

3,000 soldiers killed in Iraqi attacks

More US troops expected, 12 Iraqis die in attacks

AFP, Baghdad

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 dreaded 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 Iajuddin

FROM PAGE 1

Blaming the CA for pushing the country towards crisis through holding a one-sided election, Jali 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, Jali 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," Jali 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 brick 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.

enforcers as well as the armed forces not to act for implementing anyone's political agendas. The CA has made the army controversial by using them to resist the blockade, he added.

On president's speech on Saturday night, Jali said that it has become clear from his speech that he became the CA to hold one-sided election to bring the BNP-Jamaat coalition back to power. The president has misinterpreted the constitution on the advice of the 'half-educated' BNP appointed attorney general, he further said.

Senior leaders of the grand alliance were present at the briefing.

DU teachers

FROM PAGE 16

Condemning the mass arrest, which, according to the signatories of the statement, is launched in an apparent bid to thwart the political parties' agitation programmes, they said such move by the interim administration reminded the people of the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance regime.

Prof AAIMS Arefin Siddique, Prof Najma Shahin, Prof MA Malek, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, Prof Dr Harun-or Rashid, Prof Sultana Shafi, Prof Farida Begum, Prof Ashraf Uddin Chowdhury, Prof ABM Faruk and Prof Mizanur Rahman, among others, signed the statement.

Outlaws

FROM PAGE 1

The Janajuddho outlaws swooped on the victims at Sadipur bridge at around 11:30pm when they were returning home at Bahimadi from adjacent Philipnagar bazar 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 Porikhit 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 Uttar Boalia under Kolaroa upazila in Satkhira.

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

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 motorbike.

29 unidentified

FROM PAGE 16

Ahsanullah, 22, Ripon, 23, Ali Akkas, 50, Abdul Jalil of Sharipur 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 Amena 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 Rafikul Islam Khan is supposed to submit its report within 48 hours.

2 NBR officials

FROM PAGE 16

release said yesterday.

The two accused additional commissioners are Azam-e-Sadat and Almahh Uzazzaman.

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 Zinings, general manager of M/s Cotecona Inspection, Peter Sewell, manager (operation) of M/s Cotecona 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 Kayyum Khan, managing director of Bureau Veritas (BD) Limited.

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 Cotecona Inspection, in connivance with the NBR commissioners, dodged about Tk 5,578,031 revenue by importing stereos, watches and watch parts instead of touch lamps.

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.

HC asks govt

FROM PAGE 1

elash due to a countrywide blockade enforced by the Awami League-led grand alliance.

Earlier, on December 10, a division bench of the HC granted ad-interim anticipatory bail to the other accused. Among them are Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Amir-UI Islam, Bar Council Vice-chairman Rokonuddin 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.

Blockaders fight

FROM PAGE 1

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

Activities at the country's premier seaport were also hampered due to the blockade. Loading and unloading took place partially but delivery of cargoes remained suspended.

ADABOR

Around 50 people including policemen and journalists were injured during a four-hour clash that pumctuated Aman Housing Society, PC Culture and Adabor areas in the capital into a big battle field.

The fighting erupted after police had charged batons and dispersed several hundred AL leaders and activists when they gathered in front of the house of a local AL leader and ward commissioner Abul Hashem Hashu on Road No 10 in Baitul Aman Housing Society around 10:00am.

Following the police action, several hundred blockaders rained brickbats on the policemen. As time passed, more people joined the demonstrators and pelted police with some more brickbats. No high level police official was found in the troubled area at the time.

Two policemen suffered serious injuries and took shelter in the local Ansar camp and came out disguised as civilians. The pickets raided two houses in the area in search of the injured policemen and damaged the houses.

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 at 12:45pm took position and pointed their firearms towards the blockaders.

The crowd however left the area soon and police regrouped again. Half an hour later several hundred army men with automatic assault weapons rushed to the area and took position in rows on Ring Road in front of Adabor police station.

Soon after the army reinforcement, the policemen entered the lanes which were littered with brickbats. At that time police allegedly beat several innocent people and arrested them.

The injured in the clashes include The Daily Star photographer Showkat Jamil, Officer-in-Charge of Adabor Police Station Nasiruddin, Police Constable Anjan and Nayek Habib.

Police arrested 28 people from the spot during the clashes.

RUSSEL SQUARE

Police in Dhanmondi area, especially from Russel Square to Road No 27, sent out ominous signals to grand alliance activists with an aggressive posture since the morning.

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 Dhanmondi Road No 11.

Quickly after the arrests, scattered AL activists hurled brickbats at riot police from adjoining alleyways. 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.

MAGHBAZAR

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.

At one stage of the half an hour clash, the police fired tear gas while the agitating LDP activists set fire to a private car. They also vandalised the Maghbazar branch of Dhaka Bank.

According to the police, they charged batons on the procession after the LDP activists started pelting them with bricks. The police arrested 10 persons from the spot.

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 Jubo League held a rally at Muktangan, Bangladesh

Swetchhasebok League at Zero Point and Bangladesh Chitra League (BCL) at the mouth of Bangabandhu Avenue.

TONGI

The pickets ransacked six vehicles at Tongi on the Dhaka-Gazipur highway and set fire to a CNG-run three-wheeler at around 10:54am.

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 Mohakhali 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 DU 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 Satkhira 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 Patkelghata bazar in Tala Upazila during the blockade.

The injured – 15 of AL and 35 of BNP – were admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital and other local clinics. Hospital sources said the condition of BNP leader Abdur Rahman was critical.

Two BNP offices and 4 shops belonging to the BNP leaders were vandalised during the clash. BNP blamed the grand alliance men for the vandalism. The grand alliance leaders protesting BNP attacks called a half-day hartal at Patkelghata for today.

Reports from Keraniganj say that around 35 people were injured when police and BDR charged batons on the activists of AL-led grand alliance at Kadamtali crossing in south Keraniganj thana yesterday morning.

Witnesses said the police and BDR charged batons on the grand alliance activists at around 11:00am when they were demonstrating peacefully sitting on the highway at the south side of the 2nd Buriganga Bridge. Among the injured, eight were admitted to a local clinic.

At Sanarpah of Siddhirganj in Narayanganj, at least 20 leaders and activists of grand alliance were injured as they locked in clashes with the police at noon yesterday for about half an hour at Sanarpah of Siddhirganj.

The army was later called in to bring the situation under control.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong reports, the countrywide blockade snapped the rail and road links between the port city and the rest of the country as well as impeding regular activities of the country's prime seaport.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reports, rival activists of the AL-led grand alliance and the BNP-led 4-party alliance locked in clashes leaving at least five people injured at Dimla upazila.

The clash ensued as the blockade supporters tore up election campaigning posters of a BNP candidate Shahrin Islam of Nilphamari 2 constituency.

Blockade supporters obstructed the Rajshahi-bound Barendra Express at Saidpur Station in the morning while motorised vehicles did not ply the streets.

Our Rangpur correspondent said the grand alliance activists allegedly damaged at least 30 buses and trucks at Paglapir and Modern point in Rangpur on the first day of the blockade.

Witnesses said police rush to the scene and brought the situation under control after half an hour.

Activities at the Hill land port came to a standstill due to the blockade, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna reports, a group of picketers attacked Khulna-bound passenger train Shimanta Express at around 8:30am at Daulatpur. An unidentified woman was injured and three compartments of the train was damaged in the attack.

The train reached Khulna half an hour late after police security.

Our Barisal correspondent reports, hundreds of Dhaka-bound passengers remained stranded at all terminals as inter-district transports were cancelled due to the blockade.

Huge grenade

FROM PAGE 1

recovered bomb-making materials from Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj following information from Fahad.

The Rab yesterday made an exhibition of the recovered goods at its headquarters at 4:00pm and briefed the press about their raids.

The grenades could have been highly powerful if the explosives were set inside the cases, said Rab bomb experts.

Asked about the recent activities of JMB, Rab said they are still conducting raids across the country to hunt down the militants and recover materials from them.

"We are yet to quiz the nabbed ones," Commander Mashuk, director of Intelligence and Legal Wing, said after reading out a press release.

Replying to another query, Rab Deputy Director General Mahbub Alam Mollah said they are yet to find out the source of funds of the banned militant outfit.

N Korea fully prepared for 2nd nuclear test Says legislator

AFP, Seoul

North Korea appears fully prepared to carry out a second nuclear test but is unlikely to go ahead in the immediate future, a South Korean legislator said yesterday.

Chung Hyung-Keun, who served as a deputy chief of the National Intelligence Service in the 1990s, said unusual personnel and construction activity had recently been detected at Punggye in the north-east where the first nuclear test was staged on October 9.

But Chung, in an article posted on his website, said the communist state is unlikely to go ahead until it knows the outcome of an expected new round of six-nation talks on its nuclear program, and of scheduled negotiations with the United States on financial sanctions.

Chung quoted a government source as saying an unidentified object and up to 15 people were spotted at the west side of a tunnel at Punggye that was used for the first test.

"Chances are very high that the North Korean workers moved the facilities into the tunnel to prepare for an additional nuclear test," the opposition Grand National Party legislator told Yonhap news agency.

A South Korean foreign ministry official said Friday that activity has been detected near the site of the first test but there are no signs yet of preparations for a second test.

The official was speaking after US television network ABC reported that North Korea appears to have prepared for a repeat test.

The latest round of six-nation talks on the North's nuclear programme ended in Beijing in December without a breakthrough. The State Department said Friday the talks could resume as early as this month.

Financial officials from North Korea and the US are also scheduled to meet later this month to try to resolve a row over US financial sanctions imposed over the North's alleged counterfeiting and other illegal activities.

EC to spend

FROM PAGE 1

list," said the EC secretary, adding, "We need more money for the election purpose."

The EC yesterday revealed the number of voters in the country following its voter list correction effort conducted during December 8-18.

"The number of voters in the country now stands at 9,30,23, 513," said the EC secretary. The updated voter list had 9,33,04,167 voters. The number of male and female voters is 4,74,69,105 and 4,53,74,000 respectively.

During the correction process of the updated voter list, 11,64,413 new voters were enrolled and 11,41,761 voters were deleted from the list. Therefore, around 25,000 new voters have been enrolled to bring the figure to 9,30,23, 513 after repetitions of names were corrected.

There will be 33,735 voting centres across the country and the number of ballot papers is 8,72,64,706 as 17 candidates have already been elected unopposed.

The EC secretary yesterday said apart from printing the ballot papers, all tasks for holding the elections have been completed. The printing of the ballot papers is currently going on, he added.

He said the printing of the voter list for 300 constituencies has been completed and they have already sent those to the offices of the returning officers.

Troops raid

FROM PAGE 16

"Orders have been given to military and police to intensify their battle against the Ulfa.

"There is no question of going soft on the militants."

Police said the violence was an attempt to intimidate people after an independent opinion poll by a peace group in nine districts of the oil- and tea-producing state showed 90 percent of respondents rejected the Ulfa's separatist demands.