

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Hostile attempts to hinder Iran’s progress have backfired and sanctions imposed on the country have helped the Islamic Republic develop its military industries, Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said Saturday.

During a visit to a plant manufacturing the homegrown Yasin training jet, the defense minister said Iranian military industries, such as the air force units, have gained self-sufficiency under the pressure of the cruel sanctions. The more restrictions the enemies impose on Iran, the faster Iran moves towards progress and self-sufficiency, the minister said.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – The governor of the Central Bank of Iran said Tehran has adopted plans that will help domestic production and foreign trade not to be harmed even if the sanctions are kept in place.

In a post on his Instagram account, Abdolnasser Hemmati said Iran would never return to the situation it experienced after the U.S. unleashed its most aggressive sanctions on the Islamic Republic in 2018 because of economic policies have been designed in a way to handle every untoward scenario.

Viewpoint

Iran’s Right to Upgrade Range and Precision of Projectiles

Issues Warning to Foreign Sponsors

Nujaba: Daesh Plans to Attack Karbala, Najaf

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Iraq’s Harakat al-Nujaba resistance group on Saturday warned about plots by Daesh to carry out attacks in Baghdad, and holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, warning the regimes believed to be supporting the takfiri group that they risk dragging the terrorist sedition into their own lands.

Nasr al-Shammari, the spokesman for Al-Nujaba which is part of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Hashd al-Sha’abi, said in a televised interview with Iraq’s Aletejah TV that the movement has information that Daesh is planning more attacks after its Thursday twin bombing in Baghdad.

“Daesh is seeking to target Najaf, Karbala and the capital. Terrorists are currently preparing two suicide vehicles in the Baghdad belt area. Of the five suicide bombers, only two blew themselves up and three others are still alive,” he said.

On Thursday, Daesh carried out two simultaneous bombings in the Iraqi capital, which claimed the lives of at least 32 people and wounded 110 others in a crowded marketplace.

The first attacker drew a crowd at the bustling market in the capital’s Tayaran Square by claiming to feel sick and then detonated his explosives belt, while the second attacker set off his explosives after more people flocked to the scene to help the victims.

Al-Shammari said Al-Nujaba had information proving that Daesh is regrouping. “We ... have intelligence of that and we are ready to cooperate with the security apparatus to foil the plot,” he said.

The terrorists, he said, are attempting to reach Karbala through the Al-Anbar desert.

“One of the two suicide bombers of the recent operation had infiltrated into our territory from the Syrian border, right from the point where, in a seemingly deliberate act, Iraqi units had been moved.”

Al-Shammari said Iraq’s security and the protection of Iraqi people’s lives are “our red line,” threatening to bring the war into the land of “those who want to set fire to Iraq.”

The Thursday attack drew a wave of condemnations in Iraq and elsewhere, with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi promising that “our response to those who shed innocent Iraqi blood will be bold and earth-shattering, and the evil leaders of Daesh will face a force to be reckoned with.”

Iraq’s Kata’ib Hezbollah resis-

tance group, part of the PMU, blamed the “axis of evil” – namely Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and the occupying regime of Israel – for the bombings, warning Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman that he will pay the price for supporting such plots.

“The Zionist, American, and Saudi evil bands have restarted their filthy criminal acts against the children of the Iraqi nation by committing an ugly crime, which targeted a marketplace full of poor Iraqis,” the group said in a statement.

Another Iraqi group blamed Saudi Arabia and the UAE, warning that the Iraqi fighters will not remain indifferent in the face of such crimes.

The fingerprints of the Al Saud and Al Nahyan regimes are evident in the attacks, said Saad al-Saadi, a member of the Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq movement.

The group’s spokesman, Jawad Al-Talibawi, said Saudi Arabia “has once again mobilized its agents to shed the blood of the Iraqi nation after former U.S. President Donald Trump’s criminal role came to an end in Iraq”.

Last week, Lebanon’s Al-Mayadeen TV network reported that the U.S. military had transferred Daesh prisoners to the Iraqi-Syrian border.

American forces used choppers to relocate the Daesh inmates from prisons in Hasakah province in northeast Syria to the Iraqi border, it said.

Daesh has intensified its terrorist attacks in Iraq since January 2020, when the United States assassinated top Iranian anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani and PMU’s deputy commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis outside Baghdad airport.

Iraq declared victory over Daesh in December 2017 after a three-year counter-terrorism military campaign, which had the crucial support of Iran.

Since the U.S. assassination, the terrorist group has stepped up its sporadic attacks across Iraq, attempting to regroup and expand its bases.

Nouri al-Maliki, the former Iraqi prime minister and current head of State of Law coalition, called for a comprehensive investigation into the terrorist attacks to determine whether they are supported from or planned abroad.

In a post on his Twitter account Friday, he also called for severe punishment for any military and security officials who are found guilty of negligence.

Iran Not Interested in Direct Contact With U.S.



Iran’s Taftian Ranks 1st in French Indoor Athletics Championships



Asa’ib: Saudi-UAE Fingerprints Evident in Baghdad Blasts



Iran to Begin COVID Vaccinations in Coming Weeks



A nurse prepares to inject a volunteer taking part in an Iranian COVID vaccine trial in Tehran, December 29, 2020.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that COVID-19 vaccinations will begin in the coming weeks in Iran.

“Foreign vaccines are a necessity until local vaccines are available,” Rouhani said in televised remarks, without giving details of what foreign vaccines would be used.

Earlier this month Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei banned the government from importing vaccines from the United States and Britain.

The Leader said the U.S. and Britain are “untrustworthy” and

possibly seek to spread Covid-19 to other countries. His edict bans imports of the BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca/Oxford Covid-19 jabs.

Ayatollah Khamenei said in a televised address that “if the Americans were able to produce” a trustworthy vaccine, “the coronavirus catastrophe wouldn’t have happened in their country”.

The Leader also said that “given our experience with France’s HIV-tainted blood supplies, French vaccines aren’t trustworthy either”.

That was a reference to a scandal in the 1980s in which blood

infected with HIV was distributed in France, and later abroad, even after the government became aware of the problem. Hundreds of people in Iran were among those infected.

France’s then prime minister Laurent Fabius was charged with manslaughter but acquitted in 1999, while his health minister was convicted but never punished.

Rouhani himself, in compliance with Ayatollah Khamenei’s ban, has said that his government would purchase “safe foreign vaccines.”

Iran launched human trials of its first domestic vaccine candidate

late last month, saying this could help it defeat the pandemic despite U.S. sanctions that affect its ability to import vaccines.

“There have been good movements in the field of local and foreign vaccines,” Rouhani said, adding that three domestic vaccines - Barekat, Pasteur and Razi, some of which have been developed with foreign collaboration - could begin in the spring and summer.

Cuba said earlier this month that it had signed an accord with Tehran to transfer the technology for its most advanced coronavirus vaccine candidate and carry out last-stage clinical trials of the shot in Iran.

Tehran and Havana are under tough U.S. sanctions that while they exempt medicine often deter foreign pharmaceutical companies from trading with them.

In addition to developing its own vaccine, Iran is participating in the COVAX scheme which aims to secure fair access to COVID-19 vaccines for all countries.

The country has recorded 1,150,000 cases and 57,000 deaths, according to government data. There has been a decline in recent weeks of new infections and deaths.

Rouhani said Iran will receive over 16 million doses of vaccines from COVAX, adding the country will also try to procure vaccines from elsewhere.

“The domestic vaccine is an honor for us, and the foreign vaccine is a necessity ... until the domestic one is available,” he said.

Suspicious Blast Near Riyadh as U.S. Moves to Delist Houthis

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The U.S. State Department has initiated a review of the terrorist designation of Yemen’s popular Houthi movement and is working as fast as it can to conclude the process and make a determination, a State Department spokesperson says.

President Joe Biden’s nominee for Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier this week that Washington would take a look at the designation, which UN officials and aid groups fear is complicating efforts to combat the world’s largest humanitarian crisis.

“As noted by Secretary-Designate Blinken, the State Department has initiated a review of Ansarallah’s terrorist designations,” the spokesperson said, using the name for the Houthi movement fighting a Saudi invasion of Yemen.

“We will not publicly discuss or comment on internal deliberations regarding that review; however, with the humanitarian crisis in Yemen we are working as fast

as we can to conduct the review and make a determination,” the spokesperson said.

The United Nations describes Yemen as the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis, with 80% of its people in need.

Aid groups and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had warned against a possible designation, which was one of the parting shots of the Trump administration, saying Yemen was in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades.

Saudi Arabia launched a war on Yemen in 2015, in a bid to crush Houthis and return a former regime to power. UN officials are trying to revive peace talks to end the war as Yemen’s suffering is worsened by an economic collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday, the United States exempted aid groups, the United Nations, the Red Cross and the export of agricultural commodities, medicine, and medical de-

vices from its designation, but the carve outs are not enough to allay UN fears that Washington’s move would push Yemen into a large-scale famine.

Suspicious Blast

State media in Saudi Arabia claimed that it intercepted Saturday a “hostile target” over Riyadh which has come under repeated retaliatory attack from Yemen since 2015.

It was unclear who was behind the incident, with the kingdom’s brief statement stopping short of accusing anyone and the Houthis saying they were not involved.

A blast was heard in the Saudi capital at around 11am (08:00 GMT), AFP correspondents reported.

The Saudi military said it had “intercepted and destroyed a hostile air target going towards Riyadh,” without elaborating, according to state-run Al Ekhbariya television station.

Riyadh’s King Khaled Interna-

tional Airport said there were a number of flight delays, but it was not immediately clear if they were linked to Saturday’s incident.

Yemen’s army spokesman Yahya Saree said his country was not behind the incident and “have not conducted any offensive operations against the aggressor countries in the past 24 hours”.

In a statement, Saree added that “any operation is announced with full pride and honor”.

Deal With Taliban

The new Biden administration also said it will review the agreement Washington reached with the Taliban last year, which is mainly focused on withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

Biden’s newly appointed national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, informed his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib about the “United States’ intention to review” the deal in a phone call

(Continued on Page 7)