

Iran raps Argentina for 'meddling' in internal affairs

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday accused Argentina of meddling in its domestic affairs after the south American country expressed outrage at the nomination of a man wanted for a 1994 bombing to be the next defence minister.

"The positions taken by Argentine officials obviously amount to meddling in the domestic affairs of the Islamic Republic and we strongly condemn these illegal actions," Iran's official IRNA news agency quoted foreign ministry spokesman Hassan Ghashghavi as saying.

On Friday, Argentina strongly criticised Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's decision to put forward Ahmad Vahidi as defence minister in his new 21-member cabinet.

Vahidi is wanted by Argentina in connection with a 1994 bombing in Buenos Aires which levelled the seven-floor Argentine Jewish Mutual Association building, killing 85 people and wounded 300.

It was the worst terrorist attack in Argentina, which has the largest Jewish community in the Americas outside the United States, and the second large-scale anti-Jewish strike in Buenos Aires that decade.

In 2007, Interpol issued what it calls a Red Notice on

Vahidi, a former head of Al Qods, an elite unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps. Under the notice, Interpol distributed Argentina's arrest warrant for Vahidi to member countries.

Ghashghavi said Argentina's stand against Vahidi was a result of "pressure, bribes and propaganda by Zionist lobbies."

"It is an insult to the intelligence of the people of Argentina."

Argentina's condemnation has cast further doubt on Ahmadinejad's cabinet nominations, some of which face stiff opposition from Iranian lawmakers.

Argentine prosecutors allege Iran masterminded the bombing in Buenos Aires and entrusted the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah to execute it.

In November 2006, Argentine prosecutors issued arrest warrants against several Iranians, including former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and former foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati.

But Interpol's executive committee later withdrew warrants against Rafsanjani, Velayati and another Iranian.

Iranian lawmakers are set to vote on Ahmadinejad's cabinet line-up over a three-day period starting August 30.

DU violence

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culprits" behind the torture of DU teachers and students during and after the unrest on August 20, 2007 on the university campus.

Rejecting the investigation report on the unrest submitted by a one-member judicial probe commission, DU teachers, students and other discussants at a meeting in the Teacher-Student Centre auditorium of DU called for a fresh probe into the incident.

DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said, "Teachers and students were tortured as they protested atrocities carried out on them. This Black Day should be observed to avoid recurrence of such incidents."

He called on the government to withdraw all cases filed against students and teachers with an executive order.

Educationalist Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury said the interference of state and reactionary forces on university is undesirable.

He expressed hope that the "real culprits" behind the incident would be identified.

Other teachers also expressed hope that such an incident would not be repeated again.

Speaking at a rally in front of the arts building, law-maker and Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry Rashed Khan Menon said the committee has recommended that the home ministry withdraw cases pending against teachers and students through an executive order.

He promised that all information regarding the actual culprits behind the atrocities would be made public.

Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) also held a meeting at its own office in the afternoon.

Thousands of DU students staged protests after army personnel beat up a student during a football match on the DU central playground in August 2007. The then caretaker government later enforced curfews in all divisional cities to put a halt to the three-day student unrest that also spread to other cities.

Four teachers and eight students were arrested and kept behind bars for around five months while thousands others were allegedly tortured on the campus and also in other places across the country.

The arrested teachers and students were released in the wake of a silent and peaceful student movements in January 2008.

Potato

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didn't have any in stock due to lower yield, he added.

He said growers incurred huge loss last year because of surplus production and they must avail themselves of the opportunity of shortfall in potato production.

In the wholesale market, potato is being sold at Tk 1,800 to 2,200 per bag of 85 kg at the wholesale market whereas the price of the same bag of potato was between Tk 1,600 and Tk 1,800 a month ago.

During the harvesting period, businessmen purchased a bag of potato between Tk 1,000 and Tk 1,200 from the farmers.

Hanif

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cooperatives minister, will return home on September 5 or 6, said deputy office secretary of AL, Mrinal Kanti Das.

In a 'surprise' appointment, AL President Sheikh Hasina being empowered by the party's national council on July 24 picked Hanif as party's joint general secretary on July 30.

Before then Hanif was a vice-president of the party's Kushia district unit.

After assuming power through a landslide victory in December 29 election, the prime minister appointed Hanif, who is also a relative to her, as her special assistant.

Talking to The Daily Star some of the grassroots level leaders of different districts said they have heard of Hanif but do not know him although he has become the first joint general secretary of the party.

Some central leaders said it's not new that a district leader has been made joint general secretary. Earlier, leaders of Tangail and Moulvibazar districts were made joint general secretary of the party by Sheikh Hasina.

WHO warns

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Friday that there had been second and third waves in previous pandemics.

"We cannot say for certain whether the worst is over or the worst is yet to come," Chan said in a videotaped address to a symposium on flu in the Asia-Pacific region.

"We need to be prepared for whatever surprises this capricious new virus delivers next," she added.

Some 1,799 people have died since the A(H1N1) was uncovered in Mexico and the United States nearly six months ago, according to the UN health agency.

By comparison, an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 people die around the world every year from seasonal flu, and overall the symptoms of the new pandemic virus have proved to be mild in the great majority of known cases.

However, it has spread swiftly into 177 countries, proving to be more infectious than seasonal flu and more durable through warmer months.

Through a full season in the southern hemisphere, the pandemic strain gradually became dominant.

WHO monitoring showed that it was now on the decline there, except in South Africa, and in some later affected areas of Argentina, Australia and Chile.

Some 182,000 people worldwide are known to have caught swine flu based on laboratory confirmed cases, but the WHO has long advised countries to give up counting; the true number may be in the millions, according to some experts.

It is also striking those in a more physically fragile phase of life, such as pregnant women or the chronically ill, as well as those who are obese and younger age groups than usual.

Many of the most severe cases are among 30 to 50 year-olds.

WHO officials are also mystified at the "most worrying" characteristic of this flu

virus, Hartl explained.

About 40 per cent of the most severe or fatal cases occur in people who are in perfect health, he told AFP.

However, he was unable to say how many severe cases had occurred, although they are generally regarded as a small proportion of the outbreak so far.

With autumn approaching, northern countries have set emergency flu plans into motion, in some instances before the WHO's long heralded formal declaration of a pandemic on June 11 that marked global spread of the virus.

While that includes many of the wealthiest nations -- with the most medicines, access to key antiviral drugs and vaccine development, as well as the best health care -- Hartl pointed out that the hemisphere also includes five-sixths of the world's population.

More than one billion doses of preventive vaccine have been ordered by those countries.

But the vaccine is not expected to be ready for use until October and will only be available gradually, for the most vulnerable groups and health workers first.

The WHO has cut its estimate of maximum annual production capacity of 4.9 billion vaccines, currently focusing on about half or even one quarter of that amount. It is still unclear whether one or two doses will be necessary.

In the meantime, plans to mobilise stockpiles of antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu, reinforce health care capacity and close down schools temporarily to limit the spread of infection have already been tested in the first wave.

Hartl said it was impossible to rule out the resurgence of A (H1N1) before October to November, the more usual period for the growth in seasonal influenza.

"Everyone must be ready," said the WHO spokesman.

"It is already amongst us, as we saw this summer."

Bangabandhu

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be executed before December 16 this year.

The minister made the comment while talking to newsmen on the SC premises after a meeting with Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin at his SC office yesterday afternoon.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam and advocate Anisul Huq told reporters that they would submit a prayer to the Appellate Division to fix a date for hearing the appeals of this case after the annual vacation of the apex court.

The SC will go into vacation on August 28 and will reopen on October 4, they said.

Anisul Huq said that the concise statements contained various important legal points against the grounds used by the convicts in their appeals. The five men are appealing against their death sentences, which has been upheld by the High Court (HC).

The HC confirmed capital punishment against 12 people and acquitted three others in this case on April 30, 2001.

Five of the condemned -- dismissed army personnel, Syed Farooq-ur Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Muhiuddin Ahmed, AKM Mahiuddin Ahmed, and Bazul Huda, who are behind bars, filed separate appeals with the Appellate Division in the last week of October 2007 against their death sentences pronounced by the HC.

The condemned six still at large are Shariful Haque Dalim, Abdur Rashid, Rashed Chowdhury, Nur Chowdhury, Abdul Mazed, and Moslemuddin.

Another condemned Aziz Pasha has died.

15 pirates

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moving around the areas on trawlers in the guise of fishermen challenged the band of pirates.

The pirates opened fire and started fleeing towards the jungle, about half-a-kilometre away from Kochikhali, he added.

Meanwhile, seven fishermen, abducted by pirates on August 18, were released yesterday morning after paying ransom of Tk 2 lakh.

They are Akbar Munshi, Solaiman, Zoynal Majhi, Abdul Malek, Monsur Ali, Yunus Mir and Yusuf Ali of Charduan under Patharghata in Barguna.

On August 11, a total of 20 fishermen were abducted and 13 were injured as pirates swooped on them and looted hilsa fish, fishing nets, fuel and cash from their trawlers in the deep sea, some 50 kilometres southeast of Patharghata.

Pirates looted 22 fishing trawlers and abducted 40 fishermen along the Barguna coast of the Bay of Bengal in the dead of night on August 18.

Gulam Mostafa Chowdhury, president of the Patharghata Fish Warehouse Association, said fishermen are afraid of going to the sea as they face frequent incidents of kidnapping by pirates in the areas.

Aug 21 attack

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Arif Hassan Sumon on August 12.

Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police of Criminal Investigation Department Abdul Khar Akond submitted the petitions to advocate Syed Rezaur Rahman, chief prosecution counsel.

The petition for the murder case was submitted to the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court while the petition on the case filed under the Explosive Substances Act to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court.

Metropolitan Sessions Judge ANM Bashir Ullah fixed today for hearing from the prosecution and the defence lawyers.

Second Additional Sessions Judge Fozila Begum fixed the date for hearing on the petition on August 30.

The jail authorities were asked to produce the Huji members before the courts on the scheduled dates.

Earlier the cases were sent from speedy trial tribunal to the courts mentioned on August 18, as the trial of the cases would not be completed within 135 working days.

The Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 ordered a further probe into the cases as the prosecution submitted petitions seeking fresh probe on June 25.

The trial also directed inspector general of police to submit the probe report by two months.

In the bail cancellation petitions, the prosecution mentioned that the two Huji members were directly involved in the grenade attack and they had confessed to magistrates.

"If they go out on bail, they would create obstructions in investigating the case," the prosecution added.

CID pressed charges against 22 people including former deputy minister BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu and Huji chief Hannan on June 11 last year.

Afghan election

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the vote in an interview with The Associated Press on Saturday. Another presidential candidate has displayed mangled ballots that he said were cast for him and then thrown out by election workers.

Election observers have said the voting process was mostly credible, but are cataloguing instances of fraud and violence.

The most common complaint in the 35 high-priority allegations was ballot box tampering, Kippen said. He stressed that the number was likely to grow. The commission has only received complaints filed at provincial capitals and Kabul so far and is still waiting for complaints that were filed at polling sites.

The top Afghan monitoring group has said there were widespread problems with supposedly independent election officials at polling stations trying to influence the way people voted. That group, the Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan, also catalogued violations such as people using multiple voter cards so they could vote more than once, and underage voting.

The US special envoy to Afghanistan said allegations of vote rigging and fraud are to be expected, but observers should wait for the official complaints process to run its course before judging the vote's legitimacy.

"We have disputed elections in the United States. There may be some questions here. That wouldn't surprise me at all. I expect it," Richard Holbrooke told AP Television News in the western city of Herat. "But let's not get out ahead of the situation."

Holbrooke said the US government would wait for rulings from Afghanistan's monitoring bodies the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission before trying to judge the legitimacy of the vote.

"The United States and the international community will respect the process set up by Afghanistan itself," Holbrooke said. He has been in Afghanistan observing the vote, following a trip to Pakistan last week.

The first preliminary results will not be released until Tuesday, and final certified results won't come until next month. If neither Karzai nor Abdullah gets 50 per cent of the vote among a field of some three dozen candidates, then they will go to a runoff, probably in October.

In the interview Saturday, Abdullah said he was in contact with other campaigns to explore the possibility of a coalition candidacy in case none of the 36 candidates won enough votes to avoid a runoff.

The accusations of fraud against Karzai, which Karzai's spokesman denied, are the most direct Abdullah has made against the incumbent in a contest that likely has weeks to go before a winner is proclaimed. Both Abdullah and Karzai claim they are in the lead based on reports from campaign poll-watchers monitoring the count.

"He uses the state apparatus

Biman

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for the destination within a few hours. It involves risk to the passengers," a Biman pilot told The Daily Star last night.

Amidst the schedule chaos, Biman recently suspended two of its international routes-- Delhi and Bangkok. Yesterday it cancelled two international flights to Rome and Hong Kong.

Officials said the national flag carrier earlier had to abandon seven of its international routes, which include New York, Yangoon, Mumbai, Frankfurt, Orly (Paris), Brussels, Manchester and reduce flight frequencies on five profitable international routes like Riyadh, Jeddah, Kuwait, London and Rome, Biman officials said.

"We are flying aircraft without giving them proper rest, which is also a threat to the aircraft as well as to the passengers," a pilot of DC10-30 aircraft told The Daily Star last night.

"On an average, we use our 20 to 30 years old aircraft for 15-16 hours per day, without giving them proper rest," said the pilot wishing not to be named, adding, "It should be used for 10-11 hours per day."

An official said a Riyadh-bound Biman flight was scheduled to fly at 12:15am Saturday. But the schedule was changed to 10:30am yesterday and again to 2:00am last night.

"I am not sure whether the fresh timetable would be maintained or not," added the Biman official.

Abdul Mamdud Khan, General Manager (central control), told The Daily Star that situation will not improve unless Biman gets more aircraft to its fleet.

in order to rig an election," Abdullah said. "That is something which is not expected."

Abdullah said it "doesn't make the slightest difference" whether Karzai or his supporters ordered the alleged fraud.

"All this happens under his eyes and under his leadership," Abdullah said. "This is under his leadership that all these things are happening, and all those people which are responsible for this fraud in parts of the country are appointed by him."

Abdullah said government officials in Kandahar and Ghazni provinces, including a provincial police chief and a No. 2 provincial election official, stuffed ballot boxes in Karzai's favor in six districts. He also said his monitors were prevented from entering several voting sites.

Karzai's campaign spokesman Waheed Omar dismissed Abdullah's allegations and claimed the president's camp had submitted reports of fraud allegedly committed by Abdullah's followers to the Electoral Complaint Commission. Omar said losing candidates often claim fraud to "try to justify their loss."

BRTA drive

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Even the prime minister could not escape the morning-hour gridlock and was quite late for her office.

Her motorcade got stuck in a snarl-up on the way from her official residence Jamuna, reports the state-run news agency BSS.

BRTA magistrates Masudur Rahman and Mashur Rahman set up two mobile courts in front of BG Press in Tejgaon area. The vehicles they seized formed at least three queues, adding to the tailbacks.

Asked about obstruction to the other traffic, Magistrate Masudur Rahman told The Daily Star that they have only one wrecker and it is never enough to take away so many vehicles and clear the roads immediately.

They have no option but to keep the seized vehicles waiting to be taken to the dumping places later, he argued.

BRTA Director (enforcement) Tapan Kumar Sarker said the wrecker they have at their disposal now has been hired from DMP.

DMP Commissioner AKM Shahidul Haque said they have five wreckers but most of them are not fit to be in use at the moment.

He said they need at least 10 more to haul away the huge number of unfit and unauthorised buses and cars seized by police and transport authority.

For instance, he added, DMP alone seized 1,489 vehicles last week.

Meanwhile, the 12-member high-powered committee formed on August 20 to coordinate and monitor the measures to reduce traffic jam inspected several city roads yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star afterwards, committee chief and additional communications secretary Shaque Alam Mehdi said this ever-worsening traffic situation cannot be solved overnight. Things will not improve unless some drastic steps are taken.

"We have already proposed the government cancel the decision to lease out city roads for parking," he continued.

"The reality is we need many more flyovers and roads to see a turnaround."

The ministry on August 20 recommended the government arrange for 20 magistrates to conduct drive against old vehicles, illegal parking, obstructions to vehicular movement and violation of traffic rules.

If the recommendation is implemented, at least 16 mobile courts would work in eight DMP zones.

Contacted, DC Zilliar Rahman said, "I hope we will get the mobile courts in operation in a day or two."

Ministry asked

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The minister said if any student is suspected to suffer from flu, he or she should stop attending school and report to the nearby hospital.

The health ministry sent a letter to the education secretary saying if the situation demands, they would be asked to announce the closure of the institutions.

The letter said the school authorities could consult with the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research regarding their next step in the prevailing situation.

Around 103 people have so far been infected with the virus.

The health ministry also suggested health messages having all the measures like hand washing, covering while sneezing or coughing, stop going to public places while suffering from flu, and consulting doctors.

Letters would be sent to the information ministry to boost awareness through mass media.

Kidnappers local

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In preliminary interrogation the detainees admitted to their involvement in the abduction, he said.

Victims alleged that police are yet to recover the looted things and nab other criminals.

At the victims' residence eight-year-old Swarna said she could not forget the horrified incident that she experienced early Saturday when local armed criminals kidnapped her along with her eight other family members and kept her gagged and tied with others for over eight hours.

Swarna, a student of class II in Ekrampur Government Primary School in the area, with tears rolling down her cheeks said, "It was unbearable; I was groaning in agony. The tape on my mouth was removed for only 10 to 15 minutes for drinking water. At that time I requested them repeatedly to set me free so that I could take my exams. But they gagged my mouth again."

Panic-stricken family members were so shocked that they did not open their shops--a small tailor shop and a grocery--their only means of earning. Children of the family did not attend their schools and colleges; even they did not prepare their meals yesterday.

Armed local criminals picked up Nitai Chandra Das, 70, his cousin Shambhu Das, 50, Shambhu's wife Kajol Rani Das, 42, her son Sajal, 14, and daughter Swarna, 8, Shambhu's brother Mohabir Das, 45, his wife Lakshmi Rani Das, 38, her daughters Beauty,

Iftar items

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The price of chickpea rose to Tk 48-62, which was Tk 48-60 a day ago. The price of khesari dal soared by Tk 1. It was sold for Tk 50-56 yesterday.

Prices of different qualities of puffed rice shot up to Tk 40-80 a kg, which were Tk 40-70 just a day back.

Although fruits have become pricier this year, fruit shops across the city drew a large number of shoppers yesterday.

Ripe papaya was sold for Tk 5-150 a piece while apple for Tk 110-140 a kg. Prices of mango were hovering between Tk 100 and 180 a kg while grape between Tk 220 and 360 per kg.

The prices of fruits went up by Tk 10-50 a kg as their demand increases sharply during Ramadan.

Like every year, a large number of shoppers from various parts of the city thronged Chawkbazar in old Dhaka on the first day of Ramadan to buy traditional iftar items.

They said the prices of iftar items were quite higher than the previous year's.

The price of jilapi, a popular iftar item, rose by Tk 20 a kg compared to the previous year's, they said. Jilapi was sold for Tk 80 a kg.

Other popular iftar items beguni, potato chops and piyau were sold for Tk 3 a piece, which was Tk 2 last year.

Rajuk asked

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influential people who have taken Rajuk's plots in the past by submitting false information and take legal action against them," Alamgir, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker, said.

Replying to a question, the committee chief said they have got information that former adviser Mainul Hossain had allocated plots to his children, wife and relatives.

Besides, some people have got plots and flats in Gulshan, Baridhara and Uttara despite having their residence in the city violating the Rajuk rules. So, the committee asked the authority concerned to investigate into the matter.

He said the meeting directed Rajuk to provide housing facilities to less solvent and insolvent people living in the city following the model of Singapore.

It also asked Rajuk to be transparent in allocating plots in Purbachal, Jhilmil and Uttara projects.

"We have also asked Rajuk to take coordinated steps along with Wasa, Dhaka City Corporation and other authorities concerned to reduce traffic congestion and water logging in the capital and encourage private sector to make satellite towns on the basis of improving communications with the capital," Alamgir said.

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