

Iraq brings in tough security laws

Two national guards killed in heavy Baghdad gunbattle

AFP, Baghdad

A heavy gunbattle broke out on the streets of central Baghdad yesterday morning as insurgents shot at Iraqi national guards and US soldiers, supported by helicopters, minutes before the announcement of new security laws by the Iraqi government, witnesses said.

Two national guards were killed and 10 wounded in the battle on Haifa Street, next to Al-Talaya Square on the western side of the Tigris River, a national guard lieutenant told AFP from Al-Karkh hospital.

"Two national guard were killed and 10 wounded," Abu Noors said. The insurgents attacked the fledgling Iraqi security forces at around 11:00am (0700 GMT), just two hours before Iraq's new iron-fisted security measures were announced.

An AFP correspondent said the insurgents used light weapons and rocket launchers to attack the Iraqi guards, who were also backed by Iraqi police.

The US troops arrived in their Humvees with air support, witnesses said. Explosions echoed in the area.

A body of one of the Iraqi national guard was lying on the side of the street.

Four more US marines were killed in action on Tuesday in western Iraq, the US military said yesterday, taking its death toll in the restive region to 14 in just over one week.

SECURITY MEASURES
Iraq's prime minister has signed into

law sweeping emergency security measures, including powers to impose curfews, arrest suspects and ban associations, in a bid to end the violence endemic to Iraq since last year's US-led invasion.

Iraq's interim government defended the law as forced upon it by the deadly 14-month-old insurgency that had devastated the country, but claimed there were checks on premier Iyad Allawi's powers and that the tough steps were in line with principles of human rights.

According to a copy of the text given to AFP the law grants Allawi the right to declare emergency law in "any area of Iraq where people face a threat to the lives of its citizen because of some people's permanent violent campaign to prevent the creation of a government that represents all Iraqis."

The state of emergency cannot extend past 60 days and must be dissolved as soon as the danger has ended, but it can be renewed every 30 days, with a letter of approval by the prime minister, the president and vice presidents.

The law grants Allawi the right to issue arrest warrants and impose restriction on the movement of foreigners.

It also gives the government the right to open mail, eavesdrop on telephone conversations, ban political groups, cancel meetings and bar street protests.

Speaker denies

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AL lawmakers shouted at the top of their voice that the speaker adjourned the sitting even after promising them floor at the instruction of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and senior ministers.

"Now we don't have enough time. You will get chance to speak after the Maghrib break," Sircar told Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid, who was demanding floor to formulate a point of order when the House was dealing with call attention notices.

Shahid later accused the speaker of adjourning the Jatiya Sangsad in haste at the instruction of Khaleda and cabinet minister reneging on his own promise.

"The government doesn't want to listen to constructive opposition criticism that many correct its wrong and help stop its run of failures."

"We wanted to speak on the prime minister's doubt over the threat to the life of Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. The treasury bench signed to the speaker not to give us floor to keep our voice unheard," Shahid told The Daily Star.

AL lawmakers, who walked out the parliament on Tuesday, joined yesterday's sitting after Asr prayers, sitting outside during prime minister's question time.

Rab rescues

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Samrat Mian, Shahin Mian, Moshir Rahman, Mohammad Rana, Mohammad Sumon, Mohammad Masud and Mohammad Lokman, they added.

The arrestees are members of an organised racket involved in child trafficking. The gang lured girls from different parts of the country with promises of lucrative jobs in the capital, Rab sources said.

The gang forcibly engaged the victims in anti-social activities in city's different apartments and also smuggled out many girls from the country, they added.

Rab officials were quizzing the arrestees to trace the mastermind behind the trafficking gang.

Democracy

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48 and 56 of the constitution, Rafique noted these articles and preamble remain unchanged in the 13th amendment and there is no need for a referendum on it.

The provision of referendum, mandated by the fifth amendment to the constitution, has come in the form of martial law proclamation, which is an illegal by-product of martial law rulers, Rafique concluded.

Advocate Wadud pointed out the caretaker government does not have the power to make policies. It has the mandate to conduct a free and fair election and can only aid the Election Commission, which is why the provision for interim administration is by no means a blow to the constitution's basic structure.

Additional Attorney General Fida M Kamal made a brief submission on behalf of the government, which has been made a party to the petition, while advocates MI Farooqui and Ruhul Kuddus Babu were present on behalf of the petitioner.

The chronology

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23 December 2002
Prothom Alo telephone poll overwhelming support for abandonment of the project.

01 February 2003
Large protest rally at construction site.

01 February 2003
"Stop building houses in Jatiya Sangsad Area" protest rally attended by general people, architects, artists, and environmentalists.

03 March 2003
Letter from President, Institute of Architects, Bangladesh to the Prime Minister urging her intervention to stop the work.

19 May 2003
High Court ruling to stay construction work at site.

21 May 2003
Construction work continues unabated despite court order.

23 May 2003
Work at site ceases.

31 July 2003
Human chain in Sangsad Bhaban Complex in protest of building in Sangsad area.

18 August 2003
Appellate Division stays High Court ruling allowing construction work to continue for three months.

14 May 2003
Writ to the High Court jointly by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) and Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB)

18 May 2003
Stay order on construction again.

28 August 2003
Chamber judge vacates stay order

21 June, 2004
High Court declares the construction of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker's residences illegal. The bench also directs government to take necessary steps to declare the parliament complex a national heritage.

July 7, 2004
Appellate Division declines to pass a stay order on the June 21 High Court verdict and also pushes aside government plea to put an embargo on media coverage on any development works at the parliament complex.

Rescue team' heads

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Biman's Flight Operation Office at Zia International Airport said the absence of the F28 plane -- one of the two F28s procured from an Indonesian company only last month -- forced rescheduling of 14 flights on domestic and regional routes yesterday.

However, Acting Managing Director of Biman Mahmoodur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday that the engine shutdown in Chittagong is a minor technical fault and the plane would be brought back into operations shortly.

"The incident is not unusual. It can happen to any aircraft of any airline but the minor fault can be repaired easily with the existing expertise of Biman. The passengers have nothing to worry about," said Rahman, also director (Marketing and Sales) of Biman.

The Biman flight, BG 624, was scheduled to fly for Dhaka at 6:15pm

on Tuesday, but the engine of the plane went off when the plane was about to go to runway for take-off, sources said. It developed glitch again when the plane started toward the runway after a one-hour repair at the hangar at Chittagong airport. The passengers then boarded another plane to fly to Dhaka.

Since its maiden flight on June 3, the engine of the newly bought F28 aircraft went off six times. The engine of the other F28 plane went out of order twice. Biman bought the pair from an Indonesian company at a cost of \$2.91 million.

However, a Biman press release, received last night, said after successful flights to Kolkata and Kathmandu, one of the newly procured F28 plane yesterday operated on Dhaka-Yangon-Bangkok route. The two newly procured F28 aircraft have so far been used in 307 flights on domestic and regional destinations.

Airbus, Boeing vie

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Biman has also invited offers for dry lease or dry lease with option to purchase or to buy outright two DC10-30 aircraft. The tendered bids will be opened on August 5.

The government meanwhile has formed a seven-member expert committee to vet the technical and financial aspects of the aircraft majors' proposals. The committee will hold its first meeting on July 11 Sunday.

Former civil aviation and tourism secretary and presently Acting Communications Secretary M Shafiqul Islam heads the committee, which includes Ashfaq Hamid, additional secretary at the finance ministry, and Prof Maghub Al Noor of the mechanical engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology as members.

Apart from them, the committee also includes four Biman officials -- Acting Managing Director Mahmoodur Rahman, Director (Engineering) S Zilani Mahbubur Rahman, Director (Flight Operations) Kamal Mahmood and Director (Finance) Anwar Hossain.

Sources said Airbus, a joint venture of the three major European powers, has offered to sell two Airbus-320 for Biman's domestic flights and two Airbus-330 for its international operations while its American rival Boeing has placed a quotation for Boeing 777, the latest of Boeing's long-range aircraft series. The four Airbus will cost about Tk 1,400 to 1,500 crore.

Biman Acting MD Rahman told

The Daily Star yesterday that the committee will have to sit several times, as the proposals are very technical and complicated.

The procurement move is presently in an embryonic stage. The committee will need four to five months to decide on the proposals. If it okays a proposal, it will be forwarded first to the Biman board of directors, then to cabinet purchase committee and finally to the prime minister for approval," said Rahman, who is also Biman's director (Marketing and Sales).

If the new planes are added to its fleet, Biman can widen its present global network comprising 26 destinations -- eight South Asian, six Southeast and Far-East Asian, nine Persian Gulf and Middle-East, and six European and North American airports.

Biman's fleet now consists of 15 aircraft -- six DC-10s, four Airbus and five F-28s. Of the four Airbus, two were purchased with Biman's own resources and the rest are on lease.

The national carrier currently does not have any Boeing aircraft. It previously had five Boeing 703, which were sold out or their lease agreement had expired in 1990s.

A source alleges there is pressure on the expert committee to back the Airbus offer, as the Toulouse-based joint venture of France, Germany and the UK offers commission to the buyer while the Seattle-based US heavyweight does not and sells directly, without any intermediate agent.

Tk 390cr edn plan

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non-formal schools, the project will provide education allowance and educational materials to every student.

The allowance will be Tk 800 each per year for students of class one to class three and Tk 970 for class four and class five. Students of class one to class three will get the allowance at a rate of Tk 50 each per month besides an annual payment of Tk 200 to cover other expenses. Students of class four and class five will get Tk 60 a month each besides Tk 250 a year.

Candidates for primary scholarship examinations will be given an additional Tk 200.

Girl children are likely to constitute about 60 per cent of the children supported under the project, one source said.

Children will continue to receive allowances if they maintain an average of at least 75 per cent attendance in classes and show satisfactory achievement level, to be reported by class teachers.

Allowances will be given to children through bank accounts managed by their mothers, or guardians in the absence of mothers.

Students enrolled under the project will follow the curriculum and textbooks of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

A 10-member Centre Management Committee (CMC) comprising guardians' representatives -- mostly mothers of students, local women members of union parishad -- will run the LCs or schools under the project.

The LCs will receive annual grants ranging from Tk 25,000 each for class one to three and about Tk 31,000 for class four to five.

Students passing class five from the LCs or non formal schools will be eligible for admission to class six in high schools.

Record unapproved

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all true," the Perc member said preferring not to be named.

"The government will not spend on them on the basis of national priorities, but based on the strength of the lobbyists behind those projects," he added.

A planning ministry report in May also echoes the Perc member, "We are faced with different types of lobbying and pressure to spend money for unapproved projects. As a result, the normal pace of development is disturbed and the planning order is swayed."

A look into the ADP exposes how an irrelevant unapproved project can make the nation pay years after years.

For instance, a project to set up a research centre for spices was added in the 1994 ADP as an unapproved project with a financial requirement of Tk 47 crore. Until December last, the country paid Tk 23 crore and the new budget allocated another Tk 5.5 crore for it. But, at the current rate of implementation, it will not be completed before 2014.

Another is the soil research and testing centre construction that required Tk 64.66 crore and was incorporated as an unapproved project in the 1998 ADP. So far Tk 19 crore has been spent for it and Tk 15 crore has been allocated this fiscal.

Another striking example is inclusion of Tk 327-crore Bangladesh Land Administration Reforms Project in 2002. The government so far spent only Tk 9 lakh for this costly project and this year has allocated only Tk 10 lakh for it.

ATK 37-crore unapproved project to build a bridge across the Garai River in Kushtia was added in the ADP in 1996 and so far the govern-

ment has spent Tk 11 crore. This year the government allocated only Tk 26 lakh for it.

There are many similar construction oriented projects being carried over for many years, leading to wastage and hike in project implementation costs.

"These spending shows a tendency not to complete the tasks but to keep the projects hanging for years. Actually the sums were spent as per the strength of the lobbyists -- contractors, politicians and other people who squeeze out the cash in anyway they can," said a planning ministry source.

"If these projects are important, why don't the government approve them even after so many years?" he asked.

The Perc had recommended forming an expert committee to review the projects conceived by different ministries to see if these have national priority and poverty alleviation elements.

But presently, a cell of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) which looks after priority projects are reported to be basically respond to requests and pressures of ruling party lawmakers and businessmen who want implementation of certain projects for their personal or local political benefits, sources said.

The PMO cell sends these projects to line ministries and the ministries then send these projects to the planning ministry for incorporation in the ADP as unapproved 'priority projects'. Thus this year the lobbyists have succeeded in incorporating the record number of 330 new unapproved schemes in the ADP, the planning ministry source explained.

Launch victim

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the Meghna a year ago. The Jote demanded strict enforcement of all laws on the plying of river vessels, setting up a fund for assisting family members of victims and their proper rehabilitation.

Mahfuzur Rahman, A F M rezaul Karim and Aminur Rasul spoke at the press conference.

The Jote will organise a roundtable at the National Press Club today on the occasion of first anniversary of MV Nasreen disaster.

Shipping Minister Askbar Hossain, former shipping minister A S M Abdur Rob and G M Seraj, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on shipping ministry, are likely to attend the roundtable, Jote leaders said.

MV Nasreen-1 sank with around 1,000 people on board.

Official estimates put the number of dead at 402, the Jote said a survey conducted by it showed around 825 people drowned in the disaster.

About 4,000 people died in 255 major launch disasters in the country since 1976, it said.

Fatema of Almojan, who lost her husband and daughter in Nasreen-1 disaster, yesterday told this correspondent, "I am in dire distress with my two sons and one daughter as I have no source of income." The government gave her only Tk 15,000 as compensation, which was spent for meeting loans and other urgent needs, sobbing Fatema said.

Shakhawat, the only surviving member of a victim family and a student of class two, narrated similar plight.

Meanwhile, Rodoshi, a cultural organisation, will hold discussions and hold rallies and bring out mourning procession from Dhaka University to mark the launch disaster this day last year.

Man shown

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Inspector Mohiuddin, who is investigating the case as part of a three-member DB team, said Selim, Babul and Nasir Khan, arrested suspects in Balu murder case, provided some important clues about the killing.

The acting police commissioner, Khulna said Balu's murderers were identified and they would nab the culprits soon.

22 soldiers,

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remote district of Salyan, officials say.

"We have some of our men missing after the battle," army spokesman Rajendra Thapa told the Reuters news agency.

He did not say how many.

The army says 11 rebels were also killed in the fighting which took place in an area that is a rebel stronghold.

On Tuesday, Nepal's new Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari promised renewed peace efforts to end the insurgency.

He told reporters in Kathmandu that the government was ready for maximum flexibility and was willing to resume peace talks with an open mind.

Peace negotiations with the Maoists have failed twice over a key rebel demand for elections to an assembly that would draw up a new constitution.

Burnt housewife

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mother-in-law, and Keya Begum, wife of Harun's elder brother, poured a bucket full of hot water on Asma following an altercation over the disputed issue.

"Farkunnessa was demanding a dowry of Tk 50,000 since Asma's marriage to her son six years back. As we didn't give them the sum, she arranged a second marriage for her son two and a half years later," Asma's mother said, adding, she also wanted her son to divorce Asma.

Shiddhirganj police arrested Farkunnessa after Lata filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

Bikalpa men

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held a rally at the HC entrance and later lay down there for five minutes in a symbolic protest against the government violation of the High Court order to deploy army at each polling centre.

Leaders and activists of the BDB, Chhatra Dhara, its student wing, Jubo Dhara, the youth wing, and Samik Dhara, the labour wing, took part in the programme.

Mahi said the constitution ensures people's right to elect their representatives to parliament, people of Ramna-Tejgaon constituency could not exercise the right. Strangely though, people from different others areas exercised their franchise in the seat.

"Ramna-Tejgaon people do not have a representative in parliament," he said. He asked if the government does not trust the army, referring to its non-deployment of troops in the polling centres.

BDB leader Feroz M Hasan said the BDB would soon form its district and upazila committees.

The BDB supporters carried Kula-shaped (winnowing fan, its election symbol) placards with slogans like "The government is a vote robber" and "Step down alliance government". The members of Samik Dhara tied their hands mimicking the helpless BDB polling agents in the Dhaka-10 polls.

Police resisted the BDB men from staging demonstration and rally on the road. Some people, who attended the programme, alleged police barred them from going to the HC premises.

Pakistani's bail cancelled

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lawyer appealed twice to Judge Matur Rahman to transfer the case to another court from the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court and was rejected. The judge, however, took up the case on June 9 following a petition for transferring the case.

Matur bailed Alekjan, the Pakistani citizen, on Monday upon a bond of Tk 3 lakh in cash with two guarantors -- the first secretary of Pakistan High Commission and a lawyer, who is conducting the case.

"I've cancelled the bail order as the bail bond on behalf of the accused was not furnished and the bond in cash was not deposited as per the court order," said Matur in the cancellation order.

However, Advocate Atiur Rahman, lawyer of Alekjan, filed another bail petition yesterday with another Sessions Judge's Court. In the petition he said Judge in an open court pronounced the bail order at 4:30pm, but he (Atiur) could not

furnish the bail bond even waiting until 5:00pm the same day as he could not receive the order.

"The cancellation order is not legal as the metropolitan sessions judge remained busy in jail killing case yesterday and on Tuesday," he said.

On Tuesday, the lawyer appealed to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court seeking permission to deposit the cash security, but the judge did not give him permission for his engagement in the jail killing case.

A senior lawyer seeking anonymity said there is no precedence of granting bail to any accused in heroin haul case of this gravity.

Directorate of Narcotics Control arrested three Pakistani nationals -- Ibrahim, Rais Khan and Alekjan -- from a room of hotel Rajmoni Isha Khan in the city with 24-kilogram heroin on September 20, 1999.

The investigation officer pressed charges against Alekjan and seven others on November 24, 2000.

Blast shatters

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was not granted. People from ministerial security followed her and these officials took her into the police station. While they tried to search her she exploded herself," said police spokesman Rennie Perera.

"It is obvious Douglas was the target," he said.

The bomber was among the five dead, police said.

Peace talks to end Sri Lanka's decades-long civil war have been on hold for more than a year but both sides have been observing a Norwegian-brokered truce signed in February 2002 that put an end to fighting that had killed 64,000.

No one claimed responsibility and the Tigers offered no immediate comment on the blast, which happened on Colombo's main thoroughfare, near the prime minister's official residence and across the road from the US and British embassies.

But police and army officials said they believed the Tigers, who began fighting for a separate state for the island's minority Tamils in 1983, were responsible.

"It is a total violation of the cease-fire agreement. There is not doubt this is the work of the LTTE but we do not yet have proof," Defense Secretary Cyril Herath told Reuters.

But he said the army would continue to observe the truce.

"The Sri Lankan government has over and over again assured that despite all these provocations they will maintain the cease-fire from their side," Herath said.

The Tigers terrorized the capital with numerous suicide bomb attacks during the war and on Monday they observed "Black Tiger Day," which commemorates their suicide bombers.

While they have mostly respected the Norwegian-brokered truce, human rights groups accuse them of targeting rival Tamil politicians, mostly in the island's east, where a split within the LTTE has complicated the peace bid.

Since the split, local media have said, Devananda had been in contact with Karuna, the commander of the renegade rebel faction.

The Tigers also accused the army of helping Karuna and his renegades. The army repeatedly denied the LTTE accusation but a government spokesman said recently elements of the military had indeed helped Karuna.

Police said apart from the bomber, all four dead were police officers, including two women. Broken glass and blood covered the floor of the police station, which was under heavy guard.

"I saw many people being pulled out with injuries, including one with no arm," said one witness.

Hector Weerasinghe, the director of Colombo's National Hospital, said 13 people had been brought in, of whom four had died. He said most of the wounded were police officers, and their conditions were not critical.

Witnesses said those in hospital were crying and in shock, surrounded by grieving police officers trying to offer comfort.

In Colombo, attention turned to the fate of the cease-fire, which has brought the island peace of mind, a rebounding economy and a capital largely free of checkpoints and roadblocks.

Cairn plans increase

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Cairn under a production sharing contract (PSC). But the British company did not strike any other commercial gas field in this block and Block 15.

A significant part of Block 16 and the entire Block 15 have been relinquished as the company did not find anything there in seven years of exploration. However, Cairn says this does not mean these blocks do not have gas prospects.

"We are now talking with the government to take back some parts of Block 16 for further explorations," the Cairn executive said.

"There had been under-investment in the sector by us and others. There was no investment in S