

Iraqi, US forces push into Baghdad

3 GIs, 11 Iraqis and 8 insurgents killed, 13 others kidnapped

AFP, Baghdad

US and Iraqi forces pushed into Baghdad yesterday to clean up insurgent and militia hotbeds, launching house-to-house searches in a major operation to restore order in the battered Iraqi capital.

Witnesses said US and Iraqi troops had cordoned off areas in frontline districts in northern and southern Baghdad and were hunting for militants.

"We are still flowing forces into the city," US Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Garver told AFP, while both military and civilian officials warned reporters not to expect instant results from the operation.

The US military has begun moving the first of 21,500 reinforcements into Baghdad in the latest in a series of operations to regain control of a city plagued by insurgent gangs and sectarian death squads.

US Lieutenant Colonel Scott Bleichwehl described the activity as "framework operations" that involved "presence patrols in partnership with Iraqi national police."

Apache attack helicopters circled over the town centre and the sound of gunfire and a distant explosion dis-

Boat with 400 refugees must be allowed to dock: UNHCR

AFP, Geneva

The UN refugee agency called on Thursday for a boat carrying 400 would-be immigrants drifting off west Africa to be allowed to unload as soon as possible.

"UNHCR urges on humanitarian grounds that people on board this ship be allowed to disembark as soon as possible," said George Okoth-Obbo, UNHCR Director for Protection.

"At this point in time, the main priority should be to help these people and not let them drift on the high seas in precarious conditions."

The Spanish air rescue service spotted the Marine I on January 30, apparently adrift. A day later a tugboat from the Spanish rescue service approached the ship and has since been accompanying it.

Spain, Mauritania and several countries in west Africa have refused access to the vessel, which is believed to contain people from Africa, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Okoth-Obbo added that measures must be in place to identify people who wish to seek asylum or may be in need of international protection and to channel such claims appropriately.

"This state of affairs can seriously threaten the integrity of the time-honoured humanitarian tradition and legal obligation to assist people in distress at sea," said Okoth-Obbo.

Fertiliser seized in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The joint forces yesterday seized 177 sacks of adulterated fertiliser from Patkelghata bazar in Tala upazila and Shaikhali village in Shyamnagar upazila.

They also arrested three people in this connection. The arrestees are Abdul Mannan, proprietor of M/S Sardar Enterprise, and Brindaban Sarkar, an employee of M/S Mondal Enterprise at Patkelghata Bazar, and Abdul Latif of Shaikhali village.

Acting on a tip-off, the law enforcers raided the godowns of Sardar Enterprise and Mondal Enterprise and seized 90 and 26 sacks of spurious fertiliser.

In another raid, BDR personnel seized 61 sacks of fertiliser from the house of Abdul Latif at village Shaikhali and arrested him.

Cellphone trade

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Sadar upazila, said he uses the antenna without any hesitation, as most of his consumers are from the police and army.

An engineer from Khagrachhari BTB office requesting anonymity said a good number of privately owned cell centres is doing mobile phone business in Manikchhari upazila defying the ban.

When contacted, additional superintendent of police, Khagrachhari, said they will investigate the mater and take immediate action if anybody is found defying the ban.

BB asks

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allegedly pro-BNP businessmen Mostafiz Miltor, Mahfuz Siddique Lion, and BNP leader Mahabur Rahman PNP.

The banks were also asked to send account statements of businessmen Porimal Kumar Shing, Kamrul Islam, Chairman of Nandgram Municipality Jahangar Alam, Chairman of Dupchancha Municipality and BNP Sonatola upazila President Ahasunul Tayeb Zaker.

AL bigwigs

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and the corrupt ones. We'd still demand the caretaker government round up those who are corrupt no matter which party they belong to," said Quader.

AL sources said the party command has instructed its mid- and grassroots- level leaders to avoid being captured while the top leaders have been asked to surrender if the law enforcers request them to do so.

Many of the leaders and workers have gone into hiding after the recent crackdown on the political leaders accused of corruption. All the top leaders of the AL's front organisations have been holed up and waiting for the party chief's instructions on the future course of action, added the sources.

The former lawmakers and the prospective candidates for the next elections however have been asked to keep in contact with the constituents.

"We have instructions to be in touch with the people. And for that, we take part in different social programmes as there is no political activities under the state of emergency," said former AL lawmaker Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj.

Welcoming the arrest, he called on the CG to create an environment free of corruption, black money influence and criminal activities so that the honest and competent ones could make meaningful contributions to the welfare of the nation. He said he is ready to welcome Dr Yunus in politics.

Monsur lost his eyesight

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College although the erstwhile principal, late Zalaluddin, was viscerally uncomfortable about his admission to the college as he was looking at Monsur as a burden. Monsur sat for the higher secondary certificate (HSC) in 1968 and the very year his brilliant result got him admitted to Dhaka University.

He got admitted to the department of political science as the first ever blind student of the university and despite various difficulties in studying as a visually impaired student including non-cooperation from the library initially, he completed his master's degree from the department of public administration securing the first position among the students who passed with second class.

But the negative attitude of the authorities towards him for being blind barred him from becoming a teacher at the university, which had actually been his long cherished dream.

Even his desire for studying law was quashed in 1975, as the British embassy in Bangladesh did not give him a visa although he already had got admission to Inner Temple University.

"The days were very awful. Nobody was willing to recruit me for my physical limitations for which I was not responsible at all. However, my father inspired me to take up social work and I got myself involved with the welfare of other physically and mentally challenged people," Monsur said.

Through the projects of Impact Jibon Tari, Impact Masudul Haque Memorial Community Health Centre in Chuadanga, and Impact Jibon Mela Hospital in Meherpur, Monsur Ahmed and his team already touched the lives of more than 1,407,352 people.

Under the projects a large number of people received health education on primary health care, immunization, nutrition and sanitation, and on their relationship with disabilities.

A total of 4,286 schoolteachers, community leaders and mothers club members were trained on early detection of disabilities.

Two hundred and sixty people with disabilities received training on income generating activities and were provided with financial assistance for income generation.

Monsur received Atish Dipankar Award in 2004 and Senior Ashoka Fellowship in 2005 for social entrepreneurship.

Terming Monsur as a role model for people with disabilities in the country, noted economist Dr Atiur Rahman said Monsur proved that people can succeed in life by exercising their rights instead of begging for compassion from other people.

"He has been playing an important role in the country's policy making and even working hard to bring the disabled people in the mainstream of development," he said.

Another person who has known Monsur since his early life is former

adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal.

She said Monsur is a praiseworthy person who not only established himself through hard competition with people who did not have the disadvantage of being physically impaired but also works to establish the rights and dignity of other physically challenged people.

"He is very positive about life and focused. What he wants, he will achieve that," said Professor Monjurul Islam of Dhaka University who has been maintaining a lasting friendship with Monsur since their life together in university.

Monsur never despaired and he never complained, rather he is helping other people to find their ways, Prof Monjur added.

"Now when I look back, a feeling of satisfaction engulfs me. It makes me think I did not lose much. Rather I've got the chance to be nearer to the poor, to send positive messages to the people who are deprived in many ways," Monsur said.

"I always ask physically challenged people to attain skills and to continue fighting to prove their efficiency although the society is very tough on them," said Monsur adding that the satisfaction is higher when something is achieved through struggle.

US think tank urges

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brought about the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians, wrecked the country's already debilitated infrastructure, and spurred violent sectarian rivalries."

"The crisis has now moved beyond the capacity of Washington to control on its own... The United States lacks the military resources and the domestic and international political support to master the situation," Simon warned.

Bush and his commanders have pinned the success of his Iraq strategy on sending 21,500 additional US troops to secure Baghdad and allow the embattled Iraqi government and US reconstruction teams to rebuild the country.

But Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's so-called unity government is wracked by sectarian rivalry and much of the country is prey to illegal Shia militias and roving bands of Sunni anti-US insurgents.

In addition, Simon warns, Washington has been unable to contribute enough personnel for a sustained counterinsurgency and nation building effort.

He notes that the US civilian agencies have been only able to find 116 staff to fill a planned 167 positions on "provincial reconstruction teams," compared to the 1,700 who were thrown into a similar failed effort in Vietnam.

And even accounting for the extra troops in the ongoing "surge", the new US commander in Iraq, Lieutenant General David Petraeus, has only half the number of soldiers he would need to follow his own counterinsurgency doctrine.

In addition to destroying the Iraqi state and plunging the country into crisis, the US invasion has strengthened the hand of Washington's enemies in Iran and tied down troops that could be more usefully used elsewhere.

"By siphoning resources and political attention away from Afghanistan, a continuing military commitment to Iraq may lead to US losses in southwest Asia," Simon warned starkly of Nato's ongoing operation against the Taliban.

American failures since the March 2003 invasion had cost Bush public support at home, making military disengagement inevitable, the report warns.

"It is now just a matter of time," Simon wrote. "Better to withdraw as a coherent and somewhat volitional act than withdraw later in hectic response to public opposition to the war in the United States."

BNP men on the run

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against him are rife. Bulu, who was adviser for commerce during the BNP-led alliance rule, allegedly had amassed a fortune through the business syndicates he would head then.

Moazzem Hossain Alal, secretary general of Jubo Dal, visited Hawa Bhaban several times in last two weeks and met BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, sources said.

Few Other top leaders of Jubo Dal are also staying away from Hawa Bhaban and party office even most of them are not available at home.

"The government has restricted the political activities, so we are bound to remain inactive. But we are observing the situation closely," said a Judo Dal leader.

Senior leaders of the Swetchhasebak Dal, Sramik Dal and Krishak Dal too are not regular at Hawa Bhaban and the party office, as there are many allegations including those of corruption against them.

Meanwhile, a number of close aides to Tarique, including Hawa Bhaban spokesman Ashik Islam, who would play an important role in the running of the BNP chairperson's office, have taken cover to avoid potential action from the caretaker government, said sources.

Al-Aqsa mosque

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the Temple Mount after the prayers today. Riots began on the Temple Mount and police are dispersing the rioters," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told AFP.

"Using stun grenades at the moment and they are working cautiously to disperse the rioters who were shouting Allah Akbar (God is Greatest), throwing rocks and stones," Rosenfeld added.

Further scuffles were also reported by witnesses at various entry points into Jerusalem's Old City, where the holy places are located.

Some 2,500 policemen were on duty around the Old City and Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem to prevent troubles after three days of Arab and Muslim fury about the work near the most contested religious site in the Holy Land.

Israel had restricted access to prayers at the Al-Aqsa compound to all but Muslim women, and Muslim men aged over 45 with Israeli ID cards in order to minimize the threat of violence.

Later Hasina Begum got bail from the court, court sources said.

Palestinian unity

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addressing previous peace agreements with Israel.

In the end, the new coalition pledges to "respect" such deals, instead of "committing to" them, as Abbas initially demanded, and it remains unclear whether the US and Israel will be ready to deal with the new coalition. The international community has said any Palestinian government must recognise Israel explicitly.

In a first Israeli response, government spokeswoman Miri Eisin reiterated the international community's conditions, but did not make clear whether the Makkah deal would satisfy Israel.

In Thursday's ceremony, the names of the new Cabinet ministers were not announced. Haniyeh, formally designated as the head of the new coalition, must fill the posts in the coming five weeks.

Two of the three key portfolios were already assigned informally in previous rounds of talks.

Salam Fayyad, who served as finance minister in Fatah-run governments and is respected by the international community, is expected to return to that post. Ziad Abu Amer, an independent, is likely to be named foreign minister.

Hamas officials said they have

proposed a former military prosecutor and Fatah member Hammoudeh Jarwan as the new interior minister. The position is key because the minister controls several of the security branches, while Abbas remains in overall control of the troops.

Ahmed Yousef, an adviser to Haniyeh, said there was no objection when it proposed Jarwan during the negotiations. Jarwan told a Hamas-linked Web site that he had not been contacted yet. "I value and appreciate the trust Hamas has put in me, despite me being a Fatah member," he was quoted as saying.

Gazans hope the deal will not just end the fighting but also an international aid boycott.

"For four or five days we've been holding our breath. Allah willing, this is a permanent agreement, not a temporary truce," said Mahmoud Qassam, 27, a fish vendor who watched the signing ceremony on television with his family in their shop in the Shati refugee camp, near Haniyeh's home.

"We hope this will lead to lifting the siege," a reference to the West's cutoff of vital foreign aid after Hamas took power almost a year ago.

Mosharraf sent to jail

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mineral resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain was sent to Mymensingh Central Jail around 11:30am yesterday.

The joint forces arrested the former state minister from his residence on Gangadas Guha Road in the district town on Thursday night. Mosharraf, whose name is on the list of corrupt former ministers, had been compelled to resign from his post in June 2005 following a scandal alleging that he had received a Tk 86 lakh Toyota Land Cruiser Cynigos from the Canadian company, Niko Resources.

Mosharraf, also the president of a BNP district (south) unit, was taken to court at 11:00am in a police van and was subsequently produced before Magistrate Shefali Begum of no 1 cognisance court. Earlier a general diary was filed with Kotwali police station where he was also quizzed by the joint interrogation cell.

His counsel submitted a petition seeking bail for him but the court scheduled the hearing of the petition for Sunday and directed the jail authorities to provide him with division facilities while detained.

Meanwhile, a section of the people distributed sweets in Mosharraf's constituency Mymensingh-5 (Muktagachha) yesterday celebrating his arrest.

MUFTI SHAHIDUL
Police produced Mufti Shahidul Islam before the chief metropolitan magistrate's court of Dhaka with the home ministry's proposal for a 30-day detention for him, our staff correspondent reported.

In the forwarding report police mentioned that Shahidul patronised Islamist militancy endangering the peace and security of the country and tarnishing its image abroad. The report argued that he needs to be detained for 30 days to prevent him from patronising militancy and getting involved in militant activities.

However, defence lawyers sought his bail saying that the allegations against him are baseless.

After hearing both the sides Metropolitan Magistrate Rokan-ud-Doula sent Shahidul to Dhaka Central Jail for a 30-day detention.

Security personnel arrested Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis leader and former lawmaker Mufti Shahidul in Dhaka on Wednesday when the Afghan war veteran, facing allegations of having militant connections, surrendered to Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-2 following his party's instruction.

Shahidul, also a leader of Islami Oikya Jole (Shaikhul Hadith), was elected a member of parliament (MP) from Narail-2 in a by-election with

BNP-led four-party alliance's ticket after Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina had relinquished her claim to the seat.

NABI SOLAIMAN
Magistrate Rokan-ud-Doula sent Nabi Solaiman to a 30-day detention after granting a police petition filed with the home ministry's proposal for detaining him for 30 days in jail.

In the forwarding report placed before the court police mentioned that Nabi Solaiman is an illegal toll collector and involved in criminal activities.

No lawyer, however, appeared before the court to defend him. **OTHER ARRESTS**
The joint forces arrested listed criminal Golam Azam, 35, who had been wanted in connection with seven cases including murder and arms cases, from Teigaon area in the capital early yesterday.

Our staff correspondent reported from Chittagong that the joint forces held six persons yesterday for their reported involvement in different criminal activities there.

BDR, BSF trade fire in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) traded gunfire on Kergachhi border in Kalaroa upazila early yesterday.

The BSF troops of Tarali camp under Swarupnagar Police Station of 24 Parganas district fired five bullets targeting the Kakdanga BDR camp at about 5:30am, forcing the Bangladesh border guards to retaliate by 20 shots. No casualty was, however, reported.

After the incident, the Indian border guards reinforced its strength at all border outposts and increased patrols, according to a report received from across the border.

BDR sources said the paramilitary Bangladesh troops have been put on alert on the border.

When contacted, Lt Col Mohammad Asif Abdur Rouf, commanding officer (CO) of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the border skirmish.

Arresting the accused

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Order (RPO) for electoral reforms is possible through the president's ordinance, said Prof Dr Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University who presented the PPRC's keynote speech.

"The EC must be able to function without the influence of the prime minister's office and spend its own budget independent of the finance ministry," he said, adding that it should also be allowed to impose hefty penalties and punishments and debar candidates from running for election in cases of violation of electoral laws.

Stressing transparency of the EC, he said it should be mandatory for the EC to publish on a website an annual report of its activities, decisions, proceedings of its meetings.

The election expenditure of the candidates should be made through the EC, which would print materials for them. The regulations for disclosing of the finances of the candidates should be strengthened. "People must have unfettered access to all information about the candidates" as furnished to the election authorities," Asif said.

He said utility bill defaulters and government officials who had been on retirement for less than three years must be disqualified for contesting in the election.

In the presentation, Prof Asif said registration of political parties and their accounts and income-sheet verifications should be made mandatory, while the electoral-dispute solutions should be done in the shortest time possible.

His proposals also include limiting the number of adjournments in court, simplifying the processes of the EC and abolishing the exemption of MPs from appearing before court.

Shushashoner Janya Nagorik (Shujan), an NGO, Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar endorsed most of the proposals and added the proposals of introducing "no vote", reducing the election expenditures and holding projection meetings for the candidates and demarcating the constituency on the basis of the number of voters.

Former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru said 60 percent problems in the election will be solved if the High Court order on the candidates' disclosures is properly implemented.

He suggested formation of a committee to appoint the election commissioners instead of the prime minister's unilateral decision on the issue and remove the High Court judges who were appointed during the last BNP government.

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman of PPRC, who moderated the seminar, said the job of the MPs should also be defined. "It is not acceptable that an MP will be president of all the educational institutions of his constituency," he said.

He also stressed the upazila elections be held within a short time before or after the national elections. "There will be a great impact of it in the national politics as a campaign against corruption is now on," he added.

Munira Khan of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance and Supreme Court advocate Ruhul Kuddus also spoke on the occasion.