

Bomb kills 33 as Iraqis take charge of security

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi forces were in control of towns and cities nationwide yesterday after the pullout of US troops six years after the invasion, but a bloody car bombing underscored the tough challenge ahead.

The landmark day was marred by a bomb attack on a popular market in Kirkuk, an oil hub which has long been driven by ethnic tensions, which left 33 people dead and 92 wounded including women and children.

"The explosion occurred at a very busy time. I only saw fire and my stall was thrown over. I saw traders on fire in their shops and there were dead and wounded people on the ground," said Aras Omar Ghaffour, a 28-year-old vegetable stallholder.

Iraq marked the American pullback with a national holiday six years after the invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein but sparked an insurgency and sectarian bloodshed that left tens of thousands dead.

US President Barack Obama, who opposed the 2003 war ordered by his predecessor George W Bush, hailed the US withdrawal as an "important milestone" but warned of difficult days of bloodshed and violence ahead.

American troops were to have quit built-up areas by midnight (2100 GMT), ahead of a complete pullout ordered by Obama by the end of 2011.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-

JCD gets

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not regular students even though there was tremendous pressure from the JCD to form a committee with regular students.

The other office-bearers are Senior Vice President Shahidul Islam Babul, First Joint Secretary Amiruzzaman Khan Shimul and Organising Secretary Anisur Rahman Khokon.

Sources said the new committee was asked to form a fully-fledged committee within the next 10 days.

JCD sources said the leaders of the new committee had completed their studies long ago and the new JCD president had even contested in the last parliamentary elections from Tangail constituency.

Sultan Salahuddin Tuku is the younger brother of former BNP deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu, the prime accused in August 21, 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League rally.

Tuku's another brother Maulana Tajuddin, a militant leader, is also absconding.

Govt decides

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State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam who heads the committee said, "A total of 162 cases were placed before the committee today (yesterday). Of those, 150 cases are under the Penal Code and 12 under the Anti-Corruption Commission Act. The committee has suggested withdrawal of 66 cases, including 11 ACC cases."

Of the cases to be withdrawn, three are against AL presidium member Kazi Zafarullah, two each against another presidium member Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Deputy Speaker Shawkat Ali and party leader Mohammad Nasim, three against AHM Mostafa Kamal Lotus and one against former vice chancellor of Dhaka University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury.

Replying to a query, Quamrul Islam said till yesterday they received recommendations for withdrawal of 1,842 cases from the district level committees.

Meanwhile, cases filed against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and other party leaders were not on the list for yesterday's committee meeting. Khaleda and her family members had earlier asked for withdrawal of 20 cases filed against them during the tenure of the caretaker government.

Asked about withdrawal of the cases against BNP leaders, the committee chief said they have not received any recommendations in this regard from the district committees. The government did not ask the committees to send any recommendations concerning these cases, he added.

Quamrul Islam said baseless cases like the one concerning recovery of wine from the residence of former law minister Moudud Ahmed would be of course be withdrawn.

He however said it would not be wise to think that the cases against Khaleda's sons Tareque Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko would be withdrawn along with cases against AL leaders.

The last date for submitting applications for withdrawal of cases is July 12.

Hearing of Aug 21 attack case deferred

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the hearing till July 12 on the government petitions seeking further investigation into the August 21 grenade attack cases following a time petition by the defence lawyers.

Judge Masdar Hossain of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 passed the order after defence lawyers of the accused former deputy minister and BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu submitted a petition seeking adjournment of the hearing on the petitions.

Meantime, Pintu's lawyer Sanaulah told the reporters that the prosecution had brought petitions seeking further investigation into the cases as part of a conspiracy to implicate more BNP leaders in the cases.

Moving the petitions, Sanaulah told the court that they were not in a position to take part in hearing on the issues. So, they prayed for adjournment of the hearings.

Earlier on June 25, Advocate Syed Rezaur Rahman, chief prosecution counsel, submitted two separate petitions for further investigation into the grenade attack cases.

In the petitions, the prosecution mentioned that the attacks aimed to assassinate Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina in 2004, saying that expert and influential people, who had supplied grenades, have still remained untraced.

The grisly attack on Hasina's rally on Bangabandhu Avenue killed 23 AL leaders and workers and maimed over 300.

The Criminal Investigation Department, which investigated the two cases filed in connection with the sensational incident, submitted charge sheets in June last year, accusing 21 members of Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (Huji) including its top leader Mufti Abdul Hannan and Pintu.

Hannan, Pintu and 12 others, now in jail custody, were produced before the court during yesterday's hearing.

Overloaded

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25 tonnes of weight, which is more than twice its capacity.

An expert on highway engineering at RHD told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity that the highways are built with the calculation of 'equivalent standard axle load' of 8.4 tonnes, considered as a single unit. The roads are damaged when two-axle vehicles pass on it carrying multiple such units.

According to the expert, the weight of the vehicle and the load are not evenly distributed due to overloading. He suggested that the government should introduce multi-axle trailers that can carry large amount of cargo without causing much damage to the roads.

There are two axle load control stations in the country that are supposed to monitor the axle-load of vehicles and take appropriate actions in case of violations. However, both these stations are allegedly ridden with anomalies and irregularities, and have done little to bring any regularity in this regard.

Experts suggested introduction of more axle load control stations along with proper enforcement of the existing laws to improve the situation.

Sources said the trend of overloading vehicles started with the import of heavy Japanese and Indian trucks during the early 90s. Weight limit for those trucks was fixed at 11 tonnes including the weight of the truck. But when drivers realised their vehicles could carry as much as 20 tonnes of goods, they started to ignore the restrictions violating the national norm for roads.

Bangladesh Truck Drivers Association former chairman Monirul Islam however blamed consignees for insisting upon overloading the vehicles.

Truck owners say most of the time they are not aware of the amount of load their lorries are carrying in their countrywide tours, adding that they are paying the police more for overloading.

"Truck drivers know they are breaking the law. So they do not hesitate to bribe the police. After getting money, police are also happy to overlook the overloading," said Rustam Ali Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Truck-Coveredvan Owners' Association.

PM-level talks

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Ganges Treaty as it is our main weapon," he said.

"We will not get a solution at the international level," he observed.

He also said it will not be wise to make comments on the issue without having proper information.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua said the dam would cause a massive environmental and natural disaster not only in Bangladesh but also in northeastern India.

The Awami League government during its last tenure solved the Farakka problem through the Ganges Treaty, he said, adding, "We want to solve the problem through discussion and we don't want to confuse our people through communal mentality."

Presenting a slideshow, engineer Helaluddin of Angikar Bangladesh said the dam is being built in an earthquake-prone area. If an earthquake of medium magnitude hits the area, the dam may collapse and a massive area of Bangladesh may be inundated, he added.

He went on to say big dams instigate earthquake, badly hamper water flow and affect fisheries and ecology.

The mega project is worth around 10,000 crore rupees and two Indian ministers have already inaugurated the foundation and now army is deployed in the dam area, he informed.

China on the other hand is going to construct a dam upstream Brahmaputra which will also be a problem for Bangladesh, he added.

He demanded that parliament unanimously protest construction of Tipaimukh and another dam on the Brahmaputra river. He also demanded immediate formation of the South Asian Water Tribunal.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu, MP said the Tipaimukh dam is neither environment nor human as well as neighbour friendly and its construction should stop immediately.

Apart from taking immediate political initiatives the government should approach economic and water diplomacy, he added.

Comrade Khalequzzaman of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal said sending a parliamentary delegation to the dam site may not gain substantial information.

Urging the government to make public the information received from India, he said, "We have to do homework on the information and hold talks with India."

Columnist Syed Abul Maksud said except some left-leaning political parties, neither Awami League nor BNP is talking about the issue. Even the intellectuals have

Ha-Meem boss

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Kamal were also present at the meeting, sources said.

Industrialist Salman F Rahman, adviser to Awami League President Sheikh Hasina on private sector development, led the business delegation.

He told The Daily Star that miscreants always change political parties for their benefit.

"They (miscreants) change political parties whenever there is a change in government," Salman said.

He said the prime minister assured the businessmen that the situation would be tackled to bring back normalcy to the industrial sector.

Salman said the premier has already talked with the intelligence agencies about the matter.

"Probably the prime minister has already received reports on the incident," he added.

Annisul Huq said they met Hasina for taking necessary steps to improve law and order in the garment sector.

"It is very unfortunate that some reputed factories came under attack. It indicates that we need tight security for running the factories smoothly," he said.

"Miscreants have no political party. There are some people who always change sides and vandalise factories in the name of ruling party," Annisul Huq said.

The same people, who vandalised garment factories during the tenure of the previous governments, are now attacking the factories.

He said Hasina assured them that industrial police will be introduced soon for improvement of law and order there.

Azad said, "I shall not be able to make shipments in time this year as the fire gutted almost everything at the sweater factory."

He said they are now trying to resume production on a limited scale with a few machinery kept outside the affected factory.

kept mum in this regard, he said.

He urged all to refrain from doing politics on the issue and work together through regional cooperation for the sake of the country.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said it is learned that the government has received necessary information from India about the dam but not yet made it public.

By not making the information public the government is playing a hide-and-seek game, he said, urging the government to make public the information so that the people get an idea about the dam project.

WBP President Rashed Khan Menon said the problem is political and it has to be solved politically.

"We must know the real situation and remain united to solve it through discussion," he said.

WBP General Secretary Bimol Biswas read out a paper, while Ajoy Roy, president of Communist Kendra, Engineer Sheikh Mohammad Shahidullah, convener of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port, Amena Ahmed MP and Abu Sayed Khan, managing editor of daily Samakal, also spoke.

RMG wheels

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that it might not be of any use because of the damage to the structure, said Delwar. Another team of experts will visit the building today.

Workers had also returned to the factories in good numbers despite plans by most of the affected factory owners to cull jobs to cover losses from the violence.

Manjur Rahman, manager and company secretary of Pretty Group that owns the S Suh Industrial Park, said, "More than 65 percent workers returned to work as police cordoned off the factories for security."

The unrest originated at the SSuhisweater factory.

He said the factory management has given Tk 1 lakh to the family of Al-Amin, a worker of S Suh sweater factory who died on the first day of the violence. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) will provide another Tk 2 lakh to his family.

On June 27, factories in Ashulia stopped production after violence erupted at the S Suh Industrial Park after Al-Amin's death. The spilled over violence caused damage worth around Tk 100 crore, with arsons setting alight the Ha-Meem Group's factories.

JUBO LEAGUE INVOLVEMENT AND ARREST Police arrested five to six key individuals responsible for the violence but have not caught the Jubo League cadres who took part in the violence. The labour leaders have gone into hiding, according to police sources.

Additional Inspector General of Police (admin) NBK Tripura told The Daily Star that police have already identified the different sections responsible for the violence and have arrested five to six key people.

Sources said Airpur union Jubo League General Secretary Suman Bhuiyan and his associate Sohag led a group of 30 men to pose as labourers and conduct the most violent attacks during the three-day unrest.

Witnesses said these cadres took part in the violence equipped with sharp weapons and sticks right in front of the law enforcers.

Ashulia Police Station Officer-in-charge (OC) Monwar Hossain, however, said they had no information in this regard.

Dhaka district Superintendent of Police (SP) Md Iqbal Bahar told The Daily Star, "Criminals from outside were directly involved in the violence but it is not possible to disclose their names before their arrest."

"Despite having their political identities, we treat them as criminals," the SP said, adding, "Control over the hoot business is one of the causes behind the violence but it is not the only cause."

Dhaka Range Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Moklesur Rahman told The Daily Star, "Until we conclude investigation, it should not be proper to say that outsiders were involved in the anarchy in the garment sector."

The Ashulia OC said among the arrestees, Moksed Ali, 24, of Nalita Bari upazila in Sherpur district, and Rafiqul Islam, 44, were produced before a court, which sent them to jail.

Five separate cases were filed in connection with the three-day violence four of them against 2,000 unidentified individuals. In the case filed in connection with arson, 5,000 unidentified people and nine unidentified individuals were accused.

Sub-inspector Towhidul Islam of Ashulia Police Station, who filed the arson case, told The Daily Star that labour leader Montu Ghosh along with other labour leaders and labourers were accused in the case.

JS body

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pure and safe drinking water to city dwellers and disposing of sewerage regularly.

But in the recent years sufferings of people in various parts of the city have gone beyond tolerance as Wasa has miserably failed to address their problems.

When contacted Rahmat Ali, chief of the parliamentary body, told The Daily Star over telephone the condition of Wasa is very bad due to various irregularities and mismanagement within it.

"We asked them to take whatever steps they deem to be necessary to protect people's interests and reduce their sufferings," Rahmat Ali added.

A press release issued by the parliament secretariat said the committee also asked the LGED ministry and Wasa to take necessary steps to remove water logging in and around Dhaka, ensure supply of drinking water to people and improve the sewerage system.

The committee also asked Wasa to investigate whether there were irregularities in appointment, transfer and promotion in the organisation in the past.

The parliamentary body at its meeting also completed scrutiny of the city corporation bill and will place the report in parliament for passage next week.

The lawmakers elected within the six city corporations will be made advisers to corporations, the chief of the committee said.

Titas Gas

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second half.

Such financial performance prompted the company to hold a special meeting yesterday. Its Board Chairman and energy Secretary Mohammad Mohsin was present at the meeting as chief guest and Petrobangla Chairman Maj (retd) M Mukhtar Ali as special guest. Titas Managing Director M Abdul Aziz Khan and other high officials were present at the meeting.

The company said it sold 14,133 million cubic metres (mcm) of gas in the last fiscal year against a target of 13,302 mcm. This fetched the company Tk 5,159 crore against a target of Tk 5,130 crore.

The cumulative arrears of the company also reduced to Tk 1,214 crore, which is equivalent to the average bills of nearly three months. This arrear was Tk 1,417 crore in 2007-08. This means, the arrears have reduced by Tk 203 crore.

The Titas board expressed sincere apology for gas supply problems in some areas for low pressure.

Company records show that during the last fiscal year the Titas Revenue Control Department collected highest Tk 1,882 crore, which was 110 percent of the target, while the collection in Narayanganj zone where tendency of gas pilferage is the highest was 95 percent of the target.

SEC takes action

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Bangladesh Zipper, Beach Hatchery, Chittagong Vegetable Oil, Excelsior Shoes, Gachibata Aquaculture, GMG Industrial Corporation, Mag Enterprises, Maq Paper, Metalex Corporation, Meghna Condensed Milk, Meghna Pet Industries, Mita Textile, Modern Cement, Padma Printers, Quasem Textile, Rahman Chemicals, Rangamati Food, Rose Heaven Ball Pen, Sajib Knitwear & Garments, Sonali Paper, Sreepur Textile, Tamjuddin Textile, Wonderland Toys, and Wata Chemicals.

People close to the issue said the move is only the initial stage of placing share trading of non-performing and under-performing companies on 'over the counter' (OTC) market, which will be a separate trading window.

Under the OTC system, Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) will open a separate counter where interested buyers and sellers of shares of non-performing and under-performing companies will announce prices and numbers of shares to be traded.

Transaction will take place if the announced prices of buyers and sellers match.

In February this year, DSE decided that it will open the separate window in a bid to discourage investors from betting on non-performing and low quality companies.

DSE said trading of such companies will take place on the OTC market, meaning price movement of those shares will not be seen on the electronic board.

The DSE initiative to open an OTC market came following a surge in the share prices of a number of Z category companies. There were also allegations that the laggard companies had even declared dividends to boost their share prices.

Forgotten pledges

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In the inaugural session of the ninth Parliament, the opposition lawmakers joined on only 21 working days out of 39 sittings while Khaleda Zia was present only on three working days.

"We will return to the House when we will be convinced that the government really wants the opposition to play their due role. Unfortunately, our impression is that the government does not care whether there is any opposition in parliament," Moudud Ahmed, a standing committee member of BNP, told The Daily Star.

He said if they really realise that the government would respect the opposition and it would not evict the opposition leader from her cantonment residence, they will return to the House.

The BNP policymakers are debating over joining the House as a number of issues, including the seating arrangement, reducing security of Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia and government's move to evict her from her cantonment residence, remain unsettled while Jamaat is just following the BNP.

"At this stage, we will follow the BNP whatever it decides on parliamentary affairs," a Jamaat leader said. "We don't want to annoy the BNP in the current situation," he added.

The BNP in its electoral manifesto said steps would be taken to create an environment of consensus to bring an end to the culture of parliament boycott, if the party is voted to power.

All lawmakers will abide by the rules of procedure of parliament; no one of the lawmakers can remain absent for more than 30 consecutive sitting days without leave of the House. Jatiya Sangsad will be focal point of all political activities, the BNP promised in the manifesto.

According to the current constitutional provision, membership of a lawmaker falls vacant if he/she remains absent from House proceeding for 90 consecutive sitting days without leave of the Parliament.

So, amendment to the constitution is required to implement the BNP's electoral manifesto to end the culture of House boycott, said a legal expert.

Jamaat in its electoral manifesto also promised that rules of procedure of parliament and constitution, if necessary, will be amended so that partisan or independent lawmakers cannot make the House ineffective by remaining absent.

One may say that the BNP and Jamaat are not bound to abide by their electoral manifestos since they were not

voted to power. But political analysts and legal experts said it is the moral obligation of the two parties to honour their electoral pledges as many people kept confidence in the manifestos and cast votes for them.

Even ruling Awami League (AL) that promised in its electoral manifesto to take all-out measures to make the House effective has yet to come forward with an appropriate effort to ensure opposition lawmakers' participation in the budget session.

In absence of any effective measure of AL particularly of Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, Speaker Abdul Hamid has been urging the opposition lawmakers to join the budget session for raising their voices.

In his inaugural address to the budget session on June 4, the speaker expressed hope that constructive opinions from both treasury and opposition lawmakers would play an important role in making the next budget realistic, development-friendly and a document for improving fortunes of the country's people.

But the speaker's move failed to yield any result as only ruling party lawmakers participated in the discussion on proposed budget.

However the opposition lawmakers are attending the meetings of the parliamentary standing committees, which is part of entire parliamentary proceedings.

But their absence from the parliament session virtually puts the government in a comfortable situation as the opposition bench is not playing the role of 'Shadow Cabinet' to pass criticism on the current government and its legislations, as well as offering alternative policies, political analysts and legal experts said.

Explaining the constitutional responsibilities of parliament, eminent jurist and former attorney general Mahmudul Islam said deliberation and discussion is an important function of parliament. Parliament debates public issues and shapes and influences the government's policies and ventilates public grievances, he observed.

"Not only in making legislation but also in making appropriations parliament has opportunity of reviewing the government's policy and its administration.... Government's policies and their implementation are invariably brought into focus whenever Parliament discusses financial matters," the former attorney general wrote in his book titled "Constitutional Law of Bangladesh".

Benazir killing

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mandate and is led by the Chilean ambassador to the United Nations, Heraldo Munoz. It includes an Indonesian ex-attorney general and an Irish former police official.

Benazir, the first woman to become prime minister of a Muslim country, was killed on December 27, 2007 in a gun and suicide attack after addressing an election rally in Rawalpindi, a garrison city near the capital Islamabad.

"The six-month mandate of the Benazir Bhutto commission of inquiry has begun today. The commission is expected to visit Pakistan but the dates are not determined yet," Hiro Ueki, a UN spokesman in Pakistan, told AFP.

The United Nations says the panel will inquire into the facts and circumstances of the assassination, but makes clear it will be up to Pakistan to determine "the criminal responsibility of the perpetrators."

Pakistan called for a UN inquiry after Bhutto's party won a general election two months after her death, with Benazir supporters angered by conflicting accounts of how she died and who was responsible.

They cast doubt on a Pakistani probe into her death, criticised authorities for hosing down the scene of the attack within minutes -- allegedly destroying evidence -- and questioning whether she was killed by a gunshot or the blast.

Then president Pervez Musharraf and the US Central Intelligence Agency blamed Baillullah Mehsud, an Al-Qaeda-linked warlord based in

Pakistan's tribal region bordering Afghanistan, for masterminding the killing.

Benazir Bhutto, a two-time prime minister, said in her autobiography she had been warned that four suicide squads -- one sent by Mehsud and another by a son of Osama bin Laden -- were after her.

She also repeatedly accused a cabal of senior intelligence and government officials of plotting to kill her, notably in an attack that killed 139 people in Karachi on October 18, 2007 when she returned from exile.

British detectives said Benazir was killed by the force of a suicide bomb and not gunfire, backing the Pakistani government's controversial account.

Foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Basit told AFP the UN investigators were expected to arrive in the third week of July and that the government would provide all the records related to the incident.

Another UN spokeswoman in Islamabad, Ishrat Rizvi, said the commission was expected to visit some time this month.

The panel will submit a report to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who will then share it with Islamabad and the Security Council.

But the probe comes at a difficult time for Pakistan, which is fighting Islamist militants, straining under two million people displaced since April and preparing for an assault against Mehsud in the tribal belt.

Swine flu

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from Australia has been diagnosed with the A/H1N1 virus, nine of the infected are returnees from US and the rest six got infected due to close contact with them, Prof Rahman said.

Of the 16 cases, nine are under treatment in home confinement and seven are fully cured, he mentioned.

Meanwhile, the government has ordered opening separate outdoor services in every medical college hospitals for patients with flu like diseases.