

Saddam accuses UN experts of waging "germ warfare"

BAGHDAD, July 9: President Saddam Hussein on Friday accused UN experts of waging "germ warfare" against Iraq, following the expulsion of a New Zealander accused of sabotaging its crops, reports AFP.

"This disgusting behaviour on the part of certain UN employees amounts to germ warfare against Iraq," he said, quoted in official newspapers.

"UN employees possess and are using weapons of mass destruction, even to the point of waging a bacteriological war on Iraq, while at the same time accusing others of violating international law," he charged.

The biggest insult in the history of the international community is the UN's recruitment of employees who stoop so low," said Saddam.

The accusation came a day after a New Zealand mine-clearing expert employed by the United Nations, Ian Broughton, left the country ahead of a Friday deadline for his expulsion.

Iraq accused Broughton of burying locust eggs in an area near the Iranian border on April 8 in a bid to ruin the country's already drought-hit harvest. The United Nations denied the charge.

"These are not individual acts but planned by the security services of certain states ... which are enemies of Iraq," he said, referring to the United States and Britain.

He said "most but not all" UN employees had either indulged in smuggling out archaeological treasures from Iraq or in acts of

espionage.

Broughton's expulsion was the first such incident between Iraq and the United Nations since UN arms inspectors were evacuated on the eve of US and British air strikes last December.

Iraq regards the inspectors as spies and has vowed never to allow their return. UN chief Kofi Annan acknowledged last month that the spying charges were partly justified.

On Friday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Saeed al-Saifi renewed Baghdad's rejection of what he called "suspect projects" at the UN Security Council to resume the disarmament of Iraq and ease sanctions.

"Iraq categorically rejects all suspect projects submitted to the Security Council given that they were drawn up without consultation with Baghdad," he said, quoted by the official news agency INA.

He said Baghdad insisted on a lifting of sanctions and compensation for US and British air strikes as well as the scrapping of no-fly zones enforced by Washington and London over southern and northern Iraq.

Iraq rejects a US-backed British draft for an easing of UN sanctions, saying it adds new conditions. The sanctions, linked to Baghdad's disarmament, have been in place since Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

France and Russia have submitted rival proposals more favourable to Iraq.

Belfast Protestant parade banned in city centre

BELFAST, July 8: Belfast's biggest Protestant parade was Thursday banned from rallying in a city centre park, amid fears it might become the focus for violence, reports AFP.

Orange Order leaders had been planning to steer their main July 12 parade in Belfast, which 20,000 Orangemen were expected to attend, to Edenderry, on the outskirts of Northern Ireland's capital.

Earlier this week, an independent parades commission banned a local Orange lodge from using its traditional route down Lower Ormeau Road.

The road, one of the key arterial roads in and out of the city, is mainly Roman Catholic, and the commission feared the parade might raise tensions.

Furious Orange leaders then decided to re-route the main parade to nearby Ormeau Park as a gesture of solidarity -- but that has now been banned too.

The second ban sparked predictable anger among Orangemen, who insist they have a right to march down any public road.

Parades commission chairman Alistair Graham said it was barring the Orange Order

from deviating from the route of its main parade to Edenderry.

He said the prospect of 20,000 Orangemen converging into "one of the more contentious interfaces in this city" was certain to bring "major problems of disruption, tension and damage to fragile community relations."

Protestants see the hundreds of colourful Orange Order marches across the province every year, with their flutes and drums and pipe bands; as an honest expression of their history and culture.

The climax of the marching season is July 12, the anniversary of a victory by Protestant King William over the Catholic King James II in 1690.

Catholics however view the parades as outdated and above all designed as a provocative display of Protestant hegemony.

The parades commission was set up in order to reduce tensions by liaising between the communities and, if necessary, adjudicate on whether some of the more contentious marches, notably those which pass

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