

US Afghan strategy 'not working'

Says top general

BBC ONLINE, Kabul

A top US general in Afghanistan has called for a revised military strategy, suggesting the current one is failing.

In a strategic assessment, Gen Stanley McChrystal said that, while the Afghan situation was serious, success was still achievable.

The report has yet not been published, but sources say Gen McChrystal sees protecting the Afghan people against the Taliban as the top priority.

The report does not carry a direct call for increasing troop numbers.

"The situation in Afghanistan is serious, but success is achievable and demands a revised implementation strategy, commitment and resolve, and increased unity of effort," Gen McChrystal said in the assessment.

Copies of the document have been

sent to Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and US Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

The report came as further results from last week's presidential election were expected to be released, at 1230 GMT. President Hamid Karzai is leading so far.

The independent Electoral Complaints Commission says that of more than 2,100 allegations of wrongdoing during voting and vote-counting, 618 have been deemed serious enough to affect the election's outcome, if proven.

The general's blunt assessment will say that the Afghan people are undergoing a crisis of confidence because the war against the Taliban has not made their lives better, says BBC North America editor Mark Mardell.

Gen McChrystal says the aim should

be for Afghan forces to take the lead but their army will not be ready to do that for three years and it will take much longer for the police.

And he will warn that villages have to be taken from the Taliban and held, not merely taken.

Gen McChrystal also wants more engagement with the Taliban fighters and he believes that 60% of the problem would go away if they could be found jobs.

More than 30,000 extra US troops have been sent to Afghanistan since President Barack Obama ordered reinforcements in May - almost doubling his country's contingent and increasing the Western total to about 100,000.

This report does not mention increasing troop numbers - that is for another report later in the year - but the hints are all there, our correspondent says.



A Pakistani fireman stands beside burning trucks loaded with supplies for Nato forces at the Pakistani border town of Chaman on Sunday.



Nepalese Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal talks with students during the opening ceremony of the Regional Climate Change Conference in Kathmandu yesterday. Global warming could have catastrophic consequences for people living in South Asia, Nepal's prime minister said here on Monday as he opened the climate change conference of Himalayan nations.

'Barbaric' Taliban chops off ears, nose of Afghan man for casting vote

ANI, Kabul

The Afghanistan Taliban slashed off a man's ears and nose for defying their order and casting his vote in the country's presidential elections.

Lal Mohammed, 40, was on his way to the polling station on August 20 when he was held by Taliban militants, beaten brutally, and then had his nose and ears slashed off.

"I was stopped by three men with AK-47 rifles and bandoliers of ammunition, who did not hide their faces and identified themselves as Talibs. When they found electoral registration papers in my pocket, they began beating me.

BJP rules out change in its leadership

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Sunday dismissed speculations of a leadership change while Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leaders, who met LK Advani, said the party would emerge stronger from the present turmoil.

Refuting media reports that the party would effect a change of guard at the behest of the RSS, BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar told reporters here: "He (Advani) is leader of opposition (in the Lok Sabha), Rajnath Singh is our president; no one is resigning."

Speculations have been rife that at the instance of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, the BJP would usher in a younger leadership with general secretary Arun Jaitley tipped to be the party president in place of Rajnath Singh and Sushma Swaraj to replace Advani as the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha.

The RSS, the ideological parent of the BJP,

reiterated that the party would take its own decisions and hoped that its leadership would stand united, putting an end to infighting.

"The BJP has a mass base. And with such a party, problems are bound to occur... but the party will emerge stronger from the crisis," senior RSS leader Madandas Devi told reporters here.

"The party will decide its own course of action," he said, after he, Bhagwat and Suresh Soni held a breakfast meeting with BJP veteran Advani Sunday.

"The RSS is assured that the BJP leadership, as a team, will stand united and face the present situation; and will overcome all the problems and emerge stronger," he further said.

Adding to this, party spokesperson Javadekar said: "Let me clarify what the Sangh has said today and what has happened in the last three days. The deliberations point to the strength of BJP and Sangh Parivar that we can sort out our own matters."

PML-N takes abrupt U-turn on trying Gen Kayani for 'high treason'

ANI, Lahore

A day after the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif's spokesman Zaem Qadri said that Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani should also be prosecuted under high treason charges along with former president General Pervez Musharraf, the party has denied General Kayani's involvement in imposition of emergency rule on November 3, 2007.

PML-N spokesman Siddiqul Farooq said Musharraf had imposed emergency rule with the help of a few police officials, and did not take General Kayani into confidence.

Violence in Kashmir dips to record low

Says Indian police

AFP, Srinagar

Violence in Indian Kashmir has fallen to its lowest level since militants launched an insurgency against Indian rule 20 years ago, officials said yesterday, while warning against complacency.

According to official police records, killings have dropped to one a day, from 10 daily in 2001 and a peak of 13 in 1996 when the insurgency was at its height with daily bomb attacks and gunbattles.

"The militant violence has fallen to an all-time low," a police officer told AFP, requesting not to be named as he was not authorised to talk to the media.

"For the first time since 1989, the daily death toll has dropped to one," the officer said, referring to the year when the separatist revolt began in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region.

During the first seven months of 2009, 195 people -- 113 militants, 45 civilians and 37

security personnel -- were killed in the region. But, despite the easing of violence, Indian Kashmir's senior minister Ali Mohammed Sagar opposed any reduction in Indian troop levels in the state.

"Troops will be reduced and sent back to barracks once the situation is under total control," he said, and warned that it was not wise to "lower our guard as some incidents (of violence) were still taking place."

In two separate incidents on Monday, militants shot dead two federal policemen and a grenade attack injured five officers and nine civilians in the main city of Srinagar, police said.

The levels of violence declined sharply after India and Pakistan, whose territorial dispute over Kashmir has triggered two wars, embarked on a peace process in 2004.

The process was suspended in the wake of the militant attacks last November on India's financial capital Mumbai.

4 Afghan policemen escape Taliban prison, kill 6 rebels

AFP, Kabul

Four Afghan police staged a dramatic breakout from a militant prison in northwest Afghanistan, killing six of their captors in a gunfight that left one officer dead, the interior ministry said Monday.

The police officers, who had been held in Faryab province for some time, overwhelmed their captors, seized their weapons and began shooting their way out of the cell on Sunday, the ministry said in a statement.

One police officer and six rebels were killed during a brief exchange of fire before the officers made it to safety, it said.

"The brave policemen succeeded in escaping their jail. Six terrorists were killed and one policeman was martyred during this incident," it said.

Faryab is on Afghanistan's border with Turkmenistan, and is north of Badghis province, which has been increasingly infiltrated by Taliban-linked militants expanding their influence from southern hotspots.

Afghan police suffer more casualties than other domestic security forces in fighting the mounting insurgency in the country.

The high death toll among the police is mainly due to a shortage of equipment, compared with the US-funded Afghan national army and the 100,000-strong international military deployment.



Sri Lankan prison officials escort Tamil journalist JS Tissainayagam (R) to a prison bus yesterday. Tissainayagam, 45, was sentenced by Sri Lanka's High Court to 20 years in prison for causing "racial hatred" and "supporting terrorism," a court official said.

Lankan journalist given 20 years in prison

AP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan court Monday sentenced an ethnic Tamil journalist to 20 years in prison under the island's harsh anti-terrorism law for publishing articles critical of the government's war on the Tamil Tiger rebels.

JS Tissainayagam's articles in now-defunct Northeastern Monthly magazine in 2006 and 2007 had criticised the government's conduct in the war and accused authorities of withholding food and other essential items from Tamil-majority areas as a tool of war.

His conviction Monday in the High Court was the first of a journalist under the country's Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Government soldiers defeated Tamil Tiger rebels in May ending their 25-year campaign for an independent homeland for ethnic minority Tamils.

Special drives

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smooth traffic in the capital and for banishing old and unfit vehicles from the roads.

A high powered 12-member committee formed by the communications ministry and headed by its additional secretary, for coordinating the activities of relevant mobile courts and other agencies, also has been ineffective so far, as none has seen any worthwhile activity of the committee since its formation, the sources added.

They however said already around 2,500 old buses and other unfit automobiles, and 4,000 rickshaws were seized from the city's roads over the last three weeks.

DMP BRTA, and Dhaka district authorities have been carrying out separate traffic jam curbing drives, and also occasional joint ones.

At the directives of the communications ministry, Dhaka district authorities launched a special drive through deploying 13 mobile courts to detect unfit vehicles on roads, and to fine drivers for traffic rules violations.

Despite such measures and initiatives, most of the city roads still remain jam-packed with vehicles stranded on queues causing sufferings for commuters in this humid month of Ramadan.

DMP in its special drive since August 9 seized around 2,500 unfit automobiles including buses and minibuses, while two BRTA mobile courts, operating since August 4, impounded over 200 vehicles and filed several

hundred cases in connection with traffic rules violations.

Executive Magistrate Allied Mainul of a mobile court set up by the Dhaka district authorities told The Daily Star that they only fine drivers who violate traffic rules.

"We are asked only to fine traffic rules violators. We don't have the capacity to seize any vehicle, neither do we have any tow truck for the purpose," the magistrate said.

Asked why the nagging traffic congestion has been remaining unchanged despite the special drives, DMP Commissioner AKM Shahidul Hoque said, "As we seized a good number of unfit and old vehicles, a very few of those are currently seen on roads, because the remaining are being kept in garages by the owners. But still the city roads are not free of traffic jams."

"It means, only removal of old and unfit buses will not end traffic jams, the roads also need to be widened and new roads need to be constructed," he added saying, "Registration of old personal vehicles also should be stopped."

The DMP commissioner also said, "Soon after the special drive was launched, owners and drivers of unfit vehicles managed fitness certificates from BRTA."

Asked about the mobile courts of BRTA and the initiative of the communications ministry, Shahidul Hoque said, "We've been conducting special drives since even before the communications ministry took its initiative."

3 dead officials

FROM PAGE 1

The Rehabilitation, Renovation and Augmentation of Grid System (RRAGS) Phase-2 project for the duration of 1999 to 2003 was initially supposed to spend Tk 524 crore, which was approved as an estimated expenditure. The project ended up spending Tk 822 crore and on top of that it completed in June, 2007.

Tk 298 crore was over-spent but the IMED report said Tk 131.59 crore was additionally spent on new and additional work that did not follow the economic planning disciplines and financial policies.

According to the original plan, only nine vehicles were to be purchased but 41 vehicles were bought for the project. A car, two 4x4 vehicles, two pick-up trucks and four motorcycles were approved for purchase with Tk 68 lakh. However, a car, 15 4x4 vehicles and 26 pick-up trucks were bought at a cost of Tk 13.68 crore. These were purchased under Chinese suppliers credit.

Apart from buying these vehicles, irregular and additional expenditure include Tk 22.27 crore for equipment of power line or sub-station, Tk 50 crore for setting up lines or sub-station and about Tk 12 crore for non-

residential buildings and soil testing.

As the project failed to complete on time, PDB, the implementing agency of the project, sent the project to be revised in December 2003. The revised project was approved in the Ecneec meeting of May 31, 2005, 559 days later.

Sources alleged that the delay in approving the revised project resulted in the cost going up. About 93 percent of the additional expenditure occurred during this 559 days.

Approving the revised project in 2005, Ecneec formed an enquiry committee to probe the excess expenditure. The committee on May 17, 2007 placed the report before another Ecneec meeting.

The committee in the report asked for the three officials to be warned but the then chief adviser wanted to know whether sterner actions could be taken against them.

On March 19, 2009 the committee gave a fresh report to the planning minister but two members of the committee did not sign the report. As a result, the planning minister reconstituted the committee and the report was submitted to the Ecneec meeting.

Iraq, Syria at loggerheads over terror claims

AFP, Baghdad

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said Monday that 90 percent of foreign terrorists who infiltrate Iraq did so via Syria, a charge likely to worsen already fractured relations between the neighbours.

His comments came as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad dismissed allegations that his country was sheltering people suspected of involvement in a devastating bombing in Baghdad as "immoral" and politically motivated.

The competing claims signalled no end is in sight to a crisis initially triggered by Iraq's accusation that Syria is being used as a staging post for insurgents to launch deadly attacks across the border.

Maliki reiterated that ties with Damascus would not improve until it handed over the suspects it blames for one of two bloody attacks on government ministries in Baghdad on August 19 that killed 95 people and wounded 600.

"Ninety percent of terrorists from different Arabic nationalities infiltrated Iraq through Syrian territory," Maliki said during a visit by the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, aimed at cooling the row.

Maliki insisted that Damascus "expel the terrorists, Baathists and Takfiris (extremists) who take Syria as a base to launch criminal activity inside Iraq" and said without that there would be no progress.

The EC decided in June that Salauddin is not eligible to remain MP but it did not cancel his membership.

Asked about it yesterday, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda declined to make any comment.

Talking to journalists on the EC Secretariat premises after signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with South Korean election commission, Huda said the EC would initiate a dialogue on the necessity of caretaker government if it gets a written proposal from the government.

"If the government seeks our views on caretaker government system, we'll surely give that," he said.

Replying to a question on LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam's call to the EC to hold a dialogue on the issue, the CEC said, "We have our opinions, of course. If there is a written proposal, definitely we will do something."

On the proposed amendment to the RPO, Huda said, "We're reviewing the RPO articles."

The EC would place before the government its recommendations on sdrthe RPO after holding dialogues with the civil society, media and political parties, he said.

News in Brief

Discovery docks with ISS

AFP, Washington

The US shuttle Discovery made a textbook docking Sunday with the International Space Station where a total of 13 astronauts now begin nine days together improving and supplying the orbiting outpost.

The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration confirmed the docking procedure, which occurred at 0054 GMT, about 10 minutes ahead of schedule.

Commander Rick Sturckow guided the shuttle to a "smooth-as-silk" mating of the two vessels some 225 miles (360km) above the Atlantic Ocean, said a commentator on Nasa TV.

Commandos kill 8 in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

A gang of armed commandos gunned down five adults and three children in the northern Mexican state of Sinaloa, authorities said Sunday.

Gunmen packing assault rifles opened fire on the group in an outdoor meeting place popular with young people in the city of Navolato, Sinaloa state, a state prosecutor's spokesman told AFP.