

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 honor", 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 terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength, they are invited by the perception of weakness," Cheney said in a speech aboard the USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier at Yokosuka Navy Base near Tokyo.

"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 honor," 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 Yasuhisa 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 -- Bangla 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, according to sources.

Meantime, a director of H R C Shipping complained to the ship-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 Banga 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 Banga Lanka, they said.

A high official of HRC 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 Banga 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 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 infighting.

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 Mostofa held a light bulb from upside the reservoir. All of a sudden, we heard a sound and found fire everywhere inside the reservoir," Baroi 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 important documents, the firefighters said.

The injured were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and the body was sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy.

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 Sultana, wife of Shah Alam, Borang, Khilgaon, Dhaka, 3. Mohammed Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, son of Akhchirul Hossain Chowdhury, Charaki, Comilla, 4.

Politicians held

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Sadique, BNP activist Tanvir Ahmed and Mostafizur Rahman of Jatiya Ganotantrik Party.

In Bagerhat, police arrested Mir Joyoti Ashrafi alias James, a listed criminal and also president of district unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League, when he went to Shaheed Minar to place floral wreaths, reported our Khulna correspondent.

Meanwhile, Mongla upazila unit of Awami League President Idris Ali Ijaradar and Organising Secretary Bulbul Ijaradar surrendered to joint forces on Tuesday.

In Sirairganj, the joint forces arrested Sirairganj Municipality Chairman and BNP leader TR Nur-e-Alam Helal from his house at Bhanganbari Monday night on charges of corruption and misappropriation about Tk 5 crore public fund under different development works, reported our correspondent.

In Rajshahi, police arrested Bagha Municipality Chairman Akkas Ali, also an Awami League leader, from Narayanpur market. He is accused in 14 criminal cases.

Mughal

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In Dhulihar Pargana, now under Kaliganj upazila in Satkhira district.

The mosque was named 'Parobarpur' after the name of its builder Subedar Parobar Khan, the Pathan chief of the army of King Pratapaditya.

The mosque has architectural resemblances with Aia mosque of Tangail (established in 1608), the Shahi mosque of Narayanganj, Chumki mosque of West Bengal, India and Loton mosque, historians said.

In 1938, then Bengal Waqf commissioner declared the mosque a Waqf property and named it 'Nurullah Khan Waqf Estate'.

In 1965, Alhaj Sohrab Ali from Mukundapur village in Kaliganj upazila renovated the mosque.

Later, the Department of Architecture also made some renovation.

Meanwhile, the local influential people have grabbed around 16-acre land of the mosque, donated by Nurullah Khan, while only three acres of land is now under the possession of the mosque authorities.

The locals urged the government to recover the land.

The archaeology department should declare the mosque an archaeological site and renovate it to attract the tourists from home and abroad, they said.

Cop held

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arrested by Kotwali PS. When he came out on bail, Fasiur started pressuring him to pay Tk 5,000.

The arrested SI claimed to the investigators that he was invited by the businessman to have tea at a restaurant. As he came out after taking tea, the businessman pushed money into his pocket.

3 killed

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Later, the police brought the situation under control and arrested 19 people of both the groups. Of them, seven were released after quizzing.

The police also sent the dead bodies to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for post-mortem.

Baby's first day

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end as Noakhali Deputy Commissioner Habibul Kabir Chowdhury went to visit the jail on Amar Ekushey and International Mother Language Day yesterday.

Learning about the predicament of the ill-fated mother and son, he took the initiative for their release.

The district administration arranged to send Nurunnahar and her son to her maternal grandfather's house in Ramganj.

Losing her parents at an early age, Nurunnahar was brought up at the house of her maternal grandparents who arranged her marriage with Babul Chowdhury of Birkot village of Senbagh upazila.

Not satisfied with the dowry received during the marriage, Babul's family started asking for more.

Failing to extract more from poor Nurunnahar's family despite repeated torture, her in-laws filed a kidnab case against her under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act. The police arrested her and sent her to jail where she gave birth to the child.

The forest officials said there is no scope for anybody to take lease of the forest land secretly, as the Ministry of Land in a memorandum dated October 30, 1996 clearly stated that no Khas land shall be given lease to any person without prior approval from the ministry.

Sources said Shrimp Project Development Management Committee decided during its second meeting held on September 1, 2006 that lease proposal must be jointly signed by the union level land and forest officials prior to submitting it to the DC's office. Therefore, the forest officials claim that they did not approve it and the DC had no right to give lease of forestland in such manner.

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

Faridul Alam, a forest official, said as per a government memorandum, all newfound islands shall be under the forest department for first 20 years for afforestation.

Iran vows to pursue atom project despite UN deadline

REUTERS, Vienna

Iran vowed yesterday to press on with its nuclear fuel program, ignoring a U.N. deadline to freeze uranium enrichment or face broader sanctions, but offered to guarantee it would not try to develop atomic weapons.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad remained defiant as a 60-day grace period Iran had been given on December 23 to stop enriching uranium for nuclear fuel was expiring.

"We ... will continue our work to reach our right (to nuclear technology) in the shortest possible time," student news agency ISNA quoted him as saying in the town of Siahkhal.

With the deadline running out, the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been unable to verify Iran's program is wholly peaceful after three years of investigations, was expected to report to the UN Security Council by Thursday that Tehran was pursuing enrichment regardless of pressure to stop.

The West suspects Iran is trying to make atom bombs behind the facade of a civilian nuclear energy program. Tehran says it wants only an alternative source of electricity so it can maximize oil exports and prepare for when oil reserves run dry.

"Obtaining this technology is very important for our country's development and honor,"

Rotten dates

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Earlier, the joint forces raided a business establishment of Bhendabari union JP vice president Abdul Majid Akand and recovered 53 pieces of CI sheets.

The forces arrested JP leader Akand's manager Shamsul Hoque while Akand remained on the loose.

In another drive, the forces recovered 27 pieces of CI sheets from the house of Mozammel Hoque, chairman of Kumrodpur union council. The UP chairman fled the scene before the forces arrived.

MANIKGANJ

Joint forces seized huge quantities of fake TSP and Gypsum fertilisers from two stores and an adjacent pond in Charginar Bazar of Singair upazila in Manikganj.

The forces also arrested four people. The arrestees are sub assistant agriculture officer of Charginar union Abdul Gafor, Abdus Samad, brother of Charginar union fertiliser dealer and two retail fertiliser sellers-- Sanwar Hossain and Azizur Rahman, reports our correspondent.

Sources said when the joint forces went to raid the fertiliser stores belonging to Sanwar Hossain and Azizur Rahman for fake fertiliser, the criminals dumped a huge quantity of fertiliser in a nearby pond. The joint forces later recovered the fertiliser from the pond.

KHULNA

Police recovered 36 pieces of CI sheets from house of a local BNP leader Shah Alam at Joigopole of Khanjahan Ali thana.

Our correspondent reports, Police could not arrest Alam -- who is the president of Khanjahan Ali thana unit of BNP. The CI sheets were allotted to BNP leaders as relief goods for distribution among the destitute.

BOALMARI

Boalmari police seized 85 sacks of fertiliser from one Lutfar Rahman's home in Reninagar village, but failed to arrest Lutfar as he had fled the scene, reports our correspondent.

BAGERHAT

The joint forces led by a magistrate in separate drives at different factories around Poursasabha Road seized around 6,000 litres of adulterated coconut oil worth about Tk 7 lakh, reports UNB.

Ahmadinejad said. "It is worth it to stop other activities for 10 years and focus only on the nuclear issue."

Ultimate authority on nuclear matters lies not with Ahmadinejad but Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But senior Iranian leaders have all ruled out halting nuclear work as a precondition for talks on trade benefits from the West.

The Council, which two months ago banned transfers of nuclear technology and expertise to Iran, would consider wider sanctions -- such as a travel ban on Iranians linked to nuclear activity -- if Tehran had not frozen enrichment work by February 21.

The result was already clear, said U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "The Iranians have unfortunately not acceded to the international community's demands and we will have to consult. We will have to decide how to move forward," she told reporters during a visit to Berlin on Wednesday.

Top Iranian negotiator Ali Larjani said after talks on Tuesday with IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei that Tehran would give necessary assurances during negotiations that it would never divert enrichment into bombmaking.

Besides, police seized 96 pieces of CI sheets and arrested four including three BNP leaders-- Abdul Wahab, Arman and Ansar Ali-- from different places under Tanore upazila in Rajshahi.

Police found 18 pieces of CI sheets at the house of Pachondor union unit of Zia Parishad President Abdul Wahab, nine pieces at the residence of Akkas, son-in-law of Binodhpur unit of Zia Parishad President Arman, and 21 pieces at the house of Ansar Ali, a member of Saranaji Union Parishad and also a BNP leader.

Another 48 pieces of CI sheets were found while president of Haji Md Mohsin Library Ashrafuzzaman Pramanik was re-constructing the library house.

The police arrested Abdul Quayum, headmaster of Kesharhat Girls High School from Mohonpur and seized 40 CI sheets from his bedroom and cattle farm.

Meanwhile, Durgapur police filed a case against former BNP lawmaker and Rajshahi district BNP General Secretary Nadim Mustafa, who is missing since declaration of the state of emergency, for giving away CI sheets, meant for poor and destitute people, to a madrasa.

Our Kushtia correspondent reported that the joint forces arrested Jibonnagar Municipality Chairman Noab Ali and Baka Union Parishad Chairman Golam Murtoza and recovered 300 CI sheets and warm clothes from their houses.

They were later handed over to police.

In Lalmonirhat, police seized 32 CI sheets from the house of Lalmonirhat district Jubo Dal Joint Secretary Nuruzzaman Hossain. However Nuruzzaman managed to flee away.

In Natore, the joint forces arrested Kamal Pasha, principal of Zonail Mahila College at Baraigram upazila, for keeping 44 pieces of CI sheets in the college.

Indo-Pak peace

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India and Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri of Pakistan said they were committed to the dialogue process.

An agreement on reducing risks from accidental use of nuclear weapons was also signed by the two sides. Mukherjee said the holding of the meeting as per the schedule in the backdrop of the terror attack on Samjhauta Express was a "reaffirmation of the commitment of both India and Pakistan to the dialogue process."

For his part, Kasuri said the attack on the cross-border friendship train "further underlines the need for cooperation in fighting terror."

Mukherjee said all efforts were being made by India to bring to justice the perpetrators of this heinous act and the result of the investigation by Indian security agencies could be shared with Pakistan authorities at the joint anti-terrorism mechanism meeting in Islamabad on March 6.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had assured Pakistan Premier Shaukat Aziz over telephone about it, Kasuri said.

Asked by a Pakistani journalist about reports that Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba was behind the train blasts, the Indian foreign minister said the investigations are still on and nothing can be said at this juncture.

Replying a question on safety of the tourists from India and Pakistan visiting the two countries, Kasuri said, "we will have to take steps to protect travelers from both the countries and railway ministries of India and Pakistan need to be involved in this exercise."

The matter would be looked into at the anti-terror mechanism meet next month, he added.

Additional Secretary in Indian External Affairs Ministry KC Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Tariq Usman Haider signed the agreement on reducing risks from accidental use of nuclear weapons. The accord, seen as a major confidence-building exercise, was cleared by the foreign ministries of the two countries last December.

Mukherjee said India was examining a draft proposal by Pakistan on liberalising tourist visa.

Both Mukherjee and Kasuri said that senior military and civil officials of the two countries would meet at an agreed date to solve their differences on Siachen Glacier in the Himalayas, the highest and coldest battlefield in the world.

The joint commission meeting identified agriculture, health, science and technology, information, environment, tourism, education, and information technology and telecommunications as potential areas of bilateral cooperation.

Mukherjee said India has asked Pakistan to allow relatives of Indian prisoners of war (POWs) to visit Pakistani jails in April and pointed that Pakistan had agreed to receive them during his visit to Islamabad last month.

Pakistan agreed to this proposal of India taking into account the paramount importance of human rights, Kasuri said.