

US launches offensive in western Iraq

4 more GIs, 10 Iraqis killed in attacks

AP, AFP, Baghdad

About 1,000 US Marines and Iraqi forces launched attacks in western Iraq in an operation aimed at disrupting insurgents and foreign fighters in the Euphrates River valley, the US military said yesterday.

Rebels killed 10 people in Iraq yesterday as a crucial meeting of national leaders called to settle constitutional problems was postponed because of an emergency session of the Kurdish autonomous parliament.

The two-day delay came against a backdrop of unremitting violence that has killed about 40 US troops in 10 days, and new al-Qaeda warnings that the United States and Britain risked more death and destruction if they do not leave Iraq and other Muslim lands.

The operation, dubbed Quick Strike, began Wednesday with Iraqi soldiers and Marines positioning their units, said a military statement. They focused on an area centred around the cities of Haditha, Haqlaniyah, and Parwana, about 200km northwest of Baghdad.

On Wednesday, 14 Marines and their civilian translator were killed when their vehicle was hit by a massive roadside bomb near Haditha as they were travelling inside a lightly armoured vehicle.

On Friday, US and Iraqi troops, including Special Operations forces, moved into the city of Haqlaniyah, the Marine statement said. US jets conducted an airstrike on insurgents hiding in buildings outside of the town.

Residents in the area said US and Iraqi forces had cordoned off Haqlaniyah, about 220km northwest of Baghdad, and began conducting house to house searches. American warplanes were hovering overhead and a number of heavy explosions were heard. Witnesses said 500-pound bombs were being dropped in the area.

The US military has defended its operations in western Iraq, insisting it is reducing insurgent attacks, despite the deaths of 14 Marines. The extremist Ansar al-Sunnah Army claimed responsibility in a Web posting and said its fighters used two bombs to destroy the vehicle.

Four more US service members were killed in action Wednesday, the military said three in Baghdad and one in Ramadi.

US military spokesman Brig. Gen. Donald Alston said American military operations in Anbar province, which includes the area where the Marines died, have succeeded in disrupting insurgent activities.

"We still have deaths. We still have suicide car bombs," he said. "But the numbers we see indicate (the insurgents) can't generate the same tempo, and I think that's because we've had some degree of effect in interdicting these forces."

Alston cited figures showing there were 13 car bombs in Iraq last week the lowest weekly number since April. "There's a clear indication to me that the tempo has decreased."

US troops have stepped up operations in recent months in Anbar, the centre of the Sunni Arab-dominated insurgency and a major avenue for foreign fighters infiltrating the country from Syria.

Alston warned that militants will likely rally their forces in a concerted effort to derail the country's political progress, including a referendum on the constitution in October and an election in December.

The president's office said a key meeting scheduled for Friday by political leaders to hammer out differences in the draft constitution has been postponed until Sunday. The statement issued Friday did not say why the meeting was delayed.

The gathering was called by constitutional committee chairman Humam Hammoudi, who promised the National Assembly that the draft charter would be ready by the Aug. 15 deadline, provided the country's political leaders reach compromises on key issues including federalism, the role of Islam, and distribution of national wealth.

Kamaphuli to be dredged

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stretch of the river.

The authority took up the project as per recommendations of a survey report by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) ahead of the construction of the proposed third bridge over the Kamaphuli. The survey revealed that around 78 per cent of silt accumulation was caused by the deposition of earth when the large pillars of the Shah Amanat Bridge were inserted into the riverbed.

Its recommendations for possible remedies to siltation and river training included capital dredging, periodic maintenance dredging and revetment work of the existing erosion-prone banks.

The CPA has already appointed Bureau of Research and Testing Authority (BRTA). Buet the consultant for making assessment, design and documentation, intending to launch the project by the year-end and complete by June 2007, sources said.

After completion of the capital dredging, the minimum four-metre depth will be possible to maintain even during low tide along the 13-km stretch of the Kamaphuli from the estuary to the Shah Amanat Bridge, said Project Director Engineer MASabur.

The protection wall will be constructed after redefining the shore and foreshore as per river hydraulic science, enabling the authorities to maintain the depth with low cost maintenance and dredging, he added.

According to sources, the capital dredging project was sent to the

Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari spent Friday in Najaf meeting with the country's top Shia Muslim cleric, the highly influential Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The two were expected to talk about developments with the constitution.

US leaders, who pushed hard for the committee not to seek an extension on completing the charter, consider the constitutional process vital to maintain political momentum, undermine the insurgency and pave the way for the Americans and their coalition partners to draw down troops next year.

US commanders have warned that although the number of vehicle and roadside bombings are decreasing, they are increasing in potency and sophistication. Bombs on the roads or planted in vehicles account for 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the US deaths in Iraq, command spokesman Lt. Col. Steven Boylan said.

A roadside bomb late Wednesday killed three US soldiers in Baghdad, the US command said. A Marine was killed Wednesday by small arms fire in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province 70 miles west of Baghdad, the command added.

There has been no let-up in insurgent violence, with 10 Iraqis killed Friday after some 40 US military personnel died in the past 10 days, one of the deadliest tolls for the

Russia races

FROM PAGE 16

All crew members were said to be alive and to "feel fine," as a Japanese rescue ship steamed to join a dozen Russian naval vessels already at the scene of the accident, a chilling reminder of the sinking of the Kursk nuclear submarine in August 2000 that killed all 118 crew members.

Rescuers did not have phone contact but were in "technical" communication with the crew of the submarine, which can operate at depths of up to 1,000 metres (3,280 feet), RIA-Novosti news agency quoted Igor Dygalo, a spokesman for the Russian fleet, as saying.

Officials said the craft was resting on the seabed at a depth of about 200 metres (656 feet).

A spokesman for the Pacific Fleet acknowledged that food supplies were also running low on the vessel but said the situation was "not dangerous."

The submarine became trapped after its propeller was caught in a fishing net in Bay of Berezovaya, 70 kilometres south of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, the regional capital of the Kamchatka peninsula, Dygalo explained.

"The submarine's propeller snared on a section of the net. While trying to break free, the net wound around the propeller," he said, adding that the vessel was submerged too deeply for the crew members to be able to swim to the surface.

The rescue operation would require a second mini-submarine similar to the one trapped on the seabed, Interfax news agency quoted officials as saying, adding that there was such a vessel in the vicinity and it was being prepared for use in the operation.

Weather conditions in this section of the Pacific Ocean were calm, aiding the operation, rescuers said, and a Japanese vessel, the Chiyoda, has been called in for assistance.

"Fleet command took a decision to request assistance from Japanese colleagues in resolving the serious situation with the AS-28 submersible vehicle," the Interfax-AVN military news agency quoted Admiral Viktor Dmitriyev, commander of the Russian Pacific Fleet, as saying.

RIA-Novosti reported that the Pacific Fleet had also requested help with the rescue from the US Navy.

The AS-28 mini-submarine, first put into commission in the late 1980s, is a deep-sea vehicle used for research, surveillance and intelligence-gathering purposes, ITAR-TASS news agency said.

Military prosecutors have opened an inquiry into the incident.

Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecneac) on February 2 and had administrative approval and financial sanction on May 11 this year.

"The project consultant is scheduled to complete the feasibility study and other work within this year. They have already surveyed the site and made the soil test," said Sabur while talking to The Daily Star on Tuesday.

"We hope to get the pre-qualification and documentation done by September and appoint a contractor to start the project within this year," he said, adding that the dredging might cost 40 per cent of the total allocation while construction of the bank protection wall and sheet-piling will cost the rest 60 per cent.

"We are planning to use sheet-piling where it is most necessary while in other places we will build segmented dykes," said the project director.

The CPA sources said the dredging will also increase the river draft near the main jetty areas of the port, while construction of the bank protection wall will enable domestic water transports to anchor near it and thus create newer sources of income for the port.

Meanwhile, settlers and a group of traders have encroached on parts of the shoal by constructing bamboo structures and plantation and felling large tree trunks.

The Kamaphuli underwent capital dredging back in 1981 and 1988.

Americans since the March 2003 invasion.

Wednesday was one of the worst days for US forces as 18 troops were killed in various attacks across Iraq, 14 of them in a single roadside bombing.

US President George W. Bush vowed to "stay the course" in Iraq despite a new threat from al-Qaeda second-in-command that was aired Thursday warning the United States and Britain of more death and destruction.

"We will complete the job in Iraq," he said. "And the job is this: We will help the Iraqis develop a democracy."

Al-Jaafari announced a new 12-point security plan. He gave few details but said it included steps to improve intelligence, protect infrastructure and prevent foreign fighters from entering the country.

"We will not hesitate in saying this: We are in a state of war. It is one of the most dangerous types of war because it is not a conventional or a war of borders," he said.

Earlier at least 21 people were killed in attacks across Iraq Thursday as US President George W. Bush vowed to complete his country's mission there after al-Qaeda warned Western allies risked losing thousands of lives in the war-torn country.

The threat came from Osama bin Laden's right-hand man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a video aired on Al-Jazeera television as Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari unveiled a new security plan to try to win the country's war against insurgents.

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In his latest video, Zawahiri had warned Britain and the United States of more horror and destruction in a statement rebroadcast around the world.

"The Americans... will see horror that would make them forget the horror they saw in Vietnam," Zawahiri said.

Jaafari had earlier outlined a 12-point plan to fight insurgents which included strengthening intelligence coordination and more efforts to secure the country's borders to prevent infiltration from abroad.

"We are at war... the worst kind of war," Jaafari said.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution strongly condemning attacks in Iraq, including the murder and kidnapping of foreign diplomats, while the United States urged Syria and Iran to honour their pledge to support stability in Iraq.

The resolution "condemns without reservation and in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that have taken place in Iraq, and regards any act of terrorism as a threat to peace and security."

It followed the killing on Wednesday of 14 US marines in a roadside bombing in the western town of Haditha, that brought US losses in Iraq in the past 10 days to at least 39.

UNSC berth

FROM PAGE 1

African Union summit on UN reform refused to drop demands for two permanent veto-wielding seats on an enlarged Security Council.

Japan, a major aid donor, had banked on support from Africa and other parts of the developing world to win a seat on the Security Council.

Its bid has been strongly opposed by China, which says Japan must do more to show regret for its past aggression in Asia before joining the Security Council, whose makeup reflects the power balance at the end of World War II.

China is one of five nations that has veto power on the Security Council, along with Britain, France, Russia and the United States.

The United States has backed Japan's candidacy but not the bids of its G4 partners Brazil, Germany and India and has refused to support a deadline of September to decide on the historic changes.

On Wednesday, Machimura said he had complained to Washington that its support for Japan, one of its closest allies, had verged on being just "lip service."

Meanwhile, New Delhi expressed regret yesterday over a call by African leaders for two veto-wielding seats on an enlarged UN Security Council that could hurt the chances of other aspirants including India for slots.

On Thursday, Africa Union leaders spurned overtures from UN Security Council hopefuls India, Brazil, Germany and Japan — known as the Group of Four or G4 — to support their plan for overhauling the international body.

Instead, the African leaders meeting in Addis Ababa approved their own proposal for reforming the UN body that called for two permanent seats with veto powers.

Foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna called the African Union's decision "a matter of regret", but added in a statement India would "in close consultation with G-4 members continue to engage African countries with a view to promoting a common understanding."

Under the current set-up that reflects the 1945 post-war balance of power, the council has 15 seats — 10 chosen by regions that rotate every two years and five permanent veto-holding members which are the United States, China, Britain, France and Russia.

Ainjiabi Forum Advisory Committee Member and former speaker in the Jatiya Sangsad Shaikh Razzak Ali said the pro-opposition lawyers are plotting against the law minister on the pretext of the presidential amnesty. He also alleged that a vested quarter is out to harm the Forum.

"Forum and only Forum represents the lawyers who believe in Jatiyatabadi ideology. We know no other organisation other than the Ainjiabi Forum," he observed.

Natwar arrives today

FROM PAGE 1

Saifur Rahman and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the afternoon.

Morshed will host a banquet in honour of the Indian external affairs minister at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Centre tonight.

Singh will pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office in the afternoon.

He will meet Leader of the Opposition and main Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina. Singh will also give a speech on Indo-Bangladesh ties at the Brac Centre.

Earlier in the morning, he is expected to visit the Liberation War Museum in the city.

Morshed hosts a private lunch in the visiting Indian minister's honour tomorrow at his residence.

On the concluding day of his tour, Singh is due to visit Ramkrishna Mission in Old Dhaka and leave by a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight at 11:00am on Monday.

"It's a goodwill visit by the external affairs minister of India. We'll exchange ideas on all existing issues apart from discussing potential areas of cooperation," Morshed told reporters yesterday.

He said, "We'll not only discuss the disputed issues but also the positive and complimentary issues like how we can cooperate with each other and move forward."

Dhaka is committed to strong bilateral relations with India, he said, adding that Bangladesh and India must remain closely engaged and work together in a fast-changing world.

The minister said both countries should be sensitive to each other's concerns and initiate practical steps to address those.

Asked about major issues that might come up during the official talks with Singh, Morshed said trade imbalance, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers, border and water management, human trafficking and drug smuggling, among other issues, may be on agenda.

"We feel that the visit is going to be very important. It's a forward-looking development in our continued efforts to strengthen existing friendly ties," Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin told reporters on Thursday.

"We expect that the discussion will take place with a constructive and positive frame of mind and substantial progress will be made in resolving outstanding issues," he added.

Indian side said India has a broad-based agenda with Bangladesh and it is not a one-issue

visit by Singh.

India will use Singh's visit to persuade Bangladesh to support the G4 resolution for expanding the UN Security Council. The G4 nations comprising India, Japan, Brazil and Germany are seeking permanent seats in the council.

Singh will also try to resolve the difficulties in the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline project during his visit.

Additionally, there will be an exchange of views on international and regional issues of mutual interest including the 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka slated for November 12-13.

Other bilateral matters encompassing trade, investment, tourism and business activities as well as cultural, educational and other matters of mutual interest will also be discussed.

Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters at a briefing in New Delhi, "We have a broad-based agenda with Bangladesh. It is not a one-issue visit. We have a close interaction with Bangladesh at various levels."

"His (Singh's) visit takes place in the context of our commitment to improve and strengthen our relations with neighbouring countries and will provide an opportunity to review and assess all aspects of the bilateral relationship," he added.

It will also be an occasion for high-level political interaction between the two countries and will be a precursor to the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for the Saarc summit, he added.

Sarna said, "I can say that India attaches the highest importance to relations with Bangladesh which are marked by warmth and cordiality."

"The common cultural heritage, shared historical bonds, the extended common border and common perceptions on a number of issues make the relationship multi-faceted, dynamic and extremely important."

"We are committed to following a policy of friendship, trust and understanding which will lead to mutual benefit of the people of both countries."

Sources said the Indian prime minister is sending his external affairs minister to Dhaka to assure the Bangladesh government of New Delhi's sincerity about improving bilateral ties and India's seriousness about having strong relations with whichever party comes to power in Bangladesh.

Pro-BNP lawyers

FROM PAGE 1

that," he said, adding that the president had practised his constitutional power while giving clemency to Jhinto.

Moudud said pro-opposition lawyers have violated the rule of law and tarnished the image and dignity of the judiciary by burning copy of the High Court judgement prohibiting demonstrations on the court premises.

Criticising the on-going movement by the pro-opposition lawyers, the law minister said the lawyers loyal to Samannay Parishad are trying to make an issue of the presidential pardon to Jhinto and plunge the judiciary into anarchy.

Billing JAF as the main platform for the pro-BNP lawyers, he urged all to unite in opposition to the 'conspiracy' of the opposition parties.

Forum's Secretary General Aminul Haq said the opposition parties are trying to create 'anarchy' in the judiciary as part of their 'larger conspiracy' against the country.

Referring to the Wednesday's outburst of conflict between the two factions of pro-BNP lawyers, he said, "There may have differences of opinion among us. But we should not do anything that might benefit the opposition parties."

He described the Forum as the 'parent organisation' and said there is no doubt among the lawyers about it and its significance.

JAF leader Khandker Mahbubuddin Ahmad said there is no room for questioning the presidential clemency to Jhinto as it has been done by dint of the authority bestowed upon the president by the constitution.

Regarding the High Court verdict banning rallies and processions on the court premises, he said, "Our judges have showed a lot of patience. If I were them, I would have issued the rule even earlier."

"If the recent Awami League-backed lawyers' rally on the Bar Association premises does not come under contempt rule then why should ours be considered contempt of court," said Mahbubuddin, also the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs.

Ainjiabi Forum Advisory Committee Member and former speaker in the Jatiya Sangsad Shaikh Razzak Ali said the pro-opposition lawyers are plotting against the law minister on the pretext of the presidential amnesty. He also alleged that a vested quarter is out to harm the Forum.

"Forum and only Forum represents the lawyers who believe in Jatiyatabadi ideology. We know no other organisation other than the Ainjiabi Forum," he observed.

India, Pakistan

FROM PAGE 16

restrained in developing its arms capability," Bahadur said.

India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear weapons tests in May 1998. They have fought three wars since independence in 1947, two of them over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

After coming close to a fourth war in 2002, the rivals launched a peace process in January last year to resolve all issues through dialogue, including the Kashmir dispute.

When the experts from the two sides met in December 2004 in Pakistan, they agreed to push forward plans for a nuclear hotline but failed to reach a deal on advanced warning of ballistic missile tests.

In January, as they do annually, the two countries exchanged updated lists of their nuclear facilities in line with a bilateral agreement signed in 1988 prohibiting attacks against each other's nuclear installations.

Although the two countries normally inform each other when holding missile tests, no formal deal has been signed.

The Indian Express urged the two sides to "get a move on", saying in an editorial that agreements already being negotiated must be finalised and new ones put on the table.

"India has trapped itself into demanding too many technical details of missile launches from Pakistan," the paper said. "This approach is unproductive."

Next week, negotiators from the two sides will meet in Delhi to discuss other, non-military confidence building measures as well as ways to expand commercial ties.

The ongoing talks are aimed at resolving eight nagging disputes between India and Pakistan, including the core problem of Kashmir where a raging Islamic insurgency has killed tens of thousands of people since 1989.

The delegations for the nuclear discussions are being led by senior foreign ministry officials Tariq Osman Hyder of Pakistan and India's Meera Shankar.

Cops torture

FROM PAGE 16

The police is yet to comply with the court order but promptly arrested Zamil in a trivial case, sources said.

Several hundred local Awami League leaders and workers rushed to the police station and demonstrated at Madariganj Bazar and Ganipur union protesting the incident.

Zamil was secretly treated at a private clinic after a brief treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital yesterday afternoon.

Meanwhile, Bagmara Officer-in-Charge Motiur Rahman denied the allegations and said, "We arrested him [Zamil] in a regular case and no torture was done".

3 Ctg cops

FROM PAGE 1

According to sources, a patrol team of Kotwali Police Station snatched Tk 1200 and a mobile phone set from one Jasimuddin near the outer stadium area on Wednesday night.

The victim complained to the CMP officials against the five-member patrol team that included one member from Ansar Battalion and a microbus driver.

The authorities also formed a one-member probe committee comprising Assistant Commissioner Shah Mizan Shafiqur Rahman.

Hospital for FFs

FROM PAGE 1

College Hospital (DMCH) for the 1.75 lakh freedom fighters across the country, forcing to refuse many freedom fighters admission due to lack of accommodation.

The misery of the freedom fighters came under light after The Daily Star recently published the story of Arafat Ali Khan, a valiant freedom fighter, who did not receive proper treatment at the DMCH even after a month of his admission.

Tagore

FROM PAGE 16

Add to these his English translations, paintings, travels and lecture-tours in Asia, America, and Europe; and his activities as an educationist, as a social and religious reformer, and as a politician.

Different government and non-government cultural organisations have chalked out special programmes to mark the occasion.

After having won world-fame with the mystical-devotional poetry of the Gitanjali, he dug over much along that particular seam — a one-sided impression of his works. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913.

Born to a wealthy land-owning family of Bengal, Rabindranath was initiated into art fairly late in his life and painted close to 2,500 paintings.

In 1930, through a series of exhibitions in Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow and New York, the world discovered the poet as an important modern painter.

Politically active in India, he was a supporter of Gandhi, but warned of the dangers of nationalistic thought.

Unable to gain ideological support to his views, he retired into relative solitude.

Between 1916 and 1934, he travelled widely, attempting to spread the ideal of uniting the East and the West.

Only hours before his death on August 7, 1941 (Sraban 22 in Bangla calendar), the poet dictated his last poem.

Gono Forum confce

FROM PAGE 1

Blasting the government for distorting the history of the War of Independence in the school textbooks, the framer of the constitution stressed the need for creating consciousness among the youths.

He said though the country got rid of autocracy in 1990, democracy is yet to be achieved.

Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil announced that the 14-party will prepare a common minimum national programme that would be presented before the nation very soon.

"Greater unity is required to achieve the spirit of the Liberation War at the state level," Jalil said.

Jyotindiro Bodhipriyo Larma alias Shantu Larma, chairman of the Janasanghati Samity and Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, said the military rule in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the past three decades brought no good to people, but pushed them to the edge of ruination.

"The much-desired unity should not be targeted to election only," Shantu said, adding, "It should be aimed at facing future crisis, if needed."

Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon said the nine-point demand of the opposition

would be revised again to make it more pro-people.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) President Hasanul Haque Inu urged for a three-phased unity that he narrated as unity for movement, unity for election and unity for governance.

Blasting the government for enormous corruption, Krishak Sramik Janata League President Abdul Kader Siddiqui MP said: "If there were any competition for worthless government