

# 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 Bush.

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.

If brought to the floor by Democratic leaders, Kennedy's proposal would force Republicans to put themselves on record regarding the war for the first time since the Nov. 7 elections, when the GOP lost control of Congress to the Democrats in large part because of the war. Most Republicans say they back the president, or are at least willing to hear him out, but a few GOP moderates say there is no indication US troops would make a difference.

"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.

# Cops attack blockaders

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bombs forced the police to retreat at least 50 metres and the activists rescued the injured leaders.

Besides, at least 50 demonstrators and policemen were wounded in clashes during the siege of the president's office on the last day of the alliance's three-day country-wide blockade demanding resignation of Iajuddin Ahmed from the post of chief adviser and announcement of a new schedule for the general election after 'proper updating' of the voter list.

The Bangabhaban was cordoned off by a heavy security net comprising several thousand police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel. Five truckloads of army also patrolled around it frequently as the demonstrators chanted slogans like 'army-janata bhai bhai, Iajuddin'er fanshi chai'.

Police and BDR stood in several lines on the roads leading to the Bangabhaban from Dainik Bangla Intersection, and from Paltan to Bangabandhu Avenue.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) had already imposed a ban on squatting around the Bangabhaban to prevent a siege of it.

Reports received in Dhaka said BNP and its student wing's office at Peerganj in Rangpur was attacked and set afire on the third day of the countrywide blockade yesterday.

Besides, at least 35 people were injured in a clash between activists of the grand alliance and BNP in Netrakona.

A home ministry press release claimed that unidentified people set afire 15 to 20 bus garages at Aminbazar in Savar yesterday, damaging those. But Savar police said a bus garage at Aminbazar caught fire as a gas cylinder exploded yesterday morning. **BANGABANDHU AVENUE, NOOR HOSSAIN SQUARE** A festive atmosphere at Bangabandhu Avenue vanished and it virtually turned into a battlefield as violence erupted at Noor Hossain Square at around 1:40pm and then spread to the adjacent areas.

This situation followed arrest of one Awami Jubo Mohila League activist from a procession that attempted to stage a sit-in beside police barricades near Noor Hossain Square. Alliance activists then hurled dozens of handmade bombs and volleys of brickbats from both ends of Bangabandhu Avenue at riot police.

Police then launched an all out attack on the activists forcing them into the AL office and to flee through Golap Shah Mazar area. Police also fired a large number of tear gas shells, at least two of those into the AL office. AL activists retaliated by pelting brickbats and handmade bombs from the roofs of adjoining buildings.

After a brief thaw in the fighting, violence reached its peak at around 2:30pm as a small procession led by senior alliance leaders, including Tofail, Menon, Nurul Islam, Dilip Barua and Haji Selim, approached the police barricade.

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

hurling brickbats and homemade bombs, prompting police to go for indiscriminate beating of anyone before them.

The senior leaders, hoping they would be spared, stood still. But police became aggressive as four of them were injured in brickbat throwing by alliance activists.

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 Moulaana Bhasani Stadium and chased them away through Gulistan area.

**FAKIRERPOOL, DAINIK BANGLA CROSSING** Police swooped on a procession led by AL leaders AKM Rahmatullah and Haji Selim and dispersed it when it reached near Fakirerpool water tank at 11:15am.

Following the police clubbing, several hundred demonstrators darted out to the main road and different alleyways in Fakirerpool 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 Fakirerpool 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.

Police fired at least 30 rubber bullets and teargas canisters at the demonstrators while the latter pelted them with brickbats.

**COUNTRY** Our correspondents report: Activists of the grand alliance set fire to the offices of Pirganj upazila unit of the BNP and its student wing JCD in Rangpur, and damaged at least 15 buses at Darshana on Rangpur-Bogra highway on Monday night. Witnesses and police said the activists also attacked a rally organised by the local BNP at about 8:30 pm on Monday at Pirganj Bazar.

In Netrkona, at least 35 leaders and activists of the alliance and BNP were injured in sporadic clashes between the two arch rivals at Durgapur, Mohongonj and Kendua upazila yesterday.

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.

## 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".

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.

## Legal experts

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He hoped that the EC will initiate move to amend the existing laws if it wants the armed forces to have such authority.

When contacted, EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar told The Daily Star that the existing laws allow the armed forces to arrest anyone at any place without a warrant if he or she commits any offence under election laws.

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.

## Adviser contradicts

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own initiatives to discuss the issue of his visit to Noakhali and transfer of the secretary to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock.

"No one, excepting the president and me, was present at the meeting. We did not discuss any specific topic regarding the ongoing political crisis," the adviser said expressing his surprise about the content of the meeting as the UNB report said quoting the Bangabhaban spokesman.

"The president told me (Dhiraj) that the three advisers are consulting with the two major political parties. Adviser Dr Shoeb Ahmed will inform me (Iajuddin) about the outcome of the negotiation with the political parties. Then I will sit with all of you (advisers) to discuss the situation," Dhiraj said quoting the president. "The president did not tell me anything more," he said.

## 50 homes

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undergoing treatment in Dinajpur Sadar Hospital. The injured were identified as Babu, Hembala, Longfool, Gabinda and Sulov.

Abu Bakkar Shiddique, chairman of Sundarban-2 Union Parishad, the union in which the incident took place, claimed that the gang carried out the attack with an aim to grab the government land.

Shreejol, an 18-year-old victim, said she was mercilessly beaten during the attack.

Nipa, another victim, said the miscreants threw her two and a half year old son Umakanta into the fire but she managed to rescue her son who suffered minor injuries.

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.

# ‘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," Saif 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.

British Council usually arranges for the exams to be held at 11:30am and 4:30pm instead of 8:00am and 12:00noon if the political parties call a 12-hour hartal, but it is difficult to manage exam schedule if more than 12-hour hartal is enforced, British Council sources said.

Earlier, students, guardians, teachers and exam management authority urged the political parties to refrain from calling hartals during the exam months of January and June.

Meanwhile, a British Council press release advises all candidates to arrive at their respective exam centres at least 45 minutes before the starting of each exam to avoid overcrowding and delays due to traffic jams.

On the other hand, new dates for the postponed admission tests

at group A and B city government schools have been announced.

The admission tests for the city's top eight government high schools under A group scheduled for January 7 would now be held on January 13, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) said yesterday.

The schools are -- Government Laboratory High School, Mirpur Government High School, Motijheel Government Girls' High School, Khilgaon Government High School, Nababpur Government High School, New 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, Banglabazar Govt Girls' High School, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Govt Boys' High School, Govt Science College High School, Dhanmondi Govt Girls' High School and Dhanmondi Quamrunnesa 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.

Jailil 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 Jailil 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 role of the ambassadors would encourage them.

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.

# 15 more die

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The Met office sources said the drop of temperature around midnight is causing the dense fog to occur.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports that two people died in the Sadar upazila yesterday due to cold and cold related diseases.

More than 200 people including children are suffering from different cold related diseases there. The victims are mostly floating people and people living on the Brahmaputra flood-protection embankments.

In Jamalpur, four people died of cold-related diseases in Islampur upazila. The victims are Ajir Uddin, 70, of Bhengura village, Ketu Fakir, 75, of Belgacha village, Fakirpara, Jesmin Akter, 26, of Ulia village, and Jamila Begum, 52, of Pathorshee village, according to

the UNB.

In Bagerhat, two more people died in Sharankhola upazila. They are Mojahar Shikdar, 70, of Kadamtala and Mojai Talukdar, 78, of Golbunia village.

Cold wave claimed three lives at Ghoraghta and Birganj upazilas of Dinajpur. The victims are Singla and Bhalanga of Ghoraghta and Idris Ali of Satalna village in Birganj upazila.

In Chandpur, Rupanbala Majumdar, 60, of Charbhanga and Moran Ali, 6, of Majherchar in Haimchar upazila died of cold-related diseases.

Bhuban Chandra, 50, of Patharghata Poura area in Barguna died of cold-related diseases. In Chapainawabganj, Jarina Begum, 40, of Rashik Nagar in Shibganj upazila, died from cold.

## 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. The demands include 1. Preparation of an error-free voter list by the Election Commission (EC) and the publications of it at a just time. 2. Making reforms in the EC, and 3. Making the administration free from politicisation. The demands should be met for holding a free and neutral election. So, the demands cannot be considered as of any particular party. Rather, it should be taken into consideration that the parties who formed the grand alliance secured the majority votes in 2001 elections. The Election Commission had been dilly-dallying for a long time to prepare the voter list. Now, it's proven that the commission is either incapable or not interested in preparing an error-free and valid voter list. After assuming the post of chief adviser, you made the chief election commission and another commissioner agree to go on leave, but we noticed how much time you wasted for that. Moreover, you appointed such a commissioner who was a nominee of a party for the upcoming polls. The 300 election officials, who were appointed for partisanship, also remained in their posts."

"It was also understood, through newspapers, about how meaningless and incomplete were the transfers you made in the administration," the letter went on.

The letter said four advisers resigned, creating history, being frustrated over the roll the president was playing in resolving the crises. "You did not call for any meeting of the council of advisers after the grand alliance declared to boycott the elections, rather your unitarily gave a speech on January 6 which only reflected your lack of interest in resolve the crisis," the letter read. "We hope our speculations are wrong. Therefore, we would like to appeal to you that it requires more time to prepare an error-free and valid voter list and other related works. For this reason, we believe it will not be a violation of the constitution if the time for holding the elections was extended," the letter said.

"If you failed to take initiatives to resolve the crises, the nation would think you intentionally violated the articles of 58 C (3), (4) and (5), to assume the post of chief adviser and you intentionally violated the responsibilities for holding a free, fair and neutral election," it said.

Obaidul Hoque, Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, Prof Salahuddin Ahmad, Prof Sardar Fazlul Karim, Prof Rehman Sobhan, Kalim Sharafi, Prof Zillur Rahman Siddique, Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Prof Anisuzzaman, Justice KM Sobhan, Justice Noimuddin Ahmad, former adviser Hafiz Uddin Khan, Dr Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmed, Dr Ajay Roy, Syed Abul Maksud and Selina Hossain were among the signatories of the letter.