

UN inspectors ready to return to Iraq

REUTERS, Vienna

UN inspectors, barred from most of Iraq since last year's invasion, are ready to return to probe the disappearance of equipment that could be used in atomic weapons, the United Nations nuclear watchdog says.

"We are ready, subject to Security Council guidance and the prevailing security situation, to resume our Security Council mandated verification activities in Iraq," International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) spokesman Mark Gwozdecky said yesterday.

The IAEA, which monitored Saddam Hussein's nuclear sites before last year's Iraq war, informed the U.N. Security Council this week that equipment and materials that could be used to make atomic weapons have been vanishing from Iraq but neither Baghdad nor Washington had noticed.

Iraq's Science and Technology Minister Rashad Omar said in Baghdad on Tuesday everything at the nuclear sites belonging to his ministry was accounted for and that there had been no recent disappearances.

"The locations that belong to the Science and Technology ministry are secure and under our control," Omar told Reuters.

He said nothing had gone missing since a looting spree after the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003, which the United States and Britain said was to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. Both countries now admit Saddam had no caches of banned weapons.

But a Western diplomat close to the IAEA said Omar's comments did not appear to apply to the sites the IAEA was worried about — which may belong to Iraq's defence ministry.

Omar specifically referred to the Iraqi nuclear research complex at Tuwaitah near Baghdad, the one site where the IAEA has conducted limited inspections last year and this year.

"The concerns raised in the (IAEA) letter centre around material and equipment in dozens of other facilities, most of which are part of the broader complex of former military-related facilities," the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Satellite imagery shows entire buildings in Iraq that once housed high-precision equipment have been dismantled, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said in a letter to the U.N. Security Council.

In 1991, the IAEA detected Saddam's clandestine nuclear weapons programme and spent the next seven years investigating and dismantling it. By the time U.N.

inspectors fled the country in December 1998, Iraq's covert atom bomb programme was gone.

Rab accused

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the cases, the groups alleged. They also expressed concern at the killing of the innocent people like Mohammad Ali and Sumon Majumder.

"The stereotyped explanations on the 33 killings in Rab actions until yesterday remind us of the 56 killings in the Operation Clean Heart when law-enforcing agencies claimed the victims died of heart attack," said a statement Sultana Kamal read out at the press conference.

"Passage of the indemnity ordinance in 2003 (after Operation Clean Heart) deprives us of justice in cases of the killings," she said.

"We are horrified by the current trend of killings and anticipating future legal status of such killings."

Rab shot writer Ali dead in the open for housing a criminal and Sumon, a major witness to the killing of lawmaker Ahsanullah Master, died several hours after his arrest as an extortionist.

Killings of criminals are also hampering probe to find out 'godfathers' and their hideouts, the rights bodies said.

Their demands include fair investigation of all killings in police custody, compensation to family members of the victims, compliance with higher court directives concerning the constitution, laws, arrest and remand, and accountability of the law-enforcing agencies.

They also asked the government to ensure accountability of all government agencies and their activities and not to make any move or comments which might make the agencies think they are indemnified and beyond the reach of the law.

Replying to a query, Sultana Kamal said they are not against Rab but against their activities that violate human rights. The situation is going out of control, she added.

Asked if they plan to sue Rab, she said they are yet to decide on this matter but the victims' families are eager to file cases.

Thirty-three people died from police torture last year, 23 in the first six months of this year and 30 between June 21 and September 30.

Farida Yasmin of Blast, Rezanur Rahman Rose of Nijera Kori, Sofia Ahmed of Karmajibi Nari, Abdus Salam of Jatiya Ainjibi Parishad and Ferdousi Akther of Naripakkhya also spoke at the press conference.

Oikya Mancha slates price hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Oikya Mancha leaders yesterday said economic hardship of the common people has peaked in the wake of rocketing prices of essentials.

They also asked the people to unite and launch movement against the BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance government.

The leaders at a rally in Mukhtangan in the city blamed the soaring prices on the inefficiency of the government and demanded immediate control on price hike of essentials.

Syedur Rahman Sayeed, convenor of the party's city unit, chaired the rally, which was also addressed by Saïduddin Ahmed, Shamsul Alam Duda, Harun-or-Rashid, Ayub Khan, Rafiqul Islam and Syidur Rahman Manik.

After the rally they marched the city streets in procession.

BNP leader shot dead in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Criminals gunned down a BNP leader in Kuripol village of Mirpur upazila in the district Tuesday.

Mamun-or-Rasul alias Babu Khan, president of Mirpur upazila unit BNP, came under attack when he was returning to his Birnagar house with two BNP activists by a motorcycle at around 9:30pm.

Police said up to 10 assailants stopped Babu on Kuripol bridge and took him a few yards away at gunpoint. However, they let off the two BNP activists, Ramzan and Enamul, who said the killers were familiar to Babu.

The criminals shot Babu, also a contractor, in his head and abdomen and left him dead on the spot.

BNP lawmaker Shahidul Islam and Shahabuddin Ahmed, superintendent of police of Kushtia, visited the spot.

Police could not identify the motive behind the killing. Family sources claimed extortionists had threatened Babu with death if he failed to give them money.

Financial sector reforms on track: IMF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reforms in financial sector are on track under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the first stage of its third review of the PRGF programmes yesterday.

Missanke Weerasinghe made this observation to reporters after he led a six-member IMF delegation that met Finance Minister M Saïfur Rahman at his ministry office yesterday to discuss financial sector reforms under the PRGF.

The IMF team started their review of the PRGF in Bangladesh on October 10 and is expected to complete the review by October 23.

Hasina

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that grabbed the state power through conspiracy," Hasina told leaders of the Durga Puja celebration committee who met the AL leader at her Sudha Sadan residence.

Terminating the alliance government of Khaleda 'totally failed', Hasina said "Awami League is the people's party and we have enough confidence in people to be back to power."

She alleged that the religious minority are under tremendous pressure in this regime. "Instead of giving protection to them, the government is creating panic among the minority people with an eye on next general elections," she claimed.

"They (government) try to prevent the minority people from going to the polling centres."

"None of the machinations of the alliance government will be effective when mass upsurge throws them out of power," the AL chief cautioned.

CR Dutta, Subarata Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Sircar led the delegation and invited Hasina to join the puja celebrations.

PM warns

FROM PAGE 12 activities and pragmatic policies and steps of her three-year-old government, the prime minister said the coalition government fulfilled many of its election commitments and the rest would be implemented in the next two years.

The prime minister assured the flood-affected farmers of all assistance to recoup their losses. She distributed VGF cards and relief among the flood-stricken people of the upazila.

State Minister for Labour and Employment and Minister-in-Charge of the district Amanullah Aman and Local MP Kazi Saïlum Haq Kamal also spoke.

The prime minister also addressed another meeting at Jagla High School ground in Sadar upazila and distributed relief and VGF cards among the flood victims.

Govt to assess Tata's

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the finance minister added.

"A tough negotiation may be needed, in particular, on the issue of supply of requisite gas and its pricing," Saïfur said and hinted at a cautious approach before sealing a deal with the Indian conglomerate.

The finance minister added: "On our part, we need to look at how quickly we can develop the gas fields and extract gas from these fields... We also need to assess the domestic gas consumption and how much gas they will need before sealing the agreement."

On the gas pricing, Saïfur said, the government will have to supply gas to the proposed Tata plants for 15 to 20 years and for that, it will have to start a tough negotiation about what the gas pricing would be during that period.

The gas pricing would have to be commensurate with the volatile international fuel prices, he added.

"These elements (supply and price) will have to be there in the agreement to protect interests of both sides," the finance minister said.

On the economic viability of the planned plants, Saïfur quoted Tata Group officials as saying, "You (Bangladesh) have gas and there is no point keeping them underground. The gas needs to be properly utilised."

Asked if the Indian conglomerate is interested only in gas-based industries, he said, "Is it not natural, what else does Bangladesh have other than gas?"

On whether the fertiliser plant Tata plans to set up will be a repeat of the Kafco (Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company) fiasco, the minister admitted that they have had a bitter experience with Kafco and that this time they will conduct a feasibility study on the planned Tata projects in a professional, efficient manner.

He ruled out the possibility of supplying gas to the Tata plants at Kafco rates.

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He said the Indian conglomerate has expressed the intention to set up steel and fertiliser plants.

"But everything depends on (availability) of gas supply and the pricing," Saïfur told the media.

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Bangladesh loses out

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The BCI evaluates the underlying microeconomic conditions defining the current sustainable level of productivity in each of the countries covered.

In the GCI index, Bangladesh slipped from its position at 77 in 2002 (of 80 countries assessed) to 98 in 2003 (of 102 countries) and then to 102 this year. India ended 55th, Pakistan 91st and Sri Lanka 73rd. China found its slot at 46th and Vietnam 77th.

Other than India, which made up by one place, all of these countries also slipped from their previous year's position.

In the Technology Index, Bangladesh ranked 100th, slipping from last year's position of 95, showing a poor adoption of innovation to boost growth. India made a

remarkable achievement standing at 63 next only to China. Pakistan ranks 87th, Sri Lanka 81st, China 62nd and Vietnam 92nd.

In the Macroeconomic Environment Index, Bangladesh performed better ending at 74th, two places down from last year's. India stood 52nd, Pakistan 67th, Sri Lanka 73rd, China 24th, and Vietnam 58th.

In the Public Institutions Index, Bangladesh was rewarded with the lowest rank of 104th, showing poor public reforms. Only Pakistan is closest to Bangladesh ranking at the position of 102nd.

In the BCI, India has improved its position by 7 places to 30th, Pakistan slipped to 67th, Sri Lanka dropped to 73rd, Vietnam slipped to 79th while China improved to 24th.

Health minister opens

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fever. Heart disease, in the country, especially among the younger population is increasing which is of great concern."

Referring to another survey carried out between 2002 and 2004 the minister said, "Out of 843 children between 1 and 12 years of age hospitalised for heart diseases at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), 78 per cent have suffered from various kinds of heart defects since birth."

The minister later formally inaugurated the University Cardiac Centre at BSMMUH. The centre has a modern operation theatre with a cathlab next door, a five-bed intensive care unit, 14-bed coronary care unit, a twelve-bed post coronary care unit and a ten-bed step-down unit.

All open heart surgeries and non-invasive (closed heart) interventions will be provided from the centre which also has an outdoor service with an emergency wing.

The centre will be run by a team of 14 cardiologists and six cardiac surgeons already trained with an additional 18-member medical team to supervise admission and other jobs.

The centre is also staffed with 44 nurses especially trained in cardiac care and 52 technicians to run and supervise all the medical equipment of the centre.

State Minister for Health Mizanur Rahman Sinha, Health Secretary AFM Sarwar Kamal, Prof MA Hadi, Vice Chancellor of BSMMU Prof MA Hadi, pediatric surgeon Prof M Saïful Islam and Secretary General of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) Dr AZM Zahid Hossain were also present at the inaugural session.

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Ratan Tata, the Group's chairman, told reporters that they have not so far faced problems with their proposal.

He added that he would be able to explain their position after meetings with the ministers today.

WB, ADB READY TO SUPPORT

The donor agencies took the biggest investment proposal in Bangladesh from India positively and committed to providing support in making the proposal a reality, meeting sources said.

International Finance Corporation, the private-sector arm of the WB, co-ordinated the meeting at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday.

"Bangladesh has natural gas and Tata has money and technical expertise, so both could be benefited on the basis of a mutual understanding," said David Hughart, operations advisor of the WB, after the meeting.

He, however, said more discussions are still required.

"We are very much encouraged by the proposal and ready to facilitate it through infrastructure development," said Hua Du, deputy country representative of the ADB.

She said if necessary, the ADB would also provide supplementary support for the investment project.

Asked whether Tata has had any specific proposal for logistics or other support for implementation of its projects, she said the proposal was made to the government and donor agencies would discuss about it with the government later on.

Hua said the ADB has been providing support for long for development of the private sector in Bangladesh. "So it would also continue in future."

AHSANULLAH MURDER Arrest warrant against Dipu, 16 others

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Speedy Trial Tribunal-1in Dhaka yesterday issued warrant of arrest against Nurul Islam Dipu, a Chhatra Samaj leader and sixteen others accused in the Ahsanullah Master MP murder case.

Judge Shahed Noor Uddin gave the order as the accused have been absconding since the murder.

The tribunal also fixed October 17 for appearance of the accused and directed the Gazipur Jail authorities to produce Jatayatbadi Jubo Dal leader Nurul Islam Saker and 12 others, now in custody before the court on the date.

Earlier, on September 19 the government transferred the case to the tribunal for its quick disposal.

Gunmen opened fire on Ahsanullah Master at a rally of Awami Shechchhaseeb League, the volunteer front of Awami League at Noagaon near the legislator's house in Tongi on May 7. Schoolboy Omar Faruq Ratan was also killed and at least five others were hurt in the incident.

The slain lawmaker's brother Motiur Rahman filed a case with Tongi Police Station the next day, naming 17 as accused.

The Criminal Investigation Department on July 10 brought charges against 29 people and charged Jatayatbadi Jubo Dal leader Nurul Islam Sarker with masterminding the assassination.

The charge sheet shows 78 people as prosecution witnesses.

One more

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Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka at 4:30pm seeking seven-day remand.

The investigation officer in his remand prayer alleged Ata, a hawker, was assisting the attackers on the footpath near Bangabandhu Avenue. He needs to be quizzed to trace the whereabouts of his accomplices, the IO added.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza granted five-day remand.

Two youths Tusher and Litan arrested on the same charge are now facing interrogation. The CID picked up them from Ananda Bazar slum on Secretariat Road in the city on October 6.

Nine people — Ata, Tusher, Litan, Rahim, Walin, Abdur Rahman, Saibal Saha Partha, Habib alias Hannan and Badsha Miah — have so far been shown arrested in the August 21 grenade attack case.

Rab to swing

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their action, especially death of suspected criminals after arrest.

"The countrymen are now appreciating the work of Rab, so we cannot stand against people's aspiration. Creating controversy about its work, particularly over crossfire, is absolutely motivated," he said after the meeting with Rab officials.

The meeting discussed the activities of the elite force during the last six months. The minister said that Rab would have to be more cautious in keeping the law and order under control ahead of Ramadan and Eid.

The meeting was apprised that the Rab members recovered at least 263 illegal arms and arrested more than a thousand people, including four top terrorists, on various charges.

Among others, Home Secretary Mohammad Omar Farook and Director General (DG) of Rab Anwarul Iqbal were present at the meeting.

BNP rejects AL demand

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disgrace to the democratic process.

BNP high-ups observed that the opposition is trying to create a new issue with the caretaker government system as they failed to get public support in the anti-government movement.

On Tuesday, a meeting of Awami League Central Working Committee discussed the caretaker government system and observed that some reforms into the system is necessary to ensure neutrality of the interim government in conducting the next general elections.

"The caretaker government has been incorporated in the Constitution following a consensus of BNP and Awami League in 1996 to ensure free, fair and neutral voting," said Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, health minister and BNP Standing Committee member.

"No one having faith in democracy can make such a demand," said Mosharraf, calling the opposition demand 'unfortunate'.

Mosharraf said all the general elections under the interim government earned acclamations both at home and abroad while many have observed the system as a model.

Rejecting the demand, environment minister and BNP Vice President Tariqul Islam said, "It is very difficult to understand what they are saying when they made allegations of covert and overt rigging in the elections after failing to win."

He said there is no scope for debate on the caretaker government as it was settled through incorporation into the Constitution.

"Moreover, the High Court rejected a petition against the caretaker government system and declared the system as constitutional," said Tariqul, hinting that there was conspiracy behind the demand of the main opposition.

Another

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met office said yesterday evening. It said the low is likely to intensify further and move in a north-northwestersly direction.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to hoist local cautionary signal no three.

All fishing boats and trawlers have been advised to come close to the coast and proceed with caution.

Traffic nightmare

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double than usual fare."

As part of the Traffic Week programmes, the police and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) yesterday seized 130 unauthorised rickshaws in the capital. Nearly three lakh unlicensed rickshaws ply the streets of Dhaka while only 79,000 have licences.

The seizure of unauthorised rickshaws sparked instant protest among rickshawpullers who formed a human chain from the High Court to Shabbagh crossing.

During the Traffic Week that started on October 9, the traffic department and a number of mobile courts filed cases against more than 13,000 vehicles for not carrying legal documents, sources at the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said.

"We are trying our level best to enforce traffic rules and laws, prosecute vehicles not carrying legal documents and seize unlicensed rickshaws to reduce traffic jam," Deputy Commissioner of DMP Traffic (North) Zahurul Islam told the Daily Star.

Police sources quoting a recent survey said every day 67 motorised vehicles are added to the already congested roads in the capital. As many as 20 railway crossings in different parts of the city are adding to the traffic gridlock.

Besides frequent digging of roads by utility agencies, allowing slow and fast moving transports on the same road, haphazard parking, keeping garbage containers on the streets and minimum fine for violation of traffic rules cause traffic jam.

The traffic department has so far introduced automatic signal system at 15 points and targeted to bring 70 points under the system by December.

MEETING ON TRAFFIC JAM

A parliamentary standing committee meeting on communication ministry yesterday discussed possible ways to reduce traffic congestion in the capital.

The communications minister expressed dissatisfaction at the slow implementation of the initiatives taken by his ministry to improve traffic system by easing congestion.

"A vested quarter is creating obstacles to implementing the steps," meeting sources quoted Nazmul Huda as saying at the meeting.

Committee members alleged many old vehicles are plying the streets of Dhaka despite cancellation of the route permit of over 20-year old vehicles, which cause air pollution.

The BRTA, however, claimed in its report submitted at the committee meeting that traffic situation has improved significantly after it imposed ban on old vehicles.

Committee chairman Syed Manjur Hossain presided over the meeting.

Family of Jamal

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from blaming the BNP lawmaker from Anwara, Sarwar Jamal Nizam.

Last week, Farman Reza at a press conference here pointed his finger at Nizam. The lawmaker refuted the allegation at a counter-press conference on Tuesday.

Farman Reza handed over the letter to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

Meanwhile, Chittagong South BNP President Ahmed Khalil Khan has requested CID to look into the allegation raised by Jamal's family.

4 US soldiers killed