

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov delivered a letter from Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani here, formally inviting Iran to take part in a conference on peace in Afghanistan in late March. The conference would involve foreign ministers of 21 countries as well as representatives from the United Nations and the European Union for finding ways to bring the Afghan government, the Taliban and other parties into direct peace talks. Mirziyoyev also voiced his Central Asian country's readiness to open up a new chapter in ties with Iran.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran's Foreign Ministry on Sunday extended condolences to China and the Hong Kong special administrative region (SAR) over a bus crash that killed at least 18 people and wounded more than 60 others. The double-decker bus was traveling from Sha Tin to Tai Po Center in Hong Kong's New Territories when it turned over, shearing off part of its roof, according to news media reports. The crash was the deadliest in Hong Kong since 2003, when 21 people were killed when a bus broke through a guardrail and careened off a road.

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By: S. Nawabzadeh
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Iran Exports Vaccines to Region



Iran Secure Title at 2018 AFC Futsal Championship



UNICEF: 1 in 4 Iraqi Kids in Poverty, U.S. Denies Aid



Syria Shoots Down Zionist F-16: Start of New Strategic Phase in Region

BEIRUT (Dispatches) -- Anti-aircraft fire downed an Israeli warplane returning from a bombing raid in Syria on Saturday in the most serious confrontations yet between the occupying regime and the Arab country.

The F-16, one of at least eight Israeli planes dispatched in response to what the Zionist regime claimed was an Iranian drone's incursion into its airspace earlier in the day, was hit by a Syrian anti-aircraft missile and crashed in northern Occupied Palestine.

Both pilots ejected and were injured, one critically. Some media reports said one of the pilots had died while another warplane -- an F-15 -- had been seriously damaged.

Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement said the downing of the plane marked the "start of a new strategic phase" that would limit the occupying regime's ability to enter Syrian airspace.

The Zionist regime was quick to make it clear that it was not seeking wider conflict as PM Benjamin Netanyahu rushed to military headquarters in Tel Aviv and Syria pledged a strong response to any Israeli "terrorist action".

Russia, whose forces began intervening on behalf of President Bashar Assad in 2015, expressed its concern and urged both sides to exercise restraint and avoid escalation.

Netanyahu said he had spoken by telephone with Russian President Vladimir Putin who the Zionist leader that there was a need to avoid any steps that would lead to a new confrontation in the region, Interfax news agency reported.

A Western diplomat in the region said: "My impression is that it seems to be contained at this point. I don't think anybody wants to escalate further."

A Pentagon spokesman said the United States fully supported the occupying regime in its continued aggression on Syria.

Saturday's chain of events began at 4:30 a.m. (0230 GMT) when an Israeli Apache helicopter shot down an alleged Iranian drone over the northern town of Beit Shean, the Zionist military said.

Iran dismissed the claim as "ridiculous", with the Syrian army saying it had launched the drone to hunt down Daesh terrorists when the occupying regime targeted it after intruding into the Arab country's airspace.

Israeli planes then carried out attacks inside Syria where they are engaged by the country's air defense.

The F-16 crashed on its return from the mission, coming down in an empty field near Harduf, east of Haifa.

"We heard a big explosion and then sirens. We didn't know what was happening, we heard helicopters and planes," said Yosi Sherer, 51, who was staying at a hostel in Beit Shean.

Flights at Tel Aviv's airport were briefly halted.

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Enemies' Dreams Dealt a Massive Blow: Nation's Message: United We Stand



Demonstrators, with Iran's flag painted on their faces, attend a rally in the iconic Azadi Square in Tehran to mark the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution on Feb. 11, 2018.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Millions of Iranians rallied on the streets Sunday to mark the 39th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in a show of force and unity just weeks after scattered protests hit some cities and towns.

Demonstrators burned American and Israeli flags, as well as images of President Donald Trump, whose refusal to re-certify the nuclear deal with world powers has riled Iranians. A few burned a white sheet reading "BARJAM," the Farsi acronym for the 2015 nuclear accord that Tehran signed with world powers.

This year's rallies came after Trump cheered the rioters in a volley of tweets which angered many Iranians who view the American leader's entreaties as

"hypocritical" after he called Iran a "terrorist nation."

The vehemence of slogans cried out by huge masses of protesters on Sunday sought to reflect that anger toward the U.S. and its president who has banned Iranians from traveling to the United States and refused to properly refer to the Persian Gulf.

In the capital Tehran, hundreds of thousands of people and officials descended on the iconic Azadi Square, where Iran's President Hassan Rouhani called for "a year of unity" in a speech broadcast across the country.

"I request that the 40th year of the revolution, the coming year, be the year of unity. I ask principlists, reformists, moderates and all parties and all people to come and

be together," he said.

In his speech, Rouhani promised more job opportunities and better economic condition in the near future.

The country's economy still struggles despite the 2015 nuclear deal. The accord allowed Iran to begin selling its crude oil again on the international market, but rising food prices have squeezed the average Iranian while salaries remain stagnant and unemployment high.

A January survey by the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland and the Toronto-based firm IranPoll found that 58.4% of those interviewed said they found the country's economy was getting worse. Nearly 70% said they found

Trump to be "completely hostile" toward Iran. The telephone-interview survey of 1,002 Iranians had a margin of error of 3.1%.

The economic protests still were on people's minds Sunday even at a pro-government rally.

"Look at these people, they have come in massive numbers here though they know there are some economic problems, too," said Samaneh Heidari, a 29-year-old teacher wearing a black chador. "We are here to show support to the revolution, it's bigger than any kind of opposition."

Demonstrator Abdolali Tehrani, 57, said he took part in the economic protests but still wanted to take part in Sunday's rally.

"I went out then for a peaceful protest against the unemployment of my two sons, both at home with bachelor's degrees," he said. "Today, I am here to say I still support the revolution that brought us independence and dignity. Revolution and the economic problems, these are two different issues."

The same sentiment was echoed by demonstrator Mehdi Mohebi. "People have the right to protest against inflation and economic troubles," he said, "The same people have come to demonstrate on the revolution anniversary to announce that they are loyal to their establishment and revolution despite all these problems."

Each year on the 22nd of the month of Bahman on the Persian calendar, Iranians turn out to renew their allegiance to the Islamic establishment and Imam Khomeini, the late founder of the Islamic Republic.

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Thousands of Troops Heading to East Asia: U.S. Unveils Biggest Ever Military Budget

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- It's the biggest budget the Pentagon has ever seen: \$700 billion. That's far more in military spending than America's two nearest competitors, China and Russia, and will mean the military can foot the bill for thousands more troops, more training, more ships and a lot else.

And next year it would rise to \$716 billion. Together, the two-year deal provides what Pentagon chief Jim Mattis says is needed to pull the military out of a slump in combat readiness at a time of renewed focus on the stalemated conflict in Afghanistan and the threat of war on the Korean peninsula.

The budget bill that President Donald Trump signed Friday

includes huge spending increases for the military: The Pentagon will get \$94 billion more this budget year than last - a 15.5 percent jump. It's the biggest year-over-year windfall since the budget soared by 26.6%, from \$345 billion in 2002 to \$437 billion the year after, when the nation was fighting in Afghanistan, invading Iraq and expanding security regime after the 9/11 attacks.

The extra money is not targeted at countering a new enemy or a singular threat like Al-Qaeda militants or the former Soviet Union. Instead the infusion is being sold as a fix for a broader set of problems, including a deficit of training, a need for more hi-tech missile defenses, and the start of a complete recapitalization of the nuclear weapons arsenal.

"I cannot overstate the negative impact to our troops and families' morale from all this budget uncertainty," Mattis said just hours before the House and Senate approved the deal.

More money for the Pentagon, however, is not the simple solution some might think. Even with the spending caps of recent years, the military budget has been robust by historical standards. Todd Harrison, a military budget specialist at the Center for Security and International Studies, says military funding has been near the inflation-adjusted peak levels of the armed forces buildup during the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan.

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All 71 People Killed in Russian Plane Crash

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- A Russian passenger plane crashed near Moscow soon after take-off on Sunday, killing all 71 people on board, and investigators said they were looking at all possible causes.

Temperatures were around minus 5 degrees Celsius with periodic snowfall when the short-haul AN-148 operated by Saratov Airlines took off for the city of Orsk in Orenburg region, about 900 miles (1,500 km) southeast of the capital.

President Vladimir Putin offered condolences to those who had lost relatives and ordered a special investigative commission to be set up.

"According to preliminary information, nobody survived," the Kremlin said in a statement.

The office of Russia's transport prosecutor said all 71 people on board had been killed. Transport

Minister Maxim Sokolov confirmed there were no survivors and said DNA tests would be needed to identify the dead.

TV images of the crash site showed wreckage of the plane, including at least one engine, lying in fields covered with thick snow.

Helicopters were at the scene as well as rescuers on snowmobiles. An official of the Emergency Situations Ministry said two bodies and a flight recorder had been found.

Debris and human remains were spread over a radius of a kilometer from the crash site, investigators said.

They said they had opened a criminal case into the incident. Among the possible causes they listed were weather conditions, human error and the plane's technical condition. No distress

signals had been received from the crew.

The plane, manufactured in 2010, had been carrying 65 passengers and six crew. It disappeared from radar screens shortly after taking off from Moscow's Domodedovo airport.

Interfax news agency said one Swiss national had been among the passengers.

Elena Voronova, a spokeswoman for Saratov Airlines, said there had been no concerns about the technical condition of the plane, which went into service with her company in 2016.

Images broadcast on state TV showed relatives waiting at Orsk airport, some with their heads in their hands. The city's mayor told the Rossiya 24 TV channel a team of psychologists was working at the airport to comfort people.