

UN N-watchdog heads to t N Korea

REUTERS, Vienna

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog will meet the North Korean government next month to discuss the shutdown of its nuclear program and bring the secretive communist state back under UN supervision.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei said he had received an invitation from Pyongyang on Friday, after a deal last week to shut down its Yongbyon nuclear site and allow U.N. inspectors into the country.

"The first (issue) of course is how to develop a plan to freeze the Yongbyon facilities, and more importantly to make sure that they come back as a fully-qualified member of the agency," ElBaradei told reporters in Vienna.

"Very much welcome this opportunity," said ElBaradei in a joint briefing with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is visiting Vienna.

A spokeswoman for the IAEA added that ElBaradei planned to go after an IAEA board meeting in March.

The apparent progress of the plan to dismantle Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions came just a day after ElBaradei said in a report to the U.N. Security Council that Iran was still defying U.N. demands to suspend its nuclear enrichment program.

Ban said Iran should take a cue from North Korea and return to dialogue with the international community.

"I very much hope that the Iranian authorities learn from the case of the North Korean nuclear issue," Ban said. "It should emphasize the better future of the nuclear issue through dialogue."

The Islamic Republic says its nuclear program, kept secret for 18 years, is only for fuel production. The West fears it secretly wants to make atomic bombs.

North Korea agreed on February 13 to take steps toward nuclear

disarmament in exchange for \$300 million in aid under a deal President Bush hailed as the best chance to get it to scrap its atomic weapons program.

The landmark agreement, reached four months after Pyongyang stunned the world with its first nuclear test, requires the Stalinist state to shut down the reactor at the heart of its nuclear ambitions and allow international inspections.

The accord also calls for concessions by the United States toward economically impoverished North Korea which Bush once lumped together with Iran and Iraq as an "axis of evil."

The White House welcomed North Korea's invitation as a sign for concrete steps to implement the deal.

"It's a positive sign. It shows that we're beginning to execute the terms of the agreement. We'll be interested in hearing his report when he gets back, but certainly our view is positive on that," White House spokesman Tony Fratto said.

But Vice President Dick Cheney, speaking earlier on Friday in Sydney, questioned whether Pyongyang would follow through on its commitments under the deal.

"In light of North Korea's missile test last July, its nuclear test in October and its record of proliferation and human rights abuses, the regime in Pyongyang has much to prove, yet this agreement represents the first hopeful step toward a better future for the North Korean people," he said.

Analysts said the invitation to ElBaradei just over a week after the deal was sealed appeared to show President Kim Jong-il's government was willing to implement the accord.

"We didn't expect the North Koreans to do it so quickly and so comprehensively, so it's a very good sign that they are taking this denunciation very seriously," said David Albright, head of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington.

Relief seized

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Dhaka at 245pm yesterday.

Earlier in the day Gulshan police filed a general diary (GD) and him for 'shady bank transactions'.

After Mir Nasir's arrest, Helal took Tk 2.92 crore out of a joint bank account with his father with the Standard Chartered Bank, second officer of Gulshan Police Station Mahbub Moshed said in his forwarding report to the court.

He submitted that Helal needs to be put behind bars or placed on remand to find out the reasons for withdrawing the amount that he termed unusual.

Khondoker Mahbubuddin Ahmed moved a bail prayer for Helal but on hearing both the sides Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun Al Rashid ordered he be sent to jail.

He held under Emergency Power Ordinance at his Gulshan residence on Thursday night, he was first handed over to Gulshan Police Station Friday. But later he was shifted to Cantonment Police Station.

Meanwhile, the joint forces arrested Maruf Ahmed Bijon, the public prosecutor of Meherpur district, near Sergeant Aham Police Box in Gulistan yesterday morning.

President of Meherpur Jubo Dal and general secretary of the district sports association, Maruf was on his way to the National Sports Council.

After primary interrogation he was taken to Paltan Police Station at 4:00pm, and was there till filing of this report at around 8:00pm.

The duty officer said he did not know anything about the charges against him. The forces might have had specific allegations against him, he added.

Our Meherpur correspondent adds: Maruf, brother of former BNP lawmaker Masud Arun, had gone into hiding since the anti-crime crackdown began in January.

Earlier, he was arrested in 2002 on charge of ransacking Meherpur town police outpost and beating up the officer-in-charge. He served over three months then.

CHITTAGONG

Jahangir, commissioner of ward No 29 and former president of Dock Sramik League, and his brother Alaudin alias Alo had established a reign of terror in and around the port area after AL came to power in 1996, sources said.

Accused of killing labour leader Abdul Hannan about a decade ago, he faces numerous allegations including smuggling, extortion, and murders.

Nazim, arrested by Bangladesh Navy men, is commissioner of ward No 6. He stands accused in several criminal cases filed for extortion, robbery and arson. He is also the general secretary of Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Sandip unit.

SATKHIRA

Police yesterday recovered over 437 CI sheets for relief from the houses of local Jamaat and BNP leaders in different areas.

Police arrested four Jamaat leaders from Kaliganj and Debhata upazilas for misappropriating the CI sheets. They are Jamaat leaders Krishnanagar upazila Amir Abdus Sattar and Nayeb-e-Amir Abdus Sattar Azadi, Amjad Sardar from Naubaspur village and Abdul Khaleque from Kamta village.

Police filed a case against Bhamra union Jamaat Amir and UP chairman Samsul Alam after recovering 36 CI sheets from his house at Bhamra village.

Local Jamaat leaders con-

structed at least 20 party offices in different areas in the district with

Outlaw dies

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after raiding his house at South Mulgram under Kumarkhali upazila at around 10:30 am yesterday on information that he returned home from the hideout.

According to Rab, Bolai fell sick at around 2:45pm during interrogation at local Rab office.

Doctors at Kushtia General Hospital found Bolai's pressure very low and declared him dead at about 3:30pm.

Police said Bolai was an accused in at least a dozen cases including four for murders and evading arrest for the last several years.

Mir Nasir

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the capital in the early hours of February 4. He was shifted from Dhaka Central Jail to Bogra Jail on February 12.

Meanwhile, Bogra municipality Chairman and former BNP district unit president advocate Mahbubur Rahman met Mir Nasir at his hospital cabin yesterday noon violating rules.

As the incident created strong criticism, authorities withdrew Deputy Jailer Fazlul Haq and Sub-Inspector Saiful Islam—the latter was guarding Nasir's cabin—for negligence of duty. A committee was formed to probe the matter.

Bogra Deputy Commissioner Abdul Gani admitted that Mahbubur did not take permission for the visit and that only family members can meet a detainee once a month.

Mahbubur also admitted to visiting Nasir for "only 10-15 minutes" but claimed that he met him "mistakenly".

"I went to meet two leaders of Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal but mistakenly entered Mir Nasir's cabin," he told reporters.

Fish market raids

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only a few hours early in the morning. Traders from the city and adjacent areas collect fish from the Sawarighat market to sell them at different markets.

The joint forces raided the Sawarighat wholesale fish market at 4:00am following information from plain-clothes members that sufficient fish had reached the market.

They requested all buyers to leave the market and collected samples of fish from the wholesalers for testing.

The test with modern equipment recently given by the Department of Environment instantly found most of the samples positive with formalin.

The joint forces then seized all the fishes from the traders.

Officials of the environment department said formalin is very harmful not only for the consumers but also for the people using it and businessmen handling it.

"Formalin causes various gastro-intestinal diseases, including cancer and kidney ailments, if it is consumed for a long period of time," said Mostafizur Rahman Akanda, senior chemist of the Department of Environment.

Magistrate Rokon Ud-Doula said they will continue the drive against formalin-treated fish in the city markets.

"Fish imported from Myanmar is mostly preserved with formalin and we will catch importers of such fish too," he said.

The Conservancy Department of Dhaka City Corporation disposed the seized formalin-treated fish at Matuail dumping ground.

Later, the mobile court raided the nearby Waizghat and Kaplan Bazaar markets and seized five maunds jatka and arrested five traders.

Businessmen at the fish markets said they would not be able to sell the fish as customers either left the markets or did not go there hearing the news of the drive. They said they would have to count a huge loss.

Poppy fields

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the joint forces opened fire on the group when they tried to flee the spot.

The seized items include -- six local guns, an SBL rifle, 50 grams of gunpowder, 1.1 kg of opium, 11 litres of opium juice and a radio set.

The joint forces comprising around 300 personnel from different camps including district headquarters, Ruma and Laram camps, took part in the weeklong drive against the opium cultivators that started from February 17 in Boro Modak, army and BDR sources from Bandarban said. Around 50 acres of poppy fields were destroyed during the weeklong raids, they added.

Such anti-drug raids are conducted each year by the army and the BDR in the border areas, particularly in the regions where poppies and other plants for producing drugs are cultivated. The joint forces destroyed vast poppy fields last year also, sources said.

The arrestees and the seized items were in the custody of the joint forces as of 2:30pm yesterday.

He told The Daily Star that they

400 militants

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detained in the crackdown "and around that number have been killed" since it was launched in mid-February. The campaign is regarded as the last chance to prevent all-out civil war.

North of Baghdad, Iraqi troops supported by U.S. aircraft killed "tens" of militants as an insurgent base early on Saturday, the Interior Ministry said.

Ministry spokesman Brigadier Abdul-Kareem Khalaf said a large Iraqi force clashed with insurgents in a rural area of Mashhadah at dawn. U.S. aircraft destroyed the base.

Maliki said the crackdown would be extended to other provinces once Baghdad was stabilized. "I'm very optimistic about this plan because of the cooperation between the people and the security forces," he said.

A statement from his office said the prime minister reminded security forces to "respect the citizen" during searches. "We will punish all those who ease up on searches involving people from their sect or ethnicity," the statement said.

Washington has called the Mehdi Army, a militia loyal to radical Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, the greatest threat to security in Iraq. Sunni Arabs blame it for running death squads with the collusion of police they say are deeply infiltrated by the militia. Sadr denies the charges.

The crackdown appears to have reduced the number of death squad victims found each day in Baghdad from around 40 or 50 in recent months, but U.S. commanders have said it will take months to really judge its success.

On Friday just five bodies were found, a police source said.

ANGER OVER DETENTION

Hundreds of Iraqis took to the streets of Shi'ite towns on Saturday to protest Friday's detention of Ammar al-Hakim.

There were no reports of violence. The U.S. military said Ammar al-Hakim was held on Friday because members of his convoy acted suspiciously at a border checkpoint while returning from

Iran. He was released after several hours.

The incident could strain good ties between Washington and the elder Hakim's Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the dominant party in the Shi'ite-led government.

Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim held talks with President Bush in Washington in December.

U.S. military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Garver said in a statement the convoy was stopped because the vehicles met "specific criteria for further investigation in an area where smuggling activity has taken place in the past."

"At the time, members of the convoy did not cooperate with Coalition Forces and displayed suspicious activities which subsequently led to Mr. Hakim's detention," Garver said.

Further investigation led to Mr. Hakim's release to Iraqi authorities and the return of his possessions. Mr. Hakim was treated with dignity and respect throughout the incident. "Unfortunate incidents such as this occasionally occur as Iraq endeavours to secure its borders," he said.

Washington accuses Iran of providing weapons to Shi'ite militias in Iraq. Security forces closed the border with Iran for several days earlier this month.

U.S. forces have recently arrested a number of Iranians in Iraq, including several who were seized at Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim's compound in Baghdad. They were later released.

Abdul-Kareem al-Jazairi, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim's Basra representative, said the incident highlighted "American foolishness."

"He is a well-known figure and to claim he was arrested by mistake is nonsense. We consider this an American attempt to create chaos in Iraq," he told Reuters at a protest in Basra.

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