

Bush seeks 8,200 more troops for wars

AP, Washington

President Bush asked Congress on Saturday for \$3.2 billion to pay for 8,200 more US troops needed in Afghanistan and Iraq on top of the 21,500-troop buildup he announced in January.

Bush wants Congress to fund 3,500 new US troops to expand training of local police and army units in Afghanistan. The money also would pay for the estimated 3,500 existing US troops he already announced would be staying longer in the region to counter an anticipated Taliban offensive in Afghanistan this spring.

In Iraq, most of the additional troops would help with the latest Baghdad security plan, which is getting under way in the capital. The money would pay for 2,400 combat support troops, 2,200 military police forces and 129 troops for reconstruction teams.

The budget revisions come as many lawmakers opposed to the buildup in Iraq are debating funding for the war. But in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (news, bio, voting record), Bush proposed canceling \$3.2 billion in low-priority defense items to offset the extra money needed to support the additional troops.

Politicians finally find

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already got themselves engaged in their respective professions while some others are spending time reading, watching television, and being with their families.

Some AL and BNP leaders, who are also prominent lawyers, have been getting more involved in their jobs since the imposition of the state of emergency.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan is staying in his residence in the capital and spending time with his family since there is no political activity to tend to.

Bhuiyan's counterpart AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil is sick and undergoing treatment in Labaid Specialised Hospital while the party's Presidium Member Zillur Rahman is undergoing treatment in BIRDEM Hospital.

BNP Standing Committee Member KM Obaidur Rahman is also undergoing treatment.

Talking to The Daily Star AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah said they are closely studying the current situation when there is a government ban on indoor politics.

"As there is no political activity, I am passing time reading at least eight to ten newspapers, watching television and getting involved in different social work," said the AL leader who is a businessman in profession.

BNP Spokesman Nazrul Islam Khan said as he has been involved with a labour organisation, he is planning to give more time to it. "Besides I will be able to take rest and spend more time with my family," Khan, who is also joint secretary general of BNP, told The Daily Star last night.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said he is concentrating on studying, training his party activists, and on other officials work alongside his habit of writing. "I am writing, keeping contact with the party leaders and activists, and reviewing different books and contemporary affairs," Menon, also a key leader of 14-party coalition told The Daily Star.

AL President Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said he is concentrating on reading about current national, regional, and international affairs to stay updated on the latest situation of the world.

"I was too busy with politics, now I will be able to get updated on the latest situation," Saber, also an AL organising secretary, told The Daily Star adding, "I kept notes in my diary when I was in jail twice during the BNP-Jamaat regime and I plan to publish a book on those horrible days."

Saber, who is also a businessman, said he will spend more time with his family members and will go to London or Singapore for a medical check up of his eyes.

Another AL Organising Secretary Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed said he is passing time reading magazines and newspapers, and keeping contacts with his relatives and friends with whom he could not maintain contacts when he was swamped with political activities.

However, no AL leader visited Hasina's Sudha Sadan residence and her political office in Dhanmondi following the ban.

The central offices of BNP and AL were closed yesterday. BNP chairpersons' political office Hawa Bhaban was also closed.

The central office of Workers Party, one of the major components of AL-led 14-party coalition, has turned into an office of a weekly magazine Natun Katha. When contacted over the phone, Zaman

Caribbean alight

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The ceremony will begin at 2215 GMT.

The ceremony has a lot to live up to after the colourful 2-million-pound celebration in Cape Town four years ago, but at two and three quarter hours in length will exceed it by 45 minutes.

The choice of Sobers to open the tournament was "befitting of the greatest cricketer the world has ever seen", according to Chris Dehring, the managing director of ICC Cricket World Cup 2007.

"It is because of legends like Sir Garry that today we have the opportunity to host this event," he added.

A former all-rounder and West Indies captain, Sobers scored more than 8,000 runs and took 235 wickets in 93 Tests before retiring in 1974, just one year before the first World Cup took place.

Over 57-yr old

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as per a normal procedure, which does not allow anyone to hold government job after 57 years."

Asked about the number of would-be-retired workers, the chairman said it would depend on age. The retired persons would enjoy pension, gratuity and other facilities as per the government rule, he added.

According to sources, around 1,000 workers were sent to retirement on May 23, 2004 through golden handshake, which cost CPA around Tk 23 crore.

The CPA tried to implement the current decision last year but back-tracked fearing agitation by different workers' organisations and leaders of the CBA (collective bargaining agent), sources added.

Saturday's meeting also decided to take several other measures to bring in dynamism in goods handling and reducing operational costs.

It also decided to bring down turnaround time of vessels to three to four days from eight to nine days and time of putting undelivered imported containers on auction in 20 days from previous 45 days.

The meeting also laid emphasis on sending empty containers to off-docks at the earliest possible time through imposing exorbitant charges on them, reducing different charges and ensuring round-the-clock power supply at the port, sources said.

CID to probe

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police produced Shahabuddin before him at 3:30pm on Saturday.

Conducting a drive at Hotel Noor Residential at Fakirapool in the capital, the joint forces arrested Shahabuddin, a former SI of Motijheel Police Station, who was transferred to Rajshahi Range on February 27, with Tk 5,000 that he had taken as bribe.

EC to study

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(OSD) on March 7, carted away huge documents from the EC Secretariat Friday, sources said.

The EC Secretariat yesterday formed a committee to probe in what capacity he took away the files, they added.

His office staff and driver helped him remove the files from his room.

When a security guard called a deputy secretary and told him about it, the latter threatened him not to talk about it, sources said.

The secretary to the EC Secretariat was informed of the incident yesterday morning and he ordered a probe into it, they added.

Falu's deer

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said Dr Mustafizur Rahman, assistant veterinary surgeon of the safari park.

Forest department officials spotted a total of 15 deer on March 2, 11 of which were identified as being raised without permission. Although papers regarding purchase of four deer were shown, the caretakers of the place failed to provide any paper for the rest.

Two of the legally purchased deer gave birth to two bucks, raising the total number to 17. The offspring, however, were not confiscated or transferred.

The confiscated deer were being raised illegally in currently detained former lawmaker Falu's retreat at Gohailbari under Shimulia in Ashulia since 1995 and the incident came to light after reports on the matter had been published in national dailies.

"Domestication of any wildlife requires regular reports to be sent to the forest department every three months concerning the condition of the animals, but the owner of the place did not follow the rule," said AKM Azharul Islam, Dhaka division ranger of the wildlife preservation and management department.

"The deer were confiscated as they were being raised ignoring the wildlife preservation code 1974," he added.

"An investigation is on and the high officials will decide whether to file a case. A complaint has been lodged against Falu with Ashulia police station in connection with the matter," he said.

Nazmul Huda, Falu

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Aman Ullah Aman was shown arrested yesterday in the case filed against him for accumulating assets worth over Tk 8.28 crore through illegal means and abuse of power.

Metropolitan Magistrate Jagannath Das Khokon passed the order following a petition submitted by the investigation officer (IO) for showing Aman arrested in the case.

Deputy Director of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Abdullah Al Zahid filed the case against him and his wife Sabera Aman with Kafur Police Station on March 6.

The court directed the authorities concerned to produce them before the court on April 9.

CASE AGAINST ABDUL QAYYUM

A Dhaka court yesterday placed DCC Ward Commissioner Abdul Qayyum on a four-day remand in two attempted murder cases filed against him with Badda Police Station in February and March.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shafique Anwar passed the order when Qayyum was produced before him during the hearing on the 19-day remand prayers in two cases.

CASE AGAINST SALAHUDDIN

Another Dhaka court yesterday fixed March 15 for hearing on the seven-day remand prayer submitted by IO of the case filed against him for using one single registration number for two automobiles.

CU issues gazette

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LLB examinees and started sending those yesterday to the government departments concerned including education ministry, chancellor of the universities and different law colleges, sources said.

The CU syndicate on March 03 at an unprecedented meeting cancelled graduation and LLB certificates of the accused examinees including judge Faisal Mahmud Faizee (roll 3652) on charge of tampering with their tabulation and mark sheets.

The decision of the cancellation of certificates came from the day-long 439th meeting of the syndicate after the submission of a probe report by a committee headed by former Pro Vice-Chancellor prof M Shamsuddin Ahmed.

Sources said the list of 49 also included AM Zia Habib Ahsan (3754), an advocate practising at Chittagong District Court and also president of Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, and advocate Moinal Haq Chowdhury (3335), former president of Satkania thana BNP.

Rest of the examinees in the list are Haradhan Chandra Dey, Komol Kanti Dhar, Jahangir Alam, Oli Ahmed, Abu Hanif, Nazrul Islam, Zakir Hossain, Mohammed Jalal Hossain, Zakera Begum, Nazmul Huda Khan, Hafsa Kawsar, Hafez Ahmed Majumder, Akter Begum, Shah Alam, Hore Krishna Das, Ruhul Matin, Nazim Begum, Aleya Begum, Afrin Ara

UN watchdog

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and likelihood to wrangle with China, Russia, the United States, Japan and South Korea over how to proceed.

"This is just the first opening after years of no contact with a state whose inner workings of the mind no one can really fathom," said a developing-nation ambassador accredited to the IAEA who asked for anonymity.

"It's possible but not certain ElBaradei will reach closure on a date for inspectors to redeploy," said the envoy. "If he starts negotiations on ground rules for inspections and gets a commitment to more meetings to finalize things, that would be progress."

ElBaradei himself also sounded a cautious note on his departure, saying this was only the start of a long journey.

"I hope we can move forward but again I should caution that this is the first step in a long process -- it will have to be an incremental process," he said.

VAGUE INVITATION LETTER

A senior European diplomat noted Pyongyang's invitation to ElBaradei lacked specifics of what was expected to be addressed.

Mark Fitzpatrick, an analyst at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, said all parties were showing willingness to meet the minimum requirements of the February accord's 60-day deadline. But pitfalls lurked.

"The February 13 agreement

The joint forces on February 22 impounded five automobiles including two luxury sport-utility vehicles (SUV) - a Lincoln Navigator and a Pajero V6 - five computers, and a 42-inch plasma television from Salahuddin's residence at Kadamtala under Shyampur in the capital.

The estimated value of the two SUVs and the three other cars -- a Toyota Corolla, a Toyota HiLux and a Toyota HiAce -- is several crore taka.

The Navigator and the Corolla had the same registration number.

Following the seizure, Shyampur police filed a fraud case against him on March 4.

The IO's forwarding report placed before the court said that Salahuddin had been fraudulently using the same registration number for two vehicles and further quizzing is required to find out the sources of his income that enabled him to acquire such expensive vehicles.

Ten other criminal cases were filed earlier against him with Shyampur, Jatrabari Demra and Dhanmondi police stations on different dates. Later, he was taken on a five-day remand for interrogation in three cases. Police had earlier pressed charges against him in seven cases.

Begum, Ratan Kumar Sharma, Md Shakhawat Ullah, Kironmoy Chowdhury, Muhammad Yusuf, Mohammed Abul, Abdul Hakim, Alauddin, Jesmin Sultana, Shukla Saha, Helal Uddin, Nurul Anwar, Arifur Rahman, Pradip Kumar, Abdul Latif, Mahbub Alam, Saidul Alam, Faridul Alam, Emdad Hossain, Mohammed Shahin, Mohammed Saidur Rahman, Prashad Nandan Ghosh, F Shahjalal, Ratan Kumar Roy, Shamsur Rahman, Armanul Haq Chowdhury, Erresh Lal Dhar and Azizur Rahman.

CU sources said there were eleven types of tampering on the certificates that included examinees shown passed in gazette although failed as per tabulation sheets, shown passed without subsidiary subjects, shown passed without attending preliminary exams and overwriting or scrubbing.

When contacted, CU Vice Chancellor prof Dr M Badiul Alam yesterday evening confirmed that the gazette for the accused 49 LLB examinees have been finalised and the examination controller was advised to contact his office for details.

However, despite repeated attempts, Acting Examination Controller prof Dr M Mozaffar Hossain and Deputy Controller AKM Fazlul Haq Pasha could not be contacted over the phone.

Stocking policy

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High officials of different ministries were present at the meeting held at the Secretariat.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) will hold a meeting with all commercial banks today to review the import situation of essential items.

BB sources said businessmen recently complained that different commercial banks are taking more LC (letter of credit) margin against the imported products and in some cases the banks took 100 per cent of the amount in advance.

"Such policies of commercial banks are resulting in price increase of imported items," a BB official quoted a trader as saying. Asked about taking huge LC margin, the BB official said the banks are not taking any risk when the joint forces are conducting anti-hoarding drives across the country.

He said the central bank will assure the commercial banks that the government is very much alert about the effects of indiscriminate drives against hoarding. "There will be no wholesale drives against hoarding in future and we will ask the banks to take margin against LCs on the basis of banker-customer relationships," he added.

Another official of the central bank said today's meeting may also direct the commercial banks to encourage small importers to break the monopoly of some giant importers.

Concerned about the skyrocketing of prices of essential products, the present caretaker government earlier withdrew import duties on rice and wheat. Besides, it is going to start open market sale from March 18 to keep the prices of rice and wheat within the commoners' capacity.

JMB member

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Dulal was arrested before on October 3 in 2005 from the Chittagong Court premises immediately after a bomb attack on the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Akram Hossain, police said.

Sources said Dulal was also arrested on September 9 in 1997 for his involvement in murder of a police and snatching a rifle. Police recovered six firearms from his possession at that time as well, said Sub Inspector Wahiduzzaman of Potiya Police Station.

Police produced Dulal before the court yesterday morning while the court granted a two-day remand.

Dulal is accused in at least 13 criminal cases including robberies and a murder case filed with Potiya and Anwara police stations.

SQ Chy

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"without due process of law".

As both are put on the second list of corruption suspects published by the Anti-Corruption Commission, they surrendered before the High Court and prayed for bail. The court gave the direction following separate petitions filed by them.

The petitioners, who were on the run, moved the higher court for remedy apprehending arrest by the army-led joint forces as many a listed politicians, businessmen and influential persons have been thrown behind bars.

A division bench, comprising Justice Shah AN Mominur Rahman and Justice Abdul Alam, passed the orders.

Barrister Rafique-ul Huq appeared for the petitioners.

Vandalism at SC

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The other charge sheeted defendants are former Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) secretary advocate Enayetur Rahim, former SCBA vice president advocate Subrata Chowdhury, barrister Tania Amir and advocates Sheikh Awsafur Rahman, Subrata Saha, Khairul Alam Pipul, Mohammad Khasruzzaman, Suhrawardi, Syed Mamun Mahbub and Habibur Rahman, an outsider.

Of them, Habibur is absconding since the charge sheet was submitted against him.

Barrister Omar Sadat, son-in-law of BNP leader and former minister Shahjahan Siraj, filed the case with the CMM's Court on December 4 naming four lawyers and against 50 to 60 unidentified lawyers and others for vandalising the offices of the chief justice and the attorney general, and also for disturbing court proceedings.

The four named in the complaint are Rakanuddin Mahmud, Enayetur Rahim, Subrata Chowdhury and Sheikh Awsafur Rahman.

But the IO pressed charges against Kamal and others, as their involvement with the incident was found during the investigation of the case.

In his complaint, Sadat said Rakan asked the accused lawyers and outsiders to vandalise the chief justice's chamber, courtrooms and other public property, and also to threaten the attorney general.

The vandalism on the SC premises took place after the chief justice stayed the proceedings of three writ petitions minutes before a HC bench was about to issue a rule on a writ challenging the legality of the president's takeover as chief adviser to the caretaker government.

Powerful taskforces

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"There is no consideration for who they are. You've already got evidence. Those who appeared untouchables once are already apprehended," he said.

ACC Chairman Hasan Mashhud meanwhile preferred to get his priorities right first. "We need to decide first whether we go after the crimes committed years back or we go for the corruption suspects of immediate past years."

"No-one will be spared eventually. Since the pent-up grievances of people are too high against the immediate past government, we would like to live up to their expectation first," said Mashhud, adding that the ACC would go ahead with the second list of 50 corruption suspects made public by the taskforces hours before Tarique Rahman, eldest son of ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia, was arrested in the early hours of March 8.

Sources said, the second list of 50 top corruption suspects was drawn up by the taskforces, and inquiry will be done by the ACC with the taskforces playing crucial role in the outcome.

The central body of the National Co-ordination Committee, which drafts in all seven GOCs as members, will prepare and update the list of corrupt people, giving the taskforces -- one central, seven regional/city and 64 district-based -- seven days to complete investigation after filing of a case.

The sweeping powers of the taskforces will compel any government and non-government organisations to provide information about persons linked with different crimes, giving rise to the fear of the ACC playing a second fiddle to taskforces.

But the chief coordinator of taskforces General Masud was quick to play down the fear, saying that taskforces will assist the ACC as the organisation runs short of manpower.

"It will require some time for the ACC for capacity building. The taskforces will help the ACC in the

Loss on environmental

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and cooking technologies as long-term steps.

Highlighting deterioration of air quality of Dhaka despite banning two-stroke three-wheelers, Adriana Jordanova Damianova of WB said that further efforts are required to control gross diesel pollutants.

Total economic cost of poor water quality and drainage in the capital is about \$400 million annually, where 80 percent sewage is untreated and 330,000 kilograms of untreated industrial effluent is discharged in the water bodies every day.

The fisheries, which provide two-thirds of the country's animal protein needs, are in decline, the report said, adding that threats to fisheries include losses of floodplain habitat due to agriculture and urbanisation, loss of connections along fish migration paths, reduction in dry season river flows, over-fishing and rapidly increasing pollution.

It suggested establishment of fish sanctuaries, implementations of fisheries management and reduction of barriers in importing fish to reduce pressure on the country's fish resources.

Speaking as the chief guest, Adviser to the Ministry of Environment and Forest Dr CS Karim said effective steps must be taken to stop environmental degradation, which is being caused by various economic activities of the present day.

"The next generation otherwise will raise serious questions on what we did," he said adding that global warming is causing serious climate change, which is very evident.

Stressing the need for strengthening of the Department of Environment with skilled human resources and logistics, he said,

South Asian

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and Cambridge University and will be funded by public private ownership. The Saarc countries will provide funds on the basis of their capacity. Philanthropists will also finance for establishing the university. The governing body of the university will be formed drawing two members from each Saarc country.

It will have residential facilities and mainly the students from Saarc countries will get the opportunity to study there, he said.

The proposed university will conduct both first degree and post-graduate degree programme. There shall be mutual recognition of degree and certificates awarded by the universities in all the Saarc countries. The university will be expensive but there shall be provision for free education for the poor meritorious students, he added.

The meeting discussed the concept paper prepared by Harvard Scholar Professor Gower Rizvi.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the 13th Saarc summit in Dhaka in 2005 mooted the idea of establishing the South Asian University.

government's jihad (crusade) against corruption," he said. "The reason a comprehensive taskforce has been formed through assembling manpower from the government's different organs is to nail someone found guilty on different grounds."

It saves the government from carrying out separate investigations on a person with various offence charges, the general argued.

The ACC chairman also echoed the same. "The aim of the ACC and the National Coordination Committee is the same. So, there is no scope for a problem."

"The responsibility has been given to the committee in consultation with the ACC. That is why there is no chance for misunderstanding," asserted Mashhud, a former army chief and rebel adviser to the caretaker government of a controversial lajuddin.

Twenty taskforces are now out in action in the Dhaka metropolitan area and another 20 would soon join them, said chief coordinator General Masud. Four taskforces are active in the Chittagong metropolitan area, and the number is to go up, if required.

The taskforces will not rest on getting ready cases and charge sheets but follow those up till the disposal by keeping constant contacts and communications with relevant authorities.

In case of inquiry, investigation and litigation, the taskforces will not only take help from different government organs but also communicate and coordinate with the ACC, National Board of Revenue (NBR), Auditor and Comptroller General, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), police, Special Branch (SB), Criminal Investigation Department, Rab, National Security Intelligence (NSI), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, Bangladesh Bank and any other organisations or sources.

Bombers kill 29

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Iran will be the first supporter of this plan," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said.

Syrian state-controlled newspapers said Damascus supported a "political solution" to end violence in Iraq.

US WITHDRAWAL

But while President Bush on Saturday ordered 4,400 more US troops to be sent to Iraq on top of a force build-up he has already authorized, both Iran and Syria called for a withdrawal of US forces, saying they fueled violence.

The United States has 140,000 troops in Iraq. US and Iraqi troops have launched a security crackdown in Baghdad, seen as the last chance to stop the oil-rich nation tearing itself apart.

After the Baghdad talks among senior officials on Saturday, the United States said Turkey had offered to host a planned follow-up ministerial-level conference in April and that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would attend.

Sectarian violence between Sunnis and majority Shia Muslims has escalated since the bombing of a Shia shrine a year ago. Since the US invasion in 2003 tens of thousands have been killed and some 2 million driven abroad.

Saturday's conference brought together officials from Iraq's neighbours, the permanent UN Security Council members -- the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France -- and Arab countries.

U.S. ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad said after the conference he had talked directly to Iranian delegates as well as in a group setting but the top Iranian official said he had not had one-to-one talks with US officials.

Abbas Araghchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, said the talks had been constructive.

The meeting took place amid mounting tension between the United States and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program.