

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-fledged member of the agency," ElBaradei told reporters in Vienna.

"I 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 declassification very seriously," said David Albright, head of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington.

Outlaw dies

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after raiding his house at South Mugram 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 Jatiyatabadi 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 Bazar 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 Lama 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.

400 militants

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d 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 at 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 Mashhad at dawn. U.S. air strikes 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 Shiite 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 militias. 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."

"Unfortunately incidents such as this occasionally occur as Iraq endeavors 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.

Reckitt's illegal unit

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the company and the building owner.

Meanwhile, the court yesterday fined seven owners of Majipukur, a famous pond, Tk 2 lakh for filling it up illegally.

On Thursday, the court stopped the filling up of the pond at the city's Saltgola during a raid and arrested three people in this connection. The court ordered the owners to dig the pond again at their own cost, sources said.

On the same day, the court stopped filling up of another pond of Barrister Sultan Ahmad College under Bandar Police Station and ordered the college authority to submit record documents of the pond.

Crackdown

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Lauding the DSE's introduction of the state-of-the-art automation system, he expressed hope that with more facilities and increasing transparency and accountability, the stock exchange will be able to fulfill the investors' demands.

Emphasising transparent dissemination of information regarding floating of shares or listing of companies on the stock exchange, Finance Adviser Dr Mirza Azizul Islam said otherwise the general investors may suffer loss due to lack of proper information.

There is also a need to enhance the capacity of the market concerned for analysing the information, he observed.

Speaking at the function, Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Faruq Admad Siddiqi said the market capitalisation is 9.15 per cent of the GDP and there is huge scope for growth.

Big local and multinational companies especially telecommunications companies are yet to come to the capital market, he said, adding, "I believe that next few years will witness spectacular growth of capital market in the country."

DSE Chief Executive Officer Salahuddin Ahmed Khan made a multimedia presentation on Securities Market in Bangladesh.

DSE President Abdullah Bokhari and Senior Vice-president Ahmad Rashid Lali also spoke at the function.

Later, the chief adviser unveiled the plaque of the foundation stone.

Voter ID cards

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electoral laws regarding issuance of voter ID cards, the sources said.

The laws say the EC shall issue identity cards to every voter and no voter will be allowed to have ballot papers to exercise his or her right to franchise if he or she fails to show the card.

The EC had taken up a project in 1995 to provide voters with ID cards, but only 20 percent of the project was completed before the parliamentary election in 1996 due to time constraint.

Finally the provision, which had made showing of voter ID cards mandatory to have ballot papers, was suspended allowing voters to exercise their right to franchise without showing any card during the parliamentary elections on February 15 and June 12 in 1996.

But the provision for issuance of the identity cards however was not suspended. The electoral rolls ordinance and rules say the EC shall issue ID cards to each voter, according to the inquiry committee formed by the government in 1996 to unearth the reasons behind the failure of the voter ID card project.

The project was completed in 2000 with a cost of Tk 139 crore, but failed to issue ID cards to all voters. According to documents available at the EC Secretariat the project completed issuing ID cards among 70 percent of the voters.

But the completed project was full of flaws, said officials of the EC Secretariat.

The project that had begun in 1995 was suspended for 17 months from 1996 to 1997 due to the erstwhile government's indecision about whether to continue it. It began again in November 1997 and continued till June 2000.

EC Secretariat officials said the commission did not dare to resume the task of issuing voter ID cards again because of the failure of its first project.

15 cops killed

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"The needle of suspicion is pointed towards the Kanglei Yawol Lanna Lup," said an intelligence official, who asked not to be named.

The group, founded in 1994, is fighting for an independent homeland for the majority Meitei community, who make up 70 percent of Manipur's population.

The militants have targeted security forces, drug dealers and smugglers, and have recently begun targeting teachers, in a bid to "cleanse" the state's education system.

Rebels have shot at the legs of teachers who missed class, police say.

Shiites decry detention of leader's son

AP, Baghdad

Thousands of Shiites rallied in the holy city of Najaf yesterday to protest the nearly 12-hour detention of the eldest son of Iraq's most influential Shiite politician as he crossed back from Iran.

Amar al-Hakim, who was taken into custody on Friday, complained Saturday that U.S. soldiers handcuffed and blindfolded him before his release and "strongly abused" his bodyguards.

"Is this the way to deal with a national figure? This does not conform with Iraq's sovereignty," he said.

He said cell phones, licensed weapons and two-way radios were among items confiscated.

"It is not a question of offering apologies," the black-turbaned cleric told reporters in Najaf, about 100 miles south of Baghdad. "We need clear and honest measures to prevent such incidents from happening again."

Even though U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad issued a rapid apology, the decision to hold al-Hakim and his complaints about his detention risk touching off a backlash from Shiite leaders at a time when their cooperation is needed most to keep a major security sweep through Baghdad from unraveling. At least 13 people died in attacks on Saturday in the capital, including five in a suicide car bombing at the headquarters of the political party headed by al-Hakim's father.

It also highlights the often knotty relationship between U.S. military authorities and Iraq's leaders, whose ties to neighboring patrons Syria backing Sunnis, and Iran acting as big brother to majority Shiites add fuel to sectarian rivalries and bring recriminations from Washington about alleged arms smuggling and outside interference.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, on Saturday would only say the circumstances of the detention were still being investigated.

But Vice President Adil Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite and a top leader in the parliamentary bloc controlled by al-Hakim's father, described the behavior of the U.S. troops involved in the detention as "inappropriate, foolish and haphazard."

The U.S. military said Saturday that al-Hakim was stopped in an area where smuggling between Iraq and Iran is common and detained after members of the convoy "did not cooperate with coalition forces and displayed suspicious activities." He was released to Iraqi authorities and his possessions were returned after further investigation, the military said.

"Mr. Hakim was treated with dignity and respect throughout the incident," the military said. "Unfortunately incidents such as this occasionally occur as Iraq endeavors to secure its borders."

About 8,000 people demonstrated near the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, 100 miles south of Baghdad, against the detention, raising Iraqi flags and pictures of al-Hakim and his father.

"The detention of al-Hakim represents an insult to the Iraqi people," said Hassan al-Shebli, a

45-year-old storeowner who was among the protesters. "The Americans should avoid such irresponsible acts if they want to establish stability in the country."

Hundreds also took to the streets in Baghdad's main Shiite district of Sadr City and the southern Shiite cities of Karbala and Basra, but the protests were relatively small considering the influence of the al-Hakim family, indicating they were mainly aimed at sending a warning to the Americans.

"What happened is unacceptable," Shiite lawmaker Hamid Majid Moussa told Al-Furat television. "The Iraqi government and the American forces must put an end to such transgressions."

Al-Hakim's father, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, met with President Bush at the White House in December. He is the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI, the country's largest political force.

Former UN envoy supports Iraq pullout

AP, Washington

President Bush should follow British Prime Minister Tony Blair's lead and start withdrawing troops from Iraq, former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke said yesterday.

"Engaging in a broad-based diplomatic offensive, and beginning a redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq, represents the best way to secure America's interests in the region and combat the serious threat of terrorist networks," Holbrooke, who served under President Clinton, said in the Democrats' weekly radio address.

Britain will withdraw about 1,600 troops in the coming months and aims to cut more by late summer. The announcement came as Bush is implementing his plan to send an additional 21,500 combat troops to Iraq.

"Like our allies, the Bush White House needs to acknowledge some unavoidable, if unpleasant, facts on the ground. Plain and simple, there are not, and never have been, enough troops in Iraq to accomplish the mission as stated by President Bush," Holbrooke said.

The Bush administration has said Britain's troop cutback shows success in the region.

Holbrooke said withdrawing troops will give the U.S. more flexibility in fighting terrorists and will encourage the Iraqi government to take on more responsibility. He called for increased diplomatic efforts with countries who have a stake in Iraq's future, such as Syria and Iran.

Meanwhile, Senate Democrats are drafting legislation to require the gradual withdrawal of U.S. combat troops beginning within 120 days after the bill's enactment.

"As Americans, we should ask: Why are thousands more of our troops being sent to Iraq just as British troops are planning to leave?" Holbrooke said.

Sonadia forestland

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using those lands for more than five years for shrimp and salt farming, clearing mangrove forests, local forest department officials said.

Illegal occupation of government land and indiscriminate destruction of forests have become an order of the day in Cox's Bazar coastal areas, mainly for shrimp cultivation, they mentioned.

Many more forestlands in Sadar and Moheshkhali upazilas of the district occupied by land grabbers in the last five years are still to be recovered.

The grabbed lands are in Gomatoli, Pokkhali, Chawfaldandi, Varuakhali, Tetaya, Khurushkul and Zhilanga in Sadar upazila and Baro Moheshkhali, Kalamarchhara, Hatalia Ghona, Jhapua, Panirchhara, Kutubzum, Gorok Ghata, Kali Gong, Hanoak, Haria Chara, Thakur Tala, Fakira Ghona, North Nalbia, Dhal Ghata, Amabashya Khali, Matari Bari, Sonadia and Ghati Bhanga in Moheshkhali upazila.

Forest officials said they have so far filed 461 cases against 1,843 encroachers.

The courts at different times ordered recovery of 912 acres of forestland-- 320 acres in Dhalghata, 200 in Chirandip, 10 in Matarbari, 350 in Saradia and 32 acres in Lemshikhali. But the matter virtually ended there.

"We are still filing cases but there has been little progress either in recovery of the lands or taking steps against the encroachers," a forest official said.

Encroachment on forestland continues in different coastal areas including Goldia island.

"We got copies of court verdicts for recovery of Goldia island but we cannot take any action. We are threatened by the grabbers. The encroachment is going on and we are also filing cases," the official said looking frustrated.

When contacted, Advocate Faridul Alam, legal adviser to Chittagong Coastal Forest

Relief seized

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Dhaka at 2:45pm yesterday. Earlier in the day Gulshan police filed a general diary (GD) against 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 Morshed said in his forwarding report to the court.

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

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.

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 Ahad Police Box in Gulistan yesterday morning.

After primary interrogation he was taken to Patan Police Station at 4:00am, 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 Samrik League, and his brother Alauddin 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 Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Sandwip 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 Debhatta upazilas for misappropriating the CI sheets. They are Jamaat leaders Krishnanagar upazila Amir Abdus Sattar and Naye-b-e-Amir Abdus Sattar Azadi, Amjad Sardar from Naubaspur village and Abdul Khaledque from Kamta village.

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

Local Jamaat leaders constructed at least 20 party offices in different areas in the district with

these CI sheets for relief.

NETRAKONA

The joint forces recovered 81 pieces of CI sheets from Changau village raiding the house of Shaifuddin Ahmed Sekul, president of Madan upazila JCD.

In another drive at Kuliat village, the forces recovered 89 pieces of CI sheets from the house of MA Ahad, chairman of Jahangirpur UP.

Joint forces also arrested Abdul Bari Khan, chairman of Kakoirgora UP and vice-president of Durgapur upazila BNP as well as Mukhlesur Rahman, an AL leader of Durgapur.

SYLHET

The joint forces arrested Farhad Chowdhury Shamim at his office in Chowkidekhi area last night.

He was handed over to Sylhet Kotwali police. He has long been accused of smuggling, land grabbing, extortion, and so on, sources said.

The forces also caught Tetli UP chairman and Sylhet district organising secretary of Jatiya Party Usman Ali from his village home at Boldi yesterday. He was wanted in seven cases for bank robbery, murder, land grabbing, tender manipulation and possessing firearms.

Usman was arrested before for looting Tk 22 lakh from a Pubali Bank branch three years ago.

The joint forces also arrested Ashiqur Rahman Ashique, assistant secretary of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, at his office at Abu Horaira Mansion in the city's Ambarkhana area. He faces allegations of collecting money from people in the name of sending them abroad.

CHUADANGA

Chairman of Khadimpur UP in Alamdanga upazila and Awami Jubo League leader Zillur Rahman was picked up from Hapania village yesterday noon, reports UNB.

Zillur was wanted in several cases.

Meanwhile, the law enforcers arrested Damurhuda UP chairman and also Jubo Dal president Rafiqul Khan from Damurhuda.

PABNA

Police arrested children affairs secretary of district BNP Nizam from Radhanagar in the district.

Leader of an outlawed party Selim Chowdhury was also arrested from Sujanager upazila. Furthermore, two other activists of an outlawed party were arrested -- Tuku from Bera upazila and Kalam alias Kamal from court area in the district town, UNB reports.

JHENIDAH

Police yesterday recovered a bundle of CI sheets from the house of a local imam. Mozammel Haque, Harinakundu upazila BNP joint secretary and chairman of Taherhuda UP, had allegedly kept the CI sheets there.

MOULVIBAZAR

The joint forces arrested Hazipur UP BNP President Abdul Gofur and recovered eight relief CI sheets from his house.