

3,000 soldiers killed in Iraqi attacks

More US troops expected, 12 Iraqis die in attacks

AFP, Bagdad

US military losses in Iraq touched 3,000, according to latest figures yesterday, amid reports another 20,000 troops are to be rushed to Baghdad to stabilise the violence-wracked capital.

The additional US troops, according to the New York Times, are expected to be part of a revised security plan, which was partially announced by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Saturday.

The US military announced Sunday the death of a soldier in small arms fire near Baghdad the previous day, which took its losses in Iraq to 3,000 since the March 2003 invasion to topple Saddam Hussein, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

Of the casualties, 2,415 were killed in combat across Iraq, while 585 died due to "non-hostile" causes, according to the Pentagon.

More than 22,700 soldiers have been wounded since the invasion.

Of the 3,000 dead, 139 died during the actual invasion between March 19 and April 30, 2003.

The Pentagon said some 44 percent of US casualties have come from roadside bombs, or improvised-explosive-devices (IEDs) as the military calls them.

Small arms fire, including that from derailed snipers that have increasingly made an appearance in the past year, accounts for just under 20 percent of the casualties.

The bulk of losses have been in the restive Sunni province of Al-Anbar with battleground cities such as Ramadi, Fallujah as well as many other towns on the Euphrates river valley.

After Anbar, Baghdad has emerged as the most dangerous battlefield for the forces.

To secure Baghdad, Bush is now expected to send 20,000 additional troops even if it means possible more casualties for the military, the New York Times said.

Maliki, according to the report, has agreed to send three more Iraqi brigades to Baghdad over the next 45 days to support the "surge" in the 132,000-strong US garrison in Iraq.

Bush's new strategy, to be rolled out in a televised address possibly as soon as Wednesday, follows weeks of introspection for the administration, after Democrats routed Republicans in November's congressional elections.

Maliki said on Saturday that local forces would play a bigger role in protecting Baghdad from militias and insurgents.

"We will rely on our armed forces to forcefully implement the plan and the multinational forces will support our forces," he said.

Maliki said the revised security plan will crack down on all those who break the law, regardless of their "sectarian or political affiliations".

Soon after his announcement of the revised plan, a fierce firefight erupted in central Baghdad between Iraqi troops and insurgents, which left at least 30 militants dead, state television reported.

Iraqi and US forces have been implementing a joint security plan since June 2006 but this has failed to bring stability to the capital, where according to the UN more than 100 people are killed daily.

On Sunday, another four people died in two roadside bombs in Baghdad, a security official said.

Meanwhile, the United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon on Saturday "strongly" urged the Iraqi government to suspend executions of two of Saddam's henchmen after the bungled hanging of the former dictator himself a week ago.

Ban "strongly urged the government of Iraq to grant a stay of execution to those whose death sentences may be carried out in the near future."

Polls under lajuddin

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Blaming the CA for pushing the country towards crisis through holding a one-sided election, Jalil warned that that only the CA, also the president, will have to take the responsibility if any untoward incident takes place.

To hold an election within 90 days, a proper voter list is required, but the government wants to hold an election without a voter roll, Jalil alleged.

The people of the country has expressed their solidarity with the January 22 poll boycott by observing the first day of the 72-hour non-stop countrywide blockade, he observed.

Criticising law enforcement agency's attacks and mass arrest during yesterday's blockade, he alleged that they were not tortured like this even during the previous government's regime. Some 4,000 leaders and workers have been arrested in last three days with around 500 from the capital yesterday, he added.

"When the people are not taking part in the election, don't get involved with the electoral process. If you do so, you will be identified by the people and will have face the consequences," Jalil said towards the election related officials, asking them to refrain from carrying orders of the CA.

The AL leader also asked the law

Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti and Awad Ahmed al-Bandar are to be hanged soon. They were found guilty along with Saddam of executing 148 Shiite civilians from Dujail, north of Baghdad, in the 1980s.

The December 30 hanging of Saddam sparked an outcry after the leak of an unofficial, grisly cellphone video of his execution that showed a guard taunting the former dictator moments before his death.

Maliki however is determined to carry out the sentences.

"We will go ahead in applying the law against those who abused the Iraqi people and whose hands are stained with the blood of innocents," he said Saturday.

The date for the hangings has not yet been fixed, a Shiite lawmaker told AFP Sunday.

Meanwhile, insurgents Sunday killed at least 12 Iraqis, nine of them in Baghdad, a day after premier Nuri al-Maliki announced a revised security plan to restore stability in the capital, security officials said.

Four people were killed and five wounded when several mortars exploded near a car service company, Al-Rasheed, in Baghdad's eastern Karada district, a security official said.

Two bodyguards of Hamed al-Shammari, a senior official in the education ministry, were killed when his convoy was struck by a roadside bomb in Baghdad.

Two bodyguards were also wounded in the bombing.

Two civilians were killed when another roadside bomb exploded near central Baghdad's university of technology. One person was wounded.

In another attack, gunmen shot dead a doctor from Baghdad's Yarmuk hospital.

In Hilla, south of Baghdad, a car bomb killed one woman in a market and wounded 13 others, including several women and children, police said.

In the central city of Diwaniyah one Iraqi soldier was killed by gunmen, while another soldier was killed in a roadside bombing east of the Shiite city of Kut.

Two bodies were also found in the Tigris river near Kut.

Maliki said Saturday that Iraqi military commanders will be given more authority to take quick action in combating violence in Baghdad.

His declaration came as US President George W Bush was finalising a new strategy for curbing the violence in Iraq.

Concern over mass arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) has expressed concern over mass arrest and harassment by police on the pretext of maintaining law and order ahead of the blockade programme enforced by Awami League-led grand alliance.

BIHR General Secretary Akram Hossain Chowdhury in a statement yesterday said arresting somebody without specific charges is a violation of the constitution and a breach of human rights.

"To participate in any political programme peacefully is a person's constitutionally guaranteed right, but police are arresting innocent people only on suspicion and doing brisk business from the mass arrest," read the statement.

Chowdhury also urged the caretaker government to act impartially and devise appropriate steps, after holding talks with major political parties, to help institutionalise democracy.

According to the first case, Robin of Diamond International, in collusion with the two NBR officials, evaded about Tk 4,364,187 revenue by releasing perfumes, cigarette lighters and cosmetic items in the name of glass tumblers through Kamalapur inland container depot (ICD).

In the second case, it was alleged that Robin and two managers of Cotecna Inspection, in connivance with the NBR commissioners, dodged about Tk 5,578,031 revenue by importing stereos, watches and wristwatches instead of touchtamps.

According to the two other cases, Suravi Enterprise and Biswas Syndicate evaded about Tk 23,071,868 and Tk 621,689 respectively using the same means.

Outlaws

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The Janajuddho outlaws swooped on the victims at Sadipur bridge at around 11:30pm when they were returning home at Bahirmadi from adjacent Philipnagar bazaar after polls campaign. They slaughtered the two after taking them to a nearby field, sources said.

The Janajuddho men left the scene blasting several bombs, police said.

Police however claimed that Afaz and Daud went to a Philipnagar house to choose a bride for Afaz's son.

Police recovered some fliers containing Janajuddho ideology.

In Comilla, unknown assailants mugged and slaughtered three vegetable traders in Laksam upazila on Saturday night, reports UNB.

The deceased were identified as Uttam Kumar Devnath, 25, his younger brother Porikhati Devnath from Protappur village and Bachchu Mia, 50, of Jagatpur village of the same upazila.

Police recovered the bodies from Rajapur yesterday morning and sent those to hospital for autopsies.

Police quoting local people said the armed assailants swooped on the three vegetable traders of Sree Ang bazar on their way home on Saturday night and slaughtered them for their money.

UNB also reports, unknown assailants slaughtered a young man at Uttra Boalia under Kolaroa upazila in Sathkhira.

Police recovered the body of Sirajul Islam, 35, lying on the road, Siraj used to transport people on his motorcycle.

It is suspected that the slayers hired him to transport them to a certain place and slaughtered him on the way for his money and the motorcycle.

29 unidentified

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Ahsanullah, 22, Ripon, 23, Ali Akkas, 50, Abdul Jalil of Sharifpur in Comilla and Masuda Begum, 27, of Chandina of Comilla.

The 29 unidentified bodies were handed over to Anjuman Mufidul Islam (a charity organisation) for burial yesterday evening following autopsy in Comilla Medical College Hospital morgue.

Josna, 23, of Daudkandi was found crying beside the wreckage. Even though she survived the tragedy, her mother Shirin, brother Jashim and sister Amina did not. Josna could not identify the bodies of her family members.

Abdul Awal of Kachua also failed to identify his relatives.

A total of six investigation committees including a three-member committee of the Comilla administration have been formed to investigate the accident.

Three committees already submitted their reports yesterday saying the bus burst into flames due to a short circuit that ignited the diesel fuel following the crash.

The three-member District Administration Investigation Committee headed by Additional District Magistrate Rafiqul Islam Khan is supposed to submit its report within 48 hours.

2 NBR officials

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release said yesterday.

The two accused additional commissioners are Azam-e-Sadat and Almachi Uzzaman.

Indicted in the cases are, among others, Kaisarul Haq Robin, proprietor of M/s Diamond International, Hrishikesh Biswas, proprietor of M/s Biswas Syndicate, Monzur Ahmed, owner of M/s Monzur Enterprise, Mofizul Islam, proprietor of M/s Suravi Enterprise, Amzad Hossain, proprietor of M/s Saf Global Trade, Dermate Zings, general manager of M/s Cotecna Inspection, Peter Sewell, manager (operation) of M/s Cotecna Inspection, AAM Ferdous Sarkar, manager and senior principal officer of Johnson Road branch of Rupali Bank Limited, Mohammad Delwar Hossain, officer of the same branch, M Amir Siddiqui, chairman of Elan Corporation and A Kayum Khan, managing director of Bureau Veritas (BD) Limited.

Police charged and dispersed an AL procession, led by former home minister Mohammad Nasim, on its way to Russel Square from Road No 27 around 11:00am.

After the procession regrouped under Nasim's leadership around Russel Square, police baton charged the group slightly injuring Nasim and Sohel Taj.

Police also arrested 11 AL activists from a Nasim-led rally in Russel Square, five from in front of Metro Shopping Mall, and a Jubo Mohila League activist from Dhamondi Road No 11.

Quickly after the arrests, scattered AL activists hurled brickbats at not police from adjoining alleys. Police and blockaders were then got locked in small pitched battles in the area with no report of serious injury.

Afterwards, police indiscriminately arrested 25 to 30 people off the streets, including street vendors, security guards, rickshaw-pullers, and bystanders.

Till 3:00pm, police maintained a tight grip on the area, not allowing gatherings of more than five people.

MAHBUBA

The police clubbed an LDP procession at Maghbazar crossing leading to a clash between the police and the LDP activists that left at least 50 LDP supporters including its Secretary General Abdul Mannan injured.

As the police swooped on the LDP activists, they also retaliated by throwing bricks at the police, sources said.

Earlier, on December 10, a division bench of the HC granted an interim anticipatory bail to the other accused. Among them are Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Amirul Islam, Bar Council Vice-chairman Rokanuddin Mahmud and Adv Subrata Chowdhury in connection with the SC vandalism case filed by Barrister Omar Sadat, son-in-law of former BNP minister Shahjahan Siraj.

The vandalism took place following stay orders by the chief justice upon public-interest writ petitions minutes before issuance of rule by a High Court division bench.

Leaders of the Awami League-led 14-party combine and some rights groups filed the writ petitions challenging the legitimacy of the president assuming the office of chief adviser of non-party caretaker government.

Mahmudul Islam, a former attorney general, appeared for Dr Kamal Hossain.

The LDP leaders alleged the BNP cadres also attacked them along with the police.

BANGABANDHU AVENUE

A number of police, BDR and army personnel cordoned off the Bangabandhu Avenue to Paltan crossing area to prevent the grand alliance's activists from attending processions.

The atmosphere of this area was quite festive as artists were performing satirical songs.

Bangladesh Juba League held a rally at Muktangan, Bangladesh

Blockaders fight

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on the city streets.

Around 100 leaders of both AL-led grand alliance and BNP-led four-party alliance were injured in sporadic clashes in different places outside the capital as well.

Inter-district road communications were snared as no inter-district bus operated. Rail communications were also halted at various stations in Dhaka, Pakshi, Lalmonirhat, and Daulatpur.

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) men then clubbed the pickets away from the highway and arrested at least three.

MOHAKHALI

Some unknown men set a bus on fire at Mohakhalil at 6:30 am, police sources said.

MIRPUR

The police clubbed an AL procession at Mirpur Section-10 roundabout in the morning leading to the demonstrators hurling bricks on the policemen.

The demonstrators vandalised a taxicab and two CNG-run three-wheelers.

Police arrested nine persons from the spot.

Army men arrested a person from Mazar Road area and dispersed demonstrators as they were damaging the moving vehicles.

The demonstrators also ransacked five buses near Mirpur Section-1.

Our correspondent reported at least four BCL activists were injured when police charged batons on a procession of Chhatra Sangram Parishad (CSP) in front of the High Court. Police also arrested nine BCL workers.

COUNTRY

Our correspondent from Sathkhira reports at least 50 leaders and activists of the AL-led grand alliance and BNP were injured in sporadic clashes between the two archrivals at Patkeghata bazar in Tala Upazila during the blockade.

Police fired tear gas shells and rubber bullets at the demonstrators several hundred times. They also fired from shotguns adding fuel to the anger of the demonstrators.

By 12:30pm, the stone throwing blockaders made the policemen retreat more than a kilometre away from the Baitul Aman Housing Society to Ring Road near Adabor police station despite continuing reinforcement and supply of teargas and rubber bullets. Police were even seen taking tear gas canisters and shotgun bullets from the army.

The demonstrators went in a massive offensive against the policemen around 1:00pm and almost captured Adabor police station when a small group of army personnel who went in front of the police station