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'Fear of clashes' cancels Rafsanjani sermon

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The 75-year-old Ayatollah Rafsanjani heads both the top political arbitration body called the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Experts, the top clerical body which chooses and supervises the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.



As Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani's turn to lead the Friday prayers stirs up controversy in Iran, the influential cleric reverses his decision to deliver the sermon in order to avoid "clashes" at the event.

The office of Ayatollah Hashemi-Rafsanjani issued a statement on Monday, explaining that he would not lead the Friday prayers this week at Tehran University.

The clarification came as on Saturday, the website of the two-time former president announced that he would lead the prayers on August 14.

However, head of the Policy-making Council for Friday prayers leaders Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Reza Taqavi made a move on Monday to reject the report.

Hojjatoleslam Taqavi acknowledged that based on regulations, August 14th is Ayatollah Hashemi-Rafsanjani's rotational turn to deliver the sermon.

He, however, added that "in order to prevent any abuse of the Friday prayers occasion for unconventional and political reasons" Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani will not lead the prayers.

Shortly after, the statement by the office of Ayatollah Rafsanjani explained that "in order to prevent possible clashes during the political ritual the head of the Assembly of Experts and Chairman of the Expediency Council will not lead the Friday prayers."

The assertion comes after opposition supporters on July 17 made use of Ayatollah Rafsanjani leading the Friday prayers for the first time since the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president on June 12 to express their protest at the results of the vote.

The protests following the sermon came as the Interior Ministry on many occasions has refused to issue permits for demonstrations -- gatherings at the Friday prayers venue does not require any authorization.

During the historically-attended sermon, the influential cleric told hundreds of thousands of worshippers -- most of whom were opposition supporters -- that the ambiguities surrounding the presidential vote had led to the distrust of the Iranian nation in the establishment.

"Doubt has been created," he said. "There are two currents; one has no doubt and is moving ahead. And the other is a large portion of the wise people who say they have doubts. We need to take action to remove this doubt."

Following his sermon, fresh protests took place in the streets of the Iranian capital, provoking another crackdown on the worshippers who had crammed into downtown Tehran.

Iran's police department later announced that 40 people were arrested in the protests on July 17.

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