

Bush's Iraq plan faces Democratic challenge

US announces a new war strategy today

AP, Washington

President Bush is telling lawmakers that he will send thousands more US troops to Iraq's two most troubled regions, but before he can unveil the plan it is facing stiff challenges from Congress' majority Democrats.

Bush today will announce a new war strategy, and has decided to call for 20,000 additional troops, said Sen Gordon Smith, R-Oregon, who was among more than 30 senators briefed by the president on Monday.

The extra forces would be sent to Baghdad, which has been consumed by sectarian violence, and the western Anbar Province, a base of the mostly Sunni insurgency and foreign al-Qaeda fighters, Sen Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, said following the session with the president.

A day before Bush's nationally televised speech describing his proposal, Sen Edward Kennedy, a longtime critic of Bush and the war, will propose legislation denying him the billions needed to send more troops to war unless Congress agrees first. Though it was unclear whether the bill would ever reach the full Senate, it could at least serve as a rallying point for the most insistent foes of the Iraq conflict.

Democrats seem divided on whether to block funds for troop increases, but many were not ruling it out. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, said: "Democrats would 'look at everything' in their power to curb the war, short of cutting money for troops already in the field."

The bill by Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, is guaranteed to fuel the debate among lawmakers on how far they should go to try to force the president's hand on the unpopular war.

Under the Constitution, the presi-

dent has broad war-making powers, while Congress controls spending. Democratic leaders have swiftly rejected any suggestion of withholding money from troops already in combat zones.

Kennedy says his plan would prevent additional troops from being sent and not stop the flow of money to troops in the field now.

"The best immediate way to support our troops is by refusing to inject more and more of them into the cauldron of a civil war that can be resolved only by the people and government of Iraq," Kennedy said in prepared remarks he was to deliver at the National Press Club on Tuesday.

The spokesman said Burns stressed the need for free, fair and violence-free elections.

The president appreciated US government's support for promoting democracy in Bangladesh. He also conveyed his greetings to President George W Bush.

Asked why Bangabhaban did not give the news to the media, the spokesman said since it was a routine government-to-government level contact, it was not released to the press.

"The president's speech must be the beginning, not the end, of a new national discussion of our policy in Iraq," Kennedy said in his prepared remarks.

According to senators who attended the meeting Monday with the president, a promise to send more troops to Iraq would be conditioned on criteria met by the Iraqi government, such as reaching political deals on sharing the nation's oil resources and dispatching more of its own troops to Baghdad.

He said the EC consulted with the law ministry before taking the decision.

Asked if the armed forces can be given such authority, Home Secretary Abdul Karim said the EC asked the ministry to implement the decision. "We will issue a circular in the light of the Election Commission decision," he said, declining to make further comments.

Earlier on January 3, a home ministry circular said the armed forces would be deployed across the country at 6:00pm on January 10 and they will be in the field until January 29.

About 60,000 troops will be deployed to ensure law and order for holding the election.

Police then swooped on the leaders and bashed them with batons even after they had fallen to the ground.

At Noor Hossain Square, the assistant Commissioner of Motijheel Zone of the DMP was heard ordering his men saying, "beat, beat." When reporters asked about this later, he kept mum.

At that time police also forced out people from the shops around Moulana Bhasani Stadium and chased them away through Gulistan area.

FAKIRPOOL, DAINIK BANGLA CROSSING

Police swooped on a procession led by AL leaders AKM Rahmatullah and Haji Selim and dispersed it when it reached near Fakirpool water tank at 11:15am.

Following the police clubbing, several hundred demonstrators darted out to the main road and different alleyways in Fakirpool and started raining brickbats on the law enforcers. Police fired more than 100 teargas shells and rubber bullets on the demonstrators.

At least 20 people including some policemen were wounded as the fighting continued till 2:45pm. Police picked up at least 30 leaders and activists from the spot.

Alliance supporters exploded several homemade bombs during the clash.

Later, police allowed some innocent people trapped in an alleyway at Fakirpool to leave the place with their hands up. Police also searched their bodies at the time.

Besides, clashes and chases took place between alliance supporters and police at Joykali Temple, BCC Road, Jugi Nagar and Ranking Street at noon.

The victims have not received any aid from the government or the NGOs yet.

The victims claimed that a non-government organisation (NGO) had asked them to stay there nine months ago. Sources in Dinajpur Land Commission, however, claimed that the landless people had grabbed the 4.85 acres of government khas land and had been staying there for the last nine months.

Meanwhile, a case has been filed with Dinajpur Police Station accusing three people in connection with the attack. The accused are Jotin Banerjee, Gopal Banerjee and Ranjan Banerjee.

On contact, the accused claimed the allegation brought against them was false. They, however, said the property which the landless people were staying on belonged to them.

Officer-in-charge of Dinajpur Police Station said they are investigating the incident. They said Superintendent of Dinajpur Police Mostafa Kamal visited the area soon after the incident.

Besides, alliance activists and workers vandalised buses and trucks at Kaliganj in Jhenaidah yesterday. They also engaged in chases and counter chases with BNP workers.

A section of alliance activists at the rear of the procession started

CA told Burns

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president told the State Department official about the caretaker government's position, constitutional provision concerning election and steps taken for holding a free, fair and violence-free election on January 22.

To dispel any misgivings about the electoral issues, the president said the Election Commission has also no option other than follow the constitution in holding elections on January 22.

Iajuddin told Burns that all political parties had participated in the election process and filed nomination papers following the steps taken by the caretaker government, but "suddenly the Awami League and its allies withdrew their candidatures on January 3".

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'O', 'A' Level exams

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"British Council will cancel the exams if hartals are called and we would have to sit for the exams in next session after six months as all exams of A-level and O-level are held on the same day across the world and cannot be shifted," Sifat Khan, an A-level student of Dhanmondi Mastermind English Medium School, told The Daily Star.

Getting transport is the major trouble during the blockade programmes, he pointed out.

In Dhaka, examinees will take the exam in seven venues -- Fuller Road British Council, City Ground Hall of Basundhara Shopping Centre, Gulshan National Shooting Complex, Baridhara Basundhara Convention Centre, Uttara Red Brick School, Mohammadpur St Joseph School and College, and Dhanmondi Maple Leaf School.

The schools are -- Government Laborator High School, Mirpur Government High School, Motijheel Government Girls' High School, Khilgaon Government High School, Nababpur Government Girls' School, Islamia Government High School and Mohammadpur Government High School.

Another eight B group government high schools' admission tests slated for January 9 will take place on January 12.

The schools are -- Motijheel Govt Boys' High School, Narinda Govt High School, Govt Muslim High School, Banglazabazar Govt Girls' High School, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Govt Boys' High School, Govt Science College High School, Dhanmondi Govt Girls' High School and Dhanmondi Quamrullesha Govt Girls' High School.

The dates have been changed due to unavoidable circumstances but the timetable of the test will remain unchanged, DSHE sources said.

However, the date of admission tests of rest eight government high schools under C group will remain unchanged which will be held tomorrow as per schedule, sources added.

Advisers approach AL

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implementing a number of proposals by the advisers in last three months.

Jalil told the advisers that many decisions of the advisers could not be implemented in the past due to President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed's partisan role, who is explicitly working to favour the BNP in the elections and if those proposals were implemented, the nation would not face the current crisis.

Sources said the advisers asked Jalil about how much the grand alliance is willing to compromise to reach a consensus about going to the elections. They also presented their detailed proposals regarding the election schedule.

After the meeting was over, Adviser Shafiqul refused to disclose details of the discussion and said, "Everybody will get to know what we talked about within two to three days."

Before the meeting, Shafiqul told the reporters that if they get a positive response from both the coalitions over the proposal, they would request the president to refer the deferral of the election to the Supreme Court.

When asked whether their move was a result of pressures from the donors, he said, "We are making these moves on our own initiative, not under the pressure of donors."

Yesterday's move of the advisers came at a time when most of the donor countries including the United States, United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) informed the caretaker government that a one-sided election will not be acceptable to the international community.

On Monday, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia Butenis said the US will not consider a one-sided election a credible one. She had also

Huda critical

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rights hostage through political programmes like blockade and siege, he said adding that the gang carried out the attack with an aim to grab the government land.

Huda observed that instead of creating pressure to "violate the constitution", the ambassadors could take an initiative to resolve the political crisis in harmony with the constitution.

Therefore, the grand alliance could have been pursued to avoid destructive politics and the people would have been saved from suffering, Nazmul Huda said in the statement.

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Eminent Citizens

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upon you, would take appropriate initiatives to resolve the crises," the letter read.

The letter said, "We think, it will not be justified to presume that the Awami League-led grand alliance's decision to boycott the election was an exercise of their right to not to contest in the polls. Nor it would right to think it was the whim of a person or a party. Rather, they took the decision after being deprived of what they have been demanding for long.

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