

Veteran Republicans warn Bush over Iraq

AFP, Washington

In the clearest sign yet of Republican anxiety over Iraq, two party elder statesmen have urged President George W Bush to begin pulling US troops out of the sectarian cross-fire by the end of the year.

A new blueprint by Senators Richard Lugar and John Warner was similar to plans from anti-war Democrats to yank soldiers out of the cauldron, with an important difference -- it did not include a hard date for troop withdrawals to be completed.

Lugar and Warner released their plan Friday, a day after Bush rejected any changes to the war plan until US commander in Iraq General David Petraeus gives a definitive report on his troop "surge" strategy within two months.

"We are attempting to ensure that US military and diplomatic policy is prepared for change when the Petraeus report arrives in September," Lugar said.

"We are hopeful that regardless of where senators stand on surge versus withdrawal, they will find our amendment to be a constructive bipartisan attempt to prepare for whatever policy follows in the coming months."

The plan also calls on Congress to reauthorise Bush to conduct military operations in Iraq, and to replace the 2002 authority he was granted by

lawmakers, which became the basis of the invasion in 2003.

Bush vowed to stick to his current course in Iraq on Thursday after a keenly awaited interim report on the surge showed only meagre progress by the Iraqi government on a set of benchmarks for military and political progress.

The Lugar-Warner amendment, which appears designed to unite those Republicans who have broken with Bush on the war with anti-war Democrats, calls for a new plan narrowing the mission of US troops in Iraq to be delivered to Congress by October 16.

The president should be ready to start carrying out the new approach by the end of the year, the amendment to a defence policy bill currently being debate in the Senate said.

It called for US troops to be transitioned from "policing the civil strife or sectarian violence in Iraq" and their redeployment as "conditions permit."

Chandpur plant

FROM PAGE 16 stipulated timeframe under the Public Procurement Regulations (PPR) 2003.

As per PPR 2003, any implementation agency has to sign the contract with the selected contractor within 21 days from the issuance of the NOA. The PDB officials claimed that they failed to sign the contract within the stipulated timeframe because of the delay in getting necessary approval of the Ecneec (Executive Committee of National Economic Council). They said the planning ministry also took more than a year to give its green signal.

The sources, however, said the delay was actually caused due to the unwillingness of a section of PDB officials in signing the contract with the contractor for unknown reasons.

Recently, PDB invited Harbin to sign the contract, but the company refused to do so, arguing that due to an inordinate delay by about 16 months, the cost of the equipment on the international market has significantly gone up.

The Chinese contractor set a condition that they can sign the contract only if the project cost is raised to \$ 66 million in place of earlier \$ 45 million on grounds of price escalation on the international market.

The sources said the latest condition of the contractor placed PDB in a dilemma, as the PPR 2003 does not permit such enhanced project cost. On the other hand, if the PDB goes for re-tendering of the project, the entire process will take another about one and a half years and also increase the project cost due to worldwide price-escalation.

In a recent development, PDB referred the issue to the power ministry for a final decision. But instead of giving its decision, the power ministry forwarded the matter to the Law Ministry seeking a legal opinion.

Korean sweater

FROM PAGE 16 goods were burned down because the fire fighting units arrived late at the factory.

In response, Fire Service and Civil Defense officials said that the delay occurred because they were having trouble maneuvering their fire engines through the narrow alleys in the area. They also mentioned that two of the fire fighters, Selim and Shahidul Islam, were injured while trying to bring the blaze under control.

Quoting a security guard of the factory, police said that the factory shut down at 11:00pm on Friday and only three security guards were on duty outside the building.

The security guard said he notified some officials at the old building of the factory as soon as he noticed thick plumes of smoke rising from the ground floor of the new building at around 1:40am.

Factory officials said they lost sweaters made of fleece worth around Tk.4 lakh, raw materials and over 300 machines in the fire.

Factory officials visited the factory yesterday morning.

Police and fire brigade officials were unable to identify the cause of the fire.

Poll 'roadmap'

FROM PAGE 1 their photographs taken.

However, the EC may send enumerators on door-to-door visits only to distribute the voter registration forms and collect particulars of prospective voters, officials in the EC Secretariat said.

The EC is expected to say whether it would consult with political parties before finalising the draft proposals for electoral reforms. Sources in the EC, however, said the EC might request the government again to lift the ban on indoor politics allowing the EC to hold talks with political parties.

The CEC on April 4 at a meeting with the law adviser asked the government to withdraw its ban on indoor politics so that the commission could have talks with political parties.

When The Daily Star contacted Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain yesterday he declined to elaborate on the EC's plan. "We will announce the roadmap tomorrow [today] and you will know everything in details," he said.

"We want to complete the preparatory work for holding the polls as soon as possible. Once the preparatory work is done, we will ask the government to create a congenial atmosphere for holding the polls," the election commissioner added.

The CEC on April 5 announced an 18-month timeframe for preparing simultaneously a voter list with photographs and national identity cards. He also made public a set of draft proposals for electoral reforms.

In April, chief adviser to the caretaker government in his address to the nation said the stalled ninth parliamentary elections would be held before the end of 2008.

Sajeda

FROM PAGE 1 the name) not a distortion of history?" she posed the question.

Sajeda said that Hasina had purchased the frigate, as the country needed it. "But the irony of fate is that a case has been filed against her (Hasina) for that," she added.

She said that the movement and war that started under the leadership of Bangabandhu has not ended yet.

The AL leader observed that the caretaker government have come to rescue the nation and they have been doing some good work.

Sajeda, however, noted that the government is ignoring the person who had brought the independence of the country. "The present government is not taking any step to carry out the verdict of Bangabandhu murder case," she lamented.

About the allegation of corruption against her, the AL leader said that this kind of allegation has been brought to defame her.

DU TEACHERS BARRED FROM MEETING HASINA

The law enforcers yesterday barred a group of around 30 teachers of Dhaka University (DU) from entering Sudha Sadan, residence of Awami League (AL) president Sheikh Hasina, saying that they are under orders.

"We are angry and shocked at the government decision," Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, former president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta), told reporters at the entrance of Sudha Sadan.

"Since there is no Section 144 imposed and the country is not under military rule, then why the government is not allowing us (to meet her)," former DU vice-chancellor (VC) Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said.

They had come to greet the AL chief upon her becoming a grandmother, Prof Chowdhury added.

Blasting the government decision, the DU teachers said, "It is possible to meet even the detained persons but we were not allowed to meet Sheikh Hasina."

"On instructions of the higher authorities we cannot allow you to enter Sudha Sadan," Sub-Inspector of Dhanmondi Police Station Amirul Islam told the DU teachers when they came.

BTTB network

FROM PAGE 1 percent were not getting proper services because of problems in a certain set of routers.

The other ISPs were getting proper services as there is no technical problem, he said. Other corporate clients were also getting steady services.

The ISPs have a total demand of 577 megabyte per second (mbps).

Four BTTB experts were working to restore the network at the BTTB Moghbazar Submarine Cable Gateway and to find out why the network was affected. "For some unknown reasons, some of the routers are overloaded," said the source.

"The links are up, but there is data-packet loss. As a result, an ISP that has a demand of 12mbps is perhaps getting 4 to 5mbps," said the source.

The ISPAB claimed that BTTB was giving "special treatment" to three ISPs--including the Grameenphone--to continue uninterrupted Internet services. ISPAB protested this "special treatment".

The association pointed out that the Moghbazar gateway has only three engineers and even though the Internet service usage from there is heavy, there is no proper system of getting client services.

"To deal with any problem, one has to directly contact the engineers or the divisional engineers. This is not desirable. The ISP association has been demanding for long to increase the manpower at the gateway but there were no effective initiative," it said.

A BTTB high official refuted the ISPAB's allegation that three clients--including the Grameenphone--were getting special treatment.

"Sixty percent of the ISPs are unaffected--not just three ISPs. May be these 40 percent ISPs are big and serving a great number of users. They have to understand that the problem lies with equipment that are dedicated

to these 40 percent ISPs," he said, adding, "We cannot shut down service to Grameenphone to provide service to affected ISPs. That's unfair."

He said the problems of each ISP were being resolved one by one from yesterday afternoon.

"We hope that all network related problems will be resolved within this month," he said.

The BTTB is currently installing new routers and switches that would increase its present processing capacity by 200 times. The project will be completed within this month.

The BTTB's Internet backbone service is often under-performing because of bad network. "The old equipment had their limitations. Right now we are configuring our new network equipment and we are in a transitional phase," the official added.

NU clarification

FROM PAGE 1 The clarification claimed that the VC never takes any decision alone and all decisions taken by the VC need approval of the syndicate.

Our Reply The NU clarification does not mention anything about the main focus of The Daily Star report that the 86 NU teachers do not take classes at the NU-affiliated colleges.

The clarification said these teachers teach PhD and MPhil courses and conduct teachers' training courses. But only professors can conduct the PhD and MPhil courses and according to NU sources, only two are professors among these 86 NU teachers.

The sources also said the NU authorities have to hire professors from other public universities, especially Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University, for running the PhD and MPhil courses.

The university also hires professors and qualified teachers from other universities to run the training courses and is compelled to spend a large amount of money for this purpose.

The Daily Star report quoted the NU VC's statement that said the directive was postponed in the face of strong protest from the NU teachers.

The report referred to both the VC and the dean who alleged that the teachers misbehaved with them and other top officials of the university for issuing the notice.

The university sources provided The Daily Star with a photocopy of the teachers' attendance register that shows a poor attendance of the teachers.

We stand by our story.

VoIP tools seized

FROM PAGE 16 The two arrested officials were handed over to Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) by Rab. The two were identified as Rafiqul Islam, technical director, and Faizur Rahman, senior manager, of Bay Phones, a Public Switched Telecom Network (PSTN) private operator in Chittagong.

Acting on a tip-off, the Rab teams, led by officials and engineers of the BTRC, started examining equipment used by the phone company and found that the company had installed two extra "Excel switch" beside their normal phone network.

The investigation was conducted simultaneously at the head office of Bay Phones in the capital and its main switch room on Jamal Khan road in Chittagong.

Following information extracted from the officials of the company, the equipment pieces were recovered from Halishahar, Mogoltuli, GEC intersection, Lalkhan Bazar and Sadarghat.

"The network system the phone company had for terminating calls was distinctive, sophisticated and modern," said Lt. Col. Asif Ahmed

Ansari, director, intelligence wing, Rab.

The company was terminating calls through three American carriers named Bridge Communications, PCCW and BGLO. Bay Phones has lone official agreement with Bridge Communications.

The owner of the company, Abul Hashem, an expatriate in America, received money from the American companies in foreign currency in America.

As the number of calls using BTTB operator has decreased significantly in recent days, the intelligence wing of Rab initiated an investigation into the VoIP business and found Bay Phones running a VoIP business by terminating calls illegally, sources said.

BTRC is likely to file a case against the company.

Rab conducted the raid as part of their ongoing drive against VoIP businesses that violate the Bangladesh Telecommunications Act 2001. The elite force started busting illegal VoIP centres in the capital in December last year.

Reformists mull

FROM PAGE 1 she does not consent to it," Bhuiyan said when asked why he feels the necessity of a requisition meeting.

"A preparatory committee will be formed to organise the council. And as per party constitution, this committee will decide who will chair the council," the BNP secretary general said.

Sources mentioned that pro-reforms leaders have already started collecting signatures of party councillors as part of preparations for a requisition meeting to take decision on holding party council without the participation of Khaleda.

Meanwhile, Mannan Bhuiyan firmly rejected party Joint Secretary General Gayeshwar Chandra Roy's reported remark that he (Bhuiyan) had assured him the party council would be held under the leadership of Khaleda.

Gayeshwar reportedly made the remark after meeting Bhuiyan at his Gulshan residence on Friday.

"I have no links with his [Gayeshwar] comment. We did not even discuss the council though he supported our reform proposals," Bhuiyan said. He just told him that council would be held according to the party constitution, and there was no discussion on under whose leadership it would be held, he added.

Faizee

FROM PAGE 1 pending when Faizee filed a writ petition against the Chittagong University syndicate's charge that his LLB degree was false.

A meeting of the CU Syndicate on March 3 cancelled the certificates of around 2,000 LLB and other examinees, including Faizee, on charge of tampering with tabulation sheets. The CU authority published a gazette notification in this regard on March 11.

Faizee filed the writ petition on March 19 challenging the gazette notification.

Following the petition, the HC stayed the enforcement of the gazette.

A source close to Faizee, meanwhile, said the controversial judge denied having 180 cases pending.

According to Faizee's claim, during his two years as an HC judge, he spent six months on vacation and was unable to sit on cases because of the media spotlight on his controversial appointment.

He said it was impossible for him to have conducted so many cases within such a short period.

Faizee took charge as an additional judge on August 23, 2004 and was made a permanent HC judge from August 2006.

Supreme Court Bar Association President Amir-Ul Islam told the press, "It should have happened a long time ago, because the position of a judge is simply not a 'job', it is a constitutional post."

He said, "One can only remain a judge with the trust of the people. So, even if he [Faizee] resigns now, he cannot evade the responsibility of his crimes."

Former Attorney General Barister Rafique-ul Haq said, "Faizee should have resigned a long time ago. The image of the higher judiciary has already been tarnished because of him. But I thank him for finally coming to his senses."

Veteran constitution expert M Zahir said, "As a judge Faizee had insulted the position. Now after his resignation, all darkness surrounding the Supreme Court has cleared."

Senior lawyer ABM Nurul Islam said, "All verdicts made by Faizee should be reconsidered and criminal cases should be filed against him."

Our correspondent at Chittagong University (CU) reports: The CU authority is waiting for the verdict on the writ petition filed by Faizee to take the next course of action.

"If the verdict is in favour of the university syndicate, we will proceed for immediate implementation of the decisions taken in the March 3 syndicate meeting," CU Vice-Chancellor Prof M Badiul Alam said.

Sohel F Rahman

FROM PAGE 1 F Rahman on March 19 and March 20, the court ordered Sohul to appear before it.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case Monirul Islam submitted a charge sheet against the two that said that the accused took money from people on the promise of allocating plots, but did not do it.

Pak Red Mosque

FROM PAGE 16 vehicle in the town of Bannu.

Another soldier was shot and wounded at a security checkpoint just outside Miranshah, where security forces also said they defused two missiles set up to target a military camp in the town.

A local militant commander threatened "guerrilla war" against the military in the tribal region over setting up of new check posts last week and issued a Sunday deadline for them to leave the posts.

Speaking from an undisclosed location, the pro-Taliban militant accused the government of violating a peace deal signed with tribes and militants last September despite heavy criticism from Western allies and Afghanistan.

"If the government troops do not vacate the checkpoints by July 15, we will end the existing peace agreement with the government and launch a guerrilla war," Farhad told AFP by telephone.

Two suicide blasts killed eight people on Thursday, and police Friday said they seized three men and a car packed with seven suicide vests, 100 mortar shells and other explosives in northwestern Dera Ismail Khan.

Harris Chy's home

FROM PAGE 1 A forest official filed the case against Harris on charge of illegal rearing of wildlife after six spotted deer were seized from his Kanaighat residence on March 19.

Harris Chowdhury has been absconding since the crackdown on corrupt politicians by the army led joint forces.

Commissioner

FROM PAGE 1 Centre in Moghbazar at 12:30pm.

Sources said the flat from which Salu was arrested belongs to one of his relatives. The identity of the relative, however, could not be known.

Following information provided by the ward commissioner, a member of the elite force raided his residence in Mohammadpur and made the recovery.

He is an accused in seven cases filed with Mohammadpur Police station and had been absconding since state of emergency was declared in January.

Speaker speaks

FROM PAGE 1 Sangsad. Leaving aside the official protocol where Speaker is only second to the President in order of precedence, how can a Speaker of a sovereign parliament even think that his position is below that of the army chief? Such mentality is insulting to the high office of the Speaker and the institution and values he represents. By stating that army chief should get more prominence than the Speaker, he has undermined the importance of the office. As to the news value of our story, an injudicious action of the guardian of the parliament, verging on using official position for personal gain, is definitely worthy of national attention.

Mr Sircar claimed at the press conference that our news was intended to undermine him and that office of the Speaker. We want to categorically state that it is not we, but he himself who has undermined the high office that he holds by handling public funds the way he did. Simply put, he used the financial authority vested in him to run the parliament for his personal benefit.

The Speaker claimed that section 18 of Parliament Secretariat Act, 1994 has made him the final authority for the approval of all expenditure of allocated money for the parliament secretariat. So the first question is, was the money he took to pay his medical bill allocated in the budget of the parliament? No.

Was there any miscellaneous head of expenses linked to medical bills from which the Speaker could have taken the money? No. We repeat, the Act on which the Speaker bases his action, talks about the 'allocated money'. The medical bill was not allocated.

Our Speaker of the House appears to be totally oblivious of the distinction between being the highest financial authority of a public institution to ensure its smooth functioning and using that power to gain personal benefit from it. The power that the Act gives him is to ensure strict adherence to the existing financial rules and not to implement them for one's own self in "good faith."

In financial dealings there is no question of "good faith". Either it is sanctioned or it is not. If not, then there are special measures to be taken by authorities other than the beneficiary.

We have decided to highlight this point simply because we think what the Speaker has done has set an extremely dangerous precedent which can lead to disastrous financial consequences. What amazes us is that the Speaker appears to ignore one of the fundamental principles of financial discipline, namely the notion of "conflict of interest".

A chief, who has the right to decide about the financial or other benefits of all his subordinate staff, cannot decide the same thing about himself simply because the decision maker and the beneficiary must not be the same person. For, if they are, it will be impossible to prevent chiefs of institutions from running amok in financial matters.

The Speaker cites two previous examples of hefty medical bills, one of former speaker Mr Humayun Rashid Chowdhury of Tk 35,71,192 and the other of former chief whip Mr Abul Hasnat Abdullah for Tk 5,75,000. These examples do not hold true for

Russia pulls out

FROM PAGE 16 partners were not, and he expressed hope that Russia's move would induce Western nations to commit to the updated treaty.

"Such a situation contradicts Russia's interests," Peskov told The Associated Press. "Russia continues to expect that other nations that have signed the CFE will fulfill their obligations."

The treaty is seen as a key element in maintaining stability in Europe. It establishes limitations on countries' deployment of tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery, attack helicopters and combat aircraft.

Withdrawal from the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty would allow Moscow to build up forces near its borders.

But Russian military analysts have said the possibility of suspending participation in the treaty was a symbolic rising of ante in the missile shield showdown more than a sign of impending military escalation.

Pavel Felgenhauer, a Moscow-based defence analyst, said the moratorium probably won't result in any major buildup of heavy weaponry in European Russia. Russia has no actual interest in the highly costly build up of forces because it faces no real military threat and has no plans to launch an attack of its own, he said.

But, he said, it could mean an end to onsite inspections and verifications by Nato countries, which many European nations rely on to keep track of Russian deployments.

For the United States, the moratorium will mostly be a symbolic gesture, he said, since the US has an extensive intelligence network that keeps close track of Russian forces. But it will still be seen as another unfriendly move in Washington, Felgenhauer predicted.

"This will be a major irritant," he said. "It will seriously spoil relations. The kind of soothing effect from the last summit with Putin and (President) Bush will evaporate swiftly," he said referring a summit between the leaders earlier this month at the Bush family home in Kennebunkport, Maine.

Felgenhauer also said that there is no provision under the treaty for a moratorium, suggesting Russia was acting illegally. "This is basically non-compliance, and this is an illegal move," he said.

Mr Sircar as in both these cases the head of the government, the prime minister, had approved them. In his case the PM had sent the file back without signing. This clearly indicates that in spite of the two precedents Prime Minister Khaleda Zia did not deem it appropriate to sign. She left it to be decided in accordance with the 1994 Act. Speaker ignored the fact that Khaleda Zia did not sign though he had mentioned the two instances in his letter to her.

To make things less improper and give his action a veneer of respectability, the Speaker wrote an undertaking in which he pledged that he would 'return the money if proved unlawful by any competent authority'. This is the most absurd act for any chief of an organisation. He said in his undertaking "I have decided to pay the medical bill in good faith and on my honest understanding of the law." Imagine if the Chief Election Commissioner or the Chief of Public Service Commission (to mention two statutory bodies) or heads of government and semi government bodies (with independent financial powers sanctioned by law), the Vice-Chancellors of Universities, the MDs of banks, CEOs of companies, Executive Directors of NGOs all started writing benefits for themselves in "good faith and honest understanding of the law." What would then happen to financial discipline?

What Mr Jamiruddin Sircar appears not to understand is that the Parliament Secretariat Act, 1994 (on which his decision was based) empowers him to run the parliament secretariat for the benefit of all, except himself. One cannot use the power vested by the law on oneself, for his or her own benefit. This is more so for the position he holds. Parliament is the highest place for making law. Speaker is the guardian of that place. He must, therefore, epitomise the parliament and the whole legislative process, and not represent attempts to benefit personally either from ambiguities of law or its laboured interpretation.

In a recent speech to a meeting of Global Organisation of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC) held in Dhaka, Mr Sircar said, "Even the World Bank President Wolfowitz had to resign for corruption." The former World Bank chief did not break any law per se yet he was forced to resign because he used his office to extend undue favour, not himself, but to a friend. What should happen to someone who uses the powers of his office to extend undue favour to his own self?

The minimum he can do, to restore the dignity of his office and that of his person, is to return the fund taken by him.

Curbing loans

FROM PAGE 1 explanations on the reasons of increasing inflation rate but this time we find that the central bank has tilted to the IMF."

Debapriya said the finance adviser and the BB governor took a U-turn on the ways to control the increasing inflation rate.

The tight monetary policy would increase interest rate and thus hamper private sector investment, he thought.

Describing the current situation in banking sector, he said despite excess liquidity in banks, investment in Bangladesh is very low.

The economist suggested the central bank to lower existing interest rate to encourage more investment.

He also asked the central bank to find ways to control credit to government sector instead of pursuing the present policy targeting private sector. Government borrowing from the banking sector is huge, and the money is spent in non-productive sector, he said.

Debapriya said it is necessary to increase import of goods to keep prices of essentials stable. If banks limit credit flows, import and export promotion would also be affected.

On the WB and IMF conditions, he said the government is bowing down to the donors' conditions to get budgetary support.

One of the conditions for getting WB loan is to sign a deal with the IMF for the PRGF loan, he said. "But we don't need any loan from the IMF right now as the country's current balance of payment (BoP) situation is very much positive."

The CPD found lack of coordination in framing economic policies, and said the government's other programmes would be affected if there is no stability in economic sector.

It asked the government to review the monetary policy before implementation, considering some challenges ahead of the country's economy -- prices of products during Ramadan, Aman harvest and any possible flood.

In the wake of Aman harvest, price of hike of fertiliser, power and fuel will be disastrous, the CPD expressed.

The CPD said the next three months are very crucial for the national economy because of these challenges. "We will have to take up economic policies more cautiously," Debapriya said.

CPD Research Director Mustafizur Rahman was also present at the press briefing.