

Air strikes in Iraq effective: US

AFP, Sydney

Air strikes aimed at halting the advance of Sunni Islamic State militants in Iraq have been effective and the US is open to further requests for help, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said yesterday.

The United States has conducted three days of attacks by jets and drones on jihadists in northern Iraq whose onslaught has displaced 200,000 people since August 3, including all the residents of Iraq's largest Christian town, Qaraqosh.

Hagel said Washington was constantly assessing the situation after President Barack Obama authorised the action to help break the siege of Mount Sinjar, where thousands of civilian refugees from the Yazidi religious minority had been trapped. "They have been very effective from all the reports we have received on the ground," he said of the air strikes when asked in Sydney, where he is attending annual Australia-US defence talks. "We are constantly assessing where we can continue to assist Iraqi security forces and where, as we build partnerships, we will work with the Iraqi government.

N'ganj mob

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On April 27, seven people -- NCC panel mayor Nazrul Islam and his four associates and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver -- were kidnapped separately in Narayanganj. Their bodies were found on April 30 and May 1 in the Shitalakkhya.

Ivy said, "I believe those godfathers are involved in the incident, directly or indirectly."

She said, "There is nothing to suspect at this stage; confessions have already been made."

Ivy said the government should immediately bring back Nur Hossain, the prime accused in the seven-murder case, from India where he was detained in mid-June.

"The clues about who were involved in the murders and why they did it will come out if Nur is interrogated," she said.

Shahjahan Ali, additional secretary to the public administration ministry's who led the probe body, told reporters that they asked Ivy if she had any knowledge about the murders, as two of her counselors were involved, one murdered and the other accused of the killing.

The probe body has so far talked with over 300 people.

Retired Dhaka

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any financial benefit in the process, ACC Commissioner Md Shahabudin told The Daily Star.

The manner in which Faruk Ahmed acquitted the accused was unusual, and the ACC feels he had scope to get financial benefits and he might have taken that advantage, Shahabudin added.

Justice SK Sinha, who had been discharging the functions of Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain in the latter's absence, on Sunday asked the law ministry to take action against Faruk.

Faruk, who retired as judge of the Public Safety Disturbance Crime Prevention Tribunal in Dhaka on June 26, acquitted dozens of accused in the last few months of his service.

Many of these accused were acquitted in violation of rules, a Supreme Court source said.

Faruk's court had reportedly finished recording statements from all witnesses, cross examinations of accused and arguments of 10 cases in a single day.

He disposed of 20 cases in four to 10 days after finishing the arguments and he concluded the cross examination of the accused even before recording witnesses' statements, which is contrary to the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Faruk granted bail to 45 accused, including drug peddlers, in June and acquitted the accused of 77 cases in six months. Besides, he granted bail to 101 accused between January and May this year.

Last year, he disposed of 79 cases and acquitted the accused of 60 cases and sentenced the accused of 19 cases, according to the report, according to a newspaper report.

Meanwhile, the ministry last week sent three lower court judges into forced retirement in line with a decision of the chief justice, ministry sources said.

The CJ decided to send them into forced retirement for misconduct and corruption while discharging duties.

They are Chairman of First Labour Court of Chittagong and former District and Sessions Judge of Dhaka AKM Ishtiaque Hossain, Additional District Judge of Jessore Mizanur Rahman, and Joint District Judge of Lalmonirhat Salauddin Mohammad Akram.

At present, the ACC is investigating former Dhaka court judge Motahar Hossain, who acquitted BNP Senior vice-chairperson Tarique Rahman in a money laundering case in November last year. Motahar is reportedly in Malaysia.

RMG export fell in July

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confidence of international retailers, said Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Garment exports were badly hampered in October, November, December and January.

The garment sector experienced two massive disasters -- the Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza building collapse -- which hogged headlines all over the world.

"But at the same time the production cost increased by nearly 15 percent with appreciation of local currency against the dollar," he said.

"We need to address the issues of inadequate supply of gas and power in the industrial units, poor condition of Dhaka-Chittagong highway and the overall political crisis to overcome the situation."

He observed that workers' efficiency had remained unchanged for decades, while it was much higher in competing countries like China, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Another cause of concern for the Bangladeshi garment sector is the higher bank interest rate which has been eating up the marginal profit of the garment makers, Islam said.

"But the buyers are not increasing the prices per unit of garment item. In

some cases the buyers bargain for squeezing the prices further," the BGMEA chiefsaid.

Mohammad Hatem, acting president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said political crises had a major impact on the sector in the last quarter of 2013.

He, however, said the situation would improve in the coming months.

Inspections by European brands' Accord on Fire and Building Safety and North American retailers' Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety boosted buyer confidence as less than 2 percent factories were found vulnerable, he said.

On the other hand, the export of knitwear products rose by 4.32 percent only to \$1.30 billion in July.

In July last year, woven exports grew by 27.02 percent and knitwear products by 25.24 percent from the previous year.

But this July, overall export earnings went down by 1.37 percent and stood at \$2.99 billion -- 2.03 percent less than the targeted \$3.04 billion.

The fiscal year 2013-14 ended with export earnings of \$24.50 billion, maintaining 13.86 percent growth.

For FY 2014-15 beginning last month, the government set a target at \$26.90 billion.

Temporary fitness

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formed to probe the launch capsize that killed over 100 people.

The officials, whom the committee had found responsible for the deaths, had lobbied for the dismantling of the committee with a powerful quarter backing them, according to official sources in the department.

The committee had nearly wrapped up its investigation and it only had two days to go before it was to submit its findings, the sourcesaid.

The overcrowded Pinak-6 capsized in the choppy waters of the Padma on August 4. The sunken vessel remained untraced and its salvage operation has been called off.

"The 45-day temporary fitness certificate [token] issued the last time for Pinak-6 was absolutely illegal," said a high official of the country's lone Marine Court, requesting anonymity.

"The fitness certificate given in token form more than once was illegal and we will bring the surveyor concerned to book," a member of the enquiry committee had said before the committee got dissolved.

According to Inland Shipping Ordinance, validity of a temporary fitness token shall not exceed 45 days during which the original fitness certificate must be renewed, said Jahangir Hossain, a lawyer at the Marine Court.

The Marine Court has served show-cause notices on all four vessel surveyors of the shipping department for issuing unlawful "temporary fitness" certificates and "temporary registration" to many questionable vessels, he said.

According to the department officials, fitness permit for Pinak-6 expired on April 30. It issued a 45-day fitness token on May 1, implying the original certificate would be renewed within that period.

But the department then gave a second temporary fitness token for period between June 14 and July 15.

Shipping department surveyor Mirza Saifur Rahman issued another temporary fitness token on July 23, claiming he had physically surveyed the vessel at Mawa on July 18.

Department of Shipping Chief Inspector Shafiqur Rahman said upon physical survey of a vessel, the surveyor has to submit a declaration to the department for fitness renewal as per rules.

"But we have not received any survey declaration for Pinak-6 since its fitness expired," he said.

Mirza Saifur said he did not submit the declaration even though he had surveyed the vessel because "it had some faults" and that he was busy due to the Eid rush.

About issuing the temporary certificate again and again to Pinak-6 without submitting the survey declaration, he said, "I did it as per the law."

The Department of Shipping has also issued "temporary registration" and fitness certificates for seven years to a large vessel, Kalam Khan, plying on Dhaka-Barisal route despite its fourth (top) deck having a faulty design.

Chief Inspector Shafiqur said a month ago he had sued the vessel's construction supervisors, owner, builder and the dockyard owner for deviating from the design.

As to why he had spared the surveyor, Mirza Saifur, Shafiqur said, "I cannot sue an official of my own department."

Saifur, however, said his predecessor had issued the registration and that he could not say why it got fitness certificate without looking at the file.

Chief Engineer AKM Fakhru Islam of the department said they had issued "temporary registration" to Kalam Khan for seven years as a "customary practice" though there was no legal

provision.

Director General Commodore M Zakirur Rahman Bhuiyan of the Department of Shipping said his department had dissolved its committee to avoid "overlapping" of investigation, as the shipping ministry had a seven-member committee to probe the incident.

"The shipping minister's instruction was to dissolve the committee, as having two committees would create problems," he said, adding that it would be difficult to deal with varied findings of two committees while filing a case with the Marine Court.

It was also aimed at avoiding any possible favouritism, as the department officials, in some way or the other, were involved in the vessel's registration, survey and inspection, he said.

According to the Inland Shipping Ordinance, he continued, there should be one committee to probe a river accident and that they had given priority to the committee of the ministry.

When asked if the committee was dissolved to protect those responsible for the tragedy, the DG said, "It is not correct."

As to why they took eight days to dissolve an "unnecessary" committee, he said they had to look into its legal implications.

Regarding why they had formed it in the first place, he said it was the norm that they form a probe committee immediately after an accident.

The seven-member committee of the ministry includes two department of shipping representatives, he added.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, who lost three nieces in the accident, said, "We dissolved one committee to make the probe transparent."

Rejecting the allegation of trying to protect those responsible, the minister said the Department of Shipping probe body might not always be fair since they were involved in regulating vessels.

Australia to sign 25-year US Marine agreement

AFP, Sydney

Australia and the United States will sign a 25-year deal allowing 2,500 US Marines and air force personnel to train Down Under, Defence Minister David Johnston said yesterday, describing it as a "win-win situation".

The agreement will be inked today when US Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel meet with their Australian counterparts Julie Bishop and Johnston in Sydney.

Trouble spots abroad including Iraq and Ukraine will also be on the agenda for the Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), which focus on regional security and military cooperation.

But the centrepiece will be the agreement allowing the Marine rotational deployment in the northern city of Darwin, which was first announced by US President Barack Obama in 2011 as part of his "pivot" towards Asia.

"Approximately 2,500 US defence force personnel will come to primarily the Northern Territory to exercise on the vast, open Commonwealth (government) military exercise grounds that we have," Johnston told a joint press conference with Hagel.

"They will interoperate with Australia. They will do things that they want to, exercise activities that are important to them. We'll assist them."

Pinak-6 search abandoned

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severely decomposed. "Those would not be identifiable and it would be very painful," he said.

At Pachchar school playground on the other side of the river where bodies of the victims were brought in, there was anger and sadness as the search operation was called off.

Jharna Begum, mother of missing eighth grader Lipi Begum, was in denial, "This cannot be ... they cannot call off the search before finding all the bodies."

Kazi Humayun Kabir, who lost his mother, sister-in-law and a nephew in the disaster, said it was utterly disappointing that the government abandoned the search.

Both demanded that the bodies of their loved ones are returned to them.

DC Saiful said the river was rough and there was a 5.6 knot (10.4kmph) current. The Met office asked maritime ports to hoist signal-3 due to bad weather, which was one of the reasons to call off the operation, he said.

The survey vessels Kandari-2 and Jarip-10, which concentrated their operation only on one spot where they claimed to have found a "metallic object" could not ascertain anything.

Asked about it, the DC said Chittagong port authorities that carried

out the operation there could not say for sure whether the object was Pinak-6.

Commander Monjurul Karim Chowdhury, in charge of Kandari-2, was also unsure, Saiful said.

Locals who started searching for the vessel themselves since Sunday could not find anything. They too claimed to have detected an object around a kilometre away from where the vessel was videotaped going down on August 4.

Earlier, a ship of fire service could not find anything there despite an intensive search," Saiful said.

Contacted, Mohammad Hasan, chief of the operation carried out under "Meghna Chain Koppa and Cycle Mart", said water was about 100 feet deep at the spot.

"Our divers went down but they could not go more than 30 feet as their oxygen masks came loose in the fierce current," he told The Daily Star.

He, however, said given an opportunities, he and his men would search for the vessel one more time.

Local traders and shop owners at Mawa were disappointed with the government efforts. They said they had seen on TV how ships were salvaged from deep seas in other countries but the government could not even locate a launch in a river.

"They [the government] claimed that they used ultramodern technology to look for the vessel and claimed that they found something. So then why abandon the operation," said a restaurant owner at Mawa.

The double-decker vessel, which was on its way to Mawa from Kawrakandi, was carrying more than 200 passengers against a capacity of 85. It sank in choppy waters and strong winds in the mighty river around 11:00am on August 4.

According to the official calculations, bodies of 45, including 15 children and 15 women, have been found so far.

Of the recovered bodies, 27 were identified and handed over to the family members. The rest 18 still remain unidentified and buried in Shibchar Municipal graveyard in Madaripur.

Meanwhile, the decomposed body of a woman assumed to be in her mid 20's was discovered in the Meghna at Ramgati of Laxmipur around 8:00pm. The corps is believed to be of a victim of the Pinak-6 disaster.

Our staff correspondent Pankaj Karmakar, Munshiganj correspondent Farhana Mirza and Madaripur correspondent Nityananda Halder contributed to this report.

Inu plays

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The briefing was held in the wake of widespread criticism of the policy by media professionals who demand immediate formation of an independent commission to oversee the policy's implementation.

The minister claimed the policy was made to bring transparency and accountability in the electronic media. "Its every provision is beneficial and helpful for the media," he said.

Inu presented written statements on nine specific points, and answered queries from journalists about the policy that prohibits broadcast of any news that might taint the image of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies.

On broadcasting news on the armed forces or law enforcers, he said the policy doesn't deter the media from covering news or revealing the truth. If any member breaches discipline of the forces or engages in unlawful activities, the media can broadcast news on it.

"For example, if any member of the army grabs land, journalists can broadcast news against the person. But it is not ethical to undermine the entire force for the misconduct of one bad element, and the media cannot term the entire force land grabber," Inu said.

The electronic media can broadcast footage of incidents like hurling of bombs at buses, but it cannot air news that will instigate violence, he said.

About the provision that asks electronic media houses to have a specific charter of duties and editorial policy not contrary to the broadcast policy, Inu said it is in no way meant for interfering in their editorial sovereignty.

"It is a coordinated guideline that will protect their editorial sovereignty from unwanted meddling and commercial interests."

The minister claimed the national broadcast policy is not contradictory to the country's constitution that ensures the freedom of expression and the media.

On the formation of an independent commission to oversee the policy's implementation, Inu said the prime minister had already given directives for drafting a broadcast law for constituting the commission.

"But it is not possible to form the commission overnight as it involves a lengthy process." It could take at least one to two months to start drafting the law in consultation with the stakeholders.

Once the independent commission is formed, the information ministry will devolve to the commission the responsibilities for overseeing the electronic media, he said.

Inu also trashed the allegation that the broadcast policy didn't reflect the opinions of all stakeholders and members of the committee that drafted the policy.

The minister said those who didn't understand the policy had misinterpreted it and criticised it.

"We want praise, not criticism for the policy," he said.

If anyone thinks that there is ambiguity or any unclear provision in the policy, the person can make proposals at the time of drafting the broadcast law. "I hope all stakeholders will play active role in drafting the law," he said.

Once the commission is formed, it will oversee the electronic media and take action if any media house violates the policy, said Inu.

Referring to some Rab members' alleged role in the seven murders in Narayanganj, a reporter asked the minister whether the media would be allowed to broadcast news in the future even if it tarnishes the image of any law enforcement agency.

In reply, Inu said if any incident happens, there is no bar to covering it. Such incidents will rather help correct the force.

The minister said media people should not be worried about the new broadcast policy.

BNP now for issue

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rally in the capital on August 19 protesting the broadcast policy.

Besides, leaders of 20-party alliance will also make a ten-day divisional tour from August 21 to drum up public support for their demand for a fresh and inclusive election under a non-party administration.

At the last night's meeting at her Gulshan office, Khaleda agreed to sever ties with Shawkat Hossain Nilu-led faction of National Peoples Party his "anti-alliance activities," said Abdul Latif Nejam, chief of alliance partner Islami Oikya Jote.

Fariduzzaman Farhad who expelled Nilu last month for his "anti-organisational activities" and declared himself the chief of NPP will represent the party in the alliance from now on.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir will formally announce all these decisions before the press at the party's Nayapaltan central office today.

A BNP leader quoted Khaleda as saying at the standing committee meeting: "The government will have the opportunity to harass our leaders and activists if we go for tougher agitation right now."

Life stirs in Gaza

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outside a UN-run school, a clutch of cars and donkey carts waited to take some refugees back to homes they had fled during the fighting.

"We want to go back to see what happened to our house," said Hikmat Atta, 58, who piled his family into a small cart to visit the home they left in the northern town of Beit Lahiya in the first days of the war.

But with the second truce in a week still in its early stages, he was not taking any chances.

"We're just going back for the day, at night we'll come back here," he told AFP.

Palestinian emergency services said that a one-month-old baby girl died yesterday of injuries sustained during the offensive in the central Gaza Strip.

In Cairo, Egyptian intelligence mediators threw themselves back into shuttle diplomacy that unravelled after rocket attacks breached the previous 72-hour truce on Friday.

They spent yesterday locked in talks with the Palestinian delegation and were to relay their demands to Israeli negotiators, who returned to Cairo three days after abandoning the talks when Palestinian rocket attacks resumed on southern Israel.

Egypt has urged the warring sides to use the new lull to reach "a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire," after efforts to extend a similar truce last week collapsed into a firestorm of violence.

Israel insists that the security of millions of its citizens subject to constant fear from Palestinian rocket attacks be guaranteed.

Hamas, the de facto power in Gaza, has conditioned its acceptance of any permanent agreement on Israel lifting its eight-year blockade on Gaza.

"In the case of Israeli procrastination or continued aggression, Hamas is ready with other Palestinian factions to resist on the ground and politically," its exiled leader Khaled Meshaal told AFP in Doha.

James Rawley, the top UN humanitarian official for the Palestinian territories, said Israel's security concerns must be addressed but warned that without ending the blockade another conflict was likely.

"Not only will we see very little in the way of reconstruction, but I am afraid that the conditions are in place for us to have another round of violence," he told AFP.

Palestinian delegates in Cairo said they would be happy for Palestinian

Party insiders said another reason behind Khaleda's soft stance is that she was yet to complete the structural overhaul of the party, especially the Dhaka city unit and associated bodies, including the Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal.

After the party failed to stop the January 5 one-sided election, the BNP chief said her party would go for tougher agitation to force Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to sit in a dialogue with her on the question of a fresh election.

Khaleda last month categorically announced that she would come up with a tough agitation plan after Eid-ul-Fitr.

Wishing anonymity, a BNP standing committee member said the chairperson's statement was a strategy to give a boost to party men who were frustrated at the opposition's failed movement last year.

"The party high-ups have instructed the leaders to take legal measures to resolve the cases so that the arrested BNP leaders and activists can come out of jail. If we go for a tougher movement right now, the government might adhere to its previous tactics of oppression, resulting in more leaders landing in jail," he mentioned.

president Mahmud Abbas's Palestinian Authority to take over the reconstruction of Gaza and execute any agreement reached in Cairo.

Israel has no direct dealings with Hamas, whose charter calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.

Hamas had refused to extend the last 72-hour lull when it expired on Friday, and Israel accused the Islamist faction of breaching the agreement in its final hours with rocket attacks.

In the gap between ceasefires, warplanes hit more than 170 targets, killing at least 19 people, while the Palestinians fired at least 136 rockets at Israel, of which 93 hit and 13 were shot down, with the rest falling short inside Gaza, the army said.

The UN says just under three quarters of those killed in Gaza were civilians. Around a third of the civilian victims were children.

The first four of 200 injured Palestinians due to be airlifted to Turkey for medical treatment arrived yesterday at hospitals in Ankara, officials said.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who sees himself as a champion of the Palestinian cause, announced the initiative on Sunday during his victory speech after becoming Turkey's first president elected by popular vote.

In the West Bank, a Palestinian militant allied to the Fatah movement of Abbas, was shot dead early yesterday in an exchange of fire with Israeli troops near Nablus, witnesses and a Palestinian security source said.

Inu regrets

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speak keeping everything in mind."

Referring to his smoking on a dais, the PM said the media rather helped him in quitting smoking that he could not give up in his entire life. "So what makes you angry with the newsmen?" she questioned.

According to meeting sources, the minister defended himself saying that he had reacted to criticism of the government from some journalist leaders at the programme.

ABOUT TUBA UNREST

Hasina told the cabinet that had the BGMEA paid wages to the Tuba Group workers before the Eid-ul-Fitr, there would not have been any complications.

Condemning the Israeli attacks on Gaza, she questioned the role of the Arab countries in this regard.