

BEIRUT (Daily Star) --Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah Monday denied a media report that said he had warned of a likely war with Israel this summer.

"Usually when there is something written in a newspaper, I don't respond because most of it would be based on wrong information," Nasrallah said during a televised speech on the 34th anniversary of the founding of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts.

Kayhan International

GAZA (Dispatches) -- Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has blasted the United Arab Emirates for sending its pilots to train together with Israeli air force, calling the move a "stab in the back" for Palestine and the Islamic world.

Earlier this month, Emirati pilots traveled to Greece to partake in a military exercise that also featured Israeli fighter jets. The Persian Gulf sheikhdom has been testing the waters for official ties with Tel Aviv after years of secretive dealings.

VOL NO: LV 10865 TEHRAN / Est.1959 Tuesday, April 23, 2019, Ordibehesht 3, 1398, Sha'ban 17, 1440, Price 30,000 Rials

Viewpoint

2 **Auspicious Start to Further Expansion of Iran-Pakistan Fraternal Ties**

Legendary Dutch Director Judges at Fajr International Film Festival



Iranian Karateka Grabs Gold in Morocco Premier League



Yemeni Forces Shoot Down Three Saudi-Led Drones



Will U.S. Dare to Zero Out Iran's Oil Exports?

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Trump administration said it won't renew waivers that let countries buy Iranian oil without facing U.S. sanctions, a move that roiled energy markets and risked upsetting major importers such as China and India.

"This decision is intended to bring Iran's oil exports to zero, denying the regime its principal source of revenue," White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement Monday.

"The U.S., Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, three of the world's great energy producers, along with our friends and allies, are committed to ensuring that global oil markets remain adequately supplied," according to the statement.

Iran will close the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway vital for global oil shipments, if the country is prevented from using it, a senior military official said in what appeared to be a response to the U.S. plan to end waivers on Iranian oil exports.

"If we are prevented from using it, we will close it," the state-run Fars news agency reported, citing Alireza Tangsiri, head of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s navy force. "In the event of any threats, we will not have the slightest hesitation to protect and defend Iran's waterway."

The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway carrying a fifth of the world's traded oil that Iranian officials have vowed to block in retaliation for sanctions targeting the country's nuclear program.

Brent for June settlement climbed 2.6 percent to \$73.87 on the London-based ICE Futures Europe exchange as of 9:52 a.m. in New York. The global benchmark price rose as high as \$74.31 earlier in the session, its highest intraday level in almost six months.

The current set of waivers -- issued to China, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Turkey -- expires May 2.

President Donald Trump said in a tweet that "Saudi Arabia and others in OPEC will more than make up the Oil Flow difference in our now Full Sanctions on Iranian Oil."

Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said in a statement Monday that the kingdom will coordinate with other oil producers to ensure adequate supplies are available to consumers while ensuring the global oil market "does not go out of balance."

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the UAE are "working directly with Iran's former customers." He told reporters that "we will no longer grant any exemptions -- we're going to zero" and any nation continuing to buy Iranian oil will face U.S. sanctions.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Moussavi said Tehran gives no value and credit

to U.S. sanctions waivers, but it is in touch with European partners, neighbors and others to counter any adverse consequences of sanctions.

The decision not to renew the waivers is a victory for National Security Adviser John Bolton and his allies who had argued that U.S. promises to get tough on Iran were meaningless with waivers still in place. Pompeo and his team had been more cautious, though they also maintained that the market was well-enough supplied to ramp up pressure on Iran.

Trump's efforts to cut Iranian supplies have rocked oil markets in the past year.

China, the largest buyer of Iranian crude, reiterated its opposition to unilateral sanctions on Monday and accused the U.S. of reaching beyond its jurisdiction. "China's cooperation with Iran is open, transparent, reasonable and legitimate, and should be respected," Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said in response to a question on the waivers at a regular briefing in Beijing.

Japan and South Korea, two of the U.S.'s closest allies and long-time buyers of Iranian oil, said they were aware of the reports about the waivers but didn't confirm the decision. Japan's chief cabinet secretary, Yoshihide Suga, said Monday in Tokyo that the government had kept in close contact with the U.S. and expressed the view that "there should be no damage to the activities of Japanese companies."

An Indian foreign ministry spokesman declined to comment when reached by phone Monday.

Ayatollah Khamenei Tells PM Imran Khan: Iran-Pakistan Ties Have Serious Enemies



Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, second right, meets Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in Tehran, with President Hassan Rouhani, third right, and other officials also in attendance, April 22, 2019.

Kayhan Int'l Political Desk

TEHRAN -- Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Monday described relations between Iran and Pakistan as "wholehearted and deep" which have "serious enemies."

"Good relations are in the interest of both countries, but these relationships have serious enemies that must be strengthened in different areas," the Leader told Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan here.

The Leader touched on historical bonds between the two countries, saying "the height of the glory of

the Indian subcontinent was during the reign of Muslims."

Meanwhile, "the greatest impact of British colonialists in this important region was to destroy the prominent Islamic civilization," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

The Leader further hailed Pakistan's luminaries, including prominent poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal and the country's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

He said security issues between Iran and Pakistan are important.

"The terrorist groups that are the source of insecurity on the borders are fed with the money and weap-

ons of the enemies, and one of the aims of counter-security moves on the borders of Iran and Pakistan is to contaminate relations between the two countries," the Leader said.

Prime Minister Khan, for his part, described his talks with Iranian officials in Tehran as "good", saying many of issues between the two countries were resolved.

He said certain sides did not like Pakistan and Iran to get closer. "We are striving to strengthen relations between the two countries and to continue the ongoing contacts with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Tasnim quoted him

as saying.

Earlier, Prime Minister Khan said Pakistan will not participate in any coalition against Iran, President Hassan Rouhani said, as they agreed to form a joint rapid reaction force to combat terrorists on their shared border.

Khan arrived in Iran on Sunday to discuss security and regional issues on his first Tehran visit which is hoped to start a new chapter in historic relations between the neighbors.

"We agreed to increase the security cooperation of the two countries, our border forces, our intelligence forces," Rouhani said during a joint conference, which was broadcast live on national TV. "And also to form a joint quick reaction force on the border of the two countries for fighting terrorism."

Khan said that militant activity at the border could be a source of tension.

"The most important reason why I'm here, Mr. President, is because I felt that the issue of terrorism was going to ... increase differences between our countries," Khan said. "So it was very important for me to come here and come with our security chief that we resolve this issue."

A new umbrella group representing various terrorist groups operating in Baluchistan claimed responsibility for an attack on Thursday when 14 passengers were killed after being kidnapped from buses in the province, which borders Iran.

Iran says militant groups operate

(Continued on Page 7)

Pompeo Privately Said: Trump Will Avoid Military Confrontation With Iran

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reportedly told a group of Iranian American community leaders the U.S. is not seeking a regime change in Iran through direct military intervention.

Pompeo met with 15 leaders last Monday at the Renaissance Dallas Hotel, according to Axios, citing three sources who were in the room, one of whom took detailed notes. During the meeting, Pompeo reportedly was asked, "If regime change does not occur internally what is the endgame?"

In response, according to the site, Pompeo responded that the administration is "careful not to use the language of regime change" and that the Trump administration does not plan to intervene militarily in Iran. When asked if the administration had considered the possibility of a coup, Pompeo quipped that he would not tell the attendees even if it had, prompting laughter, according to the article.

Beyond ruling out military intervention, Pompeo was vague about the administration's plans regarding Iran.

He reportedly said that "our best inter-

est is a non-revolutionary set of leaders leading Iran," according to notes viewed by Axios, and that the Trump administration would have handled the 2009 "Green Movement," differently from the Obama administration, but he did not detail how.

Pompeo also reportedly told the group that "there are no guarantees" U.S. sanctions would not hurt the people of Iran.

The secretary of State was also reportedly grilled about Trump associates' connections to the MKO, which was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. until 2012. Several attendees asked Pompeo about the relationship between national security adviser John Bolton and Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and MEK, according to Axios.

"Ambassador Bolton spoke at an MEK rally. President Trump and I have not," Pompeo responded, according to notes viewed by Axios.

Reuters: U.S. Backtracks on IRGC Designation

The United States has largely carved out exceptions so that foreign governments, firms and NGOs do not automatically

(Continued on Page 7)

Threat of New Attacks Persists Sri Lanka Imposes Emergency as Death Toll Nears 300

COLOMBO (Reuters) -- Sri Lanka said on Monday it was invoking emergency powers in the aftermath of devastating bomb attacks on hotels and churches, blamed on militants with foreign links, in which nearly 300 people were killed and nearly 500 wounded.

The emergency law, which gives police and the military extensive powers to detain and interrogate suspects without court orders, will go into effect at midnight on Monday, the president's office said.

Colombo, the seaside capital of the Indian Ocean island, was jittery on Monday. Police said 87 bomb detonators were found at the city's main bus station, while an explosive went off near a church where scores were killed on Sunday when bomb squad officials were trying to defuse it.

A night curfew went into effect at 8 p.m., the government announced.

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack but suspicion was focusing on Takfiri militants in the Buddhist-majority country.

Investigators said seven suicide bombers took part in the attacks while a government

spokesman said an international network was involved.

Police had received a tip-off of a possible attack on churches by a little-known domestic Takfiri group some 10 days ago, according to a document seen by Reuters.

The intelligence report, dated April 11 and seen by Reuters, said a foreign intelligence agency had warned authorities of possible attacks on churches by the leader of the group, the National Thawheed Jama'ut. It was not immediately clear what action, if any, was taken on the tip-off.

Police said 24 people had been arrested, all of whom were Sri Lankan, but they gave no more details.

International anti-terrorism experts said even if a local group had carried out the attacks, it was likely that Al-Qaeda or Daesh were involved, given the level of sophistication.

Two of the suicide bombers blew themselves up at the luxury Shangri-La Hotel on Colombo's seafont, said Ariyananda Welianga,

(Continued on Page 7)