

Nuclear talks offer 'constructive'

Says Ahmadinejad aide

AFP, Tehran

A top adviser to Iran's hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday said Tehran will study the "constructive" offer for talks made by six world powers regarding its controversial nuclear drive.

"It is a constructive proposal and shows a change of approach (from the world powers)," Ali Akbar Javanfekr told AFP.

"We hope that this proposal means a change of approach to a more realistic attitude. The Islamic Republic of Iran will examine (it) and give its response."

Javanfekr responded on Thursday by

saying that Tehran will study the "constructive" proposal.

Six world powers led by Washington on Wednesday decided to invite Iran for direct talks on its nuclear programme, which they suspect is aimed at making atomic weapons but which Tehran insists is civilian and purely peaceful.

In a joint statement, the United States, Britain, Russia, China, France, and Germany said EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana has been tasked to invite Iran for these talks.

Ahmadinejad is expected later Thursday to make new key declarations

regarding the country's nuclear programme, which is bound to raise fresh international concerns.

The projects, both sited in central Isfahan province, are likely to trigger fresh concerns among the international community, which has repeatedly urged Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment programme completely.

In a bid to defuse tensions, six world powers led by Washington on Wednesday invited Iran for direct talks on the programme which they suspect is aimed at making atomic weapons but which Tehran insists is civilian and purely peaceful.



PHOTO: AFP

Supporters of Thailand's ousted former premier Thaksin Shinawatra shout slogans as they reach Victory Monument after a march in Bangkok yesterday. About 100 taxi drivers loyal to fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra blocked a critical Bangkok intersection Thursday as they joined a mass protest seeking to oust the government.

Tens of thousands seek Georgian leader's exit

AFP, Tbilisi

Tens of thousands of anti-government demonstrators on Thursday massed in the Georgian capital, launching a protest movement aimed at forcing the resignation of President Mikheil Saakashvili.

At least 50,000 protesters had gathered by the early afternoon outside the parliament in Tbilisi, waving opposition party flags and chanting "Resign!", an AFP correspondent reported.

Opposition leaders have vowed to rally at least 100,000 supporters and to carry on their protests until the flamboyant but under-fire Saakashvili resigns and calls early elections.

Fiji court rules 2006 coup illegal, calls for elections

AFP, Suva

A Fiji court yesterday ruled the country's military regime was illegally appointed after a 2006 coup and said a caretaker prime minister should be appointed to call elections to restore democracy.

Military leader Voreqe Bainimarama said the ruling meant Fiji effectively had no legal government in place, but added the military would ensure there was no disruption to law and order.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi supporter of Shia radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr flashes a paper reading "No No America" at Baghdad's Fardos square yesterday. Thousands of Sadr supporters took to streets calling for a total US pullout from Iraq the day of the 6th anniversary of the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Thousands of Iraqis join anti-US demo

AFP, Baghdad

Thousands of supporters of the anti-US cleric Moqtada al-Sadr yesterday protested the occupation of Iraq, six years after the toppling of a Saddam Hussein statue symbolised the fall of his regime.

Crowds lined the streets leading to Firdos Square in Baghdad, where Saddam's giant bronze sculpture was wrestled to the ground with the help of US Marines in 2003, an iconic image that signalled the end of his dictatorial rule.

Many of the demonstrators chanted "No no America, Yes Yes Iraq" as others carried placards adorned with pictures of Sadr, the radical Shia leader who became a key figure and symbol of resistance after the US-led invasion.

Some of the protesters waded through

mud to reach the head of the procession after Baghdad was hit by a rare bout of rain, which peaked during the morning demonstration.

Many of those gathered had camped out overnight or sheltered in nearby mosques, having travelled to the capital from Iraq's mainly Shia south.

"I came yesterday with about 500 of my friends to demonstrate against the occupation and demand its end and to call for the unity of the Iraqi people," said Raad Saghier, 28, from Kut, 175 kilometres (110 miles) south of Baghdad.

The sixth anniversary of the US-led coalition's invasion on March 20 saw Sadr supporters use that day's Friday prayers to call for an end to the occupation. But Thursday's protest was bigger in scale.

German in dock for exporting 'missile' supplies to Iran

AFP, Berlin

A German businessman accused of delivering materials to Iran that can be used to build missiles pleaded his innocence as he went on trial Wednesday, a court in the western city of Koblenz said.

The defendant, identified by the court as 63-year-old Hans-Joseph H., is suspected of supplying Iran with 16 tonnes of high-grade graphite via Turkey between 2005 and 2007.

"He denies the charges," a spokesman for the Koblenz higher regional court said.

Australia, US to lay path for nuclear disarmament

AFP, Washington

The United States holds high-level security talks with Australia on Thursday as the long-time allies find a new convergence of views on the need to abolish nuclear weapons.

Afghanistan and North Korea's long-range missile test will also figure high on the agenda for the full-day annual meeting, which brings together the two countries' foreign affairs and defence chiefs.

The session marks the first substantive talks between the Pacific nations since US President Barack Obama held a warm first summit with Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd at the White House two weeks ago.

The talks "will cover, in depth, a wide range

of bilateral, regional and global issues," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters Wednesday after meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith.

"We have few better friends in the world than Australia."

Smith said the alliance between Australia and the United States has "served us very well for over 60 years."

"It's an indispensable part of our strategic security and defence arrangements," he added.

Smith and Clinton will be joined in Thursday's talks by Australian Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon and US Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

The talks come days after Obama delivered a major speech in Prague where he laid out a vision for a world without nuclear weapons.

Ministers say

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of the government rather it was done for the greater interest of the country and the people.

The Daily Star asked Faruk Khan whether it was done to take revenge against Khaleda as her government had cancelled allotment of two houses of the then leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina, now prime minister, and Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana, soon after assuming power in 2001. Faruk replied, "It is not a tit for tat act. It would have been so had we cancelled the allotment of her (Khaleda's) Gulshan house. We have only removed her from an illegal possession."

He, however, said, "We did not behave like the way she did with us on assuming power after the 2001 elections. We are still very nice with her. We don't want to behave like the way she did with us."

"On the 21st day of her (Khaleda's) government, she cancelled allotment of the Gonobhaban, which was allotted to the daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She (Khaleda) should remember what she had done."

Faruk said under the rules of the cantonment one cannot conduct political activities inside the cantonment. "Even Sheikh Hasina and I, while she (Hasina) was the leader of the opposition, were not allowed to see Humayun Azad when he was admitted to the Combined Military Hospital in cantonment on security grounds," clarified the minister.

"If our presence breaches security of the cantonment then why her carrying out political activities from there shouldn't be construed as violation of cantonment rules?" said Faruk.

Asked why the Awami League government of 1996-2001 did not take any steps to cancel the allotment, the commerce minister said, "Until then, she (Khaleda) did not do this kind of activities there. She conducted political activities from that house between 2001 and 2006."

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said the government decided to cancel the allotment of Khaleda Zia's cantonment house since the house was allocated to her illegally and unethically. He said the ministry of land is the owner of the house and the Cantonment Board maintains it.

He said the house was used for political and business purposes, which go against cantonment rules.

He told this to reporters after a courtesy meeting with an eight-member delegation of a Chinese organisation—Chinese People Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries—yesterday afternoon.

The law minister said a person cannot have two government houses along with other facilities at a time and receiving such facilities is unreasonable and unethical.

Even though he had said the government move was not politically motivated, the law minister mentioned that the BNP government cancelled Sheikh Hasina's allotment of Gonobhaban, which bear the memories of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members, and Sheikh Rehana's allotment of a Dhanmondi house.

A police station has been set

up at "Sheikh Rehana's house" in Dhanmondi and then prime minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated it, he said.

If the BNP government could exercise its powers, this government can make legal decisions too, he said. It was a very normal decision made for the greater interest of the country and the people, shafique added.

He said even HM Ershad, who had allocated the house to Khaleda Zia, said he would not have given the allotment if he knew Khaleda would carry out political activities there.

Replying to a question on BNP leader Moudud Ahmed's claim that there is a deed on the leasing out of the land to Khaleda Zia, Shafique said the deed is invalid since the allotment process was illegal.



PHOTO: AFP

Voters arrive to register at a polling centre in Jakarta yesterday as Indonesia holds its third general election since the fall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998 -- polls that will decide who can run for president in July. The mainly Muslim country's 171 million voters are to choose between thousands of candidates at local, provincial and national levels.

Khaleda to go for Election

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military zone". Barrister Mahbub Uddin Khokon, lawmaker and a counsel for Khaleda, said they will move the writ petition on several legal grounds.

The grounds include there is no provision for cancelling allotment of the house, no time limit of the allotment and no such condition that she cannot carry out political activities from that house, said the counsel when contacted.

The contract for allotment of the house was made between the president of Bangladesh and Khaleda Zia on July 8, 1981 during the tenure of Justice Abdus Sattar.

Khokon mentioned that a military estate officer signed the contract on behalf of the president, and registration of the land was completed during the rule of HM Ershad.

He said the house was allotted to Khaleda Zia and her two sons (both minor at that time) since her husband president Ziaur Rahman, who was assassinated, rendered invaluable service to the nation and the country, and they did not have any substantial means of living.

As per provisions of the contract, the allotment can be cancelled if Khaleda Zia fails to pay Tk 1 per year as rent of the house, commercial buildings are constructed on the plot and trees on it are cut. She did not violate any of the provisions, the counsel said.

He pointed out that two houses were not allotted to her at a time as her Gulshan residence was allotted on July 17, 1982.

A number of prominent lawyers including TH Khan, Rafique-Ul-Huq and Moudud Ahmed will appear for Khaleda.

Meanwhile, Additional Attorney General M Enayetur Rahim said yesterday the present government has rightly cancelled allotment of the house.

The then governments' allotment of two houses to Khaleda was illegal, and none has the right to allot to an individual any property earmarked

for the army, he said.

Khaleda Zia has no right to do 'politics and business' at the cantonment house affecting army security, Rahim added.

BNP threatens

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attended the meeting but BNP internal conflict surfaced and he was not allowed to speak.

Two factions of party workers engaged in a scuffle creating a chaotic situation and the gathering dispersed for some time. Party leaders however managed to control the situation.

Terming the government decision vindictive and politically motivated, Khandaker Delwar Hossain said the government took revenge as the eight parliament repealed a law under which Gonobhaban was allocated to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina.

"The present government did not follow any legal process. How can the cabinet make a decision on a person's house?" he said, adding that people will not stay silent if the government tries to mentally torture Khaleda.

Former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar said the government must cancel its decision "since there is no greater martyr and freedom fighter than Ziaur Rahman".

Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said the government decision was part of its conspiracy against BNP.

Moudud Ahmed said the country is suffering from a lot of problems but the government is busy making issues out of things that already been settled.

Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said, "If conducting political activities from cantonment violates rules, then why is a person allowed to continue political activities wearing an army uniform."

After the rally, leaders and workers brought out a procession demanding cancellation of the cabinet decision.

BNP and its associate bodies also held protest rallies and brought out procession in different divisional headquarters.

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The BNP did not submit any document in support of its expenditures and also did not mention the sources of the money it had received as donations to raise the electoral fund.

In a letter to BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain sent Wednesday afternoon, the EC asked the party to submit its poll expenditure report in details attaching necessary documents, officials in the EC Secretariat said.

The commission also asked Bangladesh Jatiya Party, National People's Party and Muslim League (Khair), which submitted incomplete expenditure reports, to submit detailed report on their poll spending.

Freedom Party, Krishak Samik Janata League, Samyabadi Dal, Tarikat Federation, Gonofront and Islami Front Bangladesh had not submitted their expenditure reports and the EC sent letters to them on Wednesday, asking for detailed information.

Thirty-eight registered political parties contested the ninth parliamentary elections, of which 29 submitted their accounts of expenditure to the EC by March 31.

According to the Representation of the People Order, a political party that contests parliamentary polls will have to submit its election expenditure report within 90 days of publication of polls results in the official gazette. The report must mention the amount of money the party received as donation.

Results of the ninth parliamentary election were published in the official gazette on January 1 and the last date for submission of expenditure reports was March 31.

If parties fail to submit the reports even in an extended period of 30 days, the EC might give another 15 days to do so with fines. And finally, the EC may cancel registration of parties that do not submit their expenditure reports.

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