

PARIS (Reuters) -- France's foreign minister said Wednesday that he expected a European-backed system to facilitate non-dollar trade with Iran and circumvent U.S. sanctions would be established in the coming days.

The SPV "should be implemented in the coming days," Jean-Yves Le Drian told the French parliament's foreign affairs committee. "It will work as a sort of clearing house that will allow in euros for Iran to benefit from some of its oil resources and at the same time buy essential products from the main three main (European) partners," Le Drian said.

CARACAS (Reuters) -- Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido took an oath swearing himself in as the South American country's interim president Wednesday, as hundreds of thousands marched to demand the end of socialist President Nicolas Maduro's government.

Guaido, the head of the opposition-run Congress, has said he would be willing to assume the presidency on an interim basis with the support of the armed forces to call elections. The United States is mulling recognizing him as the country's legitimate president, sources said.

Viewpoint

Saudi Arabia's Sordid Human Rights Record

Iranian Actor Awarded at India Diorama Festival



Iran Best Team in Asian Cup: Japanese Captain



Palestinian Authority Asks U.S. to Drop All Aid



In Response to Zionist Aggression:

Syria Threatens to Attack Ben Gurion Airport

UNITED NATIONS – Syria has threatened to attack Israel's Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv in retaliation for the occupying regime's repeated aerial strikes on Damascus International Airport.

"Syria will practice its legitimate right of self-defense and respond to the Israeli aggression on Damascus International Airport in the same way on Tel Aviv Airport," said Syria's Ambassador to the United Nations Bashar Ja'afari.

Ja'afari made his remarks before the UN Security Council in New York Tuesday as he urged the body to stop the Zionist regime's attacks.

"Isn't it high time for this council to take the necessary measures to stop the repeated Israeli aggression against the territories of my country?" he asked.

"These acts were not condemned. There were no calls to halt such acts by this UNSC, in light of the position of the U.S., Britain and France, who are partners and supporters of Israel in such aggression."

Ja'afari also called on the United Nations to force the occupying regime of Israel to give up the Golan Heights, a strategic location the Zionists occupied during the Six Day War of 1967.

"Restoring the occupied Syrian Golan by all means possible... is a principled right for the Syrian Arab Republic," Ja'afari said. "It is not subject to negotiation, waiver or statutory limitation. The full withdrawal of the Israeli occupied forces... is an unwavering request based international law," he said.

The United Nations has passed several resolutions urging the occupying regime of Israel to give the Golan Heights to Syria.

The Zionist regime launched an hour of air attacks over Damascus on a second consecutive night of military action in what appeared to be a face-saving attempt after Syrian air defenses thwarted an attack on Sunday.

The Sunday attack, launched by four Israeli F-16 jets, did not damage its targets, while Syrian air defenses shot down seven missiles fired at an airport near Damascus, Russia said.

Syria's air defenses also shot down more than 30 cruise missiles and guided bombs during Israel's aerial attacks in the early hours of Monday.

Russia's National Defense Control Center said Israeli airstrikes targeting an airport in southeastern Damascus killed four Syrian soldiers and wounded six others, RIA news agency said.

The announcement came after the Zionist military claimed in a statement that it had struck what it said were Iranian targets and caused several fatalities.

Russia said on Wednesday that Israel should stop carrying out what it called arbitrary airstrikes on Syria.

"The practice of arbitrary strikes on the territory of a sovereign state, in this case, we are talking about Syria, should be ruled out," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

She said such strikes added to tensions in the region, something she said was not in the long-term interests of any side there.

"We should never allow Syria, which has suffered years of armed conflict, to be turned into an arena where geopolitical scores are settled," TASS cited her as saying.

In September 2018, a Russian reconnaissance aircraft with 15 servicemen on board was downed as Syria was responding to Israeli airstrikes.

Moscow held the Zionist regime responsible, saying its pilots had intentionally used the Russian plane as cover to conduct air raids, effectively putting it in the crosshairs of the Syrian air defenses.

Russia stopped coordinating its airborne operations over Syria with the occupying regime after the incident, and upgraded Syria's defenses with its S-300 missile systems.

According to Russian daily Kommersant, the Syrian government will be ready to use the S-300 systems as of March.

A member of the Russian Federation Council's defense and security committee, Franz Klintsevich, said the Syrian crews are currently undergoing training.

"Israeli warplanes are now striking Syria because they are still outside the Syrian air defense range, but after the deployment of the S-300, no one will be able to escape them," he said.

Leader Tells Officials, Researchers:

Keep Up Pace of Scientific Advancement



Ayatollah Khamenei meets a group of officials and researchers in Tehran, Jan. 23, 2019.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday Iran has to maintain and step up the pace of its scientific progress.

"The momentum that the scientific advancement of the country has enjoyed over the past 20 years should not decrease or cease. It should be maintained and strengthened for years to come until the country reaches the summit in science and knowledge," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with a group of officials and researchers of the Research Center for Cognitive Sciences.

"One must thank God for scientific advancements of humans and the opening of new doors to better understand the amazing and stunning order of the universe because they move mankind closer to the knowledge of the divine," he said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said each new door opening to science and knowledge will prepare the

ground for new changes in human life.

"Hence, any nation that lags behind in new sciences and relevant technologies will be doomed to backwardness, humiliation, and colonialism by the domineering powers."

Iranian scientists and scholars, as well as research and academic centers should do their best and work constantly toward keeping up the momentum of the country's scientific advancement, especially in new sciences, the Leader said.

"If we lag behind the world's scientific movement, even slightly, we can no longer catch up with the scientific movement and reach the summits of science. Hence, no pause is appropriate in our scientific advancement," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei touched on the state budget allocated to scientific and cultural centers and constraints in this regard, saying, "I am aware of the problems, but I believe when a nation is determined, it can achieve great results, even during a harsh economic and political crisis."

The Leader cited some historical examples in a few countries where great scientific achievements were made in difficult times.

Ayatollah Khamenei further advised Iranian scientists to make use of all scientific accomplishments of the West.

"Never refrain from being a learner and from learning. We are not ashamed of being learners and learning, but we are ashamed of always remaining a learner," the Leader said.

The Leader, however, advised against putting trust in the plans and enjoinments of the West.

"Western countries, which today are the most advanced in the fields of modern sciences, have also committed the highest number of crimes against nations throughout history," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Iran Finds Oil in Abadan for First Time

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Iran has discovered oil in the southwestern Abadan region for the first time, Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh told reporters here on Wednesday.

The oil was found at a depth of 3,570 meters in an exploratory well on Minoo Island and is "very light and sweet", he said. "This is the first time we've reached oil in the Abadan region."

Zangeneh gave no estimate of how much oil the well might contain. He said drilling will continue to estimate the total volume of the reservoir and the possibility of production.

"We have a lot of hope to discover (more) oil in the Abadan area and this grade discovered at a depth of 3,770 meters has an API gravity of 40 which is very light and sweet," he said.

Iran has also to determine whether it is an independent resource or an extension of an Iraqi oilfield currently producing on the other side of the border.

Iran's oil sector is facing U.S. sanctions imposed in November, including a pledge by President Donald Trump to bring the country's oil exports down to zero.

Trump has backtracked on that pledge, giving a 180-day waiver to eight customers of Iranian oil and is likely to extend it, according to analysts.

"As for the extension of the waiver for Iran's oil sales to some customers by the United States, we have to wait and see," Zangeneh said.

President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday Iran cannot be shut out of global energy markets because of its vast oil and gas reserves.

"With regard to oil issues, luckily we are pursuing various paths and roads for selling oil and we bypass American sanctions with pride," Rouhani said.

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said the U.S. has failed to prevent Iran from exporting its oil.

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Defense Minister: New Satellite to Launch 'Soon'

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Wednesday Iran will carry out another satellite launch "soon" and promised "good news" would be announced in the near future about the country's defense industry.

Hatami's comments follow an attempt by Iran to put a satellite in orbit last week. The rocket carrying the Payam satellite did not reach the "necessary speed" in the third stage of its launch.

The "technical problem" that led to the incident "is clear for us," Hatami was quoted by the official Mehr news agency as saying outside a cabinet meeting here.

Iran had said that it planned to send two non-military satellites, Payam and Doosti, into orbit. The Payam, which means "message" in Farsi, was an imagery satellite that Iranian officials said would help with farming and other activities.

Telecommunications Minister Muhammad Javad Azari Jahromi wrote on Twitter last week that "Doosti is waiting for orbit," without elaborating.

Shortly after the Payam's launch, President Hassan Rouhani Iran had achieved great success in building satellites and launching them.

"That means we are on the right track. The remaining problems are minor, will be resolved in a few months, and we will soon be ready for a new launch," he said.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space.

Iran usually displays achievements in February during the anniversary of its 1979 Islamic Revolution. This year will mark the 40th anniversary of the revolution.

The country launched its first locally-built satellite, Omid (Hope), in 2009. It sent its first bio-capsule containing living creatures into space in February 2010, using Kavoshgar (Explorer)-3 carrier.

In February 2015, Iran placed its domestically-made Fajr (Dawn) satellite into orbit, which is capable of taking and transmitting high-quality photos to stations on Earth.