

Ratan Tata flies

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has created a ripple in the country's flagging investment sector, with the World Bank (WB) committing \$2 million for a study on the investment proposals and to prepare terms and conditions by a technical committee of Petrobangla.

Donors are keen to see the single largest set of investment proposals by a foreign company in Bangladesh's history become a reality. The WB has asked the government to earmark \$2 million for Tata proposal study from a \$15 million grant it has committed to Petrobangla for preparing Gas Sector Master Plan and Strategy.

Highly placed sources said donors may desist from pushing the government on gas export once Tata's plants, which are set to create a huge domestic gas demand, are set up.

Tata will directly go to Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel from the airport to attend a luncheon meeting hosted by members of the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Later on the day, Tata Group will sign an expression of interest agreement with the Board of Investment (BoI) at 7:00pm at China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre. Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami and BoI Executive Chairman Mahmudur Rahman will attend it.

He is likely to meet Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office during the visit. Acting WB Country Director David Hughart and ADB Country Director Toru Sibuchi will meet Tata at his hotel suite.

Tata will have one-on-one meetings with Saifur, State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmood, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Kamal Uddin Siddiqui and Mahmudur.

In an interview with an Indian business magazine recently, Tata Power Managing Director Firdose A Vandrevala said the company would initiate discussions with the Bangladesh government to set up two 500-megawatt gas-based

power plants in the western region of the country.

One of the power plants will supply electricity to Bangladeshi utilities and the other will feed the Indian power grid, he said.

According to him, other projects that the group is mulling investing in include a 2.4 million tonne-capacity steel plant and a 1 million tonne-capacity fertiliser plant as part of the \$2 billion investment package.

The visiting seven-member Tata Group team is also expected to discuss the locations of the power, steel and fertiliser units. Tata Group's \$2 billion investment is expected to be at least five times the total foreign direct investment received by Bangladesh in the past few years.

However, a BoI official said Tata Group may set up a \$700 million basic steel industry in Ishwardi to produce hot rolled coil and other basic steel products. It may also invest \$700 million in the two 500-megawatt power plants likely to be set up near Ishwardi. Its proposals also include investment for a \$600 million fertiliser plant in Chittagong.

Tata is seeking a 20-year guarantee of gas supply at a price tied to an agreed formula. Tata has no investment in Bangladesh until now, but it has robust trade relations with the country.

Tata Motors has so far supplied 20,000 commercial vehicles and 1,700 Indica taxis to Bangladesh. Tata International outsourced leather worth \$ 4.17 million in 2003-2004 fiscal year from Bangladesh.

The Group's total turnover stood at \$14 billion and exports at \$3 billion in FY 2003-04. Tata Group comprises 80 business entities in services, materials, engineering, energy, consumer products, chemicals, communications and information systems. The Group's revenues account for almost three percent of India's GDP.

BSS adds: In the letter of interest agreement to be signed today, Bangladesh government may commit to provide uninterrupted gas supply to Tata units for 20 years.

PM asks opposition

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them (opposition), but they cannot bring anyone to power," the prime minister said.

She said the government has achieved success in tackling the recent floods, strengthening the economy and improving the law and order.

The opposition has realised that it has no chance to go to power in the future. So, it is trying to foil the development activities of the alliance government by creating anarchy through hartals, blockades and strikes, she added.

Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haq, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, Kabir Hossain, MP, and Nadim Mostafa, MP also addressed the rally. Tanor BNP

Convener Shish Mohammad was in the chair.

Earlier, the prime minister formally launched a Tk 37.50 crore arsenic-free water supply project of Barindra Multipurpose Development Authority at Chanduria village and inaugurated Tanor Upazila Women Teachers' Hostel built at a cost of Tk 27 lakh under a EU-funded project of the education ministry.

She also offered fateha at the shrine of Hazrat Shah Makhdum (R) in Rajshahi city.

The prime minister told the rally that when the government and members of the BNP were working hard to reach relief to the flood affected people, a particular party was hatching conspiracy to hinder relief and rehabilitation activities.

Referring to the opposition's charge that the three-year rule of the alliance was a frustration for the people, Khaleda said it is not the people but the opposition party which is frustrated by the government's success during this period.

Dhaka, Delhi

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Admiral Prakash emphasised the need for more frequent navy-to-navy interaction to build mutual confidence and trust, while Admiral Mujtaba appreciated the Indian navy extending support to train Bangladesh navy personnel in India, said the spokesperson.

Mujtaba, who arrived here yesterday on a weeklong tour, is scheduled to visit all the three Indian Naval Commands where he will be briefed on various training facilities. He is also slated to visit Agra and Ajmer.

Earlier, he was presented an impressive guard of honour on arrival at the South Block.

Mujtaba also met Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and discussed exchange of goodwill visits.

Mukherjee described Bangladesh as "one of our most friendly neighbours," according to a Bangladesh High Commission press release.

3 held Indians

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Tipra Busti in a forest area near Satchhari border outpost. The BDR also seized two guns, six bullets, three daggers and some military uniforms, Rs 220 and Tk 2,200.

The BDR filed two cases -- one for illegal entry into Bangladesh and carrying foreign currency and the other for carrying firearms and ammunition -- with Chunarugta Police Station. Sub-inspector Abdul Mannan Munsu is running the cases.

A source said the Indians, all aged below 20, might have crossed the border and entered the hilly forest area being chased by the Indian security forces.

Most of the teenagers have not received any training in militancy, but they might be recruits to the ATTF, the source added.

Jogesh Barma, an influential person of Satchhari, and his son Chittaranjan Dev Barma are out on bail in an arms case filed on July 1, 2003 after firearms were recovered from their house.

DU academic activities resume today

DU CORRESPONDENT

Academic activities at Dhaka University (DU) return to normal today after 29 days of unscheduled closure due to a strike by six opposition students organisations.

The six organisations including the main opposition Awami League's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League called the indefinite strike to press home their seven-point demand. The demands include arrest and punishment of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists who attacked a rally of the combine on September 11 and resignation of the DU proctor.

The leaders of the students organisations agreed to call off the strike at a meeting with Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof SMA Faiz on October 8 on condition that the probe committee on the attack would submit its report by October 12.

However, the probe body headed by Pro-VC AFM Yusuf Hayder failed to submit its report until 8:30 last night. Earlier, the committee's time limit for submission of the report was extended twice.

The social science faculty has meanwhile rescheduled the examinations of different departments under it. The MSS exams of different departments will start on November 29 and 30, third year finals on November 1 and the postponed exams of the second year on November 17.

Criminal killed

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arrived on the scene and decided to take Wasim, ringleader of local Wasim Gang, to Detective Branch (DB) office.

"As they came out of the building, the gang operatives again opened fire on the police, who retaliated," said Senior Assistant Commissioner of DB Ashrafuzzaman. Police fired 30 gunshots during the shootout, he added.

With two bullets in his head and chin, Wasim was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital at 1:05am where doctors pronounced him dead.

Wasim's nephew Mahir Hossain said the Cobra picked up his uncle soon after he went out of his Mirhajiribagh house at around 10:30pm. They took him to the bank of Balurmath canal and shot him dead, he alleged.

Wasim returned from Saudi Arabia two years back and had no link with criminals, his family claimed.

Wasim's death has brought 34 the number of people killed under Rab and Cheetha custody since the anti-crime forces began operation.

India denies

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Bangladesh territory in Sathkhira is completely false," the release said.

It said the BSF has never encouraged such acts by Indian nationals. This has already been unambiguously conveyed to the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) officials during a flag meeting held on October 8, to assess the facts in the situation.

The BSF company commander immediately rejected BDR claims that BSF personnel had used boats to enter Bangladeshi territory to breach the embankment.

The release said BSF has never indulged or connived in such illegal activities. The BSF company commander also pointed out that "if the embankment is breached as reported, the reason could be the heavy pressure of water flow by recent torrential rains and not because of any purported actions by Indian civilians."

EC to summon

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tested as the BNP men reportedly did not allow anyone outside of their party to file nominations.

The former chairman and others of Daulatkhan Municipality filed complaints with the EC against the polls and demanded its cancellation.

The EC on October 5 at a meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) M A Syed in the chair termed the Daulatkhan municipality polls unusual and decided to probe the irregularities.

The EC decided to enquire into the allegations all by itself as the worsening law and order situation in Bhola makes it hard for local officials to probe the irregularities.

The EC did not publish official results of the Daulatkhan municipality polls in the gazette and it will not do so until the probe is complete, sources said.

Earlier, at the very beginning of the present government's assumption of office, the EC summoned the top officials of the local administration of Chittagong at its secretariat as not a single vote was cast in the Swandip municipality polls. It was then found that voters could not exercise their rights due to threat by the ruling party activists.

The EC decided to hold the polls again by deploying army, but the court following a petition stayed the election.

Youth lost to joblessness

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engaged in household work.

A survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2000 found 2.40 crore, or 39.9 percent of the country's 6.02-crore labour force, including child labour, as either unemployed or underemployed. The population was then 12.98 crore.

The members of the labour force not doing any work at all or working less than 15 hours in the reference week were considered unemployed and one working less than 35 hours underemployed.

With over 10 lakh new entrants to the job market every year, the bulk of unproductive manpower has since been rising steeply. The country's formal employment sectors can hardly absorb one-third of the new job seekers due to low investment level, employment generation and economic growth, compounding the crisis.

"One-third of the population is unemployed or underemployed, with one million job seekers being added to that every year. And the problem becomes more and more acute, as there is little scope for creating new jobs and as the institutional and formal sectors are able to engage only one-third of the new entrants," said Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), country's leading independent think-tank.

The last survey on labour force the BBS conducted was in 2000 and researchers believe there has been no reason for the employment scenario to improve in the following years. They say if the unemployment rate is updated it will produce a more alarming picture than the last.

One observes three very disturbing trends in the employment situation, said Debapriya:

First, contrary to the global trend, probability of remaining jobless is higher for the educated workforce.

Second, there is also a mismatch in demographic profile, as reemployment possibility for retrenched old workers is very low in the newly created job placements.

Third, underemployment is much higher in rural areas than the urban ones exacerbating the imbalance in spatial development.

The cost of mitigating the adverse consequences of these exclusionary employment trends may be more than that for implementation of a universal unemployment allowance scheme, Debapriya observed.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, poverty in Bangladesh is widespread with an estimated 49.8 percent of the population living below the national poverty line.

Unemployment and underemployment keep the poverty cycle going, notes the UNDP, adding, lack of job opportunities and limited agricultural land make it difficult for people, specially those in rural areas, to break the vicious cycle.

Rushidan Islam Rahman, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said though unemployment and underemployment rates are high the main problems are low productivity and income of workers.

Citing the very low salary structure of garment workers, many of whom get a mere Tk 1,000 per month, she said, "In many cases, the wage is too little even for an individual to live on. How can he or she then contribute to the family?"

The prevalence of joblessness among the educated youths has been on the rise fuelling their frustration, observed Rushidan identifying limited number of new jobs and

Rush of the desperate

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expenses to Dhaka. He said, "I earned Tk 300 in last seven days which is not enough for myself. How can I send money to my family?"

The poor day-labourers with spades and bamboo-made baskets in hand are seen everyday getting down from the roof of inter-city buses at Gabtoli Bus Terminal from where they rush to different job markets in the city.

The newcomers don't have time to enjoy the mega city's charms as they have to wait for hours on the streets to find a job to earn their daily bread. They are ready to be hired even at a wage half than usual to cope with the tough situation.

The city's day-labourer markets like Panthapath intersection, New Market, Azimpur, Killar Mor, Hathkolia, Motijheel, Kathalbagan, Karwanbazar, Farmgate, Shyamoli and Moghbazar are now full of such newcomers.

Some of the *monga*-hit people are trying to find jobs at the city's rickshaw garages and a few fortunate ones are getting the opportunity to be rickshaw-pullers, although they do not have enough experience or required skills.

Apart from the districts under greater Rangpur and Dinajpur,

destitute people are coming to the capital from greater Mymensingh districts also, mainly because of the floods that affected two-thirds of Bangladesh during July-August.

Nur Islam, 38, rushed to the capital leaving his village in Karimganj upazila of Kishoreganj, one of the worst flood-hit areas, last week of September. "The flood has destroyed my house," said Islam, now a rickshaw-puller in Dhaka.

He said it has become difficult to manage work even in Dhaka as so many people are coming from villages in search of work.

The *monga* torments the poor in the agro-based northern region every year when the farmers have no crop to harvest. Thousands of people who work as agricultural labourers find no work during the period.

In the wake of a *monga* last year, a parliamentary committee recommended urgent steps for crop diversification in the northern region to absorb farm labourers rendered jobless during the lean period (mid-September to mid-November).

It also recommended creating alternative jobs for farm labourers to save them from the famine like situation but the government is yet to take any initiative in this regard.

AL working out

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The meeting decided to stage demonstration in Dhaka and elsewhere of the country on October 20 in protest against price hike of essentials.

On joining the upcoming parliament session, which will begin on October 28, the AL general secretary said, "We did not take any decision at the meeting on joining the next session. A decision in this regard will be taken later."

Referring to the discussion on reforms issue, Jailed said the caretaker government of 2001 has proved that there are some loopholes in the system. He however did not elaborate the shortcomings in the caretaker government system.

The AL leaders said both the caretaker governments of 1991 and 1996 were formed in consultation with major political parties but this principle was not followed in 2001.

"It was her (Sheikh Hasina) idea and she proposed to form the caretaker government in consultation with political parties who have representation in parliament".

The AL formed a committee about one year ago to suggest some reforms to the system but it could not yet make any progress. Barrister Amir Ul Islam, advocate Rahmat Ali and Mohammad Ali are the members of the committee.

Party chief Hasina also spoke about fair elections in her speech on October 10, marking the BNP-led alliance government's three years in office. She accused the ruling coalition of adopting 'election engineering' to come to power.

The ALCWC meeting observed Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's address to the nation on that day had failed to reflect the real crises of the country. "In fact the prime minister spoke against the people," the AL general secretary said.

As some party leaders criticised the party's poor showdown in the capital after the August 21 attacks, City AL President Mohammad Hanif

told the meeting that there were some organisational problems in the party.

He said fresh committees of party's thana units are yet to be formed, although initiatives have been taken to complete the process. Once the committees are formed, party workers' participation in the coming movements will be larger, he assured.

The meeting condemned the scrapping of four-star general rank of former army chief and now AL leader Mustafizur Rahman.

Hasina's USA trip

The leader of the opposition may visit the US to attend a world summit of women leaders on October 28 and 29, Jailed told journalists.

A party leader said Sheikh Hasina may leave Dhaka for the US on October 21, AL sources said. She will spend some time with her son and daughter.

Tk 393cr

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help over 13 lakh marginal and small farmers to recoup losses by growing more boro paddy, Tk 371 crore for 4.5 lakh to grow more wheat, Tk 97 crore for over one lakh farmers to grow maize, and Tk 115 crore to raise mustard, soyabean, lentils, chilli, sugarcane and betel leaf.

The deluge and rain damaged different crops including rice, vegetables and spices on 8.5 lakh hectares in as many as 300 upazilas in 46 affected districts.

According to the ministry, crops worth Tk 3,184 crore have been damaged in rain and floods this year and 48.84 lakh farming families of 1.17 crore were affected.

Asghar Ali opposed use of the word Hindu exclusively in its present form and said it should denote its geographical and historic context of including all on the east of the river Sindh, a definition distorted and narrowed by British colonialism.

Others who presented papers or took part in discussions stressed that militants use religions and its scriptures to legitimise their activities.

In the other working session on "Dealing with religious militancy in South Asia: Regional and extra-regional cooperation," speakers said state, civil society and international bodies should unitedly face militancy.

poor standard of education as the main culprits.

According to a World Bank study, a continuation of the current low-growth trends in Bangladesh would only see the problem aggravated over time. Only high-growth rates along with labour market flexibility can make a dent in the syndrome.

The economy managed only a 4-percent annual GDP growth over the last 25 years leaving it distressingly dependent on foreign assistance for development, it said.

"Should this lacklustre performance be repeated in the next 25 years, the pressure of population, urbanisation and environmental degradation could leave Bangladesh right where it started -- at the bottom of the ladder of low-income economies. This is totally unacceptable," said the bank in 'Bangladesh 2020: A Long-Run Perspective Study'.

To achieve a substantial reduction in underemployment, Bangladesh needs to create over 5 crore jobs in the next 25 years, the bank projected.

Debapriya said, "We will have to engage the labour force in waged jobs, particularly in the labour-intensive manufacturing sector. But, other than garments, there is no significant diversification in the industrial structure."

"It also needs to be investigated whether, in a capital-scarce and labour-abundant country like Bangladesh, we are getting labour substituted by capital because of adverse relative pricing of the two factors," he said.

Presently two lakh people are going abroad every year and the country will have to expand and strengthen this overseas employment trend, he felt.

9am-3pm office

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Chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the meeting also approved the recommendations for the development of upazila administration.

The recommendations include formation of separate workforces and allocation of annual development fund, construction of new union parishad buildings, development of power and telecommunication systems, filling all vacant posts of officers at the upazila level and providing ambulances and x-ray machines for the development of health service.

Flash flood

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Sreetola areas.

In Dhamurhat upazila, 20,000 people of Kokil and Taljhari unions have been affected by floods. Standing crops of more than 10,000 hectares of land have been inundated.

In Badalgachi upazila, nearly one lakh people of 95 villages of six unions have been marooned as embankment at Digundiar point of the river Chhoto Jamuna breached.

Five embankment points at Fariapara, Venpara, Boroil, Dumoil and Balubhora remained highly vulnerable to strong currents, said BWDB sources.

No relief reached the affected villages until writing the report last night.

No joint move

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also necessary that the activities of such groups are controlled by the respective governments with a strong hand."

In the first of the two working sessions yesterday on "Dealing with religious militancy in South Asia: Civil society and interfaith dialogue," Indian scholar Asghar Ali in his presentation said, "To single out only Islamic militancy and Muslim extremism would be a partial truth."

Islamic militancy should also be condemned but the situation should be understood in its totality, free from the influence of propaganda by certain powers, he stressed.

Forums for dialogue and understanding such as the United Nations have been totally ignored by countries like United States, he said. The US will have to change its ways before it can expect war against terror to succeed, he added.

The scholar said although political history of Islam has been violent, the central doctrine of love and peace professed by Sufi Islam has been ignored by the media. "The media are either unaware of the (Sufi) Islam or deliberately ignore it and project only militant Islam followed by a handful of people in the Islamic world," he added.

Asghar Ali opposed use of the word Hindu exclusively in its present form and said it should denote its geographical and historic context of including all on the east of the river Sindh, a definition distorted and narrowed by British colonialism.

Others who presented papers or took part in discussions stressed that militants use religions and its scriptures to legitimise their activities.

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Plan for mass promotion

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They also said separate summary of each listed official along with their brief service records has been sent to the intelligence agencies and the Bac to report whether the listed officials are having any link with corruption and their political allegiance.

The establishment ministry will prepare a preliminary list on the basis of the reports from the concerned agencies and then it will be sent to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for informal approval.

On approval of the PMO, the Superior Selection Board (SSB) will finally recommend the list.

"We are now waiting for the reports of the intelligence agencies. We will make no delay to prepare list of officials for promotion to the two top positions of the administration as there are big vacancies at those levels," said a senior official of the Ministry of Establishment.

According to an official estimate, currently 54 officials are enjoying the rank and status of secretary, but of them only seven are from regular service. Of the regular service secretaries, three are due for retirement by December this year.

The estimate also observes that

five full-fledged and four acting secretaries are on contract. However, contracts of six of them are due to expire by the year-end. Besides, four secretaries and five acting secretaries have been appointed from the President's 10 percent quota.

When asked, one of the top officials at the PMO said that the government is currently discouraging contract at the top level of the civil administration. Yet there are possibilities that a few officials holding important positions might get fresh contract because at present the administration seriously lacks qualified and competent people for top positions.

Meanwhile, sources said the government has also plans to give promotion to some 100 senior assistant secretaries of 1984 batch, who were dropped from promotion earlier, to the post of deputy secretary.

PMO sources said that the government is sincere about removing the promotion backlog aiming to mitigate frustration among the lower and mid-level civil servants. A decision has been taken to ensure promotion of the officials at all tiers gradually in order to bring satisfaction in the administration.

US, Iraqi forces

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Ramadi are suspected of supporting insurgents through a range of activities, including harboring terrorists, storing illegal weapons caches, promoting violence and encouraging insurgent recruitment, the US command said.

Sheikh Abdul-Aleim Saadi, the provincial leader of the influential Association of Muslim Scholars, was detained at Mohammed Aref Mosque, his relatives and followers said.

Angry residents accused Americans of disrespecting the sanctity of city mosques.

"This cowboy behaviour cannot be accepted," said cleric Abdullah Abu Omar of the Ramadi Mosque. "The Americans seem to have lost their senses and have gone out of control."

The 1st Marine Division said the raids followed a pattern of insurgent activity in and around Ramadi mosques in recent weeks.

The raids followed two days of clashes in the city, a Sunni militant stronghold 70 miles west of Baghdad. Insurgents fired two mortars at the city hall and neighboring police directorate Monday night, sparking gunfire and rocket-propelled grenade exchanges, residents said.

Three policemen and a civilian were killed, said Dr. Dhia Abdul-Karim, at the city hospital.

Elsewhere, two US soldiers were killed and five wounded in a rocket attack in the south of Baghdad, raising the number of soldiers killed in Iraq since the 2003 invasion to 1,067.

In the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, a suicide car bombing struck a US army convoy, killing two Iraqis and one US soldier and wounding 27, hospital sources and the US military said.

The blast rattled the city and blew a five-foot crater in the road, an AFP correspondent said.

Another two Iraqis were killed in a firefight between insurgents and US marines in the rebel hotbed of Ramadi. Further west in the town of Hit a fierce three-hour battle raged between marines and insurgents who had fired at them from a mosque, said a US military statement, without detailing casualties.

A local hospital said three Iraqis were wounded in the fighting.

In northern Babil province, south of Baghdad, two suspected insurgents were killed and a marine wounded as US troops continued their one-week joint operations with Iraqi forces in the area, said the military.

Meanwhile a US air strike targeting foreign militants destroyed a restaurant in rebel-held Falluja overnight, while peace moves continued aimed at restoring state authority there and elsewhere in Iraq before January elections.

Witnesses said bombs flattened the popular Haji Hussein kebab house on Falluja's main street, killing two guards and reducing it to a pile of crushed concrete and twisted metal.

The US military said it was a "precision strike" on a meeting place for militants loyal to Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who has a \$25 million US bounty on his head.

On the other hand UN nuclear watchdog has warned that equipment and materials that could be used to make nuclear arms have been vanishing in Iraq since the invasion. Satellite images show entire buildings have been dismantled without any record being made, said Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog.

Iraq's US-backed leaders have not reported to the UN on the state of nuclear plants despite a duty to do so. But they have asked the UN to help sell

off unwanted nuclear material.

Inspectors from ElBaradei's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who established that Saddam Hussein had abandoned any nuclear weapons programme before the war, have not been allowed to move about Iraq freely by the US.

Apart from a couple of limited checks on the main nuclear facility at Tuwaitha last June after reports of looting - and with no teams now on the ground - the IAEA has to rely on satellite imagery and other sources.

In a letter to the UN Security Council, ElBaradei said buildings related to Iraq's previous nuclear programme appeared to have been systematically dismantled and equipment and material removed.

"The disappearance of such equipment and materials may be of proliferation significance," the IAEA director general warned.

Sensitive technology such as rocket engines has turned up for sale abroad, ElBaradei said.

However, high-precision "dual-use" items including milling machines and electron beam welders appear to have disappeared, as has material such as high-strength aluminium.

ElBaradei called on any state with information on the location of such items to inform his agency.

The US removed nearly two tonnes of low-enriched uranium from Iraq earlier this year. The IAEA has verified that 550 tonnes of nuclear material still remain at Tuwaitha.

Iraq, the agency says, has asked for help to sell the nuclear material and in dismantling and decontaminating former nuclear facilities.

ElBaradei reminded the Security Council that Iraq was still obliged to "declare semi-annually changes that have occurred or are foreseen at sites deemed relevant" by the IAEA.

However, since March 2003 "the agency has received no such notifications or declarations from any state", he said.

Last week, a report from chief US weapons inspector Charles Duelfer concluded that Saddam Hussein had stopped trying to build weapons of mass destruction following the 1991 Gulf War.

No duty to be charged on lifesaving drugs

Saifur tells NBR officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday asked the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to get all imported lifesaving drugs, including those waiting at Chittagong Port, released free of duty.

The finance minister gave the directive when leaders of Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Importers' Association (BPIA) led by its President Md Serajul Islam met the minister in the morning. NBR officials were also present there.

According to the BPIA, as many as 40 categories of various lifesaving foreign drugs are awaiting clearance mostly at Chittagong Port for weeks due to a dispute between the NBR and BPIA over payment of duty on the import of the lifesaving drugs.

The NBR demanded duty on the plea that the lifesaving drugs are also used for other purposes, while BPIA leaders argued that all lifesaving drugs are duty-free. This led to a deadlock, adding to the sufferings of patients short on such medicines.

The lifesaving drugs waiting at the port include drugs for heart diseases, cancer, malaria, tuberculosis and liver diseases.

On BPIA's written plea, the finance minister also asked the NBR officials to consider not charging VAT at the rate of 1.5 percent on retail sales of imported drugs, as VAT was not included in fixing the maximum retail prices.