

UK ministers 'distorted' UN weapons report

THE GUARDIAN, Basra

Tony Blair's Iraq crisis deepened on Thursday night as ministers were accused of distorting the findings of the chief UN weapons inspector to support Britain's claims about Saddam Hussein's weapons programme.

Amid growing anger among senior intelligence officials about Downing Street's use of their work for political ends, Hans Blix's office rejected claims by ministers that he had provided unequivocal evidence of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programme.

As the prime minister became the first western leader to visit Iraq since the end of the war, Dr Blix's spokesman said the chief weapons inspector had "never asserted" that Iraq definitely had weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the conflict.

Ewen Buchanan, who said Dr Blix had merely said there was a "strong presumption" that banned items such as an thrax still existed, was speaking after the armed forces minister, Adam Ingram, declared that the UN had provided "damning" evidence of illegal Iraqi weapons.

Mr Buchanan's remarks will undermine the credibility of Downing Street, which faced severe pressure yesterday over claims that it doctored a dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass

destruction to strengthen the case for war. An unnamed intelligence official told the BBC that the key claim in last September's dossier - that Iraq could launch a chemical or biological attack within 45 minutes of an order - had been inserted on the instructions of officials at No 10.

Alastair Campbell, the prime minister's director of communications, who played a key role in drawing up the dossier, said yesterday in Basra that the BBC was "saying we forced the intelligence agencies to put things in the dossier that were untrue. That is wholly untrue; there is nothing in there that was not the work of the intelligence agencies".

As the prime minister insisted once again that banned weapons would be found, Downing Street faced renewed pressure last night when the hawkish deputy US defence secretary appeared to belittle the importance of such weapons.

Paul Wolfowitz told Vanity Fair magazine that the decision to highlight weapons of mass destruction as the main reason for invading Iraq was taken for "bureaucratic" reasons, indicating that Washington did not take the threat seriously.

Amid the furore, British intelligence sources expressed fury at Downing Street's behaviour. They were deeply reluctant to allow Downing Street to use their intelligence assessments because they feared it would be manipulated for political ends.

Widespread unease in the intelligence community about Downing Street's use of their information in the September dossier was compounded by a

second report in February containing sections plagiarised by Campbell's staff. John Scarlett, chairman of Whitehall's joint intelligence committee, was reported to be furious at what a senior Whitehall source described yesterday as a "serious error".

Caveats about intelligence supplied by MI6 and GCHQ, the government's eavesdropping centre, were swept aside by Mr Blair, egged on by Campbell, well-placed sources said.

A Whitehall source told the Guardian yesterday: "It may take several months to decide what the Iraqis were doing." He added that something had to be found, if only for political reasons, to support Mr Blair.

Downing Street will also struggle to shrug off the remarks by Dr Blix's office. Ministers, who privately rubbished the chief weapons inspector when he resisted the rush to war, have recently hailed a 173-page report he produced in March to prove that Iraq had a banned weapons programme.

Dr Blix's spokesman, who did not directly criticise any ministers, said the report indicated that there was a "strong presumption" Iraq did not destroy illegal substances such as anthrax. But Mr Buchanan added: "We know they had anthrax. We never asserted that these days they had them."

However, Buchanan made clear that Dr Blix's report raised serious questions about Iraq: "There are hundreds, if not thousands, of unanswered questions."

Father, son hacked to death by extortionists

BSS, Pabna

A farmer and his son were hacked to death yesterday at Patoa village under Ataikula Upazila here yesterday morning.

Police said miscreants called Jasim Uddin, 50, and his son Saiful Alam, 25, out of their house at 4:00am and took them to a nearby field where they were brutally murdered.

Police recovered the bodies later in the morning.

Sources said Jasim was killed because he refused to pay money to local extortionists.

A case was filed with Ataikula police.

Abducted shrimp cultivator's body recovered

BSS, Khulna

Police recovered the body of shrimp cultivator Chitya Hawlader from the river Telikhali of Paikgachha here yesterday, four days after he was abducted from his house.

The 50-year-old man was called out of his house at Kalinagar village of Paikgachha by a group of people wearing police uniform at midnight on May 27, family sources said.

The miscreants told the inmates of the house that they were taking Hawlader to the nearby police station.

Local people found his body floating in the river yesterday afternoon. Police later sent the body to hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed with the local police station but none was arrested yet.

Fair trade

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The NBJ leaders said about three lakh garment workers lost their job in Bangladesh under the influence of the WTO policy. A few developed countries are making 'pots of profit' from the LDCs by running banks, insurances, health care and educational organisations there, they added.

They vowed to resist the discriminatory world trade regimes and said they were deeply concerned over the fate of 16 lakh garment workers at home.

The NBJ leaders demanded of the minister concerned to represent the poor to the LDCs' ministerial meeting and mirror their life and living standard and focus on the ways to pull them from poverty.

They said a few developed countries captured 75 per cent of world trade and demanded democratisation of the world trade policy and tax-free access of Bangladeshi garments to the world market.

The NBJ urged the NGO activists and garment workers to build a greater movement against the 'injustice in world trade policy'.

The Dhaka meeting of LDCs is aimed at forging a common stand on trade liberalisation ahead of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in the Mexican city of Cancun from September 10 this year.

Presided over by Shirin Akther, the rally was also addressed by Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Mujibor Rahman Pintu, Shelina Shelly, Tamiz Uddin, Salauddin Sapwan, Delwar Hossain and Abul Hossain.

Nepalese PM

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after he recommended to the King to postpone general elections on security grounds.

Deuba dissolved the House of Representatives on May 22, 2002 following differences with Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala regarding the extension of emergency rule.

The five major parties have been agitating against the October's royal proclamation and have called it a regressive step.

The Premier's resignation comes after the two-day meeting of the former MPs convened by the agitating parties to challenge the legitimacy of the government.

Chand, a known pro-monarchist, was appointed prime minister in October last year after the king fired and named a new government. Opposition parties have been calling his appointment unconstitutional and launched a series of protests this month.

Chand, who heads the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, had been prime minister twice under the parliamentary democratic system installed in 1990 and once under the feudal, village-based political system associated with Nepal's former absolute monarchy.

On taking office in October, he had said: "My first priority will be to restore peace and stability in the country for which I will try to open dialogue with the Maoist rebels."

Nepal's seven-year rebel insurgency has killed 7,000 people, but recent peace talks have held out hope of an end. The rebels began fighting in 1996 to end the Himalayan kingdom's constitutional monarchy.

Robberies

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"I think the sensational cases should be handled by detectives, as they have expertise," DMP Commissioner Ashraf Huda told The Daily Star.

An armed gang of eight looted cash and valuables reportedly worth Tk 8.54 lakh from three flats of Eastern Flower at Siddheswari.

The robbers entered the apartment at 5:10am Tuesday after overpowering the guards. They tied guards Shamsul Arefin, Asaduzzaman and Rahat-ul-Islam and huddled them together on the landing of the ground floor.

The same day, burglars took away cash and valuables worth Tk 46.65 lakh from three offices at Alimunnesa Bhaban in Kakrail.

Robbers took away Tk 50,000 and 15-tola gold ornaments from the residence of a businessman, Jahurul Haq, at east Shewrapara Tuesday night and stabbed him when he challenged.

During a bus robbery at Abdullahpur in Keraniganj on the night of May 18, armed robbers stabbed a local bus passenger, Mohammad Ali, 50, as he refused to oblige. They got off with looted cash and valuables.

On May 12, robbers duped five guards of Venus Garments Factory in Pallabi and took away cash and valuables worth Tk 12 lakh.

On May 10, an armed gang robbed employees of All Right Garments of East Shewrapara of Tk 11.90 lakh.

Consumerism

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genuine ones. Sometimes the authorities concerned launch drives against the spurious and substandard drugs and medicines and other consumer articles but their effectiveness is largely circumscribed by the sheer enormity of the problem.

The Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) has a role to play in ensuring proper quality not only of the drugs and medicines but also numerous other consumer items whose manufacturers approach that body for its certificate. It is, however, often heard that in spite of some products bearing the BSTI label, their real quality still remains in doubt. It is, therefore, open to question whether the BSTI label on a consumer product actually guarantees its good quality. It is also alleged that dishonest tradesmen can get the BSTI certificate if the officials of that organisation can be won over by a sort of quid pro quo. So the consumers, by and large, suffer from misgivings about the quality of the products that they buy even though such products carry BSTI labels. This crisis of credibility has become a serious problem.

Some time ago, there was a draft proposal in the ministry of commerce to frame a new law to protect the interests of consumers. The draft law, when enacted, may go some way in upholding consumer interests, irrespective of the pressures that may be created by vested quarters to hinder its proper working.

The bottom line is that suitable measures for preventing widespread incidence of adulteration combined with sustained and effective exercise by concerned authorities for maintaining a stable price structure are needed to protect the interests of consumers.

Tribute to Zia

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the bugles of Bangladesh Armed Forces played the last post.

The prime minister offered 'munajat' at the mazar premises seeking blessings of Allah for peace of the departed soul of President Zia and the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the country.

Khaleda Zia, who is also chairperson of the ruling BNP, also placed wreaths at the mazar on behalf of the party. Members of the Cabinet, parliament members, leaders of the ruling BNP and its front organisations took part in the 'munajat'. She also attended a milad mahfil at the mazar premises.

Later, she distributed food and clothes among the poor at 30 different places in the city.

Leaders and activists of different socio-political, cultural and professional organisations including BNP, Jubo Dal, Chhatra Dal, Mahila Dal, JASAS, Sramik Dal, Zia Tanti Dal, Zia Academy and Zia Shishu-Kishore Sangathan also placed wreaths and offered 'munajat' at the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman.

A voluntary blood donation programme was organised at the mazar premises under the auspices of Shaheed Zia Adarsha Bastabayan Parishad. Former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Professor Moniruzzaman Mia inaugurated the programme as chief guest.

In the afternoon, a milad mahfil and special prayer were arranged at Bangabhaban.



Former vice-chancellor of Chittagong University Dr Alamgir Mohammad Sirajuddin speaks as the chief guest at the inauguration of The Daily Star-Oriental Bank Limited Third Inter-School English Debate Competition, organised by Drishty in Chittagong, yesterday.

Civil society demands

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interests in the Fifth WTO Ministerial held at a city hotel.

The 13-point declaration will be handed over to the LDC trade ministers' meeting beginning in Dhaka today. The LDC ministers will also have a common 'Dhaka Declaration' for the fifth WTO ministerial conference at Cancun, Mexico, to be held from September 10 to 14.

"Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) in favour of LDCs should be made effective and enforceable in the WTO. And a framework of agreement on SDT should be accepted," the 13-point declaration said.

The objective is to give the people in LDCs the real opportunity to participate and benefit from the global market, the declaration said and added that granting of duty and quota free market access by developed nations to all LDC products is an immediate priority.

Duty and quota free access must be complemented by improved and simplified rules of origin that take into account the industrial weakness and technological backwardness of LDCs and their difficulty in adding value, so that LDC exports can actually benefit from these preferences, the declaration added.

Export subsidies, including export credits, on agricultural products that compete with those produced by LDCs, should be eliminated. LDCs should also have the opportunity to participate in world trade in services, which requires commitments from developed nations for temporary migration of workforce, the declaration said.

The Forum believes LDCs have derived no benefits from the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). "Substantial revisions must be made to protect the rights of farmers, indigenous people and local communities and prohibit patents on life forms."

The accession process of the remaining poor nations to the WTO should be made less onerous with LDCs being automatically eligible for all SDT provisions, it demanded.

The Forum urged the LDC governments to institute democratic systems that are inclusive, transparent and accountable. "We urge the governments to institute good governance and fight against corruption."

The Forum condemns the practice of mini-ministerial and demands that no 'Green Room' type of meeting be held, which is beyond

the scope of WTO working procedures. The chairpersons of the various committees, working groups and of the trade negotiations committees should be democratically elected.

The International Civil Society Forum was formed following an initiative of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and was attended by 26 overseas representatives from 17 international organisations and local civil society members.

Kushiara bridge

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caught in long queues, as the ferry cannot transport more than 15 vehicles arun.

Necessary spare parts for repairs of the ferries are not available in Sylhet, says a Roads and Highways Department official. The department contacted Dhaka for spare parts but did not get any reply, said the official.

Traffic pressure on the Sylhet-Fenchuganj-Moulvibazar road has increased over the years, as it provides a substitute for the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway (which passes through Sherpur). Work on the highway has been going on for the last two years.



Leaders and activists of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its front organisations block road in front of the Mohamadpur Police Station to hold discussion marking the death anniversary of president Ziaur Rahman.

Palestinian state

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to bring peace in the Middle East, force Israel to stop aggression against the Palestinian people, end aggressive measures against Al-Quds Al Sharif and other Palestinian towns, stop construction of a racist wall and ensure withdrawal of the occupation forces.

The summit condemned Israel's expansionist, colonialist settlement policy and felt the necessity to stop all settlement activities.

In another resolution, the Tehran declaration strongly condemned Israel's policy to refuse compliance with Security Council resolution 497 of 1981 and to impose its mandated laws and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights as well as its policies of annexation. It also condemned Israel's bid to impose its control on the Holy Quds Haram and its repeated attempts to intervene in the affairs of management of Islamic Waqfs.

The conference also stressed the need for immediate withdrawal of the occupation forces from Iraq to enable its people to run the country.

"The Iraqi people must have the rights to run their government, uphold their national unity, protect their country's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty, and to stop exploitation of their natural resources," the ICFM said in resolution.

The ICFM also called for setting up of a broad-based Iraqi government in accordance with the consti-

tution to be agreed upon by the Iraqi people, to work for the enhancement of peaceful coexistence with neighbours of Iraq and respect for all international and bilateral treaties and agreements signed by Iraq in the past.

It underlined the need for key role of the UN in addressing the situation in Iraq in the post-war era. It also expressed readiness of the OIC to participate in international efforts to extend humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people and the reconstruction of Iraq.

AL defers rally

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all fronts of governance. "The government has no legitimacy to hold the office anymore," the party resolution said, painting a grim picture of the overall situation.

It referred to recent release of what it termed 'criminals' in the name of dropping political cases, alleging that the government was harbouring them.

Reviewing the overall socio-political and economic situation, the meeting called on the government to step down immediately in national interest. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil and presidium members Amir Hossain Amu, Johra Tajuddin, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Matia Chowdhury addressed the meeting.

Toxic threat

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containing the chemical warns that it may cause blood circulatory shock' and advises avoiding its spray mist and direct contact with the liquid.

Traders use the chemical to quickly ripen fruits like mango, orange, banana, papaya and watermelon and mature vegetables, cucumber, brinjal, gourd and tomato.

Gastro-enterologist Dr Mia Mashud said, "Bowel irritation is a common problem with artificial chemicals. Although I have not come across any patient complaining of such irritation after taking the chemical with fruits and vegetables, people should avoid using such chemicals."

The Institute of Public Health (IPH) has tested Ethrel and stated that the chemical is highly poisonous for use as an artificial plant growth regulator.

"We have the report of the tests and found that Ethrel is not registered in Bangladesh. Using it for artificially ripening and maturing fruits and vegetables is very offensive," said an official of the Drug Administration, requesting anonymity.

Sources pointed out that the chemical also enhances the look of vegetables and fruits when sprayed on them. Fruits give a bright look and vegetables do not dry up quickly. Various quarters feel that the government should take immediate steps to stop use of the toxic chemical.

Russia invites US to help build Iran N-plant

AFP, Moscow

Russia has invited the United States to join in the construction of the nuclear power station at Bushehr in Iran and Washington is considering the proposal, Atomic Energy Minister Alexander Rumantsyev said yesterday.

"We have made this proposal several times to our American colleagues in talks at expert level. For the moment, they are saying they have to consider," Rumantsyev said, as quoted by the ITAR-TASS news agency.

"There is scope for everyone," Rumantsyev noted, pointing out that Iran envisaged a power plant with six reactors whereas Moscow has contracted to supply just the

first bloc.

"Development countries not only can but should help other countries that respect the non-proliferation regime and meet the requirements" of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the minister said.

Washington has been pressing Russia to break off all nuclear cooperation with Iran, and particularly its participation in the Bushehr power plant.

Reuters adds: Russia ignored US objections on Thursday and vowed to keep building a nuclear power plant in Iran, saying only a special UN meeting could assess whether Tehran was violating promises not to use it to produce weapons.

AL: Godfathers

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Moderate and liberal sections of the AL pointed out that these so-called leaders could not even dare enter the party central office for several months after the last elections due to the wrath of workers and supporters of the party. Their re-emergence would spark off discontent among honest and dedicated leaders and workers of the party, they fear.

"An overwhelming majority of the Awami League leaders and workers want that we dissociate ourselves from people who earned bad image for the party when it was in power," said a senior party leader, requesting anonymity.

He however hoped that when Sheikh Hasina returns home early next month, she would take note of the resolutions at the AL Secretariat meeting in March and reassess the developments in the context of party councils in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

In its March 28 meeting, the AL Secretariat decided to get rid of leaders having 'godfather' image. The meeting took note of how 'godfather' image of people like Joyal Hazari of Feni, Shamim Osman of Narayanganj, Abu Taher of Laxmipuri and Abul Hasnat Abdullah of Barisal had contributed to the party's poor show in the last general elections.

Within four days of that meeting, the party high command removed the long absconding Joyal Hazari

from the post of general secretary of Feni district AL.

Hazari, who earned the more notoriety by brutally torturing journalist Tipu Sultan, has reportedly been out of the country for the last 20 months with 18 cases lodged against him.

Party leaders at any level, who drew public wrath for their criminal activities, are going to have a 'political burial', said a top AL leader.

A political aide to Sheikh Hasina pointed out that 'family bondage' did not prevent her from taking a tough stand in the interest of the party. Abul Hasnat's (a first cousin of Hasina) wife was a mayoral aspirant in the Barisal city corporation polls but she refused to give her party backing, he added.

AL leaders think godfather image of Shamim Osman was a major factor behind AL candidates' defeat in all the five parliamentary seats in Narayanganj district. However, in the last six months, pro-AL candidates swept the polls in all the five municipalities in Narayanganj district, including Narayanganj, Kanchan and Tarabo municipalities.

Hanuman

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assume the number of hanuman has come down to almost half within the last 12 years," Hashem, who is working there since 1991 in two stints, said.

Some locals think that the alleged migration of Hindu community across the border brought misfortune to hanuman of this area. Traditionally, Hindus treat hanuman with great care for religious reasons.

But, now the Muslim-dominated villagers snatch baby hanuman either to keep as pet or sell to the circus party and traders, locals claimed.

Dr Ali Reza Khan, who is carrying out a research on hanuman of this region, told The Daily Star the hanuman could only be protected by limiting their forays into private properties.

Urging all to save the vegetarian species, Dr Reza suggested the government should take immediate steps to plant fruit trees in khas lands as well as on government and private office compounds.

"The wildlife is protected under the Bangladesh Wildlife Preservation Act of 1974. As per the Act, the government is obligated to appoint wildlife biologists to protect not only the hanuman but also all wildlife species," said Dr Reza, who is also the curator of a Dubai zoo.

Education

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was given the highest allocation, only a trickle goes to developing learning aids and textbooks - key to raising the standard of education.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a thinktank, proposed to the government to increase the budget allocation for education gradually by 5 per cent of GNP (Gross National Product). Current allocation for education is around 2 per cent of GNP.

In its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the government committed to lifting the allocation to 2.62 per cent, 2.81 per cent and 2.93 per cent of GNP in the budgets for 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06. Anu Muhammad said the enhancement ratio is eye-wash.

Educationist Serajul Islam Chowdhury said the decline in allocation is a reflection of the declining interest of the government in education.

The experts fear the lowering of public sector budget allocation will lead students to enrol in private educational institutions. They also called for more budget allocation to enhance the standard of education.

Free access of goods

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The meeting's draft declaration demands fair share in international trade and duty- and quota-free access of LDC products to developed countries. The Bangladesh mission in Geneva sent copies of the draft declaration to all LDCs.

The declaration may demand implementation of the special and preferential treatment on LDC products, as pledged by WTO ministerial meetings, official sources hinted.

Bangladesh is the coordinator of the LDC grouping. The United Nations designates 49 countries as least-developed, most of them in Africa. The criteria include gross domestic product of less than 900 dollars per capita, weak health and educational assets and high economic vulnerability.

"It is a very, very difficult job to integrate the LDCs in the multilateral trading system as different countries are at different stages of development," the news agency AFP quoted the commerce minister as saying.

"Many proposals are there and being discussed and Bangladesh, as the coordinator, will be trying to take the agenda forward," he said.

Quoting a ministry official AFP added, "The market is the most conspicuous issue along with capacity building and anti-dumping matters that have to be

hammered out if the LDCs want an edge at the Cancun (in Mexico) meeting."

"The other issue is the inclusion of countries like Cambodia, Nepal and Bhutan in the WTO."

"We need market access more than anything else, as the more the trade, the less the dependence on foreign aid... the motto now is trade, not aid," he said.

"Bangladesh's garment industry flourished just because of quota-free access to the United States and Europe... it helped empower women and bring in huge foreign exchange."

Capacity building is aimed at setting up institutions to train people in the LDCs to check 'brain drain', the official said.

"This is essential as governments lose hard-earned foreign exchange by sending people abroad for training or study, but on return many quit for a better position elsewhere," he said.

"We have both skilled and unskilled manpower and we want to reduce unemployment in the LDCs," he said. "The LDCs are looking forward to developing their industrial sector and socio-economic conditions and in a society where the rich come to the aid of the poor, the developed countries also have to look at the whole trading arrangement with such a view," he said.