

MADAGASCAR CRISIS

Ex-president's side quits talks

AFP, Antananarivo

The delegation of deposed Madagascar president Marc Ravalomanana has walked out of talks to resolve the political crisis on the island, several sources reported yesterday.

"We left the talks because it was a dialogue of the deaf," Rahranaivo Andrianantoandro, spokesman for Ravalomanana's Tiako i Madagasikara (TIM) party said.

The talks began Thursday under the auspices of the United Nations and the African Union and the TIM walkout took place Friday.

"We set as a condition the return of Marc Ravalomanana (at present abroad); this request has not been met," Andrianantoandro said.

The direct talks were the first since Andry Rajoelina took power in mid-March.

Representatives of former presidents Didier Ratsiraka (1975-1993 and 1997-2002) and Albert Zafy (1993-1996) are taking part in the discussions.

Ratsiraka and Zafy were among Ravalomanana's chief opponents. They do not recognise the new transitional regime.

Andrianantoandro accused the UN special

envoy Tiebile Drame of "wanting to impose his own solution".

"We have understood that there were not just two protagonists (in this crisis) - there are other political families who have things to say," Drame said, confirming the walkout by Ravalomanana's team.

Drame told AFP that he was not looking for an "imposed solution" but was "seeking a consensus".

Talks continued in the absence of the Ravalomanana team but have halted for the Easter weekend.

Thousands of Ravalomanana's supporters demonstrated again Saturday in the capital Antananarivo calling for his return. During the rally a telephone call from Ravalomanana was broadcast in which he repeated his aim to "return soon to Madagascar".

Ravalomanana resigned on March 17 after losing the support of the armed forces and facing the most serious crisis since he took office in 2002, handing over power to a military directorate.

The directorate immediately transferred it to Rajoelina, then leader of the opposition and now head of the transition authority.

War criminals

FROM PAGE 1

the war criminals," Dipu Moni, the first ever female foreign minister of the country added.

She also said her government will ensure international standards in maintaining the due process involving the United Nations in trying the war criminals.

Dipu Moni said her ministry will take initiatives to collect from foreign countries evidence of war crimes committed in Bangladesh during the 1971 liberation war.

In response to a query about whether Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim country, Dipu Moni said, "We are a secular country with a Muslim majority and this is our identity, our country is born with this identity and I don't think there is any reason to disown this identity."

"At present many persons label different countries with different names. But it doesn't mean that we should accept those," she added. "There is no reason to accept those labels, if they don't match our culture and heritage," she said.

When her attention was drawn to Friday's 'crossfire' in the capital by Rapid Action Battalion, Dipu Moni replied, "The matter will be investigated."

"Our government hasn't shifted from its position of upholding human rights, we will investigate the matter," she said.

Replying to a question regarding whether arrested

British citizen Faisal Mostafa will be allowed access to consular facilities, the foreign minister said, "We will look into the matter in light of the law."

She stressed the need for regional integrated approach and regional connectivity for the betterment of the entire region.

Former ambassadors gathered at the seminar stressed that Bangladesh needs a proactive and dynamic foreign policy to meet the critical challenges thrown by the current global economic recession, for facing the adverse impacts of climate change and terrorism, to attract more investment, and to expand export.

Some former ambassadors stressed the need for restructuring the foreign ministry and Bangladesh's foreign missions giving the top priority to the country's interest.

Former ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman said Bangladesh has 'only foreign relations but no foreign policy'. He therefore suggested that a task force be commissioned to frame an effective foreign policy.

Dipu Moni agreed with a suggestion that the parliament should have discussions on the country's foreign policy.

She said Bangladesh will pursue 'look east' policy strengthening relations with China, Japan, and Asean countries as well as relations with Muslim countries.

Asked whether there is any

change in the new government's foreign policy, she said the government will not discontinue the past foreign policy just because it was framed by past governments or other parties.

"Whatever is necessary and important for the country must be pursued," she said.

Asked whether the government will pursue a policy of engagement and force in tackling terrorism, the foreign minister replied, the government prefers intense engagement through bringing changes in the education system to tackle the menace of terrorism rather than applying force.

She however noted 'the government will not hesitate to apply force, if needed'.

Ambassadors and high commissioners and other representatives of the US, European Commission, Australia, Sri Lanka, Norway, Turkey, China, Switzerland, and Iran were present among other diplomats.

Former Bangladesh ambassadors Barrister Harun ur Rashid, Zia Shams, QAMA Rahim, SM Rashid Ahmed, Shabbir Ahmed, Anwarul Chowdhury, Mahub Alam, Mubin Chowdhury, and Shahid Akhtar, and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) Director General Maj Gen Sheikh Mohammad Moniruzzaman also spoke among others.

Somali pirates capture

FROM PAGE 16

Ten of the 16 crew were Italians, Italy's foreign ministry said in a statement, without giving any details.

It was just the latest in a series of raids in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, despite the presence of international task force in the region to defend international shipping using the busy passage.

Meanwhile, pirate commander Abdi Garad, speaking from the northern Somali pirate lair of Eyl, told AFP that US Captain Richard Phillips would be moved from the lifeboat where he was being held to another ship off the Somali coast.

On Friday, Phillips jumped into the water and tried to swim towards the nearby US destroyer the USS Bainbridge, but was recaptured.

Only four pirates are guarding him on the lifeboat, but transfer to a larger ship would make it easier for them to thwart any US military attempt to free him.

US Navy forces have been pouring into the region amid the standoff over Philipps, who has been held hostage since Wednesday, since the Danish-operated container ship he commanded was attacked.

The four pirates hijacked the Maersk Alabama, carrying 5,000 tonnes of UN aid destined for African refugees.

Its unarmed American

crew managed to take back control of the ship, but the pirates bundled Phillips onto the lifeboat as they escaped.

Any attempt to free him would be disastrous, warned Garad.

"I'm afraid this matter is likely to create disaster because it's taking too long and we are getting information that the Americans are planning rescue tricks like the French commandos did," he said.

Somali elders and parents of pirates holding the American were trying to free the American on Saturday "without any guns or ransom," said Mwangura in a statement from Kenya.

But a spokesman for Somalia's hardline Islamist group Shebab backed the recent rash of pirate attacks.

"I believe that the pirates are not wrong to hijack the ships because there is no reason for the international ships to use Somalia's waters," Sheikh Muktar Robow told reporters in the south-central Somali city of Baidoa.

He blamed the international community for depleting the country's marine resources and dumping their waste there.

Officers of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation

meanwhile were waiting to debrief the crew of the Maersk Alabama on their arrival at the Kenyan port of Mombasa, said a spokesman from his office.

from the ship's owners Maersk.

Friday's raid by French marines came six days after the yacht, the Tanit, was seized in the Gulf of Aden.

Although French forces freed three adults and a three-year-old boy, a fourth man, Florent Lemacon, the owner of the yacht and the child's father, was killed.

French Defence Minister Herve Morin said Saturday an autopsy and investigation would determine what had happened. But he could not rule out that the fatal shot had come from the French forces.

"We did everything to save the hostages' lives," Morin said on French radio.

The Tanit had been heading toward the coast and the pirates' threats were "becoming more and more specific," said a spokesman from the office of French President Nicolas Sarkozy Friday.

France's policy is not to let pirates take their hostages ashore, he added.

The four ex-hostages -- Lemacon's wife Chloe, their three-year-old son Colin and two other adults -- were due in Paris on Sunday aboard a French-chartered plane, Morin told AFP.

Sarkozy had spoken by telephone with both Chloe Lemacon and the dead man's father Saturday, said a spokesman from his office.

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Tobacco lure

FROM PAGE 1

At Amin Bazar, Habib Mian, 40, a day labourer, told this correspondent, "I have been smoking four packs of Maries cigarette a day for the last eight months to get the items on offer."

"I already got a dozen of household utensils including melamine plates, bowls, plastic buckets by submitting the slides to nearby shops. These should be enough for my daughter's marriage," he said.

Habib has been suffering from tuberculosis for the last six months.

Azizur Rahman, 38, a gro-

cer of the area, said, "I sell around 20 more packs of Maries Cigarette a day as mostly labourers and small traders attracted by the items demand the cigarette."

He said company representative collect the slides from him and provide the items daily.

Jewel, 25, another grocer of Kamrangirchar, said he gets around 55 slides a day from his customers.

When asked about the incentive programme, Belal Hossain, assistant manager (sales) of Abul Khair Tobacco Company Ltd, Dhaka office, refused to comment.

Sheikh Zakir Hossain, marketing manager, Chittagong office, of the company, admitted the programme exists and gave the excuse that their rival companies are doing the same and they are doing it just to survive in the market.

Talking to The Daily Star Khandaker Shafiqul Alam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Savar Police Station, said this sort of campaign was running beyond his knowledge. He said he would take necessary measures.

Lawyer Shahdin Malik said since the country cannot run an anti-smoking campaign, there is no one to take legal measures against people violating such laws.

Economist Atiur Rahman, referring to the Narcotics Control Act, 2005, said, "It must be revised to make it capable of stopping campaign programmes that promote smoking."

He recommended stronger punishment for the offence and a minimum of 15 percent tax, considering inflation, on tobacco products.

Apart from Abul Khair Tobacco Company Ltd, Azizuddin Tobacco of Jamil Group for its Sahara cigarette, Akiz Corporation Ltd for its Sheikh Full Flavour cigarette, Nasir Tobacco for its Top-10 cigarettes and Bharasa Group for its Siraz and Bharasa Gold cigarettes are allegedly running similar campaigns.

Amini demands

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The government is raising issues like militancy and madrasa education to divert the nation's attention from the 'failure' to handle the BDR carnage, he added.

Amini also criticised the government for blaming the Islamist groups for subversive acts without any investigation.

Replying to a query, he said there is no war criminal in his party, and that they will not obstruct war crime trial.

However, he added, before dealing out punishment to anyone the charge against him must be proved.

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