh especially for girls with visual impairment. Poor and orphaned girls from around Bangladesh are enrolled here for formal education as well as for income generating skills.