

Bush faces mounting pressure on Iraq troop reduction issue

AFP, Washington

President George W Bush, lawmakers, members of the US military and veterans were locked yesterday in an escalating political war of words over whether to reduce US troop levels in Iraq.

With just weeks before a key September 15 progress report on the unpopular war, Bush faced mounting pressure to announce that he would bring home at least some of the roughly 160,000 US troops in Iraq.

A grim formal report from the 16 US intelligence agencies found that Iraq's political leaders are "unable to govern" effectively but warned that a drawdown of US forces could dramatically increase sectarian violence.

Bush's Democratic critics have redoubled their calls for him to pull US forces out of Iraq, while he has accused his political foes of wanting to "pull the rug out" from under US troops on the front lines.

And the White House has set the emotionally loaded date of September 11 for the top US commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, and the US ambassador in Baghdad, Ryan Crocker, to testify to Congress about the war.

The outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, denied a report that he was poised to urge Bush to cut US force levels in Iraq by nearly half next year to ease the strain the war has placed on the military.

The Los Angeles Times, citing administration and military officials, said Pace was likely to advise Bush that maintaining more than 100,000

HR Watch

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be able to seek and obtain an effective remedy before competent authorities.

Sophie Richardson, Asia advocacy director at HRW said: "While the protesters should remain peaceful and must exercise restraint to prevent loss of life and property, the government should immediately address some of their legitimate concerns instead of arbitrarily arresting people, beating detainees and fuelling anger."

Mentioning the cause of recent student protests and its aftermath, the HRW said the law enforcers have carried out several raids on Dhaka University campus and elsewhere, detaining academics and students, including five university teachers, presumably on the grounds of alleged involvement in the rioting.

The HRW said journalist associations in Bangladesh have alleged that law enforcement officers have harassed journalists during curfew hours. "Several newspapers and television networks reported that law enforcers beat up their journalists while they were gathering information on the demonstrations," it said, adding many of the journalists were attacked despite carrying press identification, which is supposed to serve as a curfew pass.

Richardson said, "The government can take steps to make sure a protest is peaceful, but it must above all respect its human rights obligations when doing so."

Recent violence

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their resentments at the caretaker government for its different activities in the last seven months," said former Dhaka University (DU) vice-chancellor (VC) Prof Emajuddin Ahmed.

Asked whether there was any vested interested group instigating the violence, he said the matter should be inquired properly.

Prof Ahmed, a renowned political scientist, also said the nation does not want its army to be controversial.

Taking part in the discussion held in Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital, Awami League (AL) leader Abdul Matin Khasru suggested that the whole matter should be solved through a proper impartial investigation of the reasons behind the recent violence.

"Without carrying out any inquiry the government already said some evil forces had created the anarchy, which I think tends to bypass the main problems," said Khasru. He also apprehended that the situation might worsen if the government does not take early measures to solve the problems.

The AL leader said the army is the symbol of the country's unity. "So no one should do any thing that might make the army controversial," said Khasru criticising the recent filing of cases against thousands of people.

Khasru, a former law and parliamentary affairs minister, urged all to beware of those who are trying to make the army controversial by giving legal advice to the government.

Former director general of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) Maj Gen (retd) Ghulam Quader said the present government already made a number of wrong moves for which the country's economy has been badly hurt. "It was a serious wrong decision of the government to set up an army camp on Dhaka University campus as its students have a history of being sensitive about the presence of the army on the campus," said Gen Quader.

Saying that the demonstrations were justified following one of the army soldiers' maltreatment of some students, he added, the vandalism carried out by the students however was also very wrong. He also observed that there is a conspiracy to

of the 162,000 troops in Iraq through 2008 would place severe strains on the military.

Such a recommendation, which the Times said would be offered privately, would highlight differences within the military and the government over Iraq, eight months after Bush's "surge" policy boosted troop levels by 30,000.

"The story is wrong. It is speculative. I have not made nor decided on any recommendation yet," Pace, who steps down in September, said in a statement.

In an earlier statement, the general said: "The Joint Chiefs and I always review a wide range of options on any issue."

"I take very seriously my duty to provide the best military advice to the president. I provide that advice privately to the president."

White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe predicted a media feeding frenzy "about what different people are recommending, what they're not recommending -- more troops, less troops, stay the same."

Meanwhile, a senior US commander said any reduction of US troops in his area of Iraq this year would be "a giant step backwards," allowing insurgents to regain sanctuaries wrested from them in hard fighting.

Cox's Bazar

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Another team recovered six firearms from Puran Bazar area of Matarbari Island in Moheshkhali yesterday and arrested a woman named Anwara Begum.

Later, the naval force recovered two firearms from Sapmara area under Dhalgahata Union of the island and arrested a man in this connection.

Move to form

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in the country, according to CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim who was present at the meeting.

All members of the Council of Advisers, the cabinet secretary and the secretaries concerned were present in the meeting at the CA's office.

Zillur

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place on Dhaka University campus last week.

"It's not justified to blame the political parties for the incident on Dhaka University campus," Zillur said.

About the arrest of the university teachers, he said the teachers community is the most respectable and honoured one in society. "I don't think that it was necessary to arrest some teachers of Dhaka and Rajshahi universities. The situation could be dealt with tolerance."

The acting AL chief demanded their immediate release and said legal actions can be taken against the teachers if they are found involved in crime after investigation.

Govt says

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Shahbagh Police Station, four with Dhanmondi, four with New Market, four with Kotwali, two with Gulshan, two with Ramna, two with Sutrapur, one each with Mohammadpur, Paltan, Mirpur and Motijheel police stations.

Investigating officers of different police stations told journalists that they would identify the protesters with the help of photographs published in different newspapers and the television footages. They will also consider the accounts of eye-witnesses of the incidents.

Other than the students, several politicians acted as instigators of the incidents, they said, adding that they would identify those instigators and seek help from intelligence agencies.

Makbul Hossain Tipu, commissioner of ward No 76, was arrested at his Narinda residence on charge of instigating the protesters in different areas of the city.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Nayeem Ahmed told The Daily Star that the actual number of accused would be much lower. The number is a bit inflated as one person was implicated in more than one case in different police stations, he said.

Our Khulna correspondent adds: Six hundred unidentified people were sued with Daulatpur Police Station for their involvement in assaulting law enforcers and damaging private and public properties.

POLICE STATEMENT
A police press release yesterday said: In the backdrop of the unwarranted incident that took place on the Dhaka University playground, some unruly people broke the Emergency Power Rules on August 20, 21 and 22 and resorted to widespread vandalism, looting and arson.

The unruly elements attacked the law enforcers and prevented them from performing their official duty. They bashed vehicles at Shahbag and set fire to a military car in front of Aziz Supermarket and assaulted drivers. They randomly damaged vehicles in front of Jagannath University and set them on fire. They also damaged vehicles at Gulistan and Fulbaria areas and torched a BRTC bus. The mob threw stones at the offices of DC and SP of Dhaka and vandalised the police club. They also attacked the Nilkhet police outpost and tried to set it on fire, threw petrol bombs on police and set fire to Science Laboratory police box.

They set fire to the electricity office at English Road. They also damaged vehicles in front of Titumir College at Mohakhali, attacked Square Building and tried to attack New Market Police Station. They attacked Sergeant Ahad Police Box and set fire to a house on Dhanmondi Road 27. They also attacked the residence of an adviser and caused extensive damage to government and private offices and created panic among people. When the police tried to control the mob, they attacked the law enforcers leaving four DCs, 3 ACs and 74 other policemen injured.

Sources said the teachers on remand might be sent to Dhaka for further quizzing.

The IO sought his 10-day remand to find out the names and whereabouts of his accomplices.

Defence lawyers said Helal was not involved in such activities. He has been suffering from jaundice.

They said Helal was tortured after he was arrested. The remand sought by the IO should be turned down, they added.

DB police arrested Helal from his Moghbazar residence in the capital on Friday morning.

The IO of the case SI Moktar Hossain successfully petitioned the court to place each of them on a 10-day remand for questing in connection with violating the EPR.

The defence lawyers claimed that the court did not bother to follow the standard procedure in granting remand and did whatever the IO had wanted it to do.

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Govt to go for

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exceed the budgetary target if additional

financial support does not come from donors, finance ministry sources said, adding that probable money shortage may result in more inflation.

Finance ministry sources said the ministry is very much cautious about post-flood allocation to check the government's borrowing from banks.

According to primary estimate of the ministry, floods caused \$2.3 billion economic losses in 2004 while the loss due to the current year's flooding will be half the amount, ministry officials said.

The government has already decided to allocate Tk 4,200 crore for post-flood rehabilitation and immediate relief programmes.

The government, anxious to avoid being heavily dependent upon borrowing from banks, is looking for additional financial supports from the donors and already met twice with the donors for the additional support.

The planning ministry is collecting information on flood-related damage from different ministries to estimate the total losses that will be conveyed to the World Bank for considering additional assistance.

The World Bank is the chair of Local Consultative Group (LCG) that comprises multilateral and bilateral donors of the country.

After having discussion with other members of LCG, the World Bank will inform the government about what they will do against government's immediate requirements, Economic Relations Division sources said.

The government is also planning to take some austerity measures, sources said.

As per the plan, government may reduce its entertainment allowance and transportation costs. Implementation of some low priority projects under annual development programme (ADP) may also be delayed to manage government expenditure.

To check misuse of the ADP money, the government has decided to formulate two committees to monitor implementation of the projects, sources said, adding that the committees will comprise social elite, government officials and law enforcers.

University teachers

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academics were taken to the court in a prison van.

In the forwarding report, IO of the case Sub-Inspector Ali Asghar Khan said the information gleaned during the interrogation suggests that the accused had endorsed the activities like processions, slogans and rampages on the DU campus between 3:00pm on August 20 and 2:00am on August 21.

Besides, they took position at different points on the campus and made statements seeking to incite the unruly students and public to pull down the army post at the DU gymnasium.

Provoked by the accused, the unruly mob set fire to tyres, put barricades on the roads and damaged public properties. They also pelted the on-duty policemen with brickbats, stones and other projectiles.

Now the detainees need to be questioned for information that might lead to capture of the other accused on the run.

In the case filed with Shahbagh Police Station, SI Sirajul Islam alleged that unidentified students, teachers and outsiders totalling up to 2,000 went on the rampage.

Our staff Correspondent in Rajshahi reports: A metropolitan magistrate's court here placed RU professors Saidur Rahman, Abmus Sobhan and Moloy Kumar Bhowmik on a 10-day remand each.

Earlier on Friday, the three were seized by the security forces at their campus residences.

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REACTION OF TEACHERS' SONS

Anwar Hossain's son Sanjeev Hossain, who met his father at the court, quoting his father, told reporters, "He (Anwar) was kept at the intelligence agencies' black hole. He was tortured not only psychologically but also physically."

"We were not prepared to hear that our father was tortured physically," Sanjeev said adding, "We received the news that he will be taken into remand. If he were taken to jail, at least no one would hurt him there. But now it's all uncertain."

"We are seriously concerned because we do not know where our father will be taken to for the next four days," he said.

Harun-or-Rashid's son Ishiaque Rashid told reporters that he found his father exhausted when he met him.

He said, "Of course we are concerned. If teachers are treated this way and taken into remand then no one is safe and we are concerned about our own security."

"If they treat teachers like this, how would they treat ordinary citizens?"

HELAL REMANDED

The same court yesterday placed detained Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) president Azizul Baree Helal on a five-day remand in a case for disrupting law and order on the DU campus.

In the forwarding report, the IO of the case mentioned that the accused gathered students and people at different places on the DU campus from 10:30pm on August 20 to 12:00noon on August 21 violating the EPR.

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Pakistan test fires new air-launched cruise missile

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday successfully test fired a new air-launched cruise missile capable of carrying nuclear weapons, the military said in a statement.

The locally developed Ra'ad (Half-8) missile -- Ra'ad means thunder in Arabic -- has a range of 350 kilometres (217 miles) and uses stealth design and materials, it said.

The missile "has been designed exclusively for launch from a variety of Pakistan's air platforms, providing these with a strategic stand-off capability on land and at sea," it said.

"The Ra'ad can carry all types of warheads and has an accuracy comparable to Pakistan's longer Babur cruise missile," the statement said. Pakistan last test fired the Babur, which has a 700-kilometre range, in July.

President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz congratulated the scientists and engineers involved in designing the new cruise missile, it added.

"Pakistan's defence will continue to be strengthened as an imperative of national security," the military statement quoted the two leaders as saying.

41 killed

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Firefighters were unable to reach all fires in time as strong winds fanned the flames and the fires spread.

Fires continued to progress in the two southern areas Saturday, but the threat to inhabited areas has shifted to another blaze in the central Peloponnese in the region of Megalopolis where several villages were evacuated Saturday morning.

Some 19 planes and 18 helicopters have been deployed to fight the fires, while the army has sent 420 soldiers to reinforce the firefighters and has planes on stand-by if needed for rescue operations.

Responding to Greece's call for help to the European Union, France said it was sending two water-dropping Canadian planes which were scheduled to land at Elefsis military airport late Saturday afternoon, the French interior ministry said.

In all, Greece on Saturday was battling 33 fires around the country, including 22, which have ignited since Friday night raising suspicions of possible arson, a fire services spokesman said.

"We are fighting a battle simultaneously on many fronts, under particularly adverse conditions," said Karamanlis.

Greece has been battling multiple forest fires since June, fanned by three heatwaves, the latest this week, and months of drought. Tens of thousands of hectares (acres) have gone up in smoke, making this summer's fires the worst in 10 years.

Due to the tragic death toll from the fires, the political opposition has refrained from criticising the effectiveness of the government in dealing with the crisis -- even as the country is scheduled to hold legislative elections on September 16.

Karamanlis called on Greeks to unite in order "to bring an end to the current crisis" and said the state "would do everything to heal the deep wounds" left by the disaster.

The Popular Resistance Committees, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and an armed group from the leftist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the latest "joint attack on Israeli territory."

A joint statement identified the dead as Khader Aokal, 22, a militant from the Popular Resistance Committees, and Mohammed Saker, 22, from the DFLP.

The Popular Resistance Committees said one of its fighters acted as a watchman for the two others, but did not cross the border.

The groups boasted that they "managed to infiltrate Israeli territory and reach the Netiv Haassarah settlement where its two martyred fighters fought for three hours with the Israeli army."

The same groups also claimed responsibility for a joint operation in the northern Gaza Strip on Friday evening in which two Palestinian fighters were killed by Israeli troops.

The Gaza Strip is now run by the Islamist group Hamas, which captured the territory in June from forces loyal to the secular Fatah faction of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

The incidents marked a surge in clashes with the Israeli army in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In the northern West Bank town of Jenin on Saturday, Israeli forces killed one Islamic Jihad militant wanted