

Raisi urges Pakistan to improve border security



International Desk

Iranian president called on Pakistan to make greater efforts to improve security at its border following a terrorist attack in southeastern Iran. Ebrahim Raisi made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Pakistani counterpart Arif Alvi on Wednesday. Eleven Iranian police forces were killed and seven more wounded in the terrorist attack that targeted the police headquarters in Rask County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province on Friday. The so-called Jaish-ul-Adl terrorist group, based in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the assault. The Pakistani president expressed sympathy with the Iranian president, government and people over the deadly terrorist attack. He emphasized that his government will do its best to improve the security of the common border and prevent the activities of hostile and terrorist groups in the areas. Also on Wednesday, Iran's police chief, Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan, said Iran expects the Pakistani government to strictly control the borders to prevent the repetition of such terrorist acts. In a statement on Saturday, members of the UN Security Council strongly condemned the terrorist attack, calling for the prosecution of the perpetrators and sponsors of such "cowardly" acts of terror. The world body's members asserted that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

Nouri verdict 'unacceptable'

National Desk

Iran has condemned as "unacceptable" a Swedish court's verdict against a former Iranian judiciary official, Hamid Nouri, who has been illegally incarcerated in Sweden.

A Swedish court on Tuesday upheld a controversial life sentence for 62-year-old Nouri, who was arrested in 2019 under unfounded allegations of rights abuse and for what was claimed to be his alleged role in the deaths of prisoners in Iran in the 1980s.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday vehemently condemned as "fundamentally unacceptable" the verdict issued by the Stockholm Court of Appeals.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran regards the primary and appeals court's verdict concerning Iranian citizen Hamid Nouri to be fundamentally unacceptable and strongly condemns it," said Nasser Kanaani, the Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Press TV reported.

"It is regrettable that the Swedish court, disregarding the standards of a fair trial, has moved to issue such a destructive verdict."

He underlined that Sweden had sided with anti-Iran terrorist groups by such a ruling and has jeopardized Tehran-Stockholm relations.

"Unfortunately, Sweden's judicial system, by siding with the terrorist groups that have been engaged in the most heinous terrorist and inhumane acts against the people of Iran,

Iraq, and even Europe for decades, has endangered the interests of the two nations as well as the old, historical and deep-rooted relations between the two countries," Kanaani said.

"In light of its inherent duties in defending the rights of its citizens, the Islamic Republic of Iran has used all legal capacities and facilities to free the said citizen from the grip of injustice and will continue its efforts until the fulfillment of the rights of its citizens," he added.

The Foreign Ministry's spokesman also stressed that the Islamic Republic reserves the right to take "appropriate" steps in that regard.

The former Iranian judiciary official has been placed in solitary confinement since his illegal arrest.

'Unfair' verdict

Also, Iran's judiciary said the Swedish court's verdict is unfair and that no ruling but the exoneration of the 62-year-old will be acceptable.

"The verdict against Hamid Nouri is unfair but predictable," Massoud Setayeshi, the judiciary spokesman was quoted as saying by ISNA.

"We will not recognize any verdict except the acquittal verdict regarding Hamid Nouri's innocence."

Nouri was arrested upon arrival at Stockholm Airport in November 2019 and was immediately imprisoned.

He was put on trial on unfounded allegations staged against him by elements



● MIZAN

representing the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group that has openly boasted about carrying out terrorist operations against Iranian officials and civilians perceived to be supporters of the government.

The terrorist group had falsely claimed that Nouri was involved in the execution and torture of MKO members in 1988, baseless charges he has vehemently rejected.

In July last year, a Swedish court sentenced Nouri to life imprisonment. The court, which was described by Iran as illegitimate in the first place, convicted Nouri of "war crimes and crimes against humanity" entirely based on claims made by MKO terrorists living in exile across Europe.

The former Iranian judiciary official has been placed in

solitary confinement since his illegal arrest.

As Nouri's lower court trial was underway in Stockholm in April 2022, Iran arrested Johan Floderus, a Swede working for the EU's diplomatic service on espionage charges, as he was returning from a trip to Iran with friends.

The Iranian judiciary spokesman also said that the case of Johan Floderus was being investigated at an official court.

On Wednesday, a court session dealing with the charges against the Swedish national was held at the Islamic Revolutionary Court in the presence of the Swedish Embassy official in Tehran, IRNA reported.

The third session of hearings was held on December 18, according to the judiciary spokesman.

"The legal proceedings for the case are underway in a court," he said.

He has been in temporary detention since last year.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry announced in March last year that it had arrested the Swedish national, who had been visiting the country, on espionage charges after having him under surveillance for some time.

The Intelligence Ministry stressed that the Swedish suspect had re-entered Iran several months earlier following the arrest of "another European spy" in order to acquire information about the identity of the detained European person and how he had been arrested by the ministry.

The suspect had had a history of traveling to the Israeli-occupied territories before leaving for Iran.

Israel, Hamas working toward new truce, prisoner deal

International Desk

Hopes rose Wednesday that Israel and Hamas may be inching toward another truce and prisoner release deal in the Gaza war, following secret talks as the head of the Palestinian resistance group visited Egypt. The leader of Hamas made his first visit to Egypt for over a month on Wednesday, a rare personal intervention in diplomacy amid what a source described as intensive talks on a new cease-fire to let aid reach Gaza and get prisoners freed. Ismail Haniyeh, who normally resides in Qatar, typ-

ically intervenes in diplomacy publicly only when progress seems likely. He last traveled to Egypt in early November before the announcement of the only agreement on a cease-fire in the war so far, a week-long pause during which more than 100 prisoners were released.

A source briefed on negotiations said envoys were discussing which of the prisoners still held by Hamas in Gaza could be freed under a new truce agreement, and what prisoners Israel might release in return. Israel was insisting that all remaining women and in-



firm men among captives be released, the source said, declining to be identified.

Palestinians convicted of serious offences could be on the list of prisoners to be freed.

President Isaac Herzog also said Israel was "ready for another humanitarian pause and additional humanitarian aid in order to enable the release of hostages".

The bloodiest ever Gaza war began when Hamas attacked on October 7, killing around 1,140 people in Israel, and abducting about 250, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. Israel launched a military campaign that Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry says has killed 19,667 people, mostly women and children, while also cutting off most water, food and power supplies.

Firm on battlefield

Ahead of the Egypt visit, Haniyeh held talks with

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in the Qatari capital Doha.

During the meeting, he said the Palestinian resistance stands "firm on the battlefield" despite two and a half months of Israeli war crimes in the besieged Gaza Strip. Haniyeh said the volume of the Israeli military's aerial, naval, and ground attacks on the besieged Gaza has been unprecedented.

"The resistance has still stood firm and steadfast on the battlefield and inflicted heavy damage on the Zionist regime after 75 days of Israeli crimes and mass murders as part of its scorched-earth policy."

Haniyeh also hailed the Palestinian nation for showing unique resilience and standing by the resistance while paying a heavy price for their position. Amir-Abdollahian, for his



An Israeli military vehicle drives near damaged buildings in the Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing war on the besieged strip, as seen from southern Israel, on December 19, 2023.

● REUTERS

caught in the conflict.

The UN estimates 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have been forced to flee their homes, many sheltering in tents amid dire shortages and the biting winter cold.

"Amid displacement at an unimaginable scale and active hostilities, the humanitarian response system is on the brink," said Tor Wennesland, the UN's special coordinator for the Middle East peace process.

Israel, which declared a total siege on Gaza at the start of the war, has since allowed in aid trucks through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt and, as of this week, its own Kerem Shalom crossing.

The UN's World Food Programme said Wednesday it had delivered food through the crossing in a first direct aid convoy from Jordan. Aid groups have warned the humanitarian goods fall far short of the dire need, and the UN children's agency said that "child deaths due to disease could surpass those killed in bombardments".

Inside Gaza, Reuters saw wounded victims of Israeli bombing, including at least two small children covered in blood and dust, carried into the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. At the hospital morgue, women wearing black abaya robes wailed by bodies laid out in black bags and white shrouds.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

