

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 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).

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

BJP to stick to hardline Hindu line

AFP, Mumbai

India's ousted BJP party said yesterday it would stick to the hardline Hindu ideology which analysts claimed contributed to its rout in national elections and instead blamed its defeat on complacency.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Venkaiah Naidu set the tone for the party's three-day wound-licking conference at a hotel here by telling delegates in the opening session there would be no deviation from its Hindutva (Hindu way of life) policy.

"The BJP has believed that Hindutva and Indianness are synonymous. They are one and the same," Naidu said.

"As far as the BJP is concerned, there is no question of being apologetic about Hindutva. The question of going back to Hindutva does not arise because we have never left, nor will we ever leave it."

Naidu said the party was also not against minorities in the country but believed in "justice for all and appeasement of none."

Political analysts said factors behind the party's shock defeat were that it had lost touch with India's vast rural poor while at the

same time had also too strongly projected its hardline Hindu image.

Defeated prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee last week said for the first time that anti-Muslim riots in the western state of Gujarat, which left 2,000 people dead in 2002, had contributed to the BJP's upset election defeat.

He said this week's BJP national meeting in Mumbai would consider replacing Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, one of the party's main exponents of Hindutva who was accused by rights groups of turning a blind eye to the killings of Muslims.

However, party leader Venkaiah Naidu at the weekend shot down Vajpayee, saying Modi's leadership would not be put under the scanner at the meeting.

In his address to party leaders on Tuesday, Naidu said the party had been overconfident going into the April-May elections.

"Overconfidence might have led to complacency in certain places. Our workers and supporters in some constituencies feel that they could take it easy, since the BJP and (its allies) were anyway going to form the government," he said.

The two sides also took positive note of results that have been seen from the efforts being made by the security personnel of both countries in controlling terrorist activities and pointed out the need for mobilising joint security teams maintaining mutual understanding.

They also stressed for discouraging the sale and trafficking of narcotic drugs and decided to expedite the exchange of information on arresting gangs involved in sex crimes, the sources said.

India, Nepal to step up border security

PTI, Kathmandu

Concerned over increasing crime-related incidents along the border, Nepal and India have agreed to mobilise special security personnel in the sensitive areas to control criminal and terrorist activities.

This was decided during talks between security officials from the two countries who met in Janakpur, Nepal, on Monday, Nepalese Home Ministry sources said.

During the meeting, the two sides stressed on the need to increase mutual co-operation in practical manner by respecting each other's laws.

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

PTI, Washington

"Any new adjustment to the (NPT) regime 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.

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.

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

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 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.

Civilians look at a damaged armoured personnel carrier on a street of the main Ingush city of Nazran yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

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.

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 Baglihar dam on the Jhelum river and the proposed Krishna Ganga dam on the Chenab in the Indian-controlled side of Kashmir.

"Talks are going on at the secre-



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.