India worried about Iraq violence: Envoy

by ASHWIN HONAWAR

DOHA: India is seriously concerned that the increasing sectarian violence in Iraq could trigger widespread Shia-Sunni riots on its own soil, Chinnmaya R Gharekhan, New Delhi’s Special Envoy for West Asia, said here yesterday. India will extend its support to the Palestinian people, regardless of the recent political changes in that country’s leadership, he added.

In an interview with The Peninsula yesterday, Gharekhan said, the current situation in Iraq was of growing concern to India since nearly 13.4 per cent of the country’s population of over one billion consists of Muslims. Of these, an estimated 20 per cent are Shiites. He feared, the sectarian extremism being currently witnessed in Iraq could also emerge in India, due to such a large population of the two sects in the country.

Gharekhan is in Doha to attend the 6th Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade that opened here yesterday evening.

On Thursday, Gharekhan, a career diplomat, will speak at the Fifth Session of the Forum entitled: ‘The Age of Great Immigration’ that will be held at the Al Dafna Hall at the Sheraton Doha, from 12noon to 2pm. The designation, Special Envoy to West Asia, which were free and fair have created a new Palestinian government and we have already established contact with them. Our representative based in Ramallah has already called upon the Palestinian premier and extended our support,” he added. India, he pointed out, had recently donated $15m towards building various facilities in Palestine.

Asked about India’s vote against Iran recently in the UN on Tehran’s nuclear controversy, Gharekhan said, “New Delhi respects Iran’s stance that it is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and has no ambitions to build nuclear weapons. However, Tehran, he said, needed to allay some suspicions about its nuclear program that had emerged in recent years.

“The Indian PM said, we are not in favour of another nuclear power in the region,” he added.

The special envoy assured Indian citizens working in Qatar and other parts of the Middle East that their country cares about them. “We are not at all neglecting them because they are our valued citizens. All our ambassadors in the region are doing their best to look after the interest of our nationals but in some cases, it is also a matter of resources,” he added.

First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani and H E Sheikha Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani with other guests attending the Sixth Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade opening yesterday.

Dan Rather moderates democracy meet

by AYSE ALIBEYOGLU

DOHA: Democracy, development, free and fair trade, the rule of law, international security and cooperation, for the developing as well as the developed countries, were the main topics being addressed by speakers at the opening ceremony of the Doha Forum.

“The Middle East region has yet not reached its full potential, however those in the West should realise that change can not be imposed from outside but from within, and to begin form real partnerships between growing economies, to ensure a better future for us all and realise that in terms of policy - one size does not fit all” on this high note the panel discussion began.

The Sixth Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade opening session was held yesterday evening at the Doha Sheraton Hotel, moderated by world renowned CBS News Anchor, Dan Rather.

In support of this statement, Rossevelt Skerit, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica and Azouz Begag, Minister delegate for the promotion of opportunities, commented Skerit, “free of poverty, ignorance, greed and prejudice”.

Azouz Begag highlighted the importance for “a culture of tolerance” and the key to achieving this is “dialogue and the free movement of people and ideas in order for development to occur”.

- THE PENINSULA