

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iranian customs authorities on Thursday taken delivery of a third batch of Russia's Sputnik V vaccines as the country moves ahead with a nation-wide immunization drive against the coronavirus pandemic.

Iranian customs office deputy chairman Mehrdad Jamali said the new batch contains 200,000 doses of Sputnik V, the vaccine developed by Russia and approved in Iran for vaccination of health workers and the vulnerable. Iran had already received 240,000 doses of the vaccine on two flights from Moscow in late January and in early February.

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- President Hassan Rouhani says the United States has violated the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and other world powers and it is Washington that should take practical steps to rejoin the deal and lift all sanctions it has re-imposed on Tehran.

"The U.S., as the one who violated the deal, shall lift all sanctions and take practical steps in order to be able to return to the JCPOA," Rouhani told the 14th summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) held via a video conference Thursday.

**Viewpoint**

### Biden's Bid to Beat Trump at his Lies

### Iran Sues European Firms Over Chemical Attacks



### Iran Asks AFC for Hosting World Cup Qualifiers



### Yemeni Drones Attack Air Base, Airport in Saudi Arabia: Military



## Iraq's Resistance Declares 'New Page' in Fighting Occupiers

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Iraqi resistance groups have announced a new phase of resistance against U.S. forces in the country, vowing "confrontation with occupiers until the liberation of Iraq".

"The resistance sees confrontation as the only option that guarantees the freedom, dignity of this country after exhausting all the means that others have bet on with the occupation," the coordinating body for the Iraqi resistance factions said in a statement on Thursday, according to the Iraqi media cited by Press TV.

"We are facing a new page from the pages of the resistance, in which the weapons of the resistance will reach all the occupation forces and its bases in any part of the homeland," they said.

Hailing the recent attacks against the "occupation forces", the statement added that "the resistance has the legal and national right and popular support for all of that, but will not target diplomatic missions."

"The Iraqi resistance is an Iraqi decision, and its choice is the choice of the Iraqi people, and it will continue circumstances and sacrifices until Iraq is liberated from the filth of the occupation," it said.

The statement came a day after 10 Grad rockets struck the Ain al-Asad air base hosting American forces in the western Iraqi province of Anbar. The incident led to the death of two American contractors and injured as many as six people. It also resulted in material damage to both parts of the outpost.

An informed security source told Press TV that eight of the projectiles struck the "American part" of the base, while two hit the section that is assigned to the US-led coalition.

The raid was conducted days after the U.S. military targeted the posi-

tions of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, on the Iraqi-Syrian border, where they were engaged in fighting the remnants of the Daesh terrorist group.

Elsewhere in the Thursday statement, the Iraqi resistance termed as "traitorous" any party that stands as an obstacle against the path of resistance and its constant choice in confronting and expelling the occupier.

"It is the right of the resistance, rather its duty, not to pay attention to such bodies, but rather to prevent it by all means from hindering its strikes against the occupation," they said.

Forbes magazine reported on Wednesday that the United States will likely deploy the Avenger air defense system in Syria, Iraq, to support U.S. forces in the face of the growing drone threat.

U.S. military bases and diplomatic missions in Iraq have been repeatedly targeted in recent months as anti-U.S. sentiments run high in the Arab country since the US assassination of Iran's legendary anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of the PMU, last year.

The two anti-terror commanders were targeted along with their companions in a drone strike authorized by former U.S. president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

The Wednesday attack against the U.S.-led occupation forces targeted the same air base that Iran openly attacked on January 8, 2020 as part of its retaliation for the Soleimani assassination, which also prompted the Iraqi lawmakers to push for the expulsion of the U.S.-led foreign forces from their country.

## Leader: Conserving Environment Is a Revolutionary Act



Ayatollah Khamenei waters a sapling after planting it on Arbor Day, March 5, 2021.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- **Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on Friday described plants and greenery an important factor in life and in building human civilization.**

"Planting trees and saplings is one of the good deeds that is stressed in the Islamic religious law," the Leader said on the occasion of National Tree Planting Day and Natural Resources Week.

The Leader spoke of the significance of the environment in the

Constitution and said, "Actions to conserve the environment are religious, revolutionary activities. We should not look at such activities as being just some formal, ornamental activities."

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that the diversity in climate and environment that exists in the country is a good opportunity for the people and the youth to engage in preserving the environment.

The Leader regretted the destruction of forests, natural resources and water sources by profiteers.

"Destroying the environment is a grave tragedy that ruins humanity's future. Therefore, both the officials and the people should work against this."

The Leader touched on bushfires and drying of lakes and wetlands, saying they can be prevented. "The officials who do not carry out their duties are to blame."

Elsewhere in his statements, the Leader touched on the issue of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Last year, people acted in accordance with the recommendations

during the New Year holidays, thus immunizing the country against a grave disaster. But this year, the danger is even more serious and more widespread. Therefore, everyone should observe the recommendations this year as well."

"Whatever the National Committee on Combating the Coronavirus announces should be carried out. If they have imposed bans on travel, people should not travel. I myself will definitely not travel this year, just like last year," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei touched on the impact of the new pandemic on people's lives. "If the corona continues, there will be more livelihood problems. Therefore, everyone should cooperate to eliminate this malady as soon as possible."

The Leader also expressed dissatisfaction with the high prices of commodities.

"This situation close to the New Year has caused us great concern. Of course, there is not a shortage of goods such as fruits, but prices are extremely high. And it is not the hardworking farmers who are benefiting from these high prices. Rather, it is the profiteering dealers and middlemen who are reaping large profits at the expense of the people."

The Leader stressed that officials must solve the people's economic problems and the issue of high prices.

"There are solutions for all these problems. I have discussed these points with officials many times in numerous meetings. I have communicated the solutions suggested by the experts to the officials."

## U.S. Capitol on High Alert Amid Militia Attack Fears

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Law enforcement was on high alert Thursday around the U.S. Capitol after authorities said intelligence had uncovered a "possible plot" by a militia group to storm the iconic building again. The alert came two months after Donald Trump supporters smashed through windows and doors to try to stop Congress from certifying now-President Joe Biden's victory.

The threat appeared to be connected to a far-right conspiracy theory, mainly promoted by supporters of QAnon, that former President Trump would rise again to power on March 4 and that thousands would come to Washington to try to remove Democrats from office. March 4 was the original presidential inauguration day until 1933, when it was moved to Jan. 20.

Online chatter identified by authorities included discussions among members of the Three Percenters, an anti-government militia group, concerning possible plots against the Capitol on Thursday, according to two law enforcement

officials who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Members of the Three Percenters were among the extremists who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6.

The threat came as the Capitol police and other law enforcement agencies were taking criticism from Congress in contentious hearings this week on their handling of the Jan. 6 riot. Police were ill-prepared for the mass of Trump supporters, some in tactical gear and armed, and it took hours for National Guard reinforcements to come. By then, rioters had broken into the building and they roamed the halls for hours, stalling Congress' certification effort temporarily and sending lawmakers into hiding.

Lawmakers, congressional staffers and law enforcement officials are still on edge after the attack on Jan. 6, even as security around the Capitol remains at an unprecedented level.

The U.S. House wrapped up its work for the week Wednesday night, but the U.S. Senate still had

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LONDON (Middle East Eye) -- **The growth of Middle Eastern fiber optic cable networks has given Western signals intelligence agencies unprecedented access to the region's data and communications traffic.**

"There is no question that, in the broadest sense, from Port Said [in Egypt] to Oman is one of the greatest areas for telecommunications traffic and therefore surveillance. Everything about the Middle East goes through that region except for the odd link through Turkey," said Duncan Campbell, an investigative journalist specializing in surveillance since 1975.

The Five Eyes, a signals intelligence (SIGINT) alliance of the U.S., the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, has been snooping on the Middle East since the network was formed during the Second World War.

The key players are the U.S.'s National Security Agency (NSA), and the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), utilizing both known and secret facilities in the region to collect data.

The Middle East is a hotbed of surveillance for obvious reasons: its strategic political-economic importance, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and political divisions between the allies of the Five Eyes and their adversar-

ies, from militant groups to countries such as Iran and Syria.

While all conventional forms of surveillance are carried out, from airspace surveillance to tapping phone lines, the region is a strategic asset for mass surveillance due to the current routes of fiber optic cables.

"The importance of cables is still largely unknown by the average person. They think smartphones are wireless and it goes through the air but they don't realize it is through cables," said Alan Mauldin, research director at telecommunications research firm TeleGeography in Washington.

Spy agencies have tapped into fiber optic cables to intercept vast volumes of data, from phone calls to the content of emails, to web browsing history and metadata. Financial, military and government data also passes through cables.

Such intercepted data is sifted by analysts, while filters extract material based on the NSA and GCHQ's 40,000 search terms -- subjects, phone numbers and email addresses -- for closer inspection.

"This physical system of fiber optic cables joins the major countries of the world and carries over 95 percent of international voice and data traffic. Given the importance of undersea cables, they are poorly

protected by international law," said Athina Karatzogianni, an academic researching the importance and regulation of undersea cables.

"They represent perhaps the most extreme example of states privatizing critical infrastructure but failing to extend protection."

### Geostrategic Cables

Between the Red Sea and Iran there are no terrestrial fiber optic cables crossing the Arabian peninsula. All internet traffic going from Europe to Asia either passes through the Caucasuses and Iran, using the Europe Persia Express Gateway (EPEG), or via the far more congested Egyptian and Red Sea routes.

Egypt is a major chokepoint, handling traffic from Europe to the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and vice versa. The 15 cables that cross Egypt between the Mediterranean and Red seas handle between 17 percent to 30 percent of the world population's internet traffic, or the data of 1.3 billion to 2.3 billion people.

Egyptian Cable Connections

Geography and politics has led to this particular setup. "You cannot build a link through Syria or Iran due to the conflict and the political situation, and the war in Yemen takes out another terrestrial option, so [cables]

take another path," said Guy Zibi, founder of South African market research firm Xalam Analytics.

"There are only a few areas globally that are so highly strategic; the Red Sea is one of them, and in the African context, Djibouti."

Most cables run under the sea, making the land crossing of Egypt more of an exception than the rule. Subsea cables are preferred as they are considered more secure, with greater vulnerability when cables hit land and then run terrestrially. "It is difficult to go under the sea and harm cables," said Zibi.

The cables that run across Egypt and via the Suez Canal have logistical risks, such as breakages by anchors in the Suez's shallow waters or from human interference.

"In 2013, three divers with hand tools cut the main cable connecting Egypt with Europe, reducing Egypt's internet bandwidth by 60 percent," said Karatzogianni.

### Red Sea to Persian Gulf Cables

The cables running through Egypt do not give the Egyptian state free rein to intercept data on behalf of the Five Eyes, however, despite the importance that President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a former director of military

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