

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.

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 Narasingdi.

Two teachers were also expelled.

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

An invigilator and 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 Brammanbaria, five in Feni and six in Luxamipur.

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 rear 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

grenades, AK47s and other small arms fire.

The Apaches, the most commonly used helicopter in the fleet for deep attacks, have sophisticated defence systems to counter missiles and longer range weapons, but pilots have to rely on their own vision to avoid the small arms.

Free access

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121 tariff lines requested in 2002 and 24 out of 191 tariff lines requested earlier by Bangladesh, the press release said.

The Bangladeshi delegation was led by commerce secretary, Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury, while, Shri Dipak Chatterjee, secretary, department of Commerce, led the Indian side.

During the talks, India pointed out the significant delay in convening a meeting of the joint group of experts of the two countries to consider issues related to border trade, trans-shipment of Indian goods through Bangladesh territory, and deepening of tariff concessions.

But Bangladesh pointed that these issues will be discussed at the upcoming joint economic commission meeting in July this year in Dhaka, the press release said.

During the meeting, India also announced that further duty-free concessions can be considered under the framework of a bilateral free trade arrangement.

Bangladesh agrees to initiating discussions on a free trade arrangement, the press release claimed.

India and Bangladesh also set up a joint working group headed by two joint secretaries of their respective commerce ministries to look into complaints related to non-tariff and tariff-barrier barriers lodged by either side and take steps to address them.

Two sides also agreed on a common list of land customs stations at the India-Bangladesh border and a time schedule to improve their infrastructure facilities.

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 Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and the British delegation voted against the session -- 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, the founder of Dhaka Fisheries, Sadequa Samad is the mother of Shahed Ali Asfaque Samad, Bir Uttam, and freedom fighter Iftiak 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 a host of relatives.

She was buried at Banani graveyard.

A prayer session will be held at the residence of her son Towfiq 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 qulqhwani 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 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.

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.

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 300, 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 other.

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

US planes are bombing 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.

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.

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Shibir attack

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

Two ICS 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 included RU JCD Organising Secretary Rafiqul Islam, Muminjan Hall Secretary Sumi, Rokeya Hall President Yasmin, Zia Hall Secretary Sajid Hossain Dip, Sher-e-Bangla Hall Organising Secretary Tushar and JCD activists Faruk, Joynal Abedin, Mizan, Mamun, Alo, Ripon, Abdulai, 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 ICS 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