

Russia snubs US claim of Iraq's terror threat

AFF, Moscow

Washington has threatened unilateral military action against Iraq if Baghdad should prove to be in material breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 mandating its complete renunciation of weapons of mass destruction.

Washington and London have already said a material breach exists, based on a 12,000-page accounting of Iraq's arsenals, mandated and received by the Security Council.

Meanwhile Syria, the only Arab member of the council, dismissed as "ridiculous" and "unfounded" accusations by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that Iraq had transferred weapons of mass destruction to Syrian soil.

Sharon said UN inspectors in Iraq were less likely to find anything than they might have previously because the weapons were being hidden in Syria.

"There is information we are verifying," said Sharon. "But we are certain that Iraq has recently moved

chemical or biological weapons into Syria."

"Saddam Hussein wanted to hide his weapons, and I think that the Americans know that," he said. Sharon strongly backs US threats to topple the Iraqi leader's regime over its alleged weapons of mass destruction programmes.

"Sharon's allegations are unfounded and aim to divert attention from the chemical, nuclear and biological arsenal that Israel possesses," a foreign ministry spokesman said in Damascus.

"The accusations are ridiculous, especially since Syria has signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and called along with the other Arab countries for the Middle East to be freed from all weapons of mass destruction," he was quoted by the official news agency SANA as saying.

"The only party that has opposed this call and continues to do so is Israel," he said.

Israel agreed with the United

States in 1969 not to declare its nuclear weapons programmes, nor to test the weapons.

In return, Washington pledged not to pressure Israel to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Experts say Israel possesses at least 200 nuclear warheads and the means to use them in an attack.

In Iraq on Christmas Day it was business as usual for UN inspectors, with five teams from the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), scouring Iraqi territory.

In Baghdad, President Saddam Hussein told his people in a broadcast he was confident Iraq would be cleared by the inspectors.

The outcome of the UN operations "will be a big shock to the United States and will expose all American lies, if things remain on a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

KAFCO containers yet to be salvaged from river

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

None of the seven containers of KAFCO that fell into Karnaphuli river at Jetty No. 7 of Chittagong Port could be salvaged till evening yesterday.

The containers caused the movement of vessels at Jetty No. 7 to be suspended and poised a high risk at the adjoining two jetties (nos. 6 & 8) as well, since the accident Wednesday morning.

The containers all loaded with chemicals, slipped off while being loaded on a barge from a vessel, QC Lark, at jetty no. 7.

However, the authority said there is no risk of the chemicals causing water pollution.

The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) sought assistance from the naval authority in rescuing the heavy containers weighing about 29 tons each.

Sources said, naval divers spotted the containers under 30-ft water. Then naval crane 'Baloban' was brought in for the salvage work at 4:00pm.

But the salvaging could not begin immediately because of the draft of water at that point. Some twenty naval divers and others were waiting to start work during the low tide after 7:00pm last evening.

Sources apprehended that the entire operation might be time

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Fishermen feel pinch of depleted Bay stock

ABUL KALAM AZAD, back from Cox's Bazar

A growing number of fishermen in Cox's Bazar is giving up their 200-year-old fishing skills and taking to other professions as fish resources in the Bay of Bengal and adjacent rivers are depleting fast.

They are shifting to professions like making handicrafts, sewing, poultry farming, agriculture and some other small income generating activities, according to fishermen and various development agencies working there.

They said different species of fish are either decreasing or have become endangered because of mindless exploitation of the resources.

The fishermen said all kinds of fish were available there till early 1990. In the last one decade, a good number of unscrupulous businessmen in the coastal areas have invested on catching fish fries for hatcheries. This encouraged poor non-fishermen and fishermen communities to catch fish fries indiscriminately using current nets and destroying other water organisms.

This is the main reason for depletion of fish resources because the natural regeneration process is affected, they said. Several thousand fries are destroyed to catch a fish, one of them said.

Helpless fishing communities in 27 villages in the district have now

been united to form two committees in each village one of men and the other of women -- to fight poverty and illiteracy and to survive through other professions.

With technical assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is financing a project for welfare of the fishermen. Twelve agencies of the government are working in the villages to organise and train the fishermen.

FAO has taken up the pilot project covering the 27 villages. The project titled "Empowerment of Coastal Fishing Community for Livelihood Security Project (ECFCLSP)" started last year.

Setting a rare example, the people are not being provided with any hard cash because that may make them idle. They are being helped to understand their own problems and find out ways and means to resolve those.

They are also taught how to protect and conserve resources and use those properly. In the 27 villages, the fishing communities have formed committees and taken up various activities to earn money. Each male and female in a village is a member of either of the committees, and they contribute Tk 20 every month to create collective funds.

"The objective of the project is to empower fishermen and their family members through alternative

means," team leader of the project Dilip Kumar said. The fishing community has become very poor now following depletion of fishes and they need alternative sources of income, he said.

"We are not giving them money. We are helping them to find out various activities other than fishing. We are also trying to improve their skill," Dilip said. He said if the project succeeds, it will be replicated in other areas of the country.

In the South Murang village in Kutubdia, several thousand fishermen are trying hard to change their life.

"We have come under the same umbrella to do something on our own," Mreadin Kanti Das, told a group of visiting journalists. He is also a college student.

Another fisherman, Premananda Das, said, "Earlier, we did not know how to catch fish properly. Now we are trying to live in a better way, taking the help of project officials".

Many fishermen of the village expressed satisfaction over the ECFCLSP and said they need more assistance and training to change their life. Many emphasised on education and are sending their children to schools.

Fifteen women of the village are being given training on sewing. Each of them save Tk 10 from their tiffin money every day, and each group of five is planning to buy a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

WATER OF LIFE



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Water provides Firoza Begum, a widow in her forties, with a means of living. She sells drinking water in bottles mostly to the passengers at the Sadarghat Launch Terminal.

Firoza begins her day with washing bottles and filling them with water from the wayside WASA tap or from the nearby fire brigade office.

She buys the throwaway plastic water bottles, at Tk 200 to 250 a hundred, from Chankharpu and Anandabazar, to sell water in.

The passengers of at least 200 launches, setting off every day from Sadarghat, are the main consumers of this water. Most of the consumers belong to the low-income bracket.

Firoza sells 50 to 60 bottles a day, each at Tk 4 to 5. A well-known face in Sadarghat, she gets

help from almost everybody.

It is not that she runs her family with the proceeds from her daily sale. She spends most of the money on education for her two daughters now attending the Badamtali High School. Her son is about to go to school.

Her foster son Nayan whom she found abandoned at the Sadarghat Launch Terminal eight years back is now her helping hand.

Shelter for repressed children demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Children Congress, an organisation working for children rights, has demanded the construction of a 'children shelter' for the repressed and the trafficked children brought back to the country.

It also demanded government and non-government initiatives for setting up housing facilities for street children and also counselling centres for the mentally disturbed children.

Children Congress made the demands in a press conference held at the Bangladesh Chapter office of Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) at Dhamondi in the city yesterday.

Emphasising the necessity of building up awareness against child trafficking and repression, the organisation sought government and non-government assistance for its ongoing programme.

At the press conference, Children Congress leaders asked authorities concerned to stop harassing children at workplaces and stop using

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

13 more listed criminals held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ninety people, 13 of them listed criminals, were rounded up in the Operation Clean Heart countrywide in 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday.

Mokfezur Rahman Bachchu, president of the Dhunat Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) unit, was admitted to the local health complex in a critical condition after the army handed him over to Dhunat Police Station in Bogra yesterday afternoon.

Sources said the army from the Sherpur camp arrested Bachchu in the Bathuabari Bridge area at 3:30pm yesterday. He was handed over to police at about 4:30pm after interrogation. However, the Sherpur camp army refuted the arrest of Bachchu.

The joint forces of the anticrime operation recovered 12 firearms, including five pistols, two revolvers, three shotguns and one shutter gun, and 18 bullets across the country.

With the latest, the number of people netted since the start of the anticrime crackdown on October 17 climbed to 10,167 including 2,247

listed criminals. The army-led drive has so far seized 1,858 firearms and 29,030 bullets.

In the capital, the joint forces raided a polythene bag factory at Mahajanpur Road in Old Dhaka and arrested its owner Hasimuddin alias Jyoty. They sealed the factory and seized 20 bags of polythene and raw materials.

Twenty-four people arrested in a raid on the Arambagh Club were handed over to Motijheel police yesterday morning. Twenty people were arrested in the Town Hall area of Mohammadpur.

In Khulna, the joint forces arrested Advocate Selim Al Azad, a close associate of Ward Commissioner Asaduzzaman Litu, a fugitive criminal, at Sher-e-Bangla Road. The former leader of the Islami Chhatra Shibir was produced before the court yesterday. He was shown as an arrestee under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

In Madaripur, Razzak Hawlader alias Ranju, a Piarpur Union Parishad member, arrested by the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Monitoring Cell reviews progress of 4 sensational cases

UNB, Dhaka

The Monitoring Cell formed for speedy disposal of sensational cases reviewed the progress of four sensational cases, including the Pubali Bank robbery case and engineer Humayun Kabir murder case, yesterday.

The meeting held with State Minister for Home Mohammad Lutfuzzaman Babor in the chair also reexamined Buddhist monk Gyanojyoti murder case and hair dressers Biren Sheel and Bhoro Sheel murder case.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury attended the meeting as special guest.

The cell has so far reviewed 90 murder cases and enlisted 162 cases for monitoring.

Cabinet Secretary Dr Sa'dat Hussein, Law Secretary Afzal Hossain Ahmed, Home Secretary Muhammad Omar Frouk, IGP Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury and other high officials of the monitoring cell were present in the meeting.

THE EYES OF GALILEO



This recent computer image shows three satellites, part of the European Galileo navigation system network. The European Space Agency (ESA) confirmed on Tuesday that plans to launch a satellite navigation system to rival the GPS network, have stalled because of a spat between Germany and Italy over which country would lead the project.

PHOTO: AFP

House robbed at Khilgaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Masked robbers looted about Tk 6.5 lakh in local and foreign currencies and gold ornaments from a businessman's house in the city's Khilgaon Taitala area in the early hours of yesterday, sources said.

The gang tied the family members of businessman Abdus Sattar, thoroughly searched the house and took away Tk 1.2 lakh, US dollars 3500 and gold ornaments weighing 40 tolas.

Family members said the armed elements wearing mask and only underwear entered the house breaking a window of the kitchen on the second floor. First they cut off the telephone line and went to the room of one of Sattar's sons.

"They pointed a revolver at my head and asked me to hand over money and gold ornaments," he said. They took some keys and money from him, tied him and knocked the door of his brother's room. As he opened the door, the gang tied his hands and asked him to keep mum.

They looted the room and then went to the room of his mother. Most of the money and ornaments were

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Landless in loan trap

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Organised moneylenders are taking advantage of the poor in Gaibandha by offering 'easy' loans among destitute families at an unusually high interest rate.

The unsuspecting borrowers, many of them women, often sell their daily labour in advance to pay back. Sometimes goaded by ever-increasing interest, the borrowers take to 'prostitution'.

Nurununnahar Nazma, an NGO worker at a remote 'char' called Kunderpara village under

Kamarzani Union, said there were instances of desperate peasants obtaining loans at a monthly interest rate of 20 per cent.

While obtaining the loan in October or November, when peasants face starvation, they agree to 'do anything' for the money. In many cases, Nazma found desperate borrowers to have agreed to sell their labour hours in advance at a surprisingly and unacceptably low price.

This correspondent talked to about 20 men and women at Kunderpara. All of them said they had obtained 'easy loans' through

middlemen because the actual lender lives in town.

"If a person borrows Tk 1,000, she or he has to pay a monthly interest of Tk 200 to the middleman. The middleman keeps Tk 50 for himself and pays the lender in Gaibandha or elsewhere the rest," Nazma said.

Thousands of men and women in the area are 'hostage' to the 'system', she added.

There are instances of the 'ultra-poor' being sent to Dhaka to work as rickshaw-pullers or farmhands in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7