

# Chemical suit find fails to prove Iraq has chemical weapons: Blix

AFP, London

The uncovering of 3,000 chemical suits and masks at a hospital in southern Iraq by US marines does not prove Iraq has chemical weapons, chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix said late Wednesday.

"I don't think it's evidence of weapons. It certainly raises suspicions that they (the Iraqis) might have expected use of chemical weapons and therefore have required it (the suits). I think we will have to find more solid evidence than this," Blix told BBC television.

US marines confiscated the

chemical suits and masks from a hospital in the southern Iraqi city of Nassiriyah that had been used by Iraqi paramilitaries, the US military said Wednesday.

In addition to the chemical suits, marines found more than 200 weapons, stores of ammunition and Iraqi military uniforms, and captured around 170 prisoners in the operation, the United States said.

Blix believes inspectors should have been allowed more time in Iraq to uncover possible weapons of mass destruction rather than being ordered out of the country prior to the start of war.

# Bush, Blair weigh

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war to overthrow Saddam. British officials said the two men would get a thorough update from their military commanders via video links from Washington, London and coalition headquarters in Qatar.

Blair and his foreign secretary Jack Straw flew in to Andrews Air Force Base near Washington on Wednesday in a driving rainstorm -- their plane was struck by lightning on its way in to land -- then took a helicopter immediately to join Bush at Camp David for dinner.

On the flight, Blair told reporters not to expect any major decisions to come out of the snap summit.

"The next couple of days are not going to determine what the post-conflict situation is going to be like," he said, visibly relieved that after many weeks of frustrating diplomatic quagmire, battle had been joined.

"We'll have to carry on debating that, working on the details of it. The immediate UN thing that has to be sorted out is humanitarian help... The rest of it, we will necessarily have some time to deal with."

On his way back to London later Thursday, Blair was to make a quick stop in New York City to see UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in an airport VIP lounge to discuss the way forward.

Blair sent 45,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen to the Gulf to join the war, plus 120 tanks, a naval task force led by the aircraft carrier Ark Royal and more than 100 fighters, bombers and support aircraft.

But he faces an uphill battle to win Bush over to giving the United Nations oversight of a post-Saddam administration, as officials in Washington are still deeply sore at Germany, Russia, and especially France, whom they blame for thwarting UN Security Council approval for war.

White House officials say privately that the United Nations and large non-governmental organizations (NGOs) definitely have a role to play to in a post-Saddam Iraq by providing sorely needed humanitarian aid.

But they question the need for a UN administration of the country, saying that they see little need for such a regime, which they say would be costly and would only delay plans to hand power quickly to Iraqis.

Briefing reporters late Wednesday, a British official indicated there would be no change to the "agreed strategy" of invading Iraq to oust Saddam and rid the country of weapons of mass destruction, even though Saddam loyalists have been putting up stiff resistance on the roads to Baghdad.

"It is not a single issue summit," he explained, "and there will be no decisions taken on that during this summit."

He added: "We have to see what the post-Saddam Iraq is going to look like. We have to see what the pace of events are, and we have to also have discussions at the United Nations."

## 1,800 expelled

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Madaripur, 10 in Faridpur, five each in Manikganj and Sherpur, one in Tangail, seven in Gopalganj, 56 in Mymensingh, one in Munshigonj, and nine in Narsingdi.

Two teachers were also expelled.

Under Jessore board, a teacher and about 183 students were expelled. Of them, 154 were expelled in Kushtia, three in Jessore, six in Jhenaidah, one in Magura, four in Khulna, two in Sakhtira, three in Chuadanga, six in Meherpur and four in Bagerhat.

An invigilator from 174 examinees were expelled from various examination centres under Chittagong board. Of them, 113 were in Chittagong, six in Cox's Bazar, 15 in Rangamati, 30 in Khagrachari and 10 in Bandarban.

Under Barisal board, 77 students were expelled from different centers. And under Comilla board, 114 examinees were expelled. Of them, 62 in Noakhali, 28 in Comilla, five in Chandpur, eight in Brahmanbaria, five in Feni and six in Laxmipur.

# Elite airborne

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here in this forward operating base. We have a combat power," he said.

The 101st began its push to enter the conflict the day after the war began, with its ground attack convoys that rearm and supply the helicopters leaving their bases in northern Kuwait on Friday for southern Iraq.

However, the 101st had problems immediately with the convoys taking up to four days to reach their forward operating base, instead of the one to two days as originally planned.

Again the weather was a culprit, causing Humvee four-wheel-drives to rear-end each other and a 5,000-gallon tanker to overturn in poor visibility.

Gass also conceded the division's planners may have underestimated the timing for the mission, which involved more than 1,000 vehicles travelling on makeshift roads in desert sand that sometimes was more than a foot deep.

"We ran into some logistical concerns," Gass said, referring to the convoy.

"(But) we knew everything wouldn't be as simple as planned."

As the convoys made their way north, Apaches from the 5th Corp's 11th Regiment attacked the Republican Guard's heavy armoured Medina Division in and around Karbala in southern Iraq on Monday.

Two Apache pilots were shot down and taken prisoner in the fighting, which soldiers said was far tougher than expected with every one of the 30-40 helicopters taking part in the battle reportedly being hit by various small arms fire.

Gass said the urban fighting tactics encountered by the 11th regiment were a concern for the 101st's helicopters because of their vulnerability to rocket-propelled

## Russia

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the brink of a human catastrophe as the US-led coalition troops targeted peaceful people.

Referring to Basra situation, the embassy said acute shortage of food and drinking water unleashed the threat of epidemics there.

It also said that mass bombardment on Iraq's oil fields could cause earthquake in the Northern Caucasus, Turkey, Iran and Armenia.

The statement added that military action in Iraq and possible human catastrophe could act as a basis for bringing the anti-Iraq coalition states to justice under the framework of the International Criminal Court.

It said the American propaganda that Iraq had huge plants of chemical weapons proved false.

The press release added that the statement of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair that pointed out that the human catastrophe in Basra had broken out before the military operation, 'does not correspond to reality'.

## FM flies

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what specific issues will be discussed during his trip.

Asked whether there will be any renegotiations on the DAP fertiliser project, initiated by Japanese supplier's credit and later canceled by the government, Khan said, "The concerned ministry (industries) is responsible for renegotiations."

However, he added, "Cancellation of one or two commercial projects cannot stand in the way of good relations between two long-time friends like Japan and Bangladesh."

But the Japanese government had not been happy with the cancellation of the fertiliser project, initiated during Awami League regime, and had said the cancellation 'would affect adversely business relations' between the two countries.

The government cancelled the project saying 'it would put huge financial burden on the country'.

## UN HR Forum

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envoy added.

The U.S. delegation, led by former UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, and the British delegation voted against the session -- but so did France which is fiercely opposed to the war.

China, which had formed a Security Council alliance with Russia and France to block UN backing for the military assault, joined Russia in supporting the call.

Speaking on behalf of the EU, Ireland argued that no special sitting was needed because the commission was already due to examine Iraq as part of its annual scrutiny of individual countries' rights records.

The Geneva-based commission has regularly condemned the Iraqi government of President Saddam Hussein for rights abuses.

A senior Western diplomat told Reuters ahead of the vote: "They don't want to talk about the regime but about the invasion. It is basically America-bashing."

## Obituary

Sadequa Samad, an educationist and mother of a liberation war martyr, passed away at a city clinic on Wednesday at the age of 79, says a press release.

Wife of late Azizus Samad, she founder of Dhaka Fisheries, Sadequa Samad is the mother of Shaheed Lt. Ashfaqus Samad, Bir Uttam, and freedom fighter Ishiat Aziz Ulfat.

Sadequa Samad, a Fulbright scholar, served as headmistress of Donovan Girls' High School, Morgan Girls' High School, Vigarunnisa Noon High School and Anandamoyee Girls' High School.

She is survived by three sons, one daughter and eight host relatives.

She was buried at Banani graveyard.

A prayer session will be held at the residence of her son Towfik Samad at House # 5, Road #4, Gulshan #1 after Asr prayers today.

### Hamida Khatun



Hamida Khatun died on March 24 at the age of 80, says a press release.

She is survived by three sons, three daughters and a number of grandchildren.

Her qulkhwan will be held at her village home at Deli, Brahmanbaria, at 9:00 am today.

## Death anniversary



Today is the third death anniversary of Dr Syed Ali Naqi, professor of Sociology, University of Dhaka, says a press release.

A doa mahfil will be held at his village home in Magura. Relatives, students and admirers are requested to pray for salvation of the departed soul.

# US opens new front

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stations were put into operation later.

Al-Jazeera television showed scores of children and men wounded in air raids by the invading forces. Medical supplies are running low.

As the death toll in Wednesday's bombing on a Baghdad market and residential buildings rose to 36, the US-British military command said it was an act of Iraqi sabotage.

Iraq denied the allegation and a BBC correspondent in Baghdad said he saw no evidence to support the US claim.

At the end of the eighth day of invasion, civilian deaths rose to 350, Iraq claimed. Another 4,000 have been injured.

Military analysts now say the invading forces are finding heavy war machines like tanks and armoured vehicles of little effect, especially with the supply line under threat. What they need is fast moving troops with sophisticated weapons.

As the war looks dragging on for months, the US announced it was flying 30,000 more troops to the Gulf, equipped with Abrams main battle tanks.

But casualties in 'friendly fire' are still occurring. Thirty US troops were wounded, two "very seriously" in heavy fighting in central Iraq.

A small group of Iraqis had gone effectively round the side of the American advance and started attacking the less well defended logistics and command positions in the rear.

Two American forces were detailed to deal with this threat, they both moved towards it, but ended up fighting each other, very heavy fire coming in from light armoured vehicles on the one side, and a group of troops on the other, and the ones not in the

armoured vehicles coming off much the worse.

A Patriot missile shot down a missile fired at Kuwait from southern Iraq, officials said.

### Resilient Basra

The second most important town of Basra still remains under Iraqi control despite US-British attempts.

Some 100 Iraqi tanks rolled out of the town at night and engaged the invading forces.

After an overnight fierce battle, British troops destroyed 14 Iraqi tanks, according to British military officials.

Iraq claimed many of its enemy vehicles were also knocked out. It was unclear why the column left Basra and headed straight for the British positions, in what a television reporter in the area described as a "suicidal" pullout.

Thousands of tired and thirsty Iraqi civilians trudged out of Basra yesterday, seeking water and shelter from air raids. A Reuters reporter saw a steady trickle leaving on foot across a bridge over the Euphrates river just south of Basra.

### Brisk air raids on Baghdad

Powerful explosions rocked central Baghdad yesterday and more blasts shook the city outskirts.

"There were three very powerful blasts, close by," a Reuters correspondent said after the first explosions hit. "There are warplanes overhead and anti-aircraft fire."

Shortly afterward, another series of explosions pounded the centre of the city. The raid was continuing at a brisk pace.

At one point, this correspondent was briefly deafened by the roar of a surface-to-air missile being launched nearby.

### Nassiriyah fight

US forces are fighting to secure

a bridgehead at Nassiriyah. But the resistance is too stubborn to win, military sources said.

US planes are bombarding the town and civilians are fleeing.

With the skies finally clear after two days of sandstorms, and good weather forecast for the next few days, US commanders have said this will enable allied forces to step up attacks.

## Shibir attack

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the encounter with JCD activists. Local photo-journalist Shahidul Islam Dukhu was beaten by police.

Two JCS activists -- Abdul Kayum and Mizan Ahmed -- were also injured in the clashes with JCD activists, he reported.

Of the injured, 30 were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH). Condition of 12 of them was learnt to be critical.

Other injured students took first aid at RMCH and some city clinics.

The injured include RU JCD Organising Secretary Rafiqul Islam, Munnujan Hall Secretary Sumi, Rokeya Hall President Yasmin, Zia Hall Secretary Sajjad Hossain Dip, Sher-e-Bangla Hall Organising Secretary Tushar, and JCD activists Faruk, Joyanal Abedin, Mizan, Mamun, Alo, Ripon, Abdullah Al Kafi, Ahmed Ali, Arif, Sagar, Masud, Prince, Manik Sayeed and Shanta.

According to some sources, the clashes ensued as two JCD activists wanted to watch BBC for news on Iraq war while two JCS activists asked for the ATN Bangla channel.

Another source claimed that JCD activists were preparing for a reprisal on Shibir cadres for an earlier attack.

Contingents of riot police and paramilitary BDR have been deployed as tension gripped the campus. RU VC Faisal Islam Faruki was holding a meeting with other officials and senior teachers on the situation till yesterday evening. The VC could not be contacted for his comment.

# Khaleda calls for end

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immediate start of humanitarian aid by UN agencies in Iraq.

"Bangladesh believes in amicable solution to all problems through peaceful means," she told the Iranian envoy.

The prime minister welcomed the envoy and assured him of all-out cooperation and support from her government and the people. She hoped that bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries would further intensify in the days to come.

The Prime Minister referred to the joint economic meeting to be held in Tehran soon and hoped that it would usher in new avenues of cooperation.

She urged for looking into scopes of investment by Iranian businesspeople in Bangladesh and mentioned the congenial investment climate created by the present government. Investment opportunities, particularly in export processing zones, have increased in the country, she said.

Khaleda said cooperation among Muslim countries would help each other improve the situation in the Muslim Ummah.

She recalled the participation of

Iran in Dhaka International Trade Fair-2003 where Iranian goods were found very popular among Bangladeshis consumers.

The prime minister called for increasing trade volumes between the two countries and mentioned the scope of importing jute, jute goods, tea, pharmaceuticals, melamine, leather and leather products from Bangladesh.

The Iranian envoy appreciated the hospitality of Bangladeshis and said Bangladesh and Iran were two great nations, which had long historic and cultural ties.

He reminded that nearly 8,000 common words were used everyday in languages of the two countries and a deep friendly relation existed between the two nations.

He congratulated Khaleda and the people of Bangladesh through her on the occasion of its 32nd anniversary of Independence Day observed on Wednesday.

Beheshti assured that he would fully utilise his office for further developing the relationship in all sectors, particularly in the fields of economy.

Although the trade volume is still in favour of Bangladesh, Iran intends to import more goods from

Bangladesh, he said, assuring that he would study the projects where Iran can invest in Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in Iran.

He said exchange of business delegations, organising trade fairs and holding of seminars both in Iran and Bangladesh would help expand trading cooperation.

Referring to the Bangladesh-Iran MOU on avoiding double taxation, he said it would help increase investment.

About the initiatives taken to expand air and sea routes between the two countries, he said a decision in this regard would come soon and it would leave positive impact on relations between the two nations.

Beheshti also assured Dhaka of looking into the welfare of Bangladeshis working in Iran.

During the meeting, the prime minister recalled President Ziaur Rahman's role in stopping Iran-Iraq war.

Khaleda invited the Iranian president to visit Bangladesh at a convenient time.

The Iranian envoy also extended invitation to Khaleda to visit Iran and said it would help expand bilateral relations.

# Outrageous, obscene

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be near to 30 and Iraqis are now witnessing these awful things each day; so there is no reason why the truth, all the truth, of what they see should not be told.

For another question occurred to me as I walked through this place of massacre. If this is what we are seeing in Baghdad, what is happening in Basra and Nassiriyah and Karbala? How many civilians are dying there too, anonymously, indeed unrecorded, because there are no reporters to be witness to their suffering?

Abu Hassan and Malek Hammoud were preparing lunch for customers at the Nasser restaurant on the north side of Abu Taleb Street. The missile that killed them landed next to the westbound carriageway, its blast tearing away the front of the cafe and cutting the two men -- the first 48, the second only 18 -- to pieces. A fellow worker led me through the rubble. "This is all that is left of them now," he said, holding out before me an oven pan dripping with blood.

At least 15 cars burst into flames, burning many of their occupants to death. Several men tore desperately at the doors of another flame-shrouded car in the centre of the street that had been flipped upside down by the same missile. They were forced to watch helplessly as the woman and her three children inside were cremated alive in front of them. The second missile hit neatly on the eastbound carriageway, sending shards of metal into three men standing outside a concrete apartment block with the words, "This is God's possession" written in marble on the outside wall.

The building's manager, Hishem Danoon, ran to the doorway as soon as he heard the massive explosion. "I found Ta'ar in pieces over there," he told me. His

head was blown off. "That's his hand." A group of young men and a woman took me into the street and there, a scene from any horror film, was Ta'ar's hand, cut off at the wrist, his four fingers and thumb grasping a piece of iron roofing. His young colleague, Sermed, died the same instant. His brains lay piled a few feet away, a pale red and grey mess behind a burnt car. Both men worked for Danoon. So did a doorman who was also killed.

As each survivor talked, the dead regained their identities. There was the electrical shop-owner killed behind his counter by the same missile that cut down Ta'ar and Sermed and the doorman, and the young girl standing on the central reservation, trying to cross the road, and the truck driver who was only feet from the point of impact and the beggar who regularly called to see Danoon for bread and who was just leaving when the missiles came screaming through the sandstorm to destroy him.

In Qatar, the Anglo-American forces -- let's forget this nonsense about "coalition" announced an inquiry. The Iraqi government, who are the only ones to benefit from the propaganda value of such a bloodbath, naturally denounced the slaughter, which they initially put at 14 dead. So what was the real target? Some Iraqis said there was a military encampment less than a mile from the street, though I couldn't find it. Others talked about a local fire brigade headquarters, but the fire brigade can hardly be described as a military target.

Certainly, there had been an attack less than an hour earlier on a military camp further north. I was driving past the base when two rockets exploded and I saw Iraqi soldiers running for their lives out of the gates and along the side of the highway. Then I heard two

more explosions; these were the missiles that hit Abu Taleb Street.

Of course, the pilot who killed the innocent Wednesday could not see his victims. Pilots fire through computer-aligned co-ordinates, and the sandstorm would have hidden the street from his vision. But when one of Malek Hammoud's friends asked me how the Americans could so blithely kill those they claimed to want to liberate, he didn't want to learn about the science of avionics or weapons delivery systems.

And why should he? For this is happening almost every day in Baghdad. Three days ago, an entire family of nine was wiped out in their home near the centre of the city. A busload of civilian passengers was reportedly killed on a road south of Baghdad two days ago. Only Wednesday were Iraqis learning the identity of five civilian passengers slaughtered on a Syrian bus that was attacked by American aircraft close to the Iraqi border at the weekend.

The truth is that nowhere is safe in Baghdad, and as the Americans and British close their siege in the next few days or hours, that simple message will become ever more real and ever more bloody.

We may put on the hairshirt of morality in explaining why these people should die. They died because of 11 September, we may say, because of President Saddam's "weapons of mass destruction", because of human rights abuses, because of our desperate desire to "liberate" them all. Let us not confuse the issue with oil. Either way, I'll bet we are told President Saddam is ultimately responsible for their deaths. We shan't mention the pilot, of course.

# Security Council

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Iranian ambassador Javad Zarif dismissed the implicit claim in the military code-name Operation Iraqi Freedom, launched to topple the regime of President Saddam Hussein.

"Democracy is not something that can be imposed by tanks and helicopter gunships," Zarif said.

"The Iraqi people may resent their government, but as they have shown in the past several days, they do not accept their liberation through foreign occupation."

Zarif accused both Iraq and United States of violating the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. "All countries, be they big or small, benefit from the principles of international law," he said.

Zarif and his Turkish counterpart, Umit Pamir, said their countries -- which both border on Iraq -- were threatened by a flood of refugees from war.

"We cannot allow an influx of refugees into Turkey to take place as it did in 1991," Pamir said, referring to the US-led military campaign to expel invading Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

"We are not convinced of the reasoning that is brought forth to explain why such an influx would not happen this time," he said, and added: "Any refugee movement should be met inside Iraq and the people provided with shelter, food and security."

The United States and Britain invaded last week after giving up efforts to secure the votes for a council resolution to strip Iraq of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes by force.

Several speakers noted that the majority of council members had supported proposals to disarm Iraq peacefully by pursuing and intensifying UN inspections which began on November 27.

But Kuwaiti ambassador Mohammed Abulhasan said the regime of Iraqi President Saddam

Hussein had only itself to blame for the war.

It had persistently rejected council resolutions dating from 1991, when "the Kuwaiti people languished under a brutal and abhorrent Iraqi occupation for seven months," he said.

"The occupying power at the time did not allow international media or the Red Cross to enter the occupied zone" to witness its abuses of human rights, he added.

By contrast, the US and British forces had permitted "unprecedented media coverage" of their actions, Abulhasan said.

The ambassadors of Australia and Poland, both of which have forces siding with the US troops in Iraq, also blamed Iraq for refusing to disarm and the Security Council for failing to enforce its resolutions.

A total of 63 speakers were scheduled to take the floor in the debate, but council rules allow other speakers to add their names to the list after a meeting begins and the session was expected to continue on Thursday.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan opened the debate with an appeal to council members to recover their shattered unity.

"All of us must regret that our intense efforts to achieve a peaceful situation through this council did not succeed," Annan said.

"We have all been watching hour by hour on our television screens the terrifying impact of modern weaponry on Iraq and its people," he added.

Annan said he hoped council members would put aside their differences over reactivating the oil-for-food programme in Iraq, which was suspended on Tuesday last week after he ordered the evacuation of all international UN staff.

Earlier, council members on both sides expressed optimism that they would rapidly reach agreement on a draft resolution to reactivate the programme for 45 days.

# Chink in US armour

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Gunfire crackling from mist-shrouded trees by the roadside sent Marines dashing for cover behind vehicles, before tanks smashed through the undergrowth to hunt down the attackers.

"We couldn't see who was shooting at us," said Lance-Corporal John Grimes, 19, who dived back into his truck without firing a shot at the hidden assailants, his combat fatigues splattered with mud.

"The bullets were hitting real close, within inches of us," he told Reuters after the raid, north of the town of Nassiriyah.

The attack, the first against this U.S. Marine truck platoon since the war began last Thursday, showed that a group of perhaps 10 men with assault rifles could temporarily disrupt a convoy backed by tanks, helicopters and armored personnel carriers.

There were no reports of casualties on either side during the 30-minute firefight, but the battle strained nerves among Marine drivers, many of whom had never been in combat before.

The threat to the supply lines was underscored last Sunday when an U.S. army supply convoy apparently made a wrong turn during a battle near Nassiriyah. U.S. officials said their soldiers were ambushed by Iraqi irregular forces and some were taken prisoner.

The threat of ambush is not just a frightening prospect for Marines riding in slow-moving trucks visible for miles across the desert, but a potential headache for Pentagon planners.

Logistics are crucial in any war, but in this invasion they have a particular significance.

Strong supply lines are vital to sustaining the pace of what

Washington wants to be a rapid campaign, making them a tempting "soft target" for Iraqi troops whose weapons can barely scratch the M-1A1 battle tanks spearheading the advance.

Without supplies, even invincible tanks cannot fight long.

"It's small