

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- The Iranian air force on Tuesday began holding its annual military exercise to test its ability to safeguard the country's airspace.

The drill is taking place near the central city of Isfahan, a region that is home to the country's key nuclear facilities, including the Natanz uranium enrichment plant. The military spokesman for the two-day drill, Gen. Masoud Rouzkhosh, said it aims to improve and update capabilities of the air force, as well as display Iran's military power. He said fighter jets, bombers and drones will be tested during the drill.

TOKYO (Reuters) - Imports of Iranian crude by major buyers in Asia rose in September for a third straight month to their highest since March, boosted by a surge in purchases in China and South Korea. China, India, South Korea and Japan imported slightly more than 1.9 million barrels per day (bpd) last month, up 5.1% from a year earlier, government and ship-tracking data showed. Their imports rose nearly 20% from August. Still, purchases from the Asian buyers remain below highs that were hit earlier this year and last year as Tehran ramped up exports following the lifting of economic sanctions.

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With President Putin Due in Tehran Today: Iran Breaks Ground for 2 More Bushehr Plants

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran on Tuesday broke ground at its Bushehr nuclear power plant for two more atomic reactors to generate electricity.

State television quoted Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, as saying the first new reactor would go online in seven years, while a third would be active in nine years.

Russia will provide assistance in building the new reactors as Moscow helped bring Bushehr online in 2011. It marks the first expansion of Iran's nuclear power industry since the nuclear accord.

"This is a symbol of the strategic cooperation between Russia and Iran," the Iranian official said at the ground-breaking ceremony for the project.

"The Majlis has enabled us to produce 20,000 megawatts of nuclear power, as part of the development plan that will end in 2025," the Fars News Agency quoted the senior official as telling reporters.

Because Iran is a dry country and the construction of a large power plant requires a source of

water, explained Salehi, small nuclear power stations should be established. He cited the transfer of electricity from the major plants to the rest of the country is economically inefficient.

In November 2014, Iran's development companies signed two contracts, worth \$10 billion, with Russian companies for the construction of power plants to produce electric energy. The capacity of the new plants will be about 2,100 megawatts.

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin will arrive in Tehran for a trilateral meeting with Iranian counterparts Hassan Rouhani and Azerbaijan's Iham Aliyev.

Putin will discuss the Syria crisis and energy cooperation with the Iranian president and Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Kremlin said on Tuesday.

"Syria-related issues will be on the agenda of the Russian-Iranian bilateral talks," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a conference call with reporters. He did not elaborate.

IRGC Chief Gen. Jafari: U.S. Knows Not to Start a War Against Iran



Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Muhammad Ali Jafari addresses "A World Without Terror" conference in Tehran, Oct. 31, 2017.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Muhammad Ali Jafari said here Tuesday he didn't believe there would be any war between Iran and the U.S.

"They know that if they begin a war between Iran and the United States, they will definitely be the

main losers and their victory will by no means be guaranteed," he said. "Therefore, they won't start a war."

Speaking on the sidelines of a conference titled "A World Without Terror," Jafari said U.S. forces are within the reach of Iran's missiles and a target of the country's retaliatory measures if it comes under attack.

"The range of our missiles is 2,000 kilometers, which can be increased, but we think this capability and range is enough for the Islamic Republic, because most of the American interests and forces are within the radius of this missile range," he said.

Jafari said Iran's missile and defense capability today is "as

much invaluable to the Iranian people as their honor."

"Iranians are zealous people who would exact revenge in the worst possible way on the aggressors if they made their blood boil."

The commander said, "The Iranian people know America very well, and if they had gained relative trust in the U.S. over the past four years under the pretext of the JCPOA, they have totally lost it as a result of the Americans' breaches of trust and deceptions."

The U.S., he said, seeks to undermine Iran's economy through imposing sanctions on his force.

Jafari pointed to the so-called Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) and said, "The Americans are trying

to implement the plan against the IRGC under the pretext of Iran's missile power."

However, this plan is targeting the Iranian economy in nature and the IRGC and the missile capabilities of the Islamic Republic are only pretexts for the U.S. sanctions, he added.

He told U.S. officials that "the more they intensify economic pressure and sanctions, the more the determination of the Iranian nation to boost defense capabilities will increase and the larger the number and the greater the range and accuracy of the missiles will become."

CAATSA, known as the "mother of all sanctions," is the most wide-ranging sanctions measure of the last five years which U.S. President Donald Trump signed into law in early August, enhancing three separate sanctions programs targeting Iran, Russia and North Korea.

The law expands U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's ballistic missile program and enhances the "legal basis" for existing sanctions targeting the IRGC.

The U.S. has imposed the fresh sanctions against Iran in flagrant defiance of the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

On Tuesday, Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said Iran's determination to boost its defensive capabilities will not be influenced by U.S. sanctions.

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UN: Failure on Climate Action 'Catastrophic'

GENEVA (Dispatches) -- There is a "catastrophic" gap between national pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the actions needed to cap global warming below two degrees Celsius, the UN's environment chief warned Tuesday, days ahead of global climate talks in Bonn.

Even if fulfilled, these voluntary pledges—inscribed along with the 2 C target in the 2015 Paris climate pact—would see the world heat up 3 C (5.6 F), unleashing deadly heatwaves, superstorms and rising seas, UN Environment said in its annual Emissions Gap report, the bleakest ever.

Record-setting extreme weather in 2017—including monsoon flooding, raging fires, and a trio of deadly hurricanes—likely bears the fingerprint of global warming, it noted.

"One year after the Paris Agreement entered into force, we still find ourselves in a situation where we are not doing

nearly enough to save hundreds of millions of people from a miserable future," said Eric Solheim, head of the UN agency. "Governments, the private sector and civil society must bridge this catastrophic climate gap."

Compiled by more than 200 climate scientists and experts, the annual, 100-page analysis tracks progress toward the Paris goal of checking the rise in global temperatures at "well below" 2 C.

With many poor nations already feeling the sting of a planet out of kilter with only one degree of warming, the treaty also vowed to explore the feasibility of holding the line at 1.5 C.

Current commitments for slashing pollution take us only a third of the way toward the 2 C target, and would eat up 80% of humanity's "carbon budget"—the amount of CO2 we can spew into the atmosphere without crossing that threshold—by 2030, the report said.

It doesn't help that the United

States, the world's second largest emitter, has abandoned its greenhouse gas goals under Donald Trump.

"Momentum is clearly faltering," said Edgar Gutierrez-Espeleta, Costa Rica's environment minister and president of the current UN Environment Assembly.

"We face a stark choice: up our ambition, or suffer the consequences."

If the gap is not closed by 2030, the report said, "it is extremely unlikely that the goal of holding global warming to well below 2 C can still be reached."

In 2016, humanity emitted the equivalent of 52 billion tonnes—or gigatonnes—of CO2 (52GtCO2e), including other gases such as methane.

To stay on the 2 C track, that number must come down to about 42 GtCO2e by 2030, and eventually hit "net zero"—meaning that any gases going into the air must also be pulled out.

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Former Qatari Prime Minister Reveals: Saudi, U.S., Turkey Coordinated Arms for Syria Terrorists

LONDON (Dispatches) -- The former prime minister of Qatar has admitted there were "maybe" links between his government and Al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria.

In a wide-ranging interview with Qatari television, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani - known colloquially as "HBJ" - said that his government would have ended support to groups like Al-Nusra Front (later rebranded Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) after a period of time when it became unacceptable.

"Maybe Nusra there was a relationship? Maybe there was. I swear myself, I don't know about

this issue," he told the interviewer. "But even if this were the case, when the decision came that Nusra was not acceptable, the support to Nusra came to an end and the focus was on liberating Syria."

He specifically ruled out Qatari support for Daesh, however, and said that any resources sent to militants in Syria had U.S. approval.

"Anything that went, went to Turkey and was coordinated with U.S. forces," he explained.

"All distribution was done through the U.S. and the Turks and us and everyone else that was

involved, the military people."

He also said that he had been sent by the emir of Qatar to meet with then Saudi king Abdullah and received his backing for the support for militants in Syria. Saudi Arabia has led a blockade of Qatar for its alleged support for terrorism since June.

Al-Thani's comments follow a similar admission made in English to American journalist Charlie Rose in May, in which he admitted that Qatar had ended up supporting groups in the country with an "agenda".

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