

US top brass cleared over Iraq abuse

AP, Washington

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, faulted by some for leadership failures in the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, has been cleared by the Army of all allegations of wrongdoing and will not be punished, officials said.

Three officers who were among Sanchez's top deputies during the period of the prisoner abuse in the fall of 2003 also have been cleared. An Army Reserve one-star general has been reprimanded, and the outcome of seven other senior Army officer cases could not be learned Friday.

Sanchez, who became the senior US commander in Iraq in June 2003, two months after the fall of Baghdad, has not been accused of criminal violations. It is unclear, however, whether the controversy surrounding his role in Iraq will stand in the way of his earning a fourth star. He is nearing the end of his tenure as commander of the Army's 5th Corps, based in Germany.

After assessing the allegations against Sanchez and taking sworn statements from 37 people, the Army's inspector general, Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Green, concluded that the allegations were unsubstantiated, according to officials familiar with the details of Green's probe.

Green reached the same conclusion in the cases of two generals and a colonel who worked on Sanchez's staff.

The officials who disclosed the findings spoke only on condition of anonymity because the results on Sanchez and 11 other officers who were the subject of Green's scrutiny have not yet been publicly released and Congress has not been fully briefed.

The question of accountability among senior Army and Defence Department officials who were in positions of responsibility on Iraq detention and interrogation policy has been hotly debated in Congress. Some Democrats accuse the Pentagon of foisting all the blame onto low-ranking soldiers.

In a statement issued Friday that did not mention Sanchez or other specific cases, Sen. John Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said that as soon as all Pentagon assessments of accountability are complete he will hold a committee hearing "to examine the adequacy of those reviews" and to hear senior civilian and military officials address the issue.

Warner, R-Va., said he strongly agrees with one investigation report that concluded last year that commanders should be held accountable for their action or inaction and that military as well as civilian leaders in the Pentagon "share this burden of responsibility."

The office of Michigan Sen. Carl Levin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, declined to comment on the matter.

Asked about public expectations

Border tension

FROM PAGE 1
message to their relatives across the border, sources at 9 BDR Battalion said quoting the victims' families.

They were killed near pillar number 49 on the no man's land about half a kilometre off Gopalpur border observation post (BOP) of BDR, sources said. The bodies had been lying near the border pillar for a long time, they said, adding BSF troops later dragged them into Indian territory.

The incident triggered off widespread panic among the people living in the bordering areas of the southwestern district.

BDR yesterday sent a letter to the BSF high command strongly protesting against the killings of two innocent Bangladeshis without any provocation. UNB quoted the commanding officer of Jessore-based 25 BDR Battalion, Lt Col Motahar Hasan, as saying.

Hasan said the letter also urged BSF to return the bodies and proposed a flag meeting to BSF.

BDR asked the people living in frontier areas to move carefully and not to go near the zone line, he added.

BSF VERSION

Talking to BBC Radio last night BSF officials in Kolkata admitted that two Bangladeshis youths were killed early yesterday in firing by BSF personnel.

According to their narration, a group of five to six Bangladeshis tried to enter North 24 Pargana of West Bengal through Madhupur border at 3:00am. The BSF personnel asked them to retreat, but the miscreants pelted bricks at the BSF troops. The BSF men then fired four rounds and killed two Bangladeshis.

The BSF officials also admitted to having two bodies at their possession. The bodies would be sent for autopsy and every thing would be done according to the law, a BSF official told BBC.

BSF INTO BARRIERS

UNB reports: Some 25 BSF men intruded 200 yards into Tarapur village in Kasba upazila at about 11:00pm Friday night.

Villagers said apprehending trouble they raised alarming cries and started running in panic. Hearing them, a BDR patrol party came quickly but refrained from firing at the trespassers and allowed them return to their territory.

The villagers termed the BSF action provocative, intended to escalate the border trouble.

An earlier report said BDR-BSF flag meeting at Akhaura border on Thursday night ended in a fiasco. The meeting broke at 8:30pm on information of BSF firing at Singerbeel border that left three

of punishment for senior officers associated with Abu Ghraib, the Army's chief public affairs officer, Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks, said the Army went to great lengths to make its investigations thorough and fair.

In addition to clearing Sanchez, the Army inspector general has determined that there should be no punishment given to Sanchez's former top deputy, Maj. Gen. Walter Wojdakowski, to Maj. Gen. Barbara Fast, who was Sanchez's intelligence chief in Baghdad; or to Col. Mark Warren, Sanchez's top legal adviser at the time.

In an interview Friday, three senior defence officials associated with the Green investigations cited mitigating circumstances in the Sanchez case, including the fact that his organisation in Iraq, known as Combined Joint Task Force 7, initially was short of the senior officers it required. They also cited the upsurge in insurgent violence shortly after Sanchez took command and the intense pressure the military faced in hunting down Saddam Hussein.

The three officials spoke on condition of anonymity.

A separate investigation by a panel headed for former Defence Secretary James Schlesinger concluded that Sanchez should have taken stronger action in November 2003 when he realised the extent of problems among the military intelligence and military police units running Abu Ghraib.

A subsequent Army investigation, made public last summer in what was called the Kern-Fay-Jones report, concluded that although Sanchez and his most senior deputies were not directly involved in the bases at Abu Ghraib, their "action and inaction did indirectly contribute" to some abuses.

Sanchez and Wojdakowski were cited in the Kern-Fay-Jones report for failure to "ensure proper staff oversight of detention and interrogation operations" in Iraq, specifically at the Abu Ghraib prison where Iraqi detainees were physically abused and sexually humiliated by military police and intelligence soldiers in fall 2003.

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CHILD'S BAIL DENIAL

HC grills Ctg magistrate

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday grilled a magistrate of Chittagong for refusing bail to a mother and her baby accused in a theft and ransacking case.

On summon, magistrate Mohammad Ali Noor appeared before the court and faced a volley of questions. He fumbled to the apparent dissatisfaction of the court.

"Have you gone through the FIR," questioned the court

As Ali Noor nodded his head, the court said all the charges were under the bailable section.

Defending himself, the magistrate said he refused bail to the accused as the prosecuting police officer opposed.

That angered the court. "Should you not apply your judicial mind? Should a magistrate go by the dictate of a police officer? Why have you not apply your mind to probity that a housewife of the minority community stormed into the house of an influential neighbour and ransack?"

As the magistrate stood mum, the court told him, "You have been granting bail even to the accused of murder."

The bench comprising justices AK Badrul Huq and M Fazlur Rahman set May 23 for passing an order on the suo moto rule issued on March 1 following media reports.

Ctg ammo haul

FROM PAGE 1
Hafiz are absconding. The rest 14 were on bail so far but the court yesterday rejected the bail of eight of them.

On April 2 last year, law enforcers seized 10 truckloads of smuggled arms and weapons in the port city and filed two cases with Karnaphuli Police Station.

The investigation officer submitted charge sheet against 41 people on June 11. Two more were included in the charge sheet on instruction from court.

Dy secy

FROM PAGE 1
50 deserving public servants.

Eleven officials have been deprived of their seniority for the second time. Apart from this, six have been promoted despite not fulfilling the requirements for promotion.

"Incompetent and junior officials have been promoted, depriving competent and senior ones on political grounds." Said AN Shamsuddin Azad Chowdhury, Faridpur district council secretary.

He said such promotion in violation of rules is rare. The entire batch of 1985 was dropped from the list of the promotion.

Those who have been deprived of their seniority for the second time are Mikail Shipper, SM Kamruzzaman, Abul Kalam Azad, Khorshed Alam Chowdhury, Moeveuddin Abdullah, Khondaker Anwarul Islam, Rebecca Sultana, Bhimcharan Roy, Iqbal Khan Chowdhury, ANM Khalilur Rahman and AN Shamsuddin Azad Chowdhury.

The persons, who have been promoted despite not fulfilling the requirements for promotion, are Nazimuddin Chowdhury, Nurul Islam, Dr Zakirul Islam, ADM Abdul Based, Syed Ahmad and Ashraf Ali Khan.

JS body

FROM PAGE 1
The meeting in a resolution said it would send a letter to Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar on May 2 seeking his go-ahead to place the bills within a certain deadline.

It will also urge the speaker to initiate steps for making the standing committee functional and free it from any interference by the executive.

"We want to give the speaker a timeframe for taking steps in this regard," Committee Member Abu Hena told reporters after the meeting. "We want his [speaker's] permission to place the bills. Let the House decide the fate of the bills."

Another Member of the Committee and Awami League lawmaker AKM Jahangir Hossain said, "As the speaker himself has stood against the placing of the private members' bills, he has to take steps to clear the obstacles."

The committee once again denounced 'interference' by the speaker and the law minister in its affairs and blamed them for making the committee dysfunctional.

Members of the committee however hinted at the possibility of taking hard decisions like resignation from the committee if the speaker does not take proper steps.

The speaker on October 27, 2003 sent a letter to the law minister seeking his recommendations on 15 private members' bills instead of giving his (speaker) go-ahead to place the bills in parliament.

But on February 3 this year, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed in a letter to the speaker suggested taking prior approval from the leader of the House before tabling any private members' bill.

Government rules restrict making such down payments on grounds that bidders misuse them and even misappropriate the money.

The PDB tender in its notice however promised such payment to

Rab to go hi-tech

FROM PAGE 1
will keep biometrics data including fingerprints and photographs.

Saber Sharif, commanding officer of the Rab-4, yesterday said the microwave link has already connected Dhaka with Chittagong and Rajshahi. The Dhaka-Khulna link will be set up by this month. "It will ensure a communication backbone for the Rab, reducing dependence on the T&T," he added.

Saber, who is taking care of the IT programmes, informed that 30 cars have been equipped with auto vehicle location (AVL) and some 20 more would be equipped with the devices to trace the location of the patrol vehicles.

Mobile data terminals (MDTs) will also be set up in 50 vehicles to transfer wireless data and messages. Saber said adding that six MDTs have been installed.

According to the Tk 145-million master plan for digitalisation of the Rab, video conferencing has already been introduced and around 300 officials have been provided training on digital communication system and network management.

Ten Rab personnel recently went to Malaysia to have a three-week training on cyber crimes, the Rab official added. Besides training abroad, 3-6 months' extensive training on networking would be provided to select personnel at country's leading universities.

"We have also plans to develop

information network with other related organisations like BRTA, passport and immigration department, the SB and the ministries," Saber Sharif said.

Under the IT communication development project of the Rab, a 195-member "communication IT directorate" would be formed to make coordination and IT communication work among the countrywide 23 companies of the Rab.

2 outlaws

FROM PAGE 1
Jahid at about 10pm yesterday.

A joint team of the DB and sadar police came under the GMF attack at Swastipur farmers' club on their way to Swastipur in a bid to seize firearms at about 4am. Jahid got caught in the crossfire while attempting to escape from the police van and died on the spot as the police also returned fire.

Police recovered eight live bombs and eight bullets from the spot.

Meanwhile, Mirpur police said a GMF group fired on them when the police were on their way to village Chitholia at 4am following a piece of information that a GMF group was preparing to attack the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party.

After an hour-long gunfight, the police found Amjad Hossain's dead body while the other gang members managed to flee, police said. Police also recovered a shutter gun and eight bullets from Amjad's possession.

The dead bodies were sent to Kushiya General Hospital for autopsy.

US envoy to report

FROM PAGE 1
Chowdhury and leader Meer Tareq Ali were present at the meeting.

Asked whether they seek a third party intervention to resolve the issue, Prof Mobashwer answered in the negative and said: "We ourselves can settle the discord prevailing among us."

"Our well-wishers come over to know how we are whenever they hear anything bad about us," he added.

SATHKHIRA CALMS DOWN

Our Sathkira correspondent reports: Situation in Jyotindranagar has calmed down in the face of local administration's measures to stop intimidation of the Ahmadiyyas.

Announcements have been made from loudspeakers yesterday that no gathering of more than 50 people, and no political or religious programme or conference in the area would be allowed without permission from the administration.

"We have taken the decision to respond better to the situation," Sathkira Superintendent of Police (SP) Abdur Rahim told The Daily Star yesterday. "There is already a law in this regard. We want all to register with us before a programme

so that we can keep an eye on them," he said.

Sathkira Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mohammad Elias and the SP visited the Ahmadiyyas in Jyotindranagar Friday afternoon and made the announcement later before local Nabuwat leaders at Harinagarbazar.

As Nabuwat leaders demanded that the pulled-down signboard be hung again at Jyotindranagar Ahmadiyya complex, the DC said that it would not be posted again.

He also cautioned the Nabuwat workers against taking up any violent programme against the Ahmadiyyas.

Sathkira police meanwhile have yet to arrest any of the six Nabuwat leaders blamed for the Sunday's attack. Local Ahmadiyya member Ohidur Rahman filed a case on Wednesday accusing the six of making attempt on his wife's life and looting their house. International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh Amir Mahmudul Hasan Momtazi, Nayeb-e-Amir Nur Hossain Nuran and local Nabuwat leader Nur Hossain are among the accused.

Why ombudsmen

FROM PAGE 1
ability of the members of parliament and public servants, ombudsmen as provided by the constitution is necessary," the petition noted.

Respondents of the petition are the secretaries of parliament secretariat and the law ministry.

In 1980, the government passed an act for installation of an ombudsman, and after 22 years, on January 6, 2002, the coalition government brought the act into force through a gazette notification.

However, on February 11, 2002, the law ministry proposed to the cabinet for amendments to some provisions of the act, which in turn formed a committee to scrutinise the bill. Since then no-one knows what has happened to the bill.

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE
The petitioners said the EC should gather the information and disclose them to the public to help them properly choose their representations through voting and to make sure that the candidates cannot cheat the voters by their rhetoric.

The EC is responsible for checking if an election candidate stands accused in a criminal case and if he or she has had past criminal record. The EC should also obtain a statement on assets and liabilities of the candidates, particulars and amount of loans taken from banks or financial institutions.

The respondents of the petition are the chief election commissioner and the EC.

The rule followed a petition that says, "The members of the legislature must have qualification and suitability, but the people have seen members in the legislature who are not at all eligible for becoming members of the legislature."

"Evil-doers having evil motive should be prevented from coming to the legislature," observes the petition filed by three Supreme Court lawyers - Abdol Momen Chowdhury, KM Zabir and Zaherul Islam.

"(A) law breaker should not be allowed to become (a) lawmaker," the petition adds.

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JS secretariat

FROM PAGE 1
Chowdhury, denied the allegation and applied for a new diplomatic passport on March 1 after the embassy had seized the passports of Mizanur, his wife and son, alleging that those were grossly tampered with.

The Parliament Secretariat referred his application to the foreign ministry but the ministry sent it back to the secretariat along with the note verbal of the Danish embassy.