

By Mohammad Davari



TEHRAN (AFP) — Parliament has scrapped plans to summon President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad over Iran's economic woes following an intervention by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the ISNA news agency said on Wednesday.

The decision was announced after Khamenei was quoted on his website, Khamenei.ir, as saying, "I ask lawmakers not to pursue" the planned questioning.

Khamenei has the final word over all state matters in the Islamic republic.

A petition submitted by 77 MPs in the 290-seat parliament on November 4 required Ahmadinejad to appear before lawmakers within a month to explain his "government's procrastination in managing" Iran's sanctions-hit economy.

The move was put in motion after the national currency, the rial, lost more than two-thirds of its value in a 20-day span starting in late September.

Shortly after Khamenei's remarks were published, parliament abandoned the planned grilling, ISNA reported.

"By adhering to the supreme leader, we announce that we will not pursue the task," it quoted lawmaker Evaz Heidarpour as saying on behalf of the 77 MPs behind the move.

Khamenei meanwhile praised the conservative-dominated parliament for initiating the plan, saying "it showed a sense of responsibility in the assembly and a readiness by government officials to answer" questions on Iran's economic woes.

The rial's collapse sparked a row within the regime's faction-driven political system, with Ahmadinejad blaming international sanctions targeting Iran's economy over its controversial nuclear programme, as well as the other branches of government.

Iran's economy is struggling to cope with the gradual tightening of sanctions by the United States and the European Union over the past two years.

The sanctions have targeted Iran's vital oil exports and revenues as well as its access to the global banking system, slowing its economy, accelerating inflation and boosting the ranks of the jobless.

Ahmadinejad's rivals in the parliament meanwhile have criticised the government for being unable to stem the crisis, which officials liken to an "economic war."

Khamenei halts Iran president's grilling by parliament

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Khamenei himself weighed in in early October, saying "some mismanagement" of the draconian measures were adding to "problems" for Iran's economy.

He however has repeatedly called on top officials in government, parliament and the judiciary to stop bickering in public.

On Wednesday, Khamenei reiterated that position, saying the country was in need of "serenity" and "unity" in its current economic situation.

Parliament had summoned Ahmadinejad in March over his handling of the economy among other policies in a first since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The rial has rallied since early November, gaining almost 30 percent of its value against the US dollar.

Western economic experts in Tehran say this might be the result of a resumption of injecting foreign currency into the open market by Iran's Central Bank, itself targeted by sanctions.

A ban on the import of more than 2,000 products deemed "luxury goods" is also playing a role in the rial's comeback.