

Israel mulls military strike to snub Iran's nuke drive

AP, AFP, Jerusalem

Israel is building up its strike capabilities amid growing anxiety over Iran's nuclear ambitions and appears confident that a military attack would cripple Tehran's atomic programme, even if it can't destroy it.

Such talk could be more than reality. However, Iran's refusal to accept Western conditions is worrying Israel as is the perception that Washington now prefers diplomacy over confrontation with Tehran.

The Jewish state has purchased 90 F-16 fighter planes that can carry enough fuel to reach Iran, and will receive 11 more by the end of next year. It has bought two new Dolphin submarines from Germany reportedly capable of firing nuclear-armed warheads in addition to the three it already has.

And this summer it carried out air manoeuvres in the Mediterranean that touched off an

international debate over whether they were a "dress rehearsal" for an imminent attack, a stern warning to Iran or a just a way to get allies to step up the pressure on Tehran to stop building nukes.

According to foreign media reports, Israeli intelligence is active inside Iranian territory. Israel's military censor, who can impose a range of legal sanctions against journalists operating in the country, does not permit publication of details of such information in news reports written from Israel.

The issue of Iran's nuclear programme took on new urgency this week after US officials rejected Tehran's response to an incentives package aimed at getting it to stop sensitive nuclear activity setting the stage for a fourth round of international sanctions against the country.

Israel, itself an undeclared nuclear power, sees an atomic bomb in Iranian hands as a direct threat to its existence.

Israel believes Tehran will have enriched enough uranium for a nuclear bomb by next year or 2010 at the latest. The United States has disputed its estimate that Iran is several years or as much as a decade away from being able to field a bomb, but has not been precise about a timetable. In general US officials think Iran isn't as close to a bomb as Israel claims, but are concerned that Iran is working faster than anticipated to add centrifuges, the workhorses of uranium enrichment.

"If Israel, US, or European intelligence gets proof that Iran has succeeded in developing nuclear weapons technology, then Israel will respond in a manner reflecting the existential threat posed by such a weapon," said Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz, speaking at a policy forum in Washington last week.

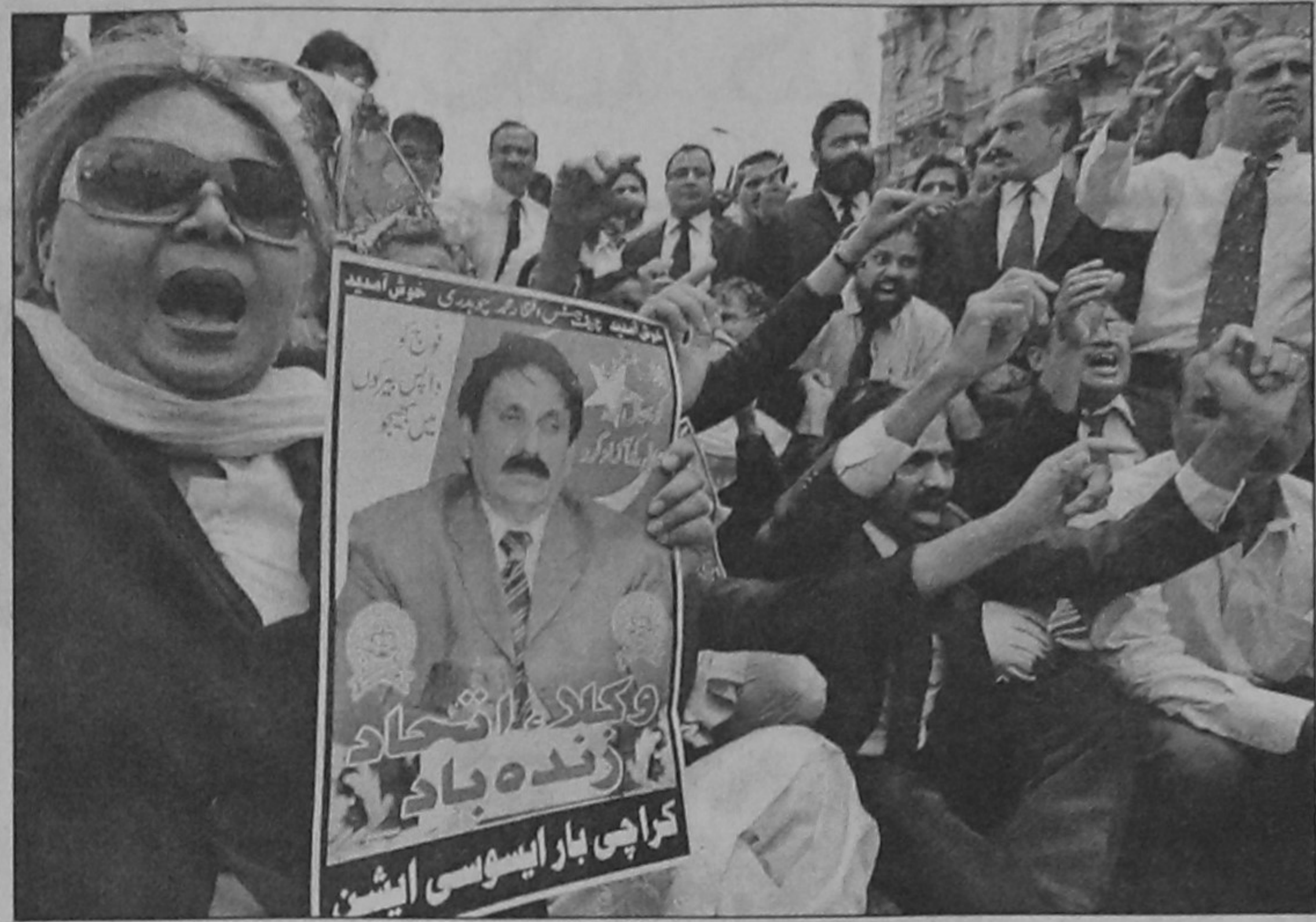
"Israel takes (Iranian President) Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's statements regarding its destruction seriously. Israel cannot risk another

Holocaust," Mofaz said.

The Iranian leader has in the past called for Israel's elimination, though his exact remarks have been disputed. Some translators say he called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," while others say a better translation would be "vanish from the pages of time" implying Israel would disappear on its own rather than be destroyed.

Iran insists its uranium enrichment is meant only for electricity generation, not a bomb an assertion that most Western nations see as disingenuous.

Israeli policymakers and experts have been debating for quite some time whether it would even be possible for Israel to take out Iran's nuclear programme. The mission would be far more complicated than a 1981 Israeli raid that destroyed Iraq's partially built Osirak nuclear reactor, or an Israeli raid last year on what US intelligence officials said was another unfinished nuclear facility in Syria.



Pakistani lawyers chant anti-President Pervez Musharraf slogans during a march in Karachi yesterday in support of sacked judges. Pakistan faced fresh political turmoil after officials said the ruling coalition had agreed to impeach President Pervez Musharraf, a vital US ally in the "war on terror."



An activist is dragged by Israeli soldiers during a scuffle between Palestinian and international activists and Israeli forces during a protest against the construction of Israel's controversial separation barrier in the West Bank village of Nilin near Ramallah yesterday.

Iraq postpones provincial polls

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq yesterday postponed provincial elections originally set for October after MPs failed to agree the necessary legislation in time, in a blow for US-backed efforts to consolidate national reconciliation.

"I can confirm to you that we have lost the chance to hold the elections in October," Qassem al-Aboudi, administrative director of Iraq's electoral commission, told AFP, following a meeting with the United Nations.

Iraq was due to go to the polls on October 1, but the long-awaited legislation that would govern the ballot has faced repeated delays over the political treatment of the disputed northern oil province of Kirkuk.

"We cannot hold an election in October because we need three months to prepare for the polls after the election law is passed," commission member Hamdiya Al-Husseini said.

7 cops, 3 dozen Taliban killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

The Afghan government said yesterday that seven policemen were killed when militants stormed their post in the troubled south, while nearly three dozen militants died in various clashes.

The attacks were part of a tide of extremist-linked violence that has gripped Afghanistan for years as insurgents try to bring down the government that replaced the hardline Taliban regime ousted in 2001.

The policemen were killed in an attack late Wednesday on their post near Lashkar Gah, capital of Helmand province, provincial government spokesman Daud Ahmad told AFP.

"We lost seven police officers. Two others were injured," he said.

Helmand, the main producer of Afghanistan's huge output of opium, is one of the provinces where the Taliban are most active

and control a handful of districts.

Authorities say about 800 members of the Afghan security forces, the bulk of them police, have lost their lives in insurgency-linked unrest since the start of the year.

More than 150 international soldiers have also died, mostly in attacks.

Afghan government officials also reported that three dozen Taliban had been killed in various clashes with security forces overnight, including in Helmand, neighbouring Kandahar and the western province of Badghis.

It is impossible to independently verify the tolls since the fighting mostly occurs in remote and dangerous areas.

Earlier hundreds of French troops have deployed to train and mentor Afghan security forces in a key southern province wracked by the Taliban-led insurgency, Nato said Thursday.

Meanwhile, eight Taliban mili-

tants were killed in the south Wednesday, authorities said.

The French troops traveled in 94 vehicles from Kandahar to Uruzgan province in what was one of the largest ground military convoys in southern Afghanistan in years, the military alliance said in a statement.

Nato did not provide the exact number of troops deployed, and officials would not specify whether they were being relocated from other areas in Afghanistan or were new to the country.

But France has about 1,500 troops in Afghanistan, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy has pledged to send 700 more soldiers by the end of the year to help Nato-led forces.

Meanwhile, Colombia may send soldiers to Afghanistan and attach them to Spanish forces already in the country, the head of the nation's armed forces said late Wednesday.

Nepal extends deadline for new govt: Official

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's president has extended a deadline for ex-rebel Maoists to form the new republic's first government, an official said Wednesday.

President Ram Baran Yadav had asked the Maoists, who won recent elections, to form a national consensus government by Tuesday, but they failed to attract support from other parties.

Political wrangling has left Nepal in limbo with no formal government since it abolished its 240-year-old monarchy and became a federal democratic republic in May.

"The president has given the Maoists three days of additional time to form a consensus government," Lokhari Pandey, joint-secretary of the president's office, told AFP.

The deadline was extended on the request of Maoist chairman Prachanda after reaching an understanding with other political parties.

The Maoists presented a policy programme earlier this week in a bid to build a consensus to lead the next government.

Hillary backers not giving up as convention looms

AFP, Washington

Diehard Hillary Clinton backers stepped up a campaign Wednesday to get their heroine onto the nominating ballot alongside White House hopeful Barack Obama at this month's Democratic convention.

But the Clinton and Obama campaigns issued a joint statement late Wednesday insisting they were working together to unify the party.

"We are working together to make sure the fall campaign and the convention are a success," the statement said.

"At the Democratic Convention, we will ensure that the voices of everyone who participated in this historic process are respected and our party will be fully unified heading into the November election," it said.

The group Colorado Women Count/Women Vote said it would hold a pro-Clinton parade in Denver on August 26, the second day of the convention when the New York senator is rumoured to be given a prime-time speaking slot.

Pakistan must rein in 'uncontrolled' elements Says Afghan minister

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan is keen to work with Pakistan to fight Islamic extremism, but Islamabad must rein in elements in the government that are "out of control," the Afghan foreign minister said Wednesday.

Relations between the neighbours plummeted last month when Afghanistan directly accused Pakistan's intelligence agency of involvement in a suicide attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul that killed more than 60 people.

A meeting Sunday between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, in which the leaders agreed to "re-engage" to fight extremism, would pave the way for more collaboration, the ministers said.

But that did not mean Afghanistan was stepping back from "our strong position in the war on terror and that secret organisations in Pakistan are sup-

porting terrorism," Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta told reporters.

This appeared to be a reference to circles in the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, which Karzai and US officials allege are fomenting unrest in Afghanistan. Pakistan has also been hit by a wave of extremist violence.

"The elected government of Pakistan is in a very difficult position... in some countries there are governments within the government which are out of the control of the legitimate institutions," Spanta said.

While Kabul could trust Pakistan's civilian authority, groups that were "using terrorism as a tool" and "interfering in others' affairs must be fought and we don't trust such groups," he said.

"We hope the civilian government of Pakistan, which has been elected by the will of the people, is able to bring under control those who are acting outside the laws of

Pakistan."

Afghanistan has been experiencing growing insurgent attacks since the 1996-2001 Taliban regime was removed from power in a US-led invasion for harbouring al-Qaeda.

Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders are said to have fled across the border into Pakistan's semi-autonomous areas, where they have regrouped.

Kabul wants these "roots" of the insurgency to be dealt with instead of the US-led "war on terror" being fought in Afghanistan, already ruined by decades of war.

Spanta said Pakistan should not be alarmed by Afghanistan's strong relationship with Islamabad's rival, India.

"Afghanistan's soil is never going to be used by one country against the security of another country. Our friendship with India... is not a coalition against the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," he said.

Mauritania generals promise fair polls

AP, Nouakchott

The military generals who staged a coup in this desert nation announced Thursday they plan to hold free and transparent elections "as soon as possible."

The junta leaders did not announce a date for the elections nor did they say their reason for toppling the 15-month old government of President Sidi Cheikh Ould Abdoullahi, the country's first freely elected president in over two decades, according to the statement read on national TV overnight.

In the interim, the generals said, the country will be governed by an 11-member council, which will ensure that government institutions continue to function normally.

"We will engage in a dialogue with all the political parties and all civic institutions in organising these elections," the junta said.

Soldiers came and seized the Abdoullahi at his living quarters inside the presidential compound early Wednesday after an increasingly bitter political fight over his ties to allies of a reviled former dictator and his overtures to

Islamic radicals.

Wednesday's bloodless coup reflected the internal struggle over how to manage this desperately poor desert nation that straddles the Arab and African worlds and is Africa's newest, if small-scale, oil producer.

Troubles began early Wednesday when President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdoullahi fired the country's top four generals, reportedly for supporting lawmakers who had accused him of corruption and disagreed with his reaching out to Islamic militants.

Troops seized state radio and television and announced the formation of a new state council led by the commander of the presidential guard, Gen. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who was one of the four fired generals.

"He fired the generals and that is his constitutional right. This is a coup d'etat against democracy..." Abdoulaye Mamadou Ba, the president's spokesman told The Associated Press. "President Abdoullahi is the victim of a coup concocted by the army with the connivance of lawmakers in parliament."

President cannot ignore

FROM PAGE 1

Commission Ordinance 2008 on March 16 this year to set up the SJC as part of government measures to put an end to the practices of political manoeuvrings in appointing SC and HC judges.

The ordinance prescribed setting up of a nine-member commission headed by the chief justice to recommend names for appointing additional judges to the HC. The commission will also recommend names of eligible candidates from the HC Division for appointing a judge to the Appellate Division.

The other members of the commission are the law minister, two senior most judges of the Appellate Division, the attorney general, two lawmakers—one nominated by the leader of parliament and the other by the leader of opposition, the president of the SC Bar Association and the law secretary.

Idrisul Rahman filed the writ petition with the HC on April 28, challenging the legality of the ordinance stating that the composition of the commission is unconstitutional as six of the members come from the executive and legislature. Besides, five are below the rank and status of the SC judges.

He said a number of provisions in the ordinance counter the independence of the judiciary as those allow the president to reject names recommended by the commission and give the executive "complete control" over selection of prospective judges.

An HC bench comprising justices Syed Mahmud Hossain and Farid Ahmed stayed functioning of the commission on the same day for three months.

It also issued a rule on the government and the SC registrar, asking them to explain within three weeks why the ordinance shall not be declared unconstitutional.

When the government appealed the apex court to stay the HC order on May 12 SC Chamber Judge Justice MA Matin referred the matter to the full bench of the SC.

Following a government petition, the Appellate Division on May 20 stayed the HC order for halting operation of the SJC.

The apex court also asked both sides in the case to wait for the HC to dispose of the rule it issued upon the writ petition challenging the validity of the ordinance.

On June 16, the government amended the ordinance to constitute the SJC with four judges of the

Appellate Division including the chief justice, two senior most judges of the HC division, the law adviser or law minister, the attorney general and the SC Bar Association president. The amended ordinance deleted the rules for keeping two lawmakers and the law secretary in the commission.

The chief justice recently constituted the three-member HC bench for hearing and disposing of the writ petition.

The bench appointed six senior lawyers—advocate IH Khan, advocate Mahmudul Islam, advocate Khandker Mahub Uddin Ahmed, barrister Rafique-ul-Huq, barrister Shaifque Ahmed and barrister Ajmalul Hossain as amicus curiae (friend of the court) for legal interpretations in this case.

Barrister Amir-Ul-Islam and Dr Shahdeen Malik assisted by advocate Protikar Chakma appeared for the petitioner while Attorney General Saaluddin Ahmed and Assistant Attorney General Zafar Imam argued for the government.

After hearing their arguments for six days the HC delivered the judgment.

Anwar pleads innocence to sodomy charge

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's top opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim pleaded innocent Thursday to a sodomy charge, dismissing it as a "treacherous" accusation as he was freed on bail to campaign for a key by-election to Parliament.

Anwar, who faced a similar accusation a decade ago, was charged in the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court amid massive police security underscoring the political tensions surrounding the case. Anwar says it is designed to thwart the rejuvenated opposition's bid to topple the government, which has been in power since independence in 1957.

Government prosecutors charged Anwar, 60, with sodomizing his 23-year-old male aide, Saiful Bukhari Azlan, on June 26 in a condominium in Kuala Lumpur. Defence lawyer Sankar Nair said "there is no case," adding that Anwar, a former deputy prime minister, has an alibi.

Anwar was charged under a section of the Criminal Procedure Code that says consensual sex between men is a crime.

ACC orders reinvestigation into graft case against Khaleda

FROM PAGE 16

Alam filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station on February 26 against detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and 15 others including 10 former ministers from BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami for graft in awarding Barapukuria coal mine operation contract to a Chinese company, causing a loss of over Tk 158.71 crore to the public exchequer.

The accused are M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, M Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar, barrister Amihul Haque, Altaf Hossain, Choudhury, AKM Mosharraf Hossain, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, Motiur Rahman Nazim, former acting secretary to energy and mineral resources Nazrul Islam, former Petrobangla chairman SR Osmani, former Petrobangla director Mainul Ahsan, former managing director of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd (BCMCL) Sirajul Islam and Hossain Group Chairman Moazzem Hossain.

"We have appointed Deputy Director Abul Kashem Fakir as the investigation officer of the case as the investigation report submitted to the commission regarding the case was inappropriate," ACC Director General (admin) Col Hanif

Iqbal said during a routine press briefing at the ACC headquarters yesterday.

Sources in ACC say that the report was considered not comprehensive, as there were weaknesses in the report including the witnesses cited.

Fakir has replaced ACC Deputy Director Monirul Huq.

Charge Sheets

The ACC yesterday approved eight charge sheets to be submitted against 18 people including Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan (Shah Alam), detained Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, former state minister Fazlur Rahman Patal on charges of concealing wealth information, amassing wealth by illegal means, bribery and deception.

In the approved charge sheet Shah Alam will be charged with concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 14.17 crore in the wealth statement submitted to the commission and amassing wealth worth over Tk 107.81 crore.

The charge sheet also includes Shah Alam's wife Afroza Begum and their sons Shahadat Sobhan, Safayat Sobhan, Safian Sobhan and Sayem Sobhan. Wife and sons of Shah Alam will be charged for abetting him in

concealing wealth information and amass wealth beyond known sources of income.

ACC Deputy Director Abdullah Al Zahid filed the case with Ramna police on December 9 accusing the Shah Alam family of amassing ill-gotten wealth worth about Tk 606 crore.

All the accused are on the run and are also accused in several other cases in connection with tax evasion and land grabbing.

Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and his wife Salma Shahadat will be charged in another charge sheet for concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 1.02 crore and amassing wealth worth over Tk 3.08 crore beyond known sources of income.

Monirul Huque, deputy director of Rajshahi ACC, filed the case against Minu and his wife with Boalia Model Police Station on November 11, 2007 for concealing wealth and concealing around Tk 1.92 crore in his wealth statement.

Former state minister Fazlur Rahman Patal will be charged for concealing information about wealth worth Tk 2.2 lakh and amassing over Tk 87.63 lakh beyond known income sources.

In another charge sheet Dhaka

City Corporation ward commissioner Mirza Khokon and his wife Masuda Ekram will be accused of concealing wealth information of Tk 29.32 lakh and amassing wealth worth over Tk 1.54 crore beyond known sources of income.

District forest officer Zafrul Hasan will be accused in another charge sheet on charges of concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 15.75 lakh and amassing wealth worth over Tk 97.68 lakh beyond known sources of income.

The other charge sheets will be submitted against the deputy manager (estate), Chittagong, Zillur Rahman, and managing director of EEC Bangla Knit Wears Ltd Palash Barua and two others and junior auditor of upazila accounts office, Jessore, Tariqul Islam on charges of concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 21.63 lakh, attempt to withdraw Tk 4 crore through deception and taking Tk 7,000 as bribe.

TAC

The ACC yesterday also confirmed that two people have applied through it to face the Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC) to disclose information voluntarily regarding their corruption and ill-gotten wealth.

"We have received applications from two persons who wanted to make voluntary disclosures about

their ill-gotten wealth before the Truth and Accountability Commission," said Col Hanif Iqbal at the briefing.

After confirming that the applicants are not politicians, Hanif, however, denied disclosing their identity saying that the Voluntary Disclosure of Information Ordinance, 2008 has the provision to keep information about an absolution seeker secret if he/she wants.

Accused ACC Officials

The ACC yesterday also handed over a list of 12 officials of the commission so far suspended temporarily or accused in cases or investigated by the commission on various charges including intimidation, bribery, misbehaviour, destruction of necessary papers from official documents and embezzlement.

Of the 12 ACC officials, case were filed against assistant inspector Nizam Uddin and Abdur Rahman, who were also suspended temporarily, on charges of intimidating people and realising bribe from them.

Five people against whom allegations were lodged have been served with notices. They are Harun-Or-Rashid Bhuiyan, constable-259, Abdul Motalib Khandaker, Mir Reza Habibur Rahman, constable-212, deputy director Kamrul Ahsan, and

assistant director Shamsul Alam charged with bribery, intimidating people, misbehaviour, and destruction of official documents.

Three ACC officials are under investigation on these charges and also embezzlement. They are office assistant Sayek Ahmed, Mizanur Rahman, constable-213, and Golam Rasul, constable-312. Investigation report has been submitted against assistant director Saif Mahmud. It has also been decided to file a case against Habibullah, a data-entry operator.

Trap Case

The ACC has decided to announce reward for trapping bribe-seekers red-handed following reports of various survey and allegations that a large number of officials at different offices take bribe in carrying out their duties.

Hanif said the decision has been taken to ease pressures of giving bribe from the shoulder of people while receiving due service.

The ACC has decided to strengthen its provision of filing trap case under rules 16 of ACC Act to catch people red-handed while taking bribe.

The commission will also go for media campaign to make people aware about its decision and send directions to its divisional offices.

Livni boosted in Kadima leadership bid

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni yesterday strengthened her bid to lead the ruling Kadima party and possibly become premier after a senior minister announced his support.

"I will support Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in her candidacy to lead Kadima and the next government," said Finance Minister Ronia Bar-On, a key member of the centrist Kadima and close ally of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"Over the past 10 years she has had an impressive political career... In the past three years she has been at the heart of Israel's decision-making process in political and security issues. I consider her apt and worthy of the job," he said at a news conference.

Olmert announced last week he would step down after Kadima elects a new leader in a September 17 primary election.

Bar-On urged other party members to "get off the fence" and announce their support for one of the candidates.