

30 killed in Iraq bloodshed

US military prison chief detained for aiding enemy

AGENCIES, Baghdad

The US military accused Lieutenant Colonel William Steele, who before his arrest was in charge of Camp Cropper, a detention centre on the outskirts of Baghdad, of aiding the "enemy by providing an unmonitored cellular phone to detainees", the military said.

He is also accused of having unauthorised possession of classified information, maintaining an improper relationship with an Iraqi interpreter, failing to obey an order and possessing pornographic videos.

The charge sheet also accuses him of "wilfully failing to fulfil obligations as an approving authority" in the expenditure of funds.

The charges against Steele cover a period of almost 17 months between October 1, 2005 and February 22, 2007.

He has been detained in Kuwait and will face a hearing before a panel of officers to decide whether he should face charges, military spokeswoman Lieutenant Colonel Josslyn Aberle told AFP in Baghdad.

"He has been detained and is now in Kuwait. His current status is that he is in confinement and waiting for his Article 32 hearing," she said.

The military statement stressed the "charges are merely an accusation of wrongdoing. Lt. Col. Steele is presumed innocent unless and until he is proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of any alleged offence."

Camp Cropper has some "high-value" detainees and, before his execution for crimes against humanity on December 30, ousted dictator Saddam Hussein received medical treatment there.

Steele's arrest is the latest in a string of scandals to hit the military since the 2003 invasion.

In 2004, pictures of the abuse of detainees by low-ranking soldiers at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison west of the capital shocked the world.

The images, which included photographs of bloodied and naked prisoners smeared with excrement or being forced to perform sexual acts, stoked anti-American sentiment.

The confessionally divided province of Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, was again battered when a suicide bomber blew up a vehicle against a joint Iraqi army and police checkpoint, killing nine soldiers.

Another 15 people were wounded in the bombing in the town of Khalis, 10 of them soldiers, a security official said.

(AFP, AP)

Meanwhile, the US military charged a top commander on Thursday with aiding the enemy and fraternizing with the daughter of an inmate in a US-run prison he headed in the latest scandal to hit the military in Iraq.

The early morning assault targeted the offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of regional president Massud Barzani, a party spokesman told AFP.

On Monday, 10 people were killed and 20 wounded in a similar attack on the party's offices in the town of Tal Isqof.

Four militants were also killed in the raid.

Meanwhile, the US military charged a top commander on Thursday with aiding the enemy and fraternizing with the daughter of an inmate in a US-run prison he headed in the latest scandal to hit the military in Iraq.

Govt unwilling free

FROM PAGE 1

proposals for electoral reforms.

The CEC said the EC will review the opinions expressed by the eminent personalities and hold talks with the editors of newspapers and senior journalists soon for their opinions on the proposals.

He said the government interfered in the activities of the previous EC. "But I will not allow this. We [the EC] are independent...The government cannot interfere in our activities if we do not give them any scope," Huda said.

In his inaugural address, the CEC said no reform proposal will be finalised without holding talks with the political parties since they are the main stakeholders.

"We had planned to hold talks with the political parties first, but we could not do it because of the restriction on indoor politics. We will hold talks with them as soon as the government withdraws the restriction," he said.

He said five consultants are expected to start working at the EC Secretariat to prepare a project proposal for simultaneously preparing the voter list with photographs and national identity cards.

DEBAPRIYA BHATTACHARYA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CENTRE FOR POLICY DIALOGUE, REQUESTED THE EC TO FIND OUT SOLUTIONS TO ENSURE THE SEPARATION OF ITS SECRETARIAT FROM THE PMO.

CEC Huda said the EC will examine if it is possible to separate the EC Secretariat without amending the constitution.

Senior journalist Syed Abul Maksud said it is the responsibility of the EC to hold the election as soon as possible so that an elected government can assume power. "There is a possibility that an unconstitutional government will emerge if the Election Commission fails to hold the election soon," he said.

At the dialogue, a few participants opposed the EC proposal for providing tax exemption for the funds of the political parties. They also suggested imposing restriction on the parties' fund collection.

The CEC said the EC has no specific information about the sources of the political parties' funds. "Talking to some political leaders, I understood that the major political parties do not face any problem raising funds. But the smaller parties do face problems and they want to reduce the election expenditures," Huda said.

The EC does not want to be the "master" of the political parties and control them, the CEC said, adding that the EC only wants the political parties to follow some rules and regulations of the commission.

A few participants, including former army chiefs Nuruddin Khan and M Harun-ur- Rashid, and Debapriya, opposed the proposal that says a civil or military bureaucrat or a statutory body official cannot participate in the polls before three years from their retirement.

Some NGO leaders supported the part of the proposal for government officials but opposed the part that deals with the NGO officials.

Woman participants of the dialogue demanded that the EC should include a provision in its proposal to make it mandatory for the political parties to nominate a certain percent of female candidates in the election.

Khaleda, Hasina

FROM PAGE 1

crore in her accounts, she said, "The money belongs to Bangabandhu Memorial Trust."

She added, "People and organisations from across the globe donate to the Trust. I can't tell you exactly how much money it has. The chief accountant could give the specifics."

She has a joint account with her sister Sheikh Rehana. But that's not supposed to have such a big amount, Hasina said adding that she won't be surprised if somebody had put the money into the accounts to fit them up.

Despite repeated attempts, neither Khaleda nor any member of her family could be contacted for reaction.

Meanwhile, replying to a query, BB Governor Salehuddin Ahmed yesterday told reporters, "The central bank can ask for information on anyone's account if necessary." He, however, did not elaborate on the matter.

According to preliminary information, BNP Chairperson Khaleda and her match in the AL together have accounts with six or seven banks. They have the money in fixed deposits and other savings and current accounts.

Sonali and Agrani Bank officials seeking anonymity admitted that the chiefs of the two major political parties that have dominated the political landscape over the years each have Tk 2-3 crore. But they refused to give specific figures on the accounts.

Contacted, the central bank authorities declined to say anything on the find.

Sources said the NCC is examining the account statements to find out the sources of the funds and irregularities, if any.

Salahuddin

FROM PAGE 20

Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, BNP leader and former state minister Mir Nasiruddin and his son Barrister Helaiddin, and BNP leader and former state minister Aman Ullah Aman and his wife Sabera Aman will be submitted on Sunday.

Three FIRs were filed on March 6 against them for concealment of information in their wealth statements sought by the anti-graft body.

Khaleda to leave

FROM PAGE 20

Arabia recently.

But the government issued a press note on Wednesday declaring that there was neither any pressure on Khaleda to go into exile nor any restriction on her movement.

The BNP chairperson went to the Baridhara residence of her younger brother Sayeed Iskandar at 9:50pm yesterday.

Several BNP leaders, including BNP Joint Secretary General Selima Rahman and Assistant Office Secretary Syed Emran Saleh Prince, and a few close relatives were also allowed to meet Khaleda yesterday.

The authorities gave hints that they may allow some more important BNP leaders and close relatives to meet Khaleda today.

Mainul

FROM PAGE 1

return and now the government's changed decision reflects its guts, Mainul said at a short briefing at his secretariat office.

The adviser said Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina then was very eager to return home but now she seems less interested in coming back. "Now we are hearing that she is not coming soon."

"If this is true then our earlier decision was correct," he said, adding that the government is still in the right direction despite change in its decision.

Responding to a question, Mainul said a letter would be sent to the airlines and other agencies concerned informing them of the withdrawal of the bar on Hasina's return.

The political situation faces a hard reality, he said, adding, "The less party politics in the present situation, the better for the country."

The main job of the present caretaker government is to hold a free and fair election as early as possible and hand over power to an honest and competent government.

Expressing concern over the present economic condition of the country, the law adviser said the caretaker government's another responsibility is to bring dynamism in the economic sector.

Referring to lower transaction in the banks, Mainul said the economy would not survive without dynamism in the banking sector. He said showing 'extra honesty' by some over-enthusiastic persons is bringing sufferings to the people.

A section of officials threaten people through serving income tax notice, whereas corruption occurred earlier in connivance with the government officials, he said.

Bhuiyan

FROM PAGE 1

meeting after restoration of political activities," he said.

He also lauded the government initiative to bring about reforms in politics. Reforms are necessary for the political parties and for the good of the country as well.

Where graft only talks

FROM PAGE 1

A teacher has to pay between Tk 80,000 to Tk 1.5 lakh to high officials to ensure a transfer from a remote area to Dhaka. Tk 50,000 to Tk 1 lakh is charged for a transfer to any town, Tk 30,000 to Tk 40,000 for district to district transfer, upto Tk 1 lakh for enrolling teachers under the MPO, Tk 1.5 lakh to Tk 3 lakh for listing an institution under MPO, Tk 20,000 for issuing loans for computer and housing matters, Tk 1,000 to Tk 3,000 for approving loan from the provident fund, Tk 15,000 for a one-year leave, Tk 25,000 to Tk 30,000 for a two-year leave.

On April 17, the Rapid Action Battalion caught two DSHE head assistants Abul Kalam Azad and Amirul Islam red-handed when they were receiving bribe from a teacher.

Following this incident, Education Adviser Ayub Quadri directed DSHE Director General (DG) Prof Nazim Uddin on April 18 to form a vigilance team for regular monitoring of tasks at the DSHE but no such move has yet been initiated, education ministry sources said.

Prof Nazim Uddin attributed the 'bribery-friendly atmosphere' in the office mainly to severe shortage of manpower.

"I have to run the office with limited manpower. We have to deal with about 16,000 non-government schools, 3,000 non-government colleges and 7,000 madrasas. Every staff and official has to deal with a large number of tasks. In such a situation, teachers who are eager to get their work done early tend to bribe staffs and officials," Prof Nazim told The Daily Star.

Although service rules demand that an official should not serve in one office for more than three years, a large number of officials are serving at the same office for five to seven years.

The Shikkha Bhaban sources said a host of officials including two directors, five deputy directors, six assistant directors, a joint secretary, a programme director and a system analyst who have been serving at DSHE for over three years through lobbying during the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

The staffs and officials serving an office for long are likely to gain influence and involve in bribery, said an official who joined the DSHE recently.

In early March, the education ministry directed the DSHE DG to take measures against all corrupt directors and deputy directors. The ministry also directed to transfer staffs and officers who are serving for more than two years but DSHE is yet to reply, education ministry sources said.

Mamun confesses

FROM PAGE 20

Mosharruf Hossain were adjourned yesterday while former housing and public works minister Mirza Abbas was shown arrested in a case filed in connection with graft.

Heavily guarded by police, Mamun was taken to the chamber of Metropolitan Magistrate ABM Abdul Fattah around 2:00pm. The magistrate recorded his statement for around two hours.

Mamun told the magistrate that he along with six others extorted the amount on different dates in 2006. The six others are Obaidullah Khandaker, Qamruzzaman, Mahbud, Manik, Hablu and Tareq Alias Mota Tareq.

Khairul Bashar, managing director of Abdul Munem Ltd, filed the case with Dhanmondi Police Station on April 19.

Mamun demanded the money identifying himself as a friend of Tarique Rahman while his goons threatened him to stop his construction business if he failed to meet their demands, added the complainant.

Gulshan police had Mamun placed on a five-day remand yesterday in connection with a Tk 81 lakh extortion case filed by Harun Ferdousi, managing director of Judge Distilleries Ltd with Gulshan Police Station on March 27.

In the case, the complainant accused five people including Tarique and Mamun of forcing him to pay them Tk 81 lakh.

The other accused are Tarique's associates Babul Kazi, Enamul Haque and Giasuddin Quaiyum.

Of the Tk 81 lakh, Tarique allegedly took Tk 45 lakh, Mamun Tk 35 lakh and the three others shared Tk 1 lakh.

Earlier, Mamun made confessional statements to the same magistrate on different dates in connection with five other extortion cases filed with Gulshan, Kafrul, Shahbagh and Dhanmondi police stations.

MAMUN'S ARMS CASE

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Cantonment Police Station Shahrum Khan, also the investigation officer (IO) of an arms case filed against Mamun, pressed charges against Mamun yesterday for possessing illegal firearms and ammunition.

Mamun was arrested from his Banani DOHS residence on March 26. Police seized a 22 bore Spanish pistol and eight bullets at his house.

Later, an arms case was filed against him and he was placed on a four-day remand for interrogation.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) Court, Dhaka yesterday sent it to the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's

Teachers have to come to DSHE for affiliation of new educational institutions and arranging their salary under MPO, approval of new teachers' appointment, transfer, audit report, timescale, pension and salary re-fixation, introduction of a new department at an educational institution, selection for seniority and many other tasks.

But teachers from across the country, tired of making repeated approaches, are finally compelled to bribe DSHE staff for getting their tasks done.

"I went to Shikkha Bhaban at least 15 times from my home district Madaripur in last eleven months but officials did not enrol me for salary under the MPO. A DSHE clerk took Tk 18,000 from me but he is yet to arrange approval for my MPO listing. Now the clerk is demanding more money," an assistant teacher of a high school told this correspondent in front of the Shikkha Bhaban.

A syndicate of 20 officials who were the privileged beneficiaries during the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance government, are still serving in DSHE even after passing three to seven years there and they have continued cheating the teachers, said DSHE sources.

These officials with political motivation illegally sacked around two thousand teachers and stopped another ten thousand teachers salary payment during the five years of the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance government, said National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), a platform of eleven teachers and employees organisations.

"The deep-rooted corruption in DSHE cannot be removed without changing its management system, Prof Quazi Faruque, convener and chief coordinator of NFTE, said.

He also blamed the lack of coordination between the education ministry and DSHE for increasing corruption and irregularities inside the DSHE.

In 2005, intelligence agencies submitted a report to the then government, saying that most of the officials of DSHE were corrupt and it was difficult to get a file signed without paying bribe.

The report identified 14 top corrupt officials and recommended stern action against them but no measures have yet been taken.

Customs officer held at ZIA while taking bribe

UNB, Dhaka

A customs inspector was arrested while allegedly taking bribe from a passenger at Zia International Airport yesterday evening.

Official sources said a team of army-led joint forces caught Nawab Ali Akhand red-handed while he was taking money from a Bangladeshi passenger.

Custom sources said Nawab demanded Tk 15,000 from Iqbal Haque, who came from the USA at noon, for helping him in evading tax.

Hasina to return

FROM PAGE 1

She said a motion was placed before the British parliament, which included the issue of the ban on return.

Meanwhile, AL sources said a specific date for her return is yet to be fixed as the caretaker government did not notify the international airlines authorities about the withdrawal of ban on the AL chief's return.

Leaders of the UK chapter of the AL told The Daily Star that the flight for Hasina's return is yet to be booked as the Bangladesh government did not officially notify the authorities of different international airlines about the withdrawal of ban on AL chief and 'no objections' from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

Hasina also mentioned these while talking to The Daily Star last night.

The British Airways that declined to issue Hasina boarding pass on April 22, said in a clarification on April 24 that it did not carry Hasina from London to Dhaka responding to a written notification from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh that "Sheikh Hasina had been barred from entering Bangladesh."

"As the government earlier officially notified the British Airways not to carry Sheikh Hasina after imposing restriction on her homecoming, now the government will have to notify the airlines' authorities that they have lifted the ban on Sheikh Hasina," said a UK AL leader preferring not to be named.

Sources in the UK said Hasina might return by Emirates or another big airliner.

Meanwhile, the pro-AL lawyers have initiated a move to file a 100 million pound sterling compensation suit against the British Airways for declining to carry Hasina, sources said, adding that the AL leaders would file the case immediately after their party chief returns home.

"We are working on it," barrister Shafique Ahmed, the principal counsel for Hasina, told newsmen at his Supreme Court cubicle.

At the same time the UK AL leaders with the help of some British MPs and human rights experts have also been preparing to file a case with the UN Human Rights Council in Brussels to challenge what they called was a violation of human rights of the former prime minister by blocking her return to Bangladesh.

Seven British MPs on Wednesday moved a motion in the House of Commons calling upon the British Government to review its policy of support for the interim government of Bangladesh 'in the interest of upholding democracy and transparency'.

The motion, moved by Karen Buck, Emily Thornberry, Frank Dobson, Clive Efford, Mr Sadiq Khan, Stephen Pound and Harry Cohen of the British parliament, contains concerns at recent decisions of the government, including the postponement of forthcoming elections until late 2008.

Star reporter

FROM PAGE 20

Court of first class Magistrate Enamul Haq also dismissed the case as the court found the complaints against the reporter false and baseless.

Tipu was arrested on March 21 after Biswajit Bhoomik Bapi, general secretary of Bhiphamuri unit of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association, lodged the case, accusing him of making 'unfair demands'.

Partial payment

FROM PAGE 20

enforcers during this time. Seventy workers were shown arrested and sent to Khulna district jail.

Meanwhile, security forces were deployed yesterday in and around all state-owned jute mills, eight in total, to ensure peace and calm during the payments of the workers' arrears.

High officials of the jute mills, BJMC and the district administration are monitoring the payment process, said the BJMC zonal coordinator.

British consultant

FROM PAGE 1

noticed that Davis was missing. Woodburn turned to the mine's communication system and alarmed the stand-by rescue team.

The rescue team rushed to the spot and recovered Davis in an unconscious state.

Davis was taken to Sayedpur combined military hospital at around 11:45 am, where doctors declared him dead at around 12:30 pm.

Exact cause of his death was yet to be ascertained. "Poisoning by carbon-monoxide could be one reason. The other reason could be that the mine's air itself is so hot and humid that one can become seriously ill from it. In such a case, Davis might have lost consciousness and fell awkwardly on the floor suffering head injury that led to his death," the source said.

As per the law, the body of Davis will be sent to England for autopsy and burial formalities. He came to Bangladesh on April 12.

"The IMC will now investigate the cause of his death. Till this investigation is over, we cannot say for sure what caused the death," the source added.

Expressing condolence at the death of the consultant, Petrobangla yesterday formed a committee asking it to file a report in this regard within seven days.

In a press release, it said his body would be kept in a mortuary in Dhaka before it is sent to England.

This is the first instance of a foreign consultant's death inside this hazardous mine, though not the first instance of death there. About eight years ago, a couple of local mining workers died in an accident.

"The air and working condition inside the mine is now very hazardous even for a healthy man. It is so hot and humid that a few hours of stay underground can make you very ill," a mining official told The Daily Star.

"The mine is constantly being flooded with water having a temperature of 48 degree Celsius, which we need to pump out round the clock. There are frequent roof collapse, and the mine's columns supporting the roof have developed alignment mismatches," he added.

The hot water phenomenon is new and mysterious. But mining engineers believe there must be a fault inside the mining area that connects the water reservoir with a source of volcanic chamber.

With a bloated price tag of over Tk 1,600 crore under Chinese Supplier's Credit, the mine stumbled due to numerous problems since 1998 because of poor project design and implementation by Chinese company CMC, and corruption by a local business house that profited from it. As a result, the mine's initial target of producing one million tonnes of coal has now come down to 500,000 tonnes (officially 700,000 tonnes), while the mine remains the country's most hazardous work place with alarming degradation of local environment.

The first major disaster took place in 1998 when the mine became flooded with uncontrollable water flow from sub-soil reservoirs. As the CMC could not handle this problem, it relocated the underground mine's shaft. For the next three years, the mine's development progressed at snail's pace.

The mining work resumed halfheartedly after 2001 but on September 30, 2005 it faced another blow when there was an alarming rise of gas in zone-1110.

Robbers also sedated Humayun Kabir, 30, at Gulistan, Abdul Malek, 50, an employee of Kamalapur Inland Container Depot, at Mohakhali, Ilias Hossain, 28, an employee of Sonali Bank, at Paltan and Shaheen, 24, at Sayedabad Bus Terminal and took their money, cellphones and other valuables.

All the seven victims and three other unidentified victims of drug-ging were admitted to DMCH.

US House okays

FROM PAGE 20

Nancy Pelosi played up the thousands of casualties endured by US troops and the 'scores of thousands' of Iraqi lives lost in the war, which she added would 'cost well over a trillion dollars if it ended today.'

"The sacrifices borne by our troops and their families demand more than the blank checks the president is asking for, for a war without end," she said.

She urged Bush "to sign the bill so that we can focus on winning the war against terrorism, which is the real threat to the American people."

Democrats were also boosted by the release of a poll that showed a majority of Americans side with them on the issue and believe victory in Iraq is no longer possible.

According to the NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, 56 percent said they agreed with setting a deadline for troop withdrawal, while 37 percent sided with Bush in opposing the move.

The bill provides more cash than the administration sought to bankroll operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but says US troops are to start withdrawing from Iraq in October, with a non-binding target of completing the pullout by March 31.

Petraeus urged lawmakers to withhold judgment on the latest US drive for success in Iraq despite a spike in violence including in Diyala on Monday where nine US troops were killed.

He spoke of nearly "breath-taking" progress in parts of Iraq since the US military began its "surge" of troops to secure the country.

"We are ahead, I think, with

The authorities suspended extraction of coal and evacuated all workers, abandoning mining equipment. On October 5, sensing deadly carbon dioxide and burning methane underground in the mine area, miners sealed off an area of 450 metres by 120 metres. Carbon monoxide causes instant death.

Mine sources said this disaster has happened because the Chinese contractor had left highly inflammable coal pits exposed to air since May 2005 and the mining authorities overlooked the matter. Mining norms dictate that coal pits should not be left exposed to air for more than 24 hours as this can lead to self-combustion of coal and emission of gas.

The mine's work remained totally suspended between October 2006 and April 2007 as the CMC refused to work demanding various payments including one instalment of the Supplier's Credit taken by Bangladesh. This suspension also stopped power generation by the 250 megawatt Barapukuria power plant.

Side by side with resuming mining activities, Barapukuria Coal Mine Company Ltd (BCMCL) had asked the CMC to recover the costly mining equipment. As part of it, the mine's British consultant IMC had brought in ventilation expert Davis.

Meanwhile, sources concerned said the 250-MW coal-based Barapukuria thermal power plant just steps into full swing operation as they are now getting 75 percent of coal requirement from the BCMCL. The plant is importing the rest from India.

The mine has a deposit of about 390 million tonnes of high quality bituminous coal within 6.68 sq km area, but less than 20 percent of it can be extracted using the underground mining method, sources mentioned.

Barapukuria project was approved in March 1992 with the target of its completion by July 31, 2001 at a cost of Tk 887 crore. This cost was pushed to more than Tk 1,600 crore but the contractors have failed to hand over a productive and complete mine even six years behind the schedule.

Cop, govt staff

FROM PAGE 20

discovered lying unconscious.

Ashrafuddin, 26, was sedated at the Zia International Airport bus stop as he was waiting for a bus to go to his home in Mymensingh. He had returned to Bangladesh from Dubai around noon.

"Some people made me have tea as soon as I reached the bus stop. After regaining consciousness, I found foreign currency worth Tk 30,000, a cellphone and my passport missing," Ashraf told The Daily Star at DMCH.

In another incident robbers tranquillised Alamgir Hossain Samon, 32, a computer engineer, and took Tk 25,000 and his cellphone in a bus on its way to Elephant Road from Banani around 11:00am.

Robbers also sedated Humayun Kabir, 30, at Gulistan, Abdul Malek, 50, an employee of Kamalapur Inland Container Depot, at Mohakhali, Ilias Hossain, 28, an employee of Sonali Bank, at Paltan and Shaheen, 24, at Sayedabad Bus Terminal and took their money, cellphones and other valuables.

All the seven victims and three other unidentified victims of drug-ging were admitted to DMCH.

US House okays

respect ... to the reduction of sectarian murders in Baghdad," he told reporters, after meeting with representatives and senators in Congress.

"Progress in Anbar is almost something that's breathtaking," he added, referring to the western Sunni province hit hard by a violent insurgency.

Republican Duncan Hunter, ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, said Petraeus "reminded us... this is a test