

Iran's participation at ME summit uncertain

AP, Cairo

Iran's level of participation remained uncertain yesterday as Iraq pushed ahead with plans to hold a March 10 conference with its neighbours and key Western countries on the Iraqi security crisis.

Some Arab neighbours like Egypt, for their part, still have grave doubts the gathering will accomplish much.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said Wednesday the Iranians had agreed to participate in a meeting with Iraq's other neighbours. But he said "they have some questions" about a separate session that would be held the same day with the five permanent UN Security council members: the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China.

His words seemed to indicate that Iran was at least partly unhappy with the arrangements for the conference. Iran has had little public comment on the conference so far beyond saying it would weigh attending and that it generally supported regional efforts to stabilize Iraq.

In the past, Iranian leaders have accused the United States of trying to use the UN Security Council as a way to "gang up" on it.

UN diplomats said the Iranians might be waiting to see if the United States is prepared to discuss issues other than Iraq at the conference.

Or, Iran may be reluctant to go to Iraq and face questions about the discovery of a factory north of Baghdad for assembling roadside bombs from Iranian-made components, the diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity.

Even as attention focused on whether Iran would attend, some of Iraq's Arab neighbours also remained leery of the conference potentially creating another complication.

Iraq's relations with its Arab neighbours have been rocky because of fears that the Shia-led government is falling under Iran's influence.

Originally, the Iraqi government had been reluctant to endorse the regional conference, fearing pressure from Sunni-dominated regimes, but it dropped those objections.

Industries ministry

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Although the probe body was supposed to submit its report yesterday, it received 24-hour extension of time as it failed to complete its analysis of the findings, senior information officer of the ministry told reporters yesterday.

Meanwhile, the ntv authorities yesterday told their staff at a consultative meeting in the city that they would soon move to a new office and resume their activities.

Addressing the consultative meeting held at a city hotel yesterday, eminent citizens, artistes, professionals and journalists asked the ntv authorities to resume their activities at the earliest possible. They also suggested broadcasting on a small scale if full-scale operations were not possible.

Some speakers also asked for the resumption of Rtv broadcasting.

Yesterday, security men allowed staffers of different offices in the ill-fated building to enter their offices. However, they did not allow curious onlookers to visit the building charred in the fire that left four people dead and 50 others injured.

Staff of different offices visited their offices to retrieve their files and

tions last year so long as the gathering was held on Iraqi soil.

Two Arab diplomats in Cairo said Wednesday that the US recently increased pressure on some Arab governments to press them to attend the conference, after they initially had turned down invitations from the Iraqi government. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity.

Syria and Egypt confirmed separately they would attend, but there was no immediate comment from Jordan or Saudi Arabia. Bahrain, Turkey and Kuwait also were invited, along with the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

Each side in the Middle East's widening Shia-Sunni split has accused another of being responsible for the spiralling violence in Iraq.

Iraqi officials have complained that Sunni countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia are not doing enough to help calm Iraq, while the Sunnis in turn blame Iraq's Shia-led government for failing to rein in death squads and Shia militias.

Mustafa Alani, an expert in Iraqi affairs at the Gulf Research Centre in Dubai, predicted that neighbouring Sunni Arab countries thus would use the conference to convey along with the United States their disquiet at Iran's growing influence.

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa, speaking to reporters Wednesday in Cairo, hinted at the continued Sunni Arab dissatisfaction with Iraq's leaders.

"Iraq is now in a crisis and needs the cooperation of all, including the United States, which is the decision-maker and the one which has an intensive presence there," he said.

"Arabs should not be blamed for their position on Iraq. Those who blame Arabs are looking for scapegoats," he said.

Moussa's deputy, Ahmed Ben Heli, said Arab foreign ministers would meet in Cairo on Sunday to discuss proposals "on how to reactivate the Arab role in Iraq."

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Asking for the resumption of Rtv broadcasting.

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documents.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police did not even allow former president HM Ershad inside the building. Ershad went to the building to see the devastation along with other senior party leaders around 11:00am yesterday.

Talking to reporters while leaving the spot, Ershad emphasised the need for a neutral probe body to unearth the "mystery" behind the fire, as people want to know about it.

Another probe body formed by the home ministry worked all daylong at the building and collected evidence. It is scheduled to submit its report to the home ministry on March 12.

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24, of Bhalbalpur, Abdul Kuddus of Shantapara and Abdur Rahman of Goalkandi.

All were arrested at their respective homes in the early hours yesterday.

Yunus asks

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He hailed Yunus as Bangladesh's hope, inspiration and joy and thanked him for brightening the country's image when it was being dragged into darkness by normal" and since it is not seen as a problem it would not be resolved.

He said innovative ideas need new and flexible laws in practice as the legal mould of outdated laws would force these cutting-edge projects to eventually fit old strictures.

Citing the case of his draft submitted long ago for a state-owned micro-credit bank, Yunus said it has been collecting dust because it required a separate banking law. He regretted that it still has not been accepted even after he, along with others, had drafted the outline of a regulatory body and its operations.

Asian Society President Prof Emajuddin Ahmed said Yunus has pulled off a rare victory in applying his economic theories successfully into practice.

Yunus also said socio-economic problems, such as beggars, continue to be taken as "normal" and since it is not seen as a problem it would not be resolved.

The Asian Society also presented Yunus with a citation read out by Emajuddin. Prof Shahjahan Mia also spoke at the reception.

Yunus will fly for Pakistan tomorrow at the invitation of Pakistan Prime Minister Sharif Aziz, said a Grameen Bank press release.

Journos' entry

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After the notice was pasted, Shamsur Rahman Rumi, a photojournalist of local daily Sonar Desh, went to the hospital to take photographs of the notice but Rajpara police detained him. He was, however, released after an hour when his colleagues rushed to the RMCH campus.

Meanwhile, Rajshahi Journalists Union, Rajshahi Photojournalists Association and journalists of Rajshahi protested the RMCH authorities' decision to prohibit the entrance of newsmen inside the hospital. They demanded immediate withdrawal of the prohibition.

The director of the hospital was reluctant to talk to journalists and receive phone calls from them.

BTV director, news editor made OSD

UNB, Dhaka

State-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) Director M Mahbubul Alam and News Editor DK Fuad Hasan have been made OSD (officer-on-special-duty) as part of the administrative reshuffle under the caretaker government.

According to an official announcement yesterday, both Alam and Fuad have been attached to the head office at Shahbagh in 30

BDT during its recent drives found almost all the fishes imported from Myanmar treated with toxic formalin.

No official record was found from any of the departments concerned about the importers of fish to Bangladesh and the amount of annual import.

Unofficial sources said two importers -- Babul, owner of Sun Moon Enterprise in Mosheshkhali, Cox's Bazar and Masud Ahmed, owner of Masud Enterprise in Potia, Chittagong -- import around 70 thousand kg of fishes and supply them to different markets in the country.

A ship carrying fishes from Myanmar anchor at Teknaf port wherefrom the fishes are sent to different markets including Dhaka.

On Saturday, a mobile court led by Metropolitan Magistrate Rokon Uddoula, seized around 6.5 tonne formalin-treated fish and 187 kg jatka (small hilsa) from the wholesale fish markets at Swarighat, Kaptan Bazaar and Waizghat in the capital. The fishes were mostly from Myanmar.

Mokhles, one of traders caught by the joint forces during the drive at Swarighat, introduced himself as an employee of Masud Enterprise.

He produced papers to the court that show that Myanmar Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries and Myanmar export control section certified those fishes as "edible".

Mokhles, who failed to produce any papers of Bangladesh government, however, said if there is any formalin in those fishes it was put in Myanmar before dispatch.

He also produced a paper provided by the Department of Pharmacy of Dhaka University

Ex-AL MP held

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In response, Sattar only identified himself as a former MP.

Saifur offered Sattar a ride on his motorbike to pass the road and was refused. Moreover, the former lawmaker also slapped him at this stage.

Sattar also slapped Additional Deputy Commissioner (Traffic South) Md Shahjahan when he arrived on the already crowded scene.

He also slapped ATN Bangla special correspondent Ashok Chowdhury and The Daily Star senior reporter Jufikar Ali Manik when they enquired about his misconduct.

Admitting that his behaviour was wrong, Sattar told The Daily Star he did it whimsically.

His wife Rokeya Sattar said he has been mentally disturbed for the last 10 days.

Family sources said Sattar, a contractor of Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa), went to its Motijheel office to collect a bill around 9:30am. The incident took place while he was returning to his Hanchmondi residence.

They also said he recently developed the habit of addressing people by touching their faces and claimed this is not "slapping".

Police arrested and sent him to Shahbagh Police Station. Liakat filed a case with the Shahbagh PS.

Bail sought

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Central Jail in connection with two cases filed with Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar police stations on different dates.

On the other hand, Metropolitan Magistrate Shamsul Alam rejected Abbas' bail petition in connection with the case filed against him for possessing illegal local and foreign currencies and sent him to jail on February 26.

Akhtar was implicated in the case filed for making a huge amount of money through corruption and was sent to jail after he was produced before the court with a proposal for a month's detention from the home ministry the same day.

PINTU'S CASES

Kabir Hossain, a BNP worker of Baragram in Kamrangirchar, filed an attempted murder case with the chief metropolitan magistrate's court on January 25 against Pintu after local police refused to record his complaint.

Shahidul Islam, another resident of Munshihati in Kamrangirchar, filed a theft case against Pintu on February 13.

ABBA'S CASE

The joint forces seized a huge sum of local and foreign currencies and other items from Mirza Abbas' South Shahjahanpur house in the capital on February 4.

Motijheel police filed a case against him under the Special Powers Act, Money Laundering Act and Excise Act on February 24.

The seized items include sales slips for gold ornaments worth Tk 40 lakh, 4,600 US dollars, 17,000 Thai bahts, 418 Singapore dollars, 432 Malaysian ringgits, several mobile phone sets and five passports.

Complainant of the case Sub-Inspector Rafiqul Islam alleged that Abbas had kept those in his possession evading a huge amount of taxes.

AKHTAR'S CASE

The forwarding report placed before the court alleged that Akhtar misappropriated a huge amount of money when he was the power secretary.

Formalin fish

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fisheries department official requesting anonymity.

BSTI during its recent drives found almost all the fishes imported from Myanmar treated with toxic formalin.

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an amount of fish is also smuggled into the country, sources said.

The government is going to formulate new rules for Fish and Fish Products (Inspection and quality control) Law modifying the existing one, but the new draft too lacks any rules for importing fish, fisheries department officials said.

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