

Occupying powers set to take control of Iraq's oil wealth

AFP, United Nations

The United States and Britain introduced a resolution yesterday that would end 12 years of UN sanctions against Iraq and give them control of the country's oil revenues for at least a year.

The tough resolution that in effect relegates the United Nations and other international institutions to an advisory role with little power, would phase out over four

months the existing UN oil-for-food humanitarian programme.

The United States and Britain, who sponsored the measure along with Spain, want a vote by June 3, when that programme, which gives the United Nations control over the oil revenues, needs to be renewed.

Without adoption of the resolution, no Iraqi, US or UN entity in Baghdad has the legal authority to export oil.

The Bush administration is counting on approval from Russia, France, China and Germany, who had the strongest anti-war position in the 15-member body, with officials saying there was little enthusiasm for another bruising fight.

And nearly every council member, including Britain, had wanted to send UN weapons inspectors back to Iraq, as called for in at least 16 resolutions as a condition for lifting the sanctions, imposed when Iraq favoured suspending the sanctions but leaving some control with the United Nations until an Iraqi government is established.

Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the construction work of the highway in December 1998.

A toll plaza was erected in Kachhikata area on the highway.

The prime minister will also address a public meeting at Nawab Shiraj-ud-Doula College ground in the afternoon.

PM to visit Natore today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Prime Minister Khaleida Zia will visit Natore today.

She will inaugurate the Bonpara-Hatikumrul-Nalka Highway linking Rajshahi region with Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge in the morning.

Construction of the 55-kilometre highway was completed in last month at a cost of nearly Tk 362 crore.

SARS virus genome is a 'double-edged sword'

AFP, Paris

The most complete genetic study to date of the SARS virus has revealed an agent that appears to undergo almost negligible mutation, a phenomenon that is described as "a double-edged sword" for the doctors battling to eradicate it.

Scientists in Singapore compared the genetic ID of samples of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus, taken in throat swabs from local patients, with the genome of samples found in other countries.

The most important areas of the genomes were identical, something that is remarkable in so-called RNA viruses, which includes SARS and other members of the coronavirus family.

A microscopic view of the coronavirus projected on a screen during a press conference on the new findings of the SARS virus yesterday.

Many feared dead as plane door opens in mid-flight

AFP, Kinshasa

Many of an estimated 200 passengers on an internal flight in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were feared dead after a door on an Ilyushin airplane burst open in mid-flight, military officials at Kinshasa airport said yesterday.

The accident occurred Thursday night when the Soviet-era cargo plane, which had been chartered by the Congolese army, was flying at an altitude of 7,000 feet (2,200 meters), en route from Kinshasa in the west to the south-eastern city of Lubumbashi.

The Russian crew was able to turn the Ilyushin 76 around and land at Kinshasa airport following the accident. The Ilyushin 76 has a large rear cargo door that runs for roughly the length of the tail along the belly of the fuselage. Members of DRC's rapid intervention police force and their families were among the flight's passengers.

The accident was only reported Friday morning after the victims' relatives were informed of the tragedy, the officials said. An investigation has been launched to determine the causes of the accident.



The building for a seismic observatory in Sylhet, constructed by the public works department about a year ago, is not ready for use yet.

Observatory project hits snag

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Implementation of a Tk 1.8 crore project for setting up a seismic observatory in Sylhet has come to a halt due to non-disbursement of funds allocated for it.

Of the total allocation, Tk 35 lakh was released till the end of fiscal 2001-2002.

for construction of a building for housing the observatory. But disbursement of fund was suspended at the beginning of fiscal 2002-2003.

The building, constructed by the Public Works Department about a year ago, has been lying uncared-for because it is still to be handed over to meteorological department.

An observatory is being set up in Sylhet under a Tk 18.17 crore project for establishing three seismic observatories.

Quest for arsenic-free drinking water

Draft policy may be okayed Monday

NAIMUL HAQ

The cabinet is likely to approve the draft of the much-awaited National Policy for Arsenic Mitigation at its meeting on Monday.

The policy highlights emergency steps to provide alternative safe drinking water options to arsenic-affected areas, rehabilitation of serious arsenic patients and research on arsenic in food chain, sources in the Local Government and Rural Development Ministry (LGRD) said.

It would set a guideline for mitigating the effect of arsenic on humans and environment in a suitable way.

Under the policy, all tubewells and irrigation wells will be screened and monitored regularly to identify which have been contaminated. Arsenic patients and people at risk will also be identified to provide remedy.

"Priority would be given to surface water options over groundwater sources. The options in order of priority include dug well, pond sand filter, rain water harvesting, deep hand-tubewells, arsenic removal by using chemicals and pipe water supply system," an official said.

The policy outlines emergency steps to ensure alternative water supply. It said villages with more than 80 per cent of contaminated tubewells will come under the emergency steps. Besides, pockets of high contamination having high number of arsenic patients in villages with otherwise low level of arsenic in water might also get emergency response.

Villages that have between 40 and 80 per cent of the wells contaminated would get medium-term response. For long-term response, only proven and sustainable

Customs officials at Bhomra, Benapole threaten strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Standstill of trade through Bhomra and Benapole land-ports is likely to continue as customs officials threatened to go on full strike from today following BDR's refusal to withdraw cases against 19 people arrested Monday in connection with smuggling of Indian jute seeds.

The decision to go on indefinite strike by Khulna and Jessore Customs and VAT Executive Officers' Association (KJCEA) was announced by its general secretary SM Matiur Rahman following Thursday's two-hour token strike by officials and employees of Benapole, Jessore, Khulna and Mongla customs. Mongla Port customs officials have also backed the KJCEA's indefinite strike.

The crisis sparked by the arrest of 14 Indian truckers and five customs officials of the Bhomra land-port on charge of smuggling 104 metric tons of jute seeds from India has already cost the government Tk four crore.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) on Thursday issued an official order to suspend the import-export trade through Bhomra land-port of Satkhira until further order, with a provision to open new LCs till May 15.

From June 7, Bhomra land-port would be sealed if the current impasse continues, customs sources said quoting NBR's official letter.

The NBR letter signed by its joint secretary AFM Abdullah Khan said the government has been compelled to take such stern measures to halt smuggling through different border points having no warehouse facility for storing legally imported goods. NBR has however allowed traders who opened LCs before issuance of the government directive to continue trade till June 6 through Bhomra landport.

West Bengal Truck Owners' and Drivers' Association and Khojadanga C&F Association of India have also unanimously decided to stop carrying Bangladeshi imported goods with effect from today unless the arrested Indian drivers and helpers are not released unconditionally.

Hearing on petition for bail of the Indian truck workers will be held today at Satkhira court.

Sources said over a thousand Indian trucks loaded with perishable and non-perishable items including onion and fruits are stranded at the Petrapole border. No Bangladeshi truck entered Indian borders through Bhomra and Benapole.

Govt patronises Bangabandhu's killers: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has accused Prime Minister Khaleida Zia and her government of patronising the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"We must know how a person sentenced to death for killing the father of the nation can get back his job," Hasina said yesterday while addressing the newly elected office bearers of the Rajshahi Bar Association at the party's central office in the city.

The government has become a government of "killing and plundering", she said.

Hasina blamed the BNP-Jamaat alliance government for taking

A verdict in favour of arsenic patients

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

British lawyers fighting for Bangladeshi arsenic patients won a judgement on Thursday, which paves the way for running a lawsuit against the British Geological Survey (BGS).

"The judgement removes all obstruction to the next steps of the case we are seeking on behalf of Bangladeshi arsenic patients," said Sharmin Murshid, chairperson of Brotee, an NGO that took the issue to the Bangladesh Arsenic Action Network (BIAN) in London about two years ago.

Claimants of the lawsuit say the BGS neglected tests for arsenic when it carried out water tests in Bangladesh in 1992.

The BIAN that pursued the fight for the last six months has won the judgement in favour of running the case in the British High Court, said

a press release yesterday.

Thursday's judgement dismissed the BGS's application to strike out the claim by victims of arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh. The BGS now has to answer why it failed to carry out the arsenic tests.

Leigh Day and Co and Alexander Harris represent approximately 750 Bangladeshi villagers suffering from arsenic poisoning, who claim that the BGS, part of the Natural Environment Research Council, was negligent in carrying out arsenic tests during its 1992 survey on toxicity of Bangladeshi well-water.

If the BGS had carried out necessary tests, it would have identified high levels of arsenic contamination in the water. Instead, it gave the water a clean bill of health and the claimants continued drinking the contaminated water.



Akram quitting international cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh skipper and prolific batsman Akram Khan finally plans put an end to his illustrious international cricket career. He was expected to formally announce his retirement in Dhaka on Monday.

Akram captained Bangladesh from 1995-98. His greatest achievement was leading Bangladesh to winning the 1997 ICC Championship which opened the door for the country to play in the 1999 World Cup and eventual Test status a year later.

He played in 44 one-day internationals and scored 976 runs with an average of 23.24 with a top score of 65 against Kenya. In Tests, he played 16 innings in 8 matches, finishing with 259 runs at an average of 16.19. His best was 44 against Zimbabwe in April, 2001.

(MORE ON PAGE 13)

DOWN TO EARTH

Caught in a crazy cycle

ASM NURUNNABI

Life in the city appears to be revolving around urban housing, plots for housing in suburban areas, shopping malls, fast food shops, etc.

At the moment, we are passing through a phase in which high-rise buildings seem to take priority over not-so-tall buildings. As a result, old buildings in many localities are being demolished to give way to high-rise ones. The boom in the construction of high-rise buildings may give the impression that the country's economy is spiralling.

The basic question relating to high-rise buildings within the city periphery seems to be whether the present trend in this respect really provides any meaningful relief by way of meeting the housing needs of a significant section of the city population, besides the affluent classes and high-income groups in society. Some knowledgeable persons feel that the present emphasis on high-rise buildings may be shifted to comparatively low-cost lands available outside the city to ease the pressure of a growing population.

A simultaneous phenomenon is the growing interest being shown by real estate business companies to attract prospective customers to invest in the lands in city suburbs like Savar, Joydevpur, Ashulia, Nabinagar, etc. This may work, in some way, to give effect to the indicated shift from the emphasis on high-rise buildings within city areas, but obviously such a shift will take time to materialise. The pace of development of the housing plots by private owners in the suburban areas of the city is slow for obvious reasons, particularly on account of inadequate transport and communication facilities and uncertainty about prospects of monetary return.

Lately, we have been observing a high tide of advertisements, in the print media, inviting bookings for allotments in a good number of

Interns at Barisal medical college hospital continue strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Strike by interns at the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) entered its seventh day yesterday as all attempts to break the deadlock failed so far, hospital sources said.

Patients have already started to leave the hospital, which is heavily dependent on the services of interns, as an emergency medical team comprising 30 interns proved too small to cope with the hundreds of patients needing urgent medical attention.

The strikers, who are demanding payment of arrears of three month's salary to the hospital's 280 interns, have threatened a complete shutdown unless their demand is met by today.

Sources said SBMCH director Dr Moazzem Hossain has been in Dhaka for the last five days trying to get the higher authorities to resolve the crisis.