

International

Iran accuses Paris of 'interference' over jailed Iranian-French academic

Tehran insists Adelkhah faces security charges

TEHRAN: Tehran accused Paris yesterday of "interference" in the case of an Iranian-French academic held in the Islamic republic, saying she is considered an Iranian national and faces security charges.

France said Friday it summoned Iran's ambassador to protest the imprisonment of Fariba Adelkhah and another academic, Roland Marchal of France, saying their detention was "intolerable".

Their imprisonment has added to distrust between Tehran and Paris at a time when French President Emmanuel Macron is seeking to play a leading role in defusing tensions between Iran and its arch-foe the United States. "The statement by France's foreign ministry regarding an Iranian national is an act of interference and we see their request to have no legal basis," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said in a statement.

"The individual in question (Adelkhah) is an Iranian national and has been arrested over 'acts of espionage'," he said, adding that her lawyer had knowledge about the details of the case which is being investigated.

Iran does not recognize dual nationality and has repeatedly rebuffed calls from foreign governments for consular access to those it has detained during legal proceedings. In its statement on Friday, the French foreign ministry reiterated its call for the release of Adelkhah and Marshal.

It also reaffirmed France's demand for consular access. In response, Mousavi said Marshal was detained for "conspiring against national security", that he has had "consular access multiple times" and that his lawyer was in touch with the judiciary.

Hunger strikes

A specialist in Shiite Islam and a research director at Sciences Po University in Paris, Adelkhah's arrest for suspected "espionage" was confirmed in July. Her colleague Marchal was arrested while visiting Adelkhah, according to his lawyer. A judge had decided to release the two on bail this month, as they had been entitled to it after six months in detention, their lawyer said.

But this was opposed by the prosecution, and as a result the case was referred to Iran's Revolutionary Court to settle the dispute, Iran's semi-official news agency ISNA reported.

The Revolutionary Court typically handles high-profile cases in Iran, including those involving espionage. The university and supporters said this week that Adelkhah and another detained academic, Australian Kylie Moore-Gilbert, had started an indefinite hunger strike just before Christmas.

The French statement said the ministry had made clear to the ambassador "our grave concern over the situation of Mrs Fariba Adelkhah, who has stopped taking food".

"Creating hype cannot stop Iran's judiciary from handling the case, especially considering the security charges the two face," Mousavi said. Mousavi had previously dismissed similar calls from France, saying it should remember that "Iran is sovereign and independent" and interference in its affairs is "unacceptable". The latest tensions come after Xiyue Wang, an American scholar who had been serving 10 years on espionage charges, was released by Iran this month in exchange for Massoud Soleimani, an Iranian who had been held in the US for allegedly breaching sanctions.



A handout photo made available by the Iranian Army office yesterday shows a view of the Russian Navy Neustrashimyy-class frigate "Yaroslav Mudry" during joint Iran-Russia-China naval drills in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman. —AFP

Iran has said it is open to more such prisoner swaps with the United States. Tehran is still holding several other foreign nationals in high profile cases, including British-Iranian mother Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Iranian-American businessman Siamak Namazi and

his father Mohammad Bagher Namazi.

US-Iran tensions have soared since Washington pulled out of a landmark nuclear agreement with Tehran last year and reimposed crippling sanctions. —AFP

Algeria's new PM pledges to regain trust

ALGIERS: Algeria's new president on Saturday named as his prime minister an academic turned political insider who vowed to work to win back people's trust after months of street protests.

Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected this month to succeed ousted president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, asked Abdelaziz Djerad to form a government, the presidency announced in a statement carried by state television. The 65-year-old premier, who has a Ph.D in political science, struck a conciliatory tone after meeting Tebboune, whose election victory was rejected by protesters as a ploy to keep establishment insiders in power.

Djerad pledged to work with all Algerians to surmount the economic and social challenges confronting the north African country. "We face a major challenge to win back the trust" of the people, he added.

But the initial response on the street

to Djerad's appointment suggested he has his work cut out.

"This change of prime minister is illegitimate since the one who appointed him is illegitimate," said pharmacy student Maassoum. The people "asked for a new soup. They just changed the spoon," said one of his friends, Amine. Although from an academic background, Djerad already has experience of the inner workings of the Algerian state, having held posts including general secretary of the presidency from 1993-1995 and the same role at the foreign ministry from 2001-2003.

He replaces Sabri Boukadoum, the foreign minister who was appointed interim prime minister after Tebboune's election win. Algeria's 10-month-old protest movement has rejected Tebboune as part of the same corrupt system that has ruled since independence in 1962. Demonstrators have stayed on the streets since Bouteflika resigned in April after two decades in office. On Friday tens of thousands of Algerians rallied again insisting on a total revamp of the political establishment.

But the demonstration seemed one of the smallest since the start of the unprecedented, peaceful uprising, with some protesters saying school and uni-



ALGIERS: A handout picture released by the official Algeria Press Service (APS) shows Algerian President Abdelaziz Tebboune (left) receiving the newly appointed Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad in the capital Algiers on Saturday. —AFP

versity holidays had kept people away.

The crowd was outnumbered by the throngs of people who had turned out for the funeral on Wednesday of powerful army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah, who had become the de facto strongman in the country after Bouteflika quit. The

December 12 election was boycotted by a large part of the electorate. Tebboune won with 58.1 percent of the vote on a turnout of less than 40 percent, according to official results, and was sworn in on December 19, days before Gaid Salah died of a heart attack at age 79. —AFP

Qaeda-linked Shabaab in Somalia

MOGADISHU: Dozens of people were killed in a massive car bomb attack on a busy street in the Somali capital Mogadishu on Saturday. No group has claimed responsibility, but Al-Shabaab, meaning "youth" in Arabic, is the main militant group in Somalia, which has been mired in chaos since 1991.

Here is some background on the Islamist militant organization with links to Al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda links

The Shabaab stem from Somalia's Islamic Courts Union that controlled central and southern Somalia including the capital Mogadishu for six months in 2006 before being ousted by Ethiopian troops.

In 2010 the Shabaab declared their allegiance to Al-Qaeda, to which they were officially integrated in 2012. They are estimated to have between 5,000 and 9,000 men. Since the death in September 2014 of Ahmed Abdi Godane, killed in a US strike, the group's leader has been Ahmed Diriye.

The Shabaab were chased out of their last bastions in Mogadishu in 2011 by the 22,000-strong African Union peace-enforcement mission, AMISOM-in Somalia since 2007 — and since then they have had to abandon most of their strongholds.

They nevertheless control vast rural areas and remain the key threat to peace in Somalia. In October 2017 a truck bombing in a busy neighborhood of Mogadishu killed more than 500 people in the deadliest attack in Somalia to date. The Shabaab have intensified their activity since the start of 2016 and Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, elected in February 2017, has declared a state of war against the group.

In March 2017 US President Donald Trump authorized the Pentagon to take action against suspected militants in Somalia and since then US forces have conducted a series of air strikes against the Shabaab. On October 12, 2018 one of these strikes killed around 60 militants, according to the US army.

Moving abroad

In 2010, the Shabaab claimed responsibility for a twin attack in Kampala, the capital of Uganda and main contributor to AMISOM. The suicide bombings in two restaurants in Kampala on July 11 killed 76 people and injured more than 80. It was the first major Shabaab attack outside its borders.

On May 24, 2014 the Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack in Djibouti on a restaurant packed with Westerners, saying they had targeted French "crusaders" and that the strike was in retaliation for Djibouti's hosting of the biggest US military base in Africa.

Shabaab targets Kenya

The Shabaab began a spate of bloody attacks in

neighboring Kenya since its troops intervened in Somalia in 2011. The deadliest took place on April 2, 2015 when the Shabaab killed 148 people at Garissa University in northeastern Kenya. In June-July 2014 around 100 people were killed in raids in the coastal Lamu region in Kenya's northeast, home of a once-popular tourist island.

In September 2013 the Shabaab claimed responsibility for a dramatic raid on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi that killed 67 people over a four-day siege.

In January 2019, a Shabaab attack on an upscale Nairobi hotel complex left at least 21 people dead in an hours-long siege.

Foreign forces

Somalia's armed forces rely heavily on the 21,000-strong AMISOM troops, though the African Union last year said it is gradually scaling back its forces as local forces are trained up. Uganda has the most troops in the AMISOM Somalia mission at 6,200 men followed by Burundi at 5,400 troops. Other contributors include Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. US special forces have been deployed in Somalia for years while US drone strikes have also been used against Shabaab commanders. Dozens of regular troops from the 101st Airborne Division have also deployed since 2017.

Strikes in Somalia also surged in 2017 after US President Donald Trump declared the south of the country an "area of active hostilities". But the rate of air strikes rose sharply again in 2019 against Al-Shabaab and Islamic State in Somalia. —AFP

ment in Tripoli. Greece immediately rejected it as baseless, arguing that Turkey and Libya share no maritime border. "(Libya) is our natural maritime neighbor, not Turkey's," Mitsotakis said yesterday. The Turkish deal lays claim to much of the Mediterranean for energy exploration, conflicting with rival claims by Greece and Cyprus.

At the same time, Turkey is stepping up military aid to Tripoli, which is battling the forces of military strongman Khalifa Haftar for control of the capital. —AFP

'World's oldest rhino' dies in Tanzania at 57

DAR ES SALAAM: A rhino believed to be the world's oldest has died at the age of 57 in a Tanzanian conservation area, authorities said. Fausta, a female black rhino, died of natural causes in captivity on Friday in the Ngorongoro Crater, the state conservation body said.

"Records show that Fausta lived (longer) than any rhino in the world and survived in the Ngorongoro, free-ranging, for more than 54 years before it was kept in a sanctuary for the last three years of its life in 2016," the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority said in a statement.

Fausta was first located in 1965 at between three and four years' old by a scientist. Her health deteriorated from 2016 after hyena attacks, when she was taken into refuge.

"Fausta survived 57 years without bearing calves," the statement added. Rhinos' life expectancy is around 40 years in the wild but they can live an extra decade in captivity, according to the Ngorongoro authority. Decimated by poaching, black rhinos now number around 5,500, according to charity Save The Rhino. The smaller of the two African species, they are found around south and east Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. —Reuters



The rhino named Fausta is seen in Ngorongoro, Tanzania in this undated picture. —Reuters

Yemen missile strike kills five separatists

ADEN: A missile struck a passing out ceremony in southern Yemen yesterday, killing at least five southern separatists, security officials said. The ceremony in the town of Ad-Dali was for new recruits to the separatist-dominated Security Belt Forces, a formation trained and equipped by the United Arab Emirates to patrol territory retaken from northern rebels or Al-Qaeda, its spokesman Majed Al-Shuaibi said. Five soldiers were killed and nine others wounded when the missile hit the reviewing stand during the march-past.

Shuaibi told AFP the missile was fired by the Houthi rebels who control the capital Sanaa and much of the north. But there was no immediate claim of responsibility from the Iran-allied rebels, whose forces are present in the mountains just 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of Ad-Dali.

In August, 36 Security Belt soldiers were killed in a drone and missile attack by the Houthis on a passing out ceremony just outside the main southern city of Aden. The security forces in the south have also come under repeated attack by both Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group. —AFP

Greece 'wants a say' in Libya peace process: PM

ATHENS: Greece wants to be included in UN-sponsored talks in January on the Libya conflict, Prime Minister Kyriakos

Mitsotakis said yesterday, as tensions escalate with neighbours Turkey over the issue. Libya has become another diplomatic front for Greece and Turkey as the traditional rivals jostle over Mediterranean maritime rights and the competing camps in the North African country's conflict.

"We do not want a source of instability in our neighbourhood. Therefore we want a say in developments in Libya," Mitsotakis told To Vima weekly in an interview. "We want to be part of the solution in Libya, as it concerns us too," he said. The UN has said an international

conference will be held next month in Berlin to pave the way for a political solution to Libya's ongoing conflict.

Libya has been beset by chaos since a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, with rival administrations in the east and the west vying for power. "I have requested, and will do so again with greater insistence, that we participate in the Berlin process," Mitsotakis said.

In November, Ankara signed a contentious maritime and military deal with the embattled UN-recognized govern-