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7,000 expected to help at Big Event

By Melissa McKeon
THE BATTALION

More than 7,000 Texas A&M students are expected to gather on O.R. Simpson Drill Field Saturday morning for the start of the 2003 Big Event, the largest one-day student-run service project that allows students to give back to the community.

This year students are expected to complete more than 660 jobs in the Bryan-College Station area. This year also marks Big Event's 21st year as the largest community service project in the nation.

The Big Event originated in 1982 when six Aggies, led by Joe Nussbaum, cleaned a local cemetery.

The day will begin with music by Feeding 5000, as well as food and drinks.

Lori McLain, director of Big Event, said people are touched by Aggies who give their time just to change the look of a house by painting or gardening.

"Some people have recently lost a loved one and just want to talk to young people in order to re-energize them," McLain said.

"Students reap huge rewards by helping someone and making a connection with people. They also get to see the results of their hard work."

McLain said the Big Event team targets needy areas but is not limited to those communities.

"Big Event is not need-based," she said. "We accept the first 700 people that come in before our deadline, which was Feb. 26."

Kappa Delta Chi sorority is one of the many organizations participating in Big Event. The sorority will paint two houses, as well as break down a fence and clear out a yard.

"We have always participated because we feel it unifies the A&M community and its organizations," said Arycelis Segura, president of Kappa Delta Chi. "We are also helping out the community that supports A&M. We are giving our time, which is sometimes the best thing people need."

Students and organizations are assigned randomly using a computer program, but there are special assignments for some projects.

"Some people only speak Spanish, so we try to make some special matches,"

McLain said.

Michelle Rivera, community interest chair for Big Event and a junior psychology major, said Big Event staffers look for donations year-round.

"Big Event costs \$50,000 to put on, so we gather donations to buy supplies, while a small amount of supplies are donated," Rivera said. "We ask businesses in the community for donations and we also had an auction featuring signed football memorabilia that raised \$4,000."

Rivera also said there are a few corporate sponsors, such as Bank of America and the 12th Man Foundation.

"We're also working on becoming a non-profit organization so in future years businesses can get a tax deduction," she said. "That will definitely help us get more donations."

Currently, 30 schools across the nation host The Big Event, and the number is expected to increase in the upcoming year.

"Our goals in the upcoming year are to establish an endowment fund, include more service projects and students on the day of The Big Event, and expand nationally to other universities," McLain said.

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Bush and Blair assess progress in Iraq

By Scott Lindlaw
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair are assessing the progress of the war in Iraq after a week of fierce combat, meeting amid growing signs Saddam Hussein has dug in for a prolonged fight.

The American and British leaders were getting together at the Camp David presidential retreat while grappling with how to prepare their citizens for a longer war than many had.

Iraqi forces have frustrated U.S. officials hopes that they would defect or surrender en masse, and there have been few celebratory welcomes for U.S. and British troops. The coalition march on Baghdad has been slowed by weather and unexpectedly strong Iraqi resistance.

In their talks Thursday, Blair

and Bush also were looking beyond the conflict to a rebuilding phase, both for Iraq and for U.S.-Europe relations. And they were discussing how best to move humanitarian supplies such as food into war-torn regions of Iraq.

Blair, under fire at home for supporting the invasion of Iraq, is pressing for a strong U.N. role in rebuilding. He says the United States and its allies must broaden their agenda beyond Iraq to help build peace in the Middle East and across the globe.

"I will see President Bush at Camp David to discuss not just the military campaign but also the diplomatic implications of recent events for the future — in particular, how we get America and Europe working again together as partners and not as rivals," he said before leaving for the United States.

Bush arrived at Camp David

in Maryland's Catocin Mountains on Wednesday afternoon in a driving rain, following a quick trip to Florida. He sought to rally the troops and the American people behind the Iraq war at a time when U.S. forces are suffering casualties.

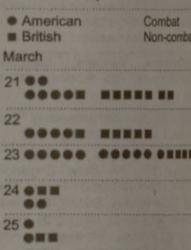
"I can assure you there will be a day of reckoning for Iraq, and that day is drawing near," the president told hundreds of cheering American troops and their families in a packed hangar at MacDill Air Force Base, the headquarters of Central Command, which is overseeing the war.

"Our military is making good progress in Iraq, yet this war is far from over," he said, making a last-minute change of wording that dropped a reference to the U.S. military being "ahead of schedule."

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer, briefing reporters on

Coalition losses

There have been 27 U.S. casualties and 22 British casualties since the beginning of war in Iraq.



NOTE: The date of one American non-combat casualty was not released.

SOURCE: Associated Press

the way to Florida aboard Air Force One, said Bush would tell his audience: "Our progress is ahead of schedule, yet this war is far from over."

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Israel fears Iraqi attack

By Piskey Dodds
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — Israel is staying on high alert against an Iraqi strike despite a British assertion that coalition forces have disabled Saddam Hussein's ability to launch missiles from western Iraq, an Israeli government official said Thursday.

Thousands of Palestinians demonstrated in the West Bank, pleading with S a d d a m Hussein to strike Israel with missiles and chemical weapons. In the 1991 Gulf War, the Jewish state was hit with 39 conventional Scud missiles, which caused heavy damage and hundreds of injuries but few deaths.

"We have disabled Iraq's ability to launch external aggression from the west," British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Thursday in a joint news conference with President Bush.

Western Iraq is the part of the

country closest to Israel and the launching point of the missiles fired in the previous war.

But an Israeli government official who declined to be identified said Israel still could come under attack from elsewhere in Iraq and will remain under high alert until the threat of missiles or "other attacks" is removed completely.

Israelis have been told to keep gas masks with them and to prepare sealed rooms in case of a chemical or biological attack.

The war in Iraq, which began a week ago, has fueled anger in the Gaza Strip and

West Bank, where Saddam has doled out \$35 million to Palestinian families with relatives killed during the uprising against Israel.

"Strike, strike Tel Aviv with chemicals!" more than 4,000 people chanted in the West Bank towns of Tulkarem and Tubas on Thursday. "Bush, the little one, you are a coward! The land of Iraq is not for you!"

NEWS IN BRIEF

Universities warn students abroad

As anti-war sentiment rises in other countries, U.S. colleges are warning their students studying abroad to avoid demonstrations, street corner debates on U.S. foreign policy and clothes that identify them as Americans.

But just to be on the safe side, some students are passing themselves off as Canadian.

In interviews over the past week, students and faculty overseas said the anti-American sentiment they've encountered has been directed at the Bush administration — not at U.S. citizens.

U.S. Navy plays important role in war

Floating fortresses on Saddam Hussein's doorstep, the Navy warships that opened Operation Iraqi Freedom with a thunderous strike of Tomahawk cruise missiles are now launching planes that can protect ground troops by picking off a single tank or mortar emplacement.

The Navy has deployed tens of thousands of men and women more than half of its 305 ships and more than 4,000 aircraft to the Persian Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean to focus its impressive array of weapons on Baghdad.