

**TRANSCRIPTS OF R4 NEWS BULLETINS
THURSDAY 29 MAY 2003 (10.00, 11.00, 12.00, 13.00)**

10.00 News Bulletin

Newsreader:

Tony Blair has become the first western leader to visit Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein. He's flown to the southern city of Basra -- where he's meeting British troops to thank them for work in the country. His visit comes amid fresh controversy about weapons of mass destruction. A senior official involved in preparing the Government dossier on the alleged threat told Today that Downing Street ordered a late rewrite to include a claim that some weapons could be activated within 45 minutes. That has been denied by Downing Street.

A new report into the rail crash at Potters Bar is expected to conclude there's still no evidence that either sabotage or vandalism were to blame. Seven people died and 76 were injured when a commuter train was derailed just outside the station last May. The engineering firm Jarvis, which had responsibility for track maintenance in the area, has insisted that sabotage can't be ruled out. The solicitor, Louise Christian, who represents five of the bereaved families -- said that a year had been wasted: *[quote from Louise Christian]*.

A sixty year old woman has been charged with intimidating a witness in the murder inquiry into the deaths of the Soham schoolgirls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. The woman will appear in court in Grimsby later today.

The chemicals used to keep swimming pools clean have been linked with the rise in childhood asthma. Scientists in Belgium found that chlorine reacted with sweat or urine, producing a gas which damaged swimmers' lungs.

Five hundred jobs are to go at the electronics company, Marconi. It's unclear whether any cuts will be made in the UK.

Bob Hope, is celebrating his 100th birthday today. He was born in south-east London, but his family left for America when he was a child. Thirty-five states have declared today "Bob Hope Day."

11.00 News bulletin

Newsreader:

The report into the Potters Bar rail crash has found that the points were poorly maintained. The Health & Safety investigation into the crash found that this was the most likely underlying cause for the derailment. The engineering firm Jarvis -- which was responsible for maintenance -- has always insisted that sabotage could not be ruled out. Tony Blair has arrived in the Iraqi city of Basra, where he's been meeting British troops. He told them that their liberation of Iraq had been a mighty and momentous act. *[Quote from Tony Blair]*.

His visit comes amid fresh controversy about weapons of mass destruction. A senior official involved in preparing the Government dossier on the alleged threat told Today that Downing Street ordered a late rewrite to include a claim that some weapons could be activated within 45 minutes. That has been denied by Downing Street.

David Beckham, is to make a televised appeal to ask England fans not to disrupt the side's match against Serbia and Montenegro next week. He says a repeat of the violence which marred last month's game against Turkey could have serious consequences for the team in Europe.

A sixty year old woman has been charged with intimidating a witness in the murder inquiry into the deaths of the Soham schoolgirls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. The woman is to appear in court in Grimsby

Police and the RSPB are investigating the disappearance of a Golden Eagle chick, from a nest in south-west Scotland. Conservationists say they're "very concerned" about the fate of the bird. Dumfries and Galloway police say they're looking at whether there's been any criminal activity.

12.00 News bulletin

Newsreader:

The Prime Minister has thanked British troops in Iraq for what he described as the magnificent job they had done in helping to liberate the country. Addressing some four hundred British personnel in the southern city of Basra, Tony Blair said he wanted to give them his and the nation's thanks for the work they'd done and continued to do: *[Quote from Tony Blair]*.

Mr Blair's visit to Iraq comes at a time of growing controversy over the failure to find weapons of mass destruction. Downing Street has dismissed a report on the Today programme suggesting that certain information contained in a dossier about Saddam Hussein's arsenals was included against the wishes of the intelligence agencies.

The Palestinian prime minister, Abu Mazen, has said he expects to strike a ceasefire next week with the largest Palestinian militant group, Hamas. Abu Mazen told an Israeli newspaper that he hoped to reach similar deals with other militant groups.

Medical services in southern India are struggling to cope with the effects of a continuing heatwave. Officials in the state of Andhra Pradesh say more than 550 people are known to have died.

Celebrations are taking place in Nepal to mark the golden jubilee of the first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953 by Sir Edmund Hillary and the late Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. Sir Edmund has been recounting his feelings on reaching the summit. He said he didn't realise the significance of their achievement until he heard it from the lips of a BBC newsreader: *[Quote from Sir Edmund Hilary]*

David Beckham is to make an unprecedented television appeal to England supporters not to cause trouble at future matches. It's feared England could be excluded from the Euro 2004 tournament in Portugal if there is any repeat of the trouble caused at last month's game against Turkey.

A sixty year old woman is appearing before Grimsby and Cleethorpes magistrates this afternoon accused of intimidating a witness in the case of two murdered schoolgirls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. A school caretaker, Ian Huntley, has been charged with murdering the two ten-year-old girls, who lived in Soham in Cambridgeshire.

13.00 News bulletin

Newsreader:

Tony Blair is visiting British troops in Iraq -- he said the war provided a historic opportunity for progress towards peace in the Middle East

Downing Street has dismissed a claim that the Government's dossier on Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction was rewritten to make it more dramatic.

A report into the Potters Bar rail crash has found that poorly maintained points were the most likely cause of the derailment.

Tony Blair is in southern Iraq, to meet some of the British troops who helped capture and secure the city of Basra and the port of Umm Qasr. He's the first western leader to visit Iraq since the end of the conflict. After meeting local people and schoolchildren, Mr Blair told the troops that they'd done a magnificent job -- and that their efforts had made them famous around the world. Our correspondent, Richard Miron heard the prime minister's speech at a military base in Basra

Miron:

Tony Blair was greeted warmly by about a hundred and fifty troops who'd been gathered to hear him speak. He said he'd come to congratulate them for their role in the recent conflict. Their actions, he said, would mark changes not only in Iraq but also in the whole of the Middle East. Earlier, he visited a local school where he met Iraqi children. There have been complaints here by locals that the British haven't done enough to bring security. Controversy has also surrounded this trip, with questions raised about the existence of weapons of mass destruction - a point Mr Blair acknowledged but didn't address in his speech to troops. This wasn't intended to be a triumphalist visit, but Mr Blair took this opportunity to signal his determination to build on the British/American victory in Iraq.

Newsreader:

Downing Street has dismissed a claim that the Government's dossier on Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction was rewritten to make the threat appear more urgent. According to a report on the Today programme, the changes were made against the wishes of the intelligence services. From Westminster, here's our Political Correspondent, Shaun Ley

Ley:

The dossier set out the risk posed by Iraq's weapons programme. According to a security source who spoke to the Today programme, Downing Street asked for the dossier to be re-written to make its impact more dramatic. As a result, it included a claim that weapons of mass destruction could be launched within 45 minutes. The source suggested this was against the wishes of the security services, who didn't want to include the claim because it could not be corroborated. The Armed Forces Minister, Adam Ingram, acknowledged that the claim only came from one source but he says the whole of the dossier was based on the best available information. Mr Ingram denied the suggestion that Number Ten asked for it to be made more dramatic. But following suggestions that the weapons may have been destroyed before the war began, this argument is fuelling concern among Labour MPs that they may have been misled about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein

Newsreader:

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria has been sworn in for a second term. More than a dozen fellow African leaders watched as Mr Obasanjo, in traditional white robes, took the oath of office. The ceremony went ahead despite opposition calls for the results of last month's election to be rejected on grounds of ballot rigging.

A report into the Potter's Bar rail crash has found no evidence that sabotage was the cause of the derailment, which killed seven people in May last year. The Health and Safety Executive said the most likely cause was the poor condition of a set of points on the tracks. Here's our transport reporter, John Moylan. *[Moylan's report]*

The England football captain, David Beckham, is to make a televised appeal to fans asking them not to disrupt the team's match against Serbia and Montenegro next week. He says a repeat of the violence which marred last month's game against Turkey could have serious consequences for England in Europe.

Celebrations are taking place in Nepal to mark the golden jubilee of the first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953 by Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. Five hundred climbers who've reached the summit are attending a gala dinner hosted by the King of Nepal, at which Sir Edmund is the guest of honour.