

Iraqi military preparing to take control of Kurdish borders

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Irbil (Iraq): Iraq's military prepared Saturday to take control of the international borders of the northern Kurdish region. The move is part of the central government's stepped-up efforts to isolate the Kurds following their vote on independence earlier this week.

Kurdish women protest against Iraq govt's flight ban order

On Friday evening, Iraq instituted a flight ban that halted all international flights from servicing the territory's airports.

Iraqi troops now in Turkey and Iran are expected to start enforcing control over the border crossings in and out of the Kurdish region, but are not expected to move into Kurdish territory.

Abdul-Wahab Barzani, director of intelligence at the crossing point from the Kurdish region into Turkey, said Iraqi troops are in position on the Turkish side of the border.

“So far they have not contacted us,” he told The Associated Press. He said he heard they plan to set up a customs point some 15 meters (16 yards) away on the Turkish side and traffic is expected to continue to be allowed to pass the crossing normally.

The escalation feeds worries in the United States, a close ally of both the Kurds and Baghdad, that the referendum vote could lead to violence, setting off an unpredictable chain of events.

The nonbinding referendum, in which the Kurds voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence from Iraq, will not immediately result in an independent state.

But the vote has set off alarm bells in Baghdad, where the government has said it is determined to prevent a break-up of the country, and in Iraq's neighbors, Iran and Turkey, which fear the vote will fuel similar ambitions among their own significant Kurdish populations.

- AP