

# US wants to leave Iraq "with honour"

Cheney says

REUTERS, Tokyo

Vice President Dick Cheney said yesterday the United States wants to finish its mission in Iraq and "return with honour", despite the war's growing unpopularity at home and doubts among US allies.

Cheney, whose visit to Tokyo comes just weeks after Japan's defense minister said starting the Iraq war was a mistake, also insisted Americans would not back a "policy of retreat".

The defense minister's remarks forced Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to scurry to reassure Washington that Tokyo's backing for US policy in Iraq was unchanged, although most Japanese think that President Bush was wrong to start the war.

"We know that if we leave Iraq before the mission is completed, the enemy is going to come after us," Cheney said.

"And I want you to know that the American people will not support a policy of retreat," he added. "We want to complete the mission, we want to get it done right, and we want to return with honour," said Cheney, who heads on Thursday for Australia to meet

Prime Minister John Howard, another backer of Bush's Iraq policy.

## ASIA-PACIFIC COMMITMENT

Bush is sending 21,500 more troops to Iraq, but surveys show that most Americans are unhappy with the war and Democrats in charge of the US Congress are pressing for a new strategy.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair was to announce on Wednesday a timetable for the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq, a government source said in London, adding that Britain's 7,100-strong Iraq force would fall to 5,500 by year's end.

In talks earlier with Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhiro Shiozaki, Cheney thanked Japan for the roughly 550 non-combat troops it sent to southern Iraq in 2004 as part of Tokyo's largest and riskiest overseas mission since World War Two.

The soldiers came home last July, but about 200 Japanese air force personnel based in Kuwait are still transporting supplies to the US-led coalition in Iraq.

A Japanese Foreign Ministry official told reporters that Cheney and Abe had agreed on the need to "closely monitor" China's military capacity in space after its satellite-killing test last month, the first known such test in space in 20 years.

The two leaders also shared concerns about Beijing's rapid military buildup and its lack of transparency, the official said.

Cheney sought to allay any fears that Washington's commitment to Japan and the Asia-Pacific region would falter.

"The president asked me to make this journey, first to Japan, then to Guam, and then to Australia ... to reaffirm America's deep commitment to a forward presence in the Asia-Pacific region," he said in his speech on the *Kitty Hawk*.

The United States has some 50,000 troops based in Japan, about half its total military presence in the region.

The two allies agreed last year to reorganize those forces, including shifting 8,000 Marines from Japan's southern island of Okinawa to the US Pacific territory of Guam by 2014.

**NORTH KOREA** On attempts to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions, Cheney and Shiozaki agreed in their talks that a six-party energy-for-arms agreement forged in Beijing last week was a step in the right direction, a Japanese statement said.

Cheney expressed understanding for Tokyo's refusal to provide economic aid to Pyongyang until progress was made on resolving a feud over Japanese citizens kidnapped by the North's agents decades ago, the statement added.

# Export hampered

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vessels in getting waiver from the government and loading export goods.

But they (local vessels) often cannot carry those due to various reasons like engine breakdown, lack of capacity, bad weather etc. And sometimes they are reluctant to carry cargo considering the freight unacceptable and the routes not suitable for them, the sources pointed out.

There are 28 local vessels including 11 public sector ones which are unable to carry all export cargo from the country. As a result, those frequently fail to maintain expected time of arrival (ETA) and expected time of departure (ETD).

On the other hand, foreign ships cannot load cargo without clearance from the Department of Shipping that there are no local ships to carry the goods or they are unable to carry those.

"This type of system is very old and against the spirit of free market economy," said Amirul Haque, chairman of the standing committee on ports and shipping of the FBCCI and CCCI (Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry).

"When we are campaigning for removing all sorts of barriers to export-import trade, this is creating new hurdles."

He stressed that the flag vessel ordinance should be reviewed and amended keeping in view modern methods of international trade.

Bangladesh Shipping Corporation's (BSC) ship *Banglar Mukh* was scheduled to call at Mongla port recently for carrying raw jute to Karachi port. But it could not as it got stranded at the outer anchorage of Chittagong port due to engine trouble.

Shippers had gathered the export item at Mongla and had been waiting for the ship since November last year. And they had to arrange a foreign ship to carry the cargo.

The foreign vessel -- M V *Khaleda* -- carrying the flag of Malta applied for waiver, got it and started loading raw jute on February 1.

But a local company -- H R C Shipping -- objected to this, urged the authorities to cancel the waiver and said it would send a ship -- *Banga Lanka* -- to Mongla port. This vessel also failed to reach the port in time. The shippers had allotted 7,000 tones of cargo for Banga Lanka.

A correspondent from Benapole reported, quoting a Bangla daily published from Kolkata, that no less than 70 to 80 people will participate in the course at Bithari camp of BSF in 24 Pargana.

## Ekushey

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across the country. Besides, black flags were also flown as a sign of sombre commemoration.

Some 10,000 security personnel drawn from Special Security Forces (SSF), Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and other intelligence agencies stood guard at the Shaheed Minar and on and around the DU campus where the memorial is situated. The security measures went into effect on the afternoon of February 20.

Around 800 volunteers from Bangladesh National Cadet Core (BNCC), Rover Scouts and the Girls Guide helped the law enforcing agencies manage the crowd.

Different government and non-government, socio-cultural and political organisations organised elaborate programmes to mark the day.

State-run Bangladesh Television (BTV), Bangladesh Betar, and private TV channels aired special programmes. BTV telecast the wreath laying ceremony live from the Shaheed Minar. Newspapers published supplements highlighting the significance of the day. Different national dailies however came out on the holiday through special arrangement.

Many people including political leaders and cultural activists went to the Azimpur graveyard also to pay homage to the martyrs.

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign country definitely came as the obvious conclusion of the peoples' movement that started in 1952.

As the clock struck a minute past midnight yesterday, President Iajuddin Ahmed led the nation in paying tribute to the martyrs by placing a wreath at the Central Shaheed Minar, followed by Chief Adviser to the Caretaker Government Fakhruddin Ahmed, who stood a while in solemn silence showing respect to the fallen international heroes.

Speaker Barrister Jamir Uddin Sircar, Deputy Speaker Akther Hamid Siddique, Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, foreign diplomats and members of international organisations, DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz, members of DU Teachers' Association, DU Senate and Syndicate, and DU Alumni Association placed wreaths following the chief adviser in line with the protocol.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia led her party in paying the tribute.

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina accompanied by her party colleagues including Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdur Razzak, Tofal Ahmed, Suranjan Sengupta, Obaidul Quader and others placed wreaths at 12:25am.

Gano Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury also placed wreaths at the memorial.

The lone entrance to the Shaheed Minar was opened for all around 12:37am after the departure of the VIPs. Alongside a continuing stream of people different political parties and their front organisations, and socio-cultural and professional bodies also placed wreaths.

The Shaheed Minar and its adjacent areas had gone through a facelift, and the roads and medians had been adorned with Bangla alphabets and the national flag on the occasion.

Yesterday was a public holiday. The national flag was hoisted at half-mast at offices of different government, non-government, autonomous and private organisations and at private residences

## Khaleda, Tarique

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Senior leaders, including BNP secretary general, had called for self-realisation and self-correction of the leaders and workers who have brought disaster for the party through unbelievable corruption by using government power and facilities in the last five years.

"The BNP will not suffer and lose but we will have to go through self-purification and self-criticism," Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said at a discussion meeting on Tuesday.

BNP Vice-Chairman MK Anwar also said, "Those, whose activities have come under questions, will have to give their replies themselves. The party cannot take their responsibility."

Sources said party leaders are worried that the party will weaken more day by day if more leaders and activists are arrested in the ongoing drive initiated by the interim government.

Laying of wreaths continued until 3:30pm yesterday since a minute past midnight. After paying their tribute at the Shaheed Minar many of the people thronged the ongoing month-long Amar Ekushey Book Fair in hundreds on the Bangla Academy premises.

11-party Communist Party of Bangladesh, Muktijoddha Sangsads and its fronts, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and its fronts, Jatiya Party (JP-Monju), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Liberal Democratic Party, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), Bangladesh Chhatra League, Chhatra Sangram Parishad, Bangladesher Chhatra Union and other student organisations, Bangladesh Ain Samiti, National Press Club, Dhaka Reporters' Unity, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Bangladesh Medical Association, Jatiya Sramajibi Party, Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), Bangladesh Open University, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Independent University, North-South University, Bigyan Chetona Parishad, Amra Muktijoddha Santan, Muktijoddha Projonto, Pahari Chhatra Parishad, Nazrul Institute, Bangla Academy, Shilpakala Academy, DU Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra, different residential dormitories of DU, different indigenous students' organisations, Uidichi Shilpi Goshthi, Notre Dame College, Jagannath University, Jatiya Khelaghar Ashar and numerous other organisations also laid wreaths at the Shaheed Minar.

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## BMW seized

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The taskforce arrived from Dhaka earlier to investigate the allegations of corruption against Wadud, who was detained earlier this month.

The former lawmaker imported the branded car defying rules and regulations in October 2006, sources said.

Mia Zahid, officer in charge (OC) of Khagrachari Police Station, said the BMW was kept at the police station and a case will be filed against Wadud.

However, Mahfuz alias Gharbaka Mahfuzza, president of the district unit Swachchhasebhaik Dal, volunteers' wing of BNP, is still at large. He went into hiding when the present caretaker government took over.

Meanwhile, another investigation team conducted search at Wadud's house throughout the whole day yesterday, but it did not disclose the findings to the reporters. The same team seized around 3,000 jackets allotted for relief from the house on Tuesady. A case was also lodged.

Wadud, arrested on February 4 at his Kalabagan house "Baithak" by the joint forces, is in Comilla Central Jail at present. He was recently listed as one of the top 50 corrupted people by Anti Corruption Commission (ACC).

Mahfuz is accused of various criminal activities including murder, rape, corruption, torturing opposition activists, filing false cases against them and journalists, land grabbing and tender manipulation. He was also the leader of Wadud's cadre group styled G-8.

# A mangrove forest

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lines 18, 21, 23 of Charandip and 2027, 2035 of Rampur has a total area of 150 acres. The forest department carried out a huge forestation programme in 1989 and the trees have now grown up. Hence, the quarter is grabbing the land as well as the trees.

Meanwhile the forest department lodged four cases against Syedul with Moheshkhali Police Station. Forest official Faridul Alam said a legal notice was also issued against Syedul recently.

Despite repeated efforts, The Daily Star failed to contact Syedul and talk about the matter. However, Enamul Haque, younger brother of Syedul, contacted The Daily Star and admitted to the ongoing deforestation and embankment building in the island but denied their involvement.

When The Daily Star contacted the deputy commissioner's (DC's) office regarding the issue none agreed to provide any information. However, an official requesting not to be named said on August 1, 2006 the then DC of the district sent a lease proposal to the Ministry of Land for approval. It was approved on October 17, 2006.

Sources claimed the then DC Mohammed Habibur Rahman along with the upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) of Cox's Bazar Sadar and Chakaria and the land officers of Chakaria on August 1, last year surreptitiously gave away lease of Goldia island's land to their relatives and took lease of land through false names.

This lease was approved at the 13th meeting of District Shrimp Development Management Committee. The recipients of the land are 1. Rahela Begum, wife of Abu Rahim, who was a house help to former DC Habibur Rahman, 2. Chand Sultan, wife of Shah Alam, Borang, Khilgaon, Dhaka, 3. Mohammed Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, son of Akhirul Hossain Chowdhury, Charaki, Comilla, 4.

Sources said Syedul is experienced in grabbing land and the lease takers of Goldia's land invested large amounts of money through him.

Pro Bono committee sources said a few ward commissioners lodged a complaint to the district deputy commissioner against Abdul Hamid with 12 allegations against him.

A preliminary investigation found proofs of seven allegations.

Lanka, according to sources.

Meantime, a director of H R C Shipping complained to the shipping adviser through Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners Association that granting of waiver to M V *Khaleda* was a violation of the flag vessel law. The company also urged the government to stop loading of export cargo in that ship and take punitive action for violation of law.

M V *Khaleda* then left Mongla with 6,800 tonnes of cargo although it could carry another 2,500 tonnes.

Local ship Bangla Lanka arrived at Mongla recently and started loading cargo. But it did the job very slowly due to weak lifting gear, causing frustration in the shippers.

Around 7,000 tonnes of cargo were left even after full loading of Bangla Lanka, they said.

A high official of H R C Shipping said the waiver to M V *Khaleda* was given "illegally". He claimed that the local ship had arrived at Mongla before the foreign ship.

When contacted, Captain Habibur Rahman of Mercantile Marine Department, who is the authorised to grant waiver, said rule was not violated in this case. The waiver was given on January 25 as the BSC ship failed to reach in time and there was no other local ship on the route.

The waiver was cancelled immediately after arrival of Bangla Lanka at Mongla on February 2. Besides, there was enough cargo for both the ships, he said.

He pointed out that although the flag vessel law is applicable only to BSC ships, private sector ships carrying Bangladesh flag often get priority in cargo handling under this law.

Shippers have expressed concern over piling up of export goods at Mongla port. In such a situation, the cargo, particularly raw jute, is likely to be smuggled out to a neighbouring country where it is in high demand, sources said.

## Car bomb

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that several car bombers were targeting Shiite provinces in central Iraq, and that five bombs had been found and made safe in neighbouring Karbala and Babil.

A medic said the city's Al-Hakim hospital was treating 34 people wounded in the blast.

Najaf is an almost entirely Shiite city and security is controlled by local Iraqi units rather than US-led forces. It has been spared the worst of the sectarian war raging elsewhere in central Iraq.

Nevertheless, it has been attacked by Sunni extremists bent on provoking greater conflict and has seen killings linked to Shiite political-in-fighting.

Police reinforcements arrived after the explosion and sealed off the scene, where blood stains were mingled with charred wreckage. It was not immediately clear how many police were among the dead.

Last August, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive belt when he was seized at the last police checkpoint before the shrine of Imam Ali, killing about 30 people and triggering the rage of Shiite communities.

And in August 2003 a car bombing killed a prominent Shiite cleric, the Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr Hakim, and more than 80 bystanders.

## Cleaner dies

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"After we got into the reservoir, another labourer Golam Mostafa held a light bulb from upside the reservoir. All of a sudden, we heard a sound and found fire everywhere inside the reservoir," Barozi said.

"Within a few minutes, the fire engulfed the ground floor breaking the glasses of the reservoir," he added.

The firefighters brought the fire under control after two-hour effort.

According to them, the fire originated due to gas in the reservoir.

The fire damaged four air conditioners, eight computers, a zerox machine, furniture and