

US special forces, CIA agents working in Iraq for invasion

Saddam accuses Washington of plotting to occupy Gulf

REUTERS, Boston

US Special Forces and CIA agents have been working inside Iraq for months to lay the groundwork for a possible US invasion, The Boston Globe reported on Sunday.

The Globe, citing intelligence officials and military analysts who claim first-hand knowledge of the operations, said the American teams are searching for Scud missile launchers, monitoring oil fields, marking minefield sites and helping US pilots bomb Iraqi air-defence systems.

Yesterday, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein charged that the United States was plotting to "occupy" the oil-rich Gulf region.

"Behind this uproar and self-defeating pandemonium, the enemy is pursuing several objectives and Iraq is not the only target. The objective is to fully and effectively occupy the Arab Gulf in order to achieve several goals," Saddam said a televised speech marking Iraq's Armed Forces Day.

The Iraqi leader also accused UN arms inspectors of engaging in spying.

"Instead of searching for so-called weapons of mass destruction in order to expose the lies of the liars, the inspection teams have been compiling lists of Iraqi scientists, asking questions with undeclared purposes, and inquiring about army camps and non-

prohibited armament.

"All this, or at least most of it, is sheer intelligence activity."

Meanwhile in New Delhi, a visiting top US official yesterday said the US has not taken any decision to attack Iraq.

Richard Haass, director of policy planning for the US State Department, said the United States was "working with the Iraqis to persuade them to cooperate," and denied plans to attack were set in stone.

The Globe, citing intelligence officials and military analysts who claim first-hand knowledge of the operations, said the American teams are searching for Scud missile launchers, monitoring oil fields, marking minefield sites and helping US pilots bomb Iraqi air-defence systems.

The report said Jordanian, British and Australian commandos have on occasion joined the Americans.

The Globe's report, which puts the number of US Special Forces members and CIA officers at roughly 150, comes just weeks before UN arms inspectors are to submit the results of their search for any weapons of mass destruction that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein has allegedly been hiding.

Some Special Forces members have been following suspicious movements around suspected

weapons sites in Iraq. That information, the Globe said, could be turned over to the inspectors.

Other Americans are said to be trying to identify potential leaders in Iraq to work with the Bush administration in case of an invasion. Similar tactics were used in Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance before the war there.

The Globe said US military and CIA officials declined to make official comment on these activities.

Many of the strikes on radar sites have been directed by men on the ground using lasers.

Meanwhile, the US military has put at least 275 Army Reserve units - involving more than 10,000 soldiers - on alert to be ready to move overseas as early as this week in preparation for a possible war with Iraq, USA Today reported yesterday.

Citing Defence Department sources, the newspaper said unit commanders were ordered to be ready to move out between January 10 and February 15 and that Reserves in this latest call-up would likely be sent to the Persian Gulf region, joining thousands of other US forces.

Lieutenant General James Helmly, commander of Army Reserve Forces, told the paper the new orders affect more than 10,000 troops, including several thousand other Reserves alerted Friday for duty in the United States.



PHOTO: STAR

The Sammilito Sangskritik Jote stages a sit-in at Muktangon in the city yesterday, demanding the release of cultural activists, journalists and intellectuals from jails.

RU teachers

FROM PAGE 12

Hawladar, Fazlul Karim, Anisur Rahman, Rezaul Hassan Karim and Dr PM Shafiqul Islam attended the press conference.

Referring to the report on cassette scandal published in different newspapers, the RUTA leaders alleged that the appointment of some teachers was not carried out on merits.

Six teachers were appointed to the Department of Computer Science, according to a decision taken at a syndicate meeting on December 29.

But Quazi Zahedur Rahman, one of the candidates, who scored highest among 15, was not recruited as the administration identified him as an Awami League supporter and member of the Rabindra group, as revealed by an audiocassette.

The cassette obtained by the local press recorded snatches of a telephonic conversation between Proctor Nurul Absar and Khwaja Zakaria Chisti, chairman of the computer science department.

The cassette also revealed why Zahedur Rahman, a first class first achiever in Honours and Master's, was not appointed.

The proctor told Chisti over phone that "he (Zahedur) is an Awami Leaguer, so he would not be recruited."

The RUTA leaders have claimed that one of the teachers involved in the cassette scandal is a member of the teacher recruitment board.

They alleged that the RU administration engaged in appointing teachers, violating regular norms and recommendations of the RU planning committee.

Rickshaws

FROM PAGE 12

to the deputy commissioner (DC) of traffic department requesting him to release the rickshaw on 'humanitarian ground'.

The DC traffic imposes a fine of Tk 10 on the applicant and asks him to obtain a clearance from the magistrate's court concerned. When the magistrate receives the fine and issues a clearance, the owner gets it back.

Mia Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain from Jatrabari area, who owned 20 illegal rickshaws, yesterday came to take back his vehicles. He said he would try to sell those to villagers.

About three lakh illegal rickshaws ply in the city, according to an estimate.

tee.

Replying to a question, the leaders said the November 27 syndicate meeting approved appointments of at least 32 teachers to eight departments although the planning committee recommended 22 posts.

The administration also recruited three new teachers for permanent posts in the applied chemistry department although three lecturers were in wait for promotion to assistant professor on a permanent basis upon completion of their three-year service, the press conference was told.

Dr Sharmin Alam, daughter of Professor Shamsul Alam Birprotik, was not recruited either despite her right to the 30 per cent allocation for the freedom fighters' sons and daughters.

Meanwhile, RU Students Advisor Professor M Rafiqul Islam, Syndicate Member Professor Azhar Ali and pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Professor M Nazrul Islam in a joint statement denied involvement in the press conference.

The statement circulated among journalists minutes before the press conference termed yesterday's press conference illegal.

Earlier on Sunday night, as many as 50 BNP-Jamaat-aligned teachers, including the RU proctor, threatened the RUTA leaders with dire consequences if they held any press conference.

Listed criminal

FROM PAGE 12

with 26 bottles of phenisidyl syrup from a house at Ramer Dighiripar in the City Sunday night.

Meanwhile, an impersonator posing as an army man was arrested from the Uttara Export Processing Zone area here Thursday.

Police said Arifuzzaman Arif, 28, of Khulna district, called himself an army officer and collected money from local youths, assuring them jobs.

The police headquarters in a press release yesterday informed that a total of 1,227 people, including eight listed criminals, had been captured across the country in the last 24 hours ending at 6:00am Monday.

During the countrywide drive they recovered three firearms, five lethal weapons and 11 rounds of bullet.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a press release said that they had arrested 277 people in a special drive during this period.

Detention of Shuvra Dev lawful: HC

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday held lawful the detention of Shuvra Dev, a popular singer, terming the grounds of detention under the Special Powers Act as 'definite'.

Shuvra was arrested last month from his Pallabi residence in the city. Later, he was detained under the Special Powers Act on charge of masterminding the failed attempt to smuggle top terror Abdur Rashid alias Kala Farooq out of the country as member of a cultural team to Sweden.

Police arrested Kala Farooq from Zia International Airport before he could flee the country. Later he died in custody.

A division bench comprising Justice Hamidul Huq and Justice Salma Masud Chowdhury delivered the verdict after hearing both sides.

Advocate Mahbub-e-Aalam appeared for Shuvra while Assistant Attorney General Zaman Akhtar Bulbul stood for the state.

Fares up

FROM PAGE 1

taxicab driver Lokman Hossain said he was realising Tk 5 to 10 over meter reading. "I am helpless because the (fuel) price has increased".

Ali Hossain, controller of a taxicab company admitted that drivers were realising TK 10 to TK 20 more than actual fares.

He said drivers are demanding increase in fare rate. But he can not allow this before transport leaders meet the communication minister, he said.

CNG autorickshaw driver Md. Mansur said he is charging more as the vehicle owner has increased its daily rent.

The present fare rate is Tk 20 for first two kilometers and Tk 8 per kilometer thereafter for yellow taxicabs in the city. For black cabs, it is Tk 15 and Tk 6 respectively.

Justifying 40 per cent enhancement in bus fares against 14 per cent increase in fuel prices, Abdur Rashid Khan said, "In the last budget the government increased taxes on imported spares, raised registration fees and even imposed VAT on assembling vehicles.

"We also have to pay more toll to the government and extortionists."

The official fare rates are 65 paisa per kilometer for inter-city buses and 62 paisa for city service buses.

Army deployment

FROM PAGE 1

Election Commission for peaceful holding of the UP elections beginning on January 25. The meeting noted that usually the UP polls were held in a festive mood in villages and, as such, deployment of the army was not needed.

Sources said the meeting reviewed the overall situation, particularly law and order. It has also been pointed out that there is no instance of deployment of troops in the UP polls.

"The army is usually deployed in general elections and it would not at all be wise to ask for its service in all elections. If an example is set through deploying the army in the UP polls, then the army might have to be deployed in elections at all levels in future," said an influential minister.

Besides, he said, the costs of such deployment would be very high.

Talking to the Daily Star, a BNP leader claimed that the law and order situation has improved greatly since Operation Clean Heart began on October 17 last year.

He said the government has decided to give all-out support for peaceful holding of the elections, and necessary instructions have already been given to the home ministry and

local administration to extend full cooperation to the EC.

Sources at the PM's office said the Prime Minister would hold a meeting with all the DCs and SPs on January 13 and ask the civil and police administration to extend the necessary support to the EC.

PMO sources further said that the government would soon explain to the CEC why it does not want to deploy the army in the UP polls. Besides, the CEC would be informed of the measures adopted by the government for smooth holding of the polls.

They said the government might not write back to the CEC, but its decisions would be communicated verbally. If necessary a delegation of the government would meet and discuss the matter with the EC.

Sources said the Prime Minister has already instructed the Ministry of Home Affairs to prepare police, Ansars and VDP for deployment during the polls. If necessary the BDR would be called out, they added.

"The CEC should realise the problems faced by the government," they concluded.

Mystery shrouds

FROM PAGE 1

group of army personnel. The members of the Operation Clean Heart first inquired about Milton's younger brother Tawhidul Hasan Tofi, 26, an accounting honours student of the Khilgaon Model College and president of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, Khilgaon unit.

The army personnel wanted to know about the licensed firearm owned by Milton's family. But the gun was already deposited with the police station and so, the documents were shown to the army.

Unmoved, the joint forces blindfolded the two brothers and took them to the Khilgaon army camp.

When Milton and Tofi were finally handed to the Khilgaon police after about 33 hours of interrogation, both were nearly dead.

Each had their legs broken into pieces. Milton also suffered a serious kidney injury while red fluid was oozing out of Tofi's ear.

The Khilgaon police immediately sent the two brothers to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) from where they were referred to the National Orthopaedic Hospital (Pangu) Hospital at Agargaon.

On Sunday, as Milton's kidney condition deteriorated, he was shifted to the DMCH again. Doctors said one of his kidneys suffered grave injuries. Yesterday morning, Tofi died in the hospital bed semiconscious. A policeman sat near his bed as he was shown arrested under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), which means he is a suspect.

Relatives said Tofi could not sleep at night due to pain in his broken leg. His entire left leg was plastered and doctors said he had multiple fractures.

A source in the Khilgaon police station said both the brothers were badly mauled when the joint forces handed them to police.

When contacted, army sources alleged that both the brothers were identified criminals of the locality. They also have links with top criminals like Liakat and Hannan. They are also accused in a number of cases including that of a murder with the Sabujbag Police Station (Case Nos. 61(1)95 and 51(7)94.

Army sources further said after they were arrested, the brothers confessed to have given arms to listed criminals of the locality, Shawkat and Jewel. After Tofi said he had hidden a weapon under the floor of the garage of their residence, army and police went there and dug up the garage. But nothing was found. Tofi then said somebody else must have removed the weapon. He also confessed that

Milton has links with top criminal Liakat, army sources claimed.

After checking Milton's mobile phone, it was found that he had links with top criminals of Dhaka including Awlad, Apollo, Badal, Delwar, Habib, Hasan, Emon, Kabir and Milton, it was claimed.

Army sources further claimed that a photograph was published in newspapers after a fight between the supporters of Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Mirza Abbas, which showed Milton carrying a revolver and Tofi a shotgun.

Army sources also claimed that both the brothers were handed over to police in good condition and that they got themselves admitted to hospital to delay the remand process by the police.

However, contrary to the army claim, The Daily Star correspondent who visited the hospital found the two brothers badly injured and the attending doctors also gave descriptions of their injury.

Family members said Milton and Tofi are not criminals. "They are involved in politics and the cases were all politically motivated. The cases were later withdrawn."

The family members also challenged the army claim that their pictures carrying arms were published. "We challenge this claim," said a relative of the brothers. "If any one has any such pictures, let it be made public."

At Khilgaon, Milton and Tofi's neighbours also said the brothers had good reputation in the area. An owner of a shop said neither Milton nor Tofi was engaged in any extortion in the area.

"I do not know if they were involved in any other illegal activities elsewhere," said the shopkeeper, requesting not to be named.

Explosives recovered in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

Army-led joint forces recovered 31 sacks of explosives from a house at Jagannathpur village in Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Police said the joint forces raided the house of Abu Taher, 48, at the village and recovered a huge amount of chocolate bombs and firecrackers.

They also arrested Abu Taher and his son Farook, 28, in this connection and handed them over to police.

Girlfriend set on fire

FROM PAGE 12

with a few others present on the spot doused the flames with sands.

They took her inside the hostel with most parts of her body badly burnt. Khodabakh then called the superintendent of the hostel, Aklima Begum and took Mimi to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. As her condition deteriorated, she was later shifted to the City Hospital at Panthapath.

Doctors said that about 75 percent of her body including the face were badly burnt. Her lungs and eyes were also affected.

Several people, who witnessed the incident, said it was not an accident. "The two youths poured petrol on Mimi's body, set her on fire and fled the scene immediately," they added.

Mimi's elder brother Captain AS Masud Parvez, who came to the city from Rangpur on Sunday, blamed Babu and Arif for the incident. "I came to know about the affair of my sister with Babu a couple of months ago. Mimi herself told me that she liked a cricketer," said a walling Parvez at the City Hospital.

Maruf Morshed Masum, younger brother of Mimi said Babu called him over phone about 11 hours after the incident and told that Mimi had committed suicide, pouring petrol on her body.

Babu 29, a member of the Bangladesh team that took part in the 1999 World Cup in England, played his last match in the National League for Chittagong at the Fatullah Stadium on Thursday.

But since Friday the strike bowler went missing. He failed to turn up for Saturday's regular practice session.

"We only learnt today that his name was linked to the tragic incident in which a young woman was allegedly set on fire," said former national captain Minhazul Abedin.

"Whether he has done it or not, it has definitely brought shame on all cricketers," said the veteran all-rounder.

Sources said Mimi engaged herself with Babu several months ago, and Babu used to visit the hostel to meet her. She was trying to manage Babu, after her elder brother asked her

to forget the relationship and concentrate on her studies.

Mimi had been staying at the hostel for six months.

Captain Parvez filed a case with the Tejgaon Police Station Sunday accusing Babu and Arif of attempting to kill his sister. Both Babu and Arif have been missing since the incident.

Police raided several places to arrest them, as they believe that the two are still hiding in the city. Sub-Inspector Jahangir Hossain is investigating the case.

A container was recovered from the spot, which, according to police, was filled with petrol.

Trinamul

FROM PAGE 12

iment to their cordial relationships in West Bengal."

However, what was important to note at a rally organised by the Trinamul Congress in Kolkata yesterday was that both the parties were ready to accept that they had made a mistake by breaking an alliance that had been so successful from 1997 to 2001, observers said.

Mamata said, "The alliance with the Congress is history and we have learnt from our mistakes."

On the other hand, Tathagata Roy said, "Both the sides developed a misconception and the result was that the Left triumphed. This has to be prevented."

BB autonomy

FROM PAGE 12

for four years from five and waiver of the provision to appoint deputy governors for different tenures.

As per the proposed amendments, the BB governor cannot be appointed to any other post and the central bank can declare currency of any country as an approved foreign currency without a prior approval from the government.

The BB would also have the authority to sell and buy foreign currencies without government approval.

ated the micro-credit programme.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also sought Canadian government's involvement in imparting training to teachers for improving quality of education.

Responding to the PM, Whelan showed interest in importing jute goods from Bangladesh rating its environment-friendly quality.

She also appraised the prime minister that Canada is interested in expanding Canadian aid in Bangladesh alongside providing assistance in education sector.

The prime minister briefly appraised the Canadian minister of her government's various pragmatic and bold steps in improving law and order, establishing good governance and the rule of law and spurring economic growth overcoming a "shattered condition" inherited by her government.

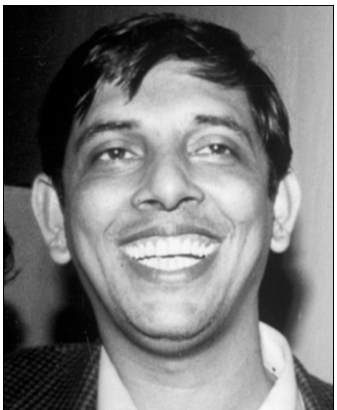
The Canadian Minister for International Cooperation was accompanied by Canadian High Commissioner in Dhaka Gerry Campbell, CIDA vice-president for Asia Hau Sing Tse, Policy Advisor to the Minister for International Cooperation Robert Lea and CIDA and High Commission officials.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamaluddin Siddiqui and Bangladesh High Commissioner to Canada Mohsin Ali Khan were present on the Bangladesh side.

Nasim freed

FROM PAGE 1

Upon receiving the order seven days later, the Rangpur jail authorities released the AL leader.



"I wonder whether I will be arrested yet again before I reach home," Nasim told The Daily Star over mobile phone soon after his release.

He alleged that he was tortured while on remand and in jail. "I need proper medical treatment."

Bahauddin Nasim, who was received by family members and local AL leaders, started for the capital at 5:00pm.

On February 27 last, he was arrested at the Zia International Airport, prior to his departure for the United States, under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

Next day, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court placed him on a five-day remand and ordered the police to produce him before the court once the remand period expired.

However, in violation of the order, the police kept Bahauddin Nasim for two more days and then sent him straight to jail.

On November 18, the AL leader was sent on a 30-day detention under the Special Powers Act. He was accused of conspiring against the state while in custody. On December 15, the authorities extended his detention for 90 more days.

Bahauddin Nasim was shown arrested in connection with the attack on the motorcade of then leader of opposition Khaleda Zia in Madaripur.

Moreover, he was also implicated for sedition and illegal dollar transaction.

In all three cases, he was granted ad interim bail.

3 think-tanks

FROM PAGE 12

Barrister Amir-ul-Islam, Monjurul Imam, Major General (Retd) K M Shafiqullah, Lt. General (Retd) M Nur Uddin Khan, General (Retd) Mustafizur Rahman, Rear Admiral (Retd) Nurul Islam, Major General (Retd) Abdus Salam, Major General (Retd) Golam Mawla and Major General (Retd) AMSAmin.

Sources said the AL no longer wants to see its advisory council without any work most of the time. Rather, it wants that the new advisory council would work in full gear in tandem with the fresh and younger generation leaders of the party's newly constituted central committee.

"We now think if advices and guidelines on various issues come from our experienced advisors, the new generation leadership of Awami League will be able to serve the people and the country better," said a party central leader.

FROM PAGE 12

owners just pay Tk 200 fine and the vehicles hit the roads again" he said.

On March 27, 2002, the High Court ordered the installation of filters in the city's diesel-run vehicles within 6 months to stop particulate emission. But the directive is yet to be carried out as government has asked for a year's time to comply with the order.

Experts say, diesel-run vehicle exhausts are one of the major contributors to air pollution. Thousands of unfit vehicles with faulty engines, such as pickup vans, overloaded trucks, buses and government vehicles are constantly pumping oxides of carbon, sulfur oxide and other toxic components into the atmosphere.

Moreover, almost the entire government fleet of vehicles, particularly the ones run by diesel contribute to air pollution because of faulty engines. Another major source of pollution is the hundreds of brick kilns around the city that burn coal, firewood and used tyres round-the-clock between September and April of each year.

Meanwhile, the particulate matter measuring equipment of the AQMP detected an extremely high density of pm10 (particulate matter less than 10 microns) and pm2.5 (particulate matter less than 2.5 microns) in the capital's atmosphere.

This winter particulate matter in

the air is very high -- an average of 140 micrograms per cubic meter and rising up to 300 microgram per cubic metre at times in the Sangsad Bhaban area.

Too much exposure to particulate matters has been linked to premature deaths from respiratory and cardio-vascular illnesses, higher rates of bronchitis and other chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and respiratory tract infections.

Other impacts of air pollution include crops and ecosystem damage, degraded visibility, soiling of buildings and water quality deterioration because of pollutant deposition.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials said as many as 2,800 buses and mini-buses are permitted to ply in the capital. Thousands other buses shuttle through the city from peripheral towns every day.

According to a World Bank report of Feb, 2001, as many as 15,000 deaths, a million cases of sickness requiring medical treatments and 8.5 million cases of minor illnesses can be avoided if pollution levels in the air of the four cities of Bangladesh is reduced to standards set by the WHO. The report says, the economic cost of these avoidable deaths and sicknesses is estimated to be about 200 to 800 million U.S. dollars every year in

Bangladesh.

Interestingly, it not possible to convert diesel engines to CNG engines.

When asked, Engineer Rezaul Karim, general manager of Rupantarita Praktik Gas Company Ltd. (RPGCL) said the conversion is not economically viable.

Director of Operation of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) Dr. S. M. Salehuddin said some unfit diesel-run vehicles are plying the city roads illegally. It is very difficult to stop them.

DC Traffic (south) Abu Musa Md. Fakhruul Islam Khan said they need pollution detector machines to mark the faulty vehicles. He added that he could not understand how the BRTA officials give permission for the faulty vehicles to ply.

Shahriar

FROM PAGE 1

specific charge against him. Later, he was shown arrested in a sedition case. He obtained bail from the HC in both cases. Then he was given a one-month detention under the Special Powers Act.

The HC order was sent to Chittagong jail, where Shahriar is imprisoned now. He might be released today, his lawyer said.

FROM PAGE 12

from attending two key meetings this month, government sources said.

They said Israel would stop top Palestinian officials from travelling to a Jan. 14 conference in London sponsored by the British government to discuss Middle East peace and Palestinian Authority reforms demanded by the United States.

Israel would also prevent the Palestinian Central Council from meeting for the first time in two years on January 9 to ratify a Palestinian constitution, including a clause establishing the post of prime minister.

The meeting of one of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's top bodies was to have been held in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Israeli forces reoccupied Palestinian cities after suicide bombings in June.