

Iran to prosecute British sailors

UK embassy seeks access to soldiers

AP, AFP, Tehran

Eight British Navy sailors serving in Iraq will be prosecuted on charges of entering Iran's territorial waters, Iran's state-run television said yesterday.

The eight were detained in the Shatt-al-Arab waterway on Monday as they were delivering a patrol boat for the new Iraqi Riverine Patrol Service. The waterway runs along the border between Iran and Iraq.

"They will be prosecuted for illegally entering Iranian territorial waters," the Arabic language Al-Alam television said Tuesday.

"The vessels were 1,000 meters inside Iranian territorial waters. The crew have also confessed to having entered Iranian waters," the broadcast said.

The British Foreign Office said Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has spoken to Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazmi about the incident.

The waterway, Iraq's main link

with the Persian Gulf that divides Iran and Iraq, has long been a source of tension between the neighbors. The 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war broke out after then-Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein claimed the entire waterway.

Monday's incident follows a strain in Iranian-British relations after London helped draft a resolution rebuking Iran for past nuclear cover-ups at last week's meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors.

Iran says its program is aimed only at producing energy, while the United States accuses Tehran of trying to develop nuclear weapons. Iran accused Britain, which it had seen as a partner in the investigation into its nuclear activities, of caving in to US pressure on the resolution.

Iran Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said Monday that Iranian naval guards, "acting upon their legal duty," seized the boats and detained the

occupants when they entered Iran's territorial waters, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency.

Al-Alam television reported that the crew members were carrying maps and weapons.

The British Defence Ministry said the personnel were from the Royal Navy training team based in southern Iraq. They were delivering a boat from Umm Qasr to Basra, Iraq.

"The boats are unarmed but the crews were carrying their personal weapons," a statement said.

AFP adds: Britain and Iran were locked in talks yesterday following the arrests of eight British soldiers who allegedly strayed from Iraq into the Islamic republic's territory, the British embassy said.

"What we are concentrating on now is contacts with the Iranian ministry of foreign affairs and trying to gain access," a diplomat and spokesman at the embassy, Andrew Dunn, told AFP.

N Korea, US still poles apart on eve of talks

REUTERS, Beijing

Negotiators at six-party talks in Beijing this week will discuss a freeze of North Korea's nuclear programs and inspections leading to their dismantling, a South Korean official said yesterday.

The official was speaking at the end of two days of working-group talks to lay a foundation for the senior-level negotiations among the two Koreas, the United States, Russia, Japan and host China set to run from Wednesday to Saturday.

It was unclear whether progress toward ending the 20-month-old crisis over Pyongyang's nuclear programs could be made.

Protagonists the United States and North Korea have given little sign of budging from their widely divergent positions.

"There was a consensus that at the plenary talks there should be specific discussions on a nuclear freeze accompanied by inspection as the first step of dismantlement," the South Korean official told reporters after the working-level talks closed.

"We believe that there will be authoritative and substantive discussions on elements of a freeze and other issues at the plenary talks," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Foreign Minister K. Natwar Singh (R) chats with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (L) prior to the opening ceremony of the 3rd Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), in the eastern Chinese port city of Qingdao yesterday. A forum of 22 Asian foreign ministers discussed some of the region's thorniest issues -- from the North Korean standoff to the Indo-Pakistani rift, although these were not the official agenda of the third session of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD).



PHOTO: AFP

Former Deputy Prime Minister of India and senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) L.K. Advani (L) walks alongside BJP President Venkaiah Naidu (R) as they arrive for a BJP National Executive meeting in Mumbai yesterday. Some 199 BJP delegates are taking part in the meeting which will discuss the removal of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi from office and the prevailing political situation after the defeat in the recent elections and efforts to regain party's premier position by taking corrective measures to overcome shortcomings.

'Iraq needs court order to take Saddam custody' Saddam's letters confiscated : ICRC

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's interim government must obtain a court order before it can take legal custody of former dictator Saddam Hussein, a senior official with the US-led coalition said yesterday.

He added that Saddam, held now by US forces, would be in the "initial group" of what are being termed high-value detainees, handed to the Iraqis for trial.

"Before we turn over any of the detainees we have to make sure there is a valid Iraqi court order that authorises the Iraqi government to detain them," the official told a briefing.

"We are now planning to (issue) that order in a way that will abide by Iraqi law so the detainees who are handed over to the Iraqi government are accorded due process," he added.

He said the due process would give the prisoners rights such as

legal counsel and a certain standard of detention.

"We will maintain physical custody and control and ensure their safety and security and wellbeing," he said. "We will make sure they are treated in accordance with Iraqi law and we will grant access in accordance with Iraqi law."

Meanwhile, US forces have confiscated three letters written by ousted Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to his family to check their contents before releasing them, an ICRC spokeswoman said here yesterday.

"The American authorities are holding on to three messages written by Saddam Hussein to his family to check their content and for the purpose of censorship," Nada Doumani said in Amman.

She said this was in line with the terms of the Geneva Conventions.

Spy's defection to cause no rupture in Indo-US ties

THE STATESMAN/ANN, New Delhi

The defection of the spy from the RAW, Rabinder Singh, to the United States has injected an added element of caution into strategic relations with Washington, but no rupture.

While it would indicate a certain penetration into the country's intelligence services by US agencies, according to sources, such events were "common" even among close allies like the British and the Americans, and did not mean that bilateral ties would be hit, contrary to suggestions by US analysts.

While New Delhi is upset and has chosen to downplay the incident which has clearly been an embarrassment, strategic ties with Washington, forged largely by the previous NDA government, will proceed, but with greater wariness.

Troops blamed for killing in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Police in Indian Kashmir have in the past year received 450 complaints of alleged human rights violations by Indian troops including torture and custodial killings, officials said yesterday.

The complaints were filed with police by the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), an autonomous body set up by the government in the mid-1990s to investigate claims of human rights abuses, senior police officer K. Rajendra Kumar said in a statement.

Kumar said some 350 complaints were investigated and reports sent back to the commission. Twenty cases were found to be fabricated while the commission was dealing with the remaining 330.

"These cases are still under investigation. We are examining witnesses and victims," a commission official told AFP.

Though Kumar did not say what were the charges, the SHRC official said they included disappearances of arrested activists, molestation of women and unwarranted detentions and raids.

Indian troops battling a 15-year-old anti-Indian insurgency in the restive region are often accused of human rights violations by rights groups and separatists, charges they deny.

The unrest has so far left 40,000 people dead by official count. Separatists, wanting to secede Kashmir from India and join it with rival Pakistan or keep it independent put the toll between 80,000 and 100,000.

Kumar said complaints were thoroughly investigated and sent back to the SHRC for appropriate action. The services of detectives were sought to probe certain complicated cases, he said.

Police were also strengthening their mechanisms to redress public grievances, he added.

Indo-Pak officials talk water sharing

AFP, New Delhi

Senior Indian and Pakistani officials began talks here yesterday aimed at resolving differences over the sharing of water from rivers running through disputed Kashmir.

The Pakistani team, which arrived in the Indian capital New Delhi Monday, is headed by Water and Power Secretary Ashfaq Mehmood and includes Water Commissioner Jamaat Ali Shah, engineers and experts, an Indian official said.

The Indian side is being led by V.K. Duggal, secretary in the water resources ministry and includes Water Commissioner D.K. Mehta, he said.

India's minister for water resources, Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, after a meeting with the Pakistani team late Monday, said he hoped for a "positive and good" outcome for the talks.

"Talks are going on at the secre-

tary level. We hope that the outcome will be both positive and good which in turn will help in improving the overall bilateral relations," the Press Trust of India news agency quoted Dasmunshi as saying.

The two delegations were aiming to narrow recent differences over the sharing of waters under the 1960 Indus Basin Treaty, which divides between Pakistan and India six rivers which run through or start in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

The provisions of the treaty give India exclusive rights over the waters of the Sutlej, Ravi and Beas rivers, while Pakistan has rights over the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum rivers.

According to Pakistan, India is violating the provisions of the treaty with its construction of the Bagliar dam on the Jhelum river and the proposed Krishna Ganga dam on the Chenab in the Indian-controlled side of Kashmir.

China will never seek hegemony, says PM

PTI, Qingdao

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao yesterday said that disputes left over from history should be resolved through dialogue and reassured the communist giant's neighbours that Beijing will never seek "hegemony".

"For those problems left over by history or controversial issues, we should focus on the larger picture, conduct consultation on an equal footing, and handle them properly through mutual understanding and accommodation," Wen said this without naming any country, in his inaugural speech at the third Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) Foreign Ministers meeting in Qingdao.

China views its boundary dispute with India as a "historical issue" and under the first-ever joint declaration signed last June between New Delhi and Beijing, both Governments have reiterated their readiness to seek a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution through consultations on an equal footing."

"To some of these issues, the principle of 'shelving differences and going in for joint development' can be applied," he said.

"We should adhere to the five

principles of peaceful co-existence and safeguard peace and stability in Asia," Wen said at the meeting attended among others by External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh and 21 other Foreign Ministers from Asia.

"China will never pursue hegemony," the Chinese Premier Wen said one should respect the reality of Asia's diversity, carry forward the tradition of Asian cooperation, treat each other candidly and as equals, settle disputes through dialogue and seek security through cooperation.

He said China's development cannot be separated from the support and help from all Asian countries, adding Beijing would play "a more active part" in various multilateral processes that are aimed at promoting Asian cooperation.

"We will honour our commitments and fulfill our responsibilities," he said while stressing that his Government will strengthen cooperation with East Asian countries as well as with south Asian, central Asian and west Asian countries.

"China will unswervingly uphold the policy of 'building an amicable, tranquil and prosperous neighbourhood,'" he said.

Changes to NPT must include India, Pakistan, Israel: IAEA

PTI, Washington

Any adjustment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) must include India, Pakistan and Israel at the negotiating table. Without their inclusion in and commitment to the broad nonproliferation and security reform, our efforts will fail," El Baradei said at a two-day conference on International Non-Proliferation organized by the Carnegie Endowment yesterday.

Meanwhile, the United States has welcomed the meeting between External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri saying that it was an opportunity for progress in bilateral ties and reducing the risk of use of nuclear weapons.

"We do think this is an opportunity for them to make further progress and comprehensive engagement while at the same time agreeing on concrete steps to lower the risk of accidental or intentional use of nuclear weapons. So we do think there are opportunities here and we are glad the parties are pursuing them," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday.

Warning that India and Pakistan are unlikely to agree to give up their nuclear weapons unless the five Permanent Members of the Security Council do likewise, he said the logical point for bringing India and Pakistan into the arms control process would be a part of the global disarmament road map.

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PHOTO: AFP

Civilians look at a damaged armoured personnel carrier on a street of the main Ingush city of Nazran yesterday. Armed clashes erupted near Russia's separatist republic of Chechnya in the early hours of yesterday as rebels stormed police targets in neighboring Ingushetia in brazen attacks that killed at least 48 people and wounded several others. Some 200 rebels were involved in the clashes with law-enforcement authorities, Interfax quoted an official with the Ingush Interior Ministry as saying.



PHOTO: AFP

Customers flip through copies of the new Bill Clinton autobiography "My Life" at a Barnes and Noble book store yesterday in New York City. Former US president Bill Clinton's autobiography went on sale yesterday and was set to become an instant hit with his account of how he confessed to his affair with Monica Lewinsky.