

LONDON (Dispatches) -- A British Labour Party candidate for the party's this year election has reportedly been trained with the Israeli military forces.

Izzy Lenga, an officer in the Jewish Labour Movement, is running for the party's new National Women's Committee, as a right-wing candidate. The movement worked for years to oust the party's former leader Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn, well known for his support of the Palestinian cause, has repeatedly been described by pro-Israeli lobbies in Britain as a threat to the life of Jews in the country.

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Iran's Guardian Council has rejected the general outlines of the government's draft state budget for the new Iranian fiscal year, which begins on March 21.

After months of wrangling between the Iranian parliament and government over the outlines of this year's draft budget, the final budget bill is yet to be approved. In February, lawmakers dismissed the generalities of the budget bill, after the government read the draft budget in parliament without the presence of President Hassan Rouhani.

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Viewpoint

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Zionist Regime Likely Behind Attack on Shahr-e Kord

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- The occupying regime of Israel is highly likely to have been behind an attack in the Mediterranean this week that damaged an Iranian container ship, an Iranian investigator was quoted as saying on Saturday.

Zionist officials did not comment on Friday when asked if the occupying regime was involved in the incident on Wednesday, Reuters reported.

The container ship Shahr-e Kord was hit by an explosive object which caused a small fire, but no one on board was hurt, Iranian reports said on Friday. Two maritime security sources said initial indications were that the ship had been intentionally targeted by an unknown source.

"Considering the geographical location and the way the ship was targeted, one of the strong possibilities is that this terrorist operation was carried out by the Zionist regime (Israel)," an unnamed member of the Iranian team investigating the incident was quoted as saying by Nournews.

A spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry said on Saturday reports confirmed a sabotage attack "in clear violation of international law".

"Measures to identify the perpetrators of this sabotage action are on our agenda," said Saeed Khatibzadeh.

Iran's state-run shipping company IRISL said on Friday it would take legal action to identify the perpetrators of the attack, which it called terrorism and naval piracy.

IRISL spokesman Ali Ghiasi said one of the group's cargo ships had been damaged after it was targeted en route to Europe.

The official said the vessel's hull sustained slight damage, but those aboard were unharmed, noting that a small fire broke out in the aftermath of the explosion, which was quickly put out by its crew members.

In its Saturday report, Nournews spoke to a member of the technical team inspecting the damage, who said the explosives had hit a number of containers on the ship's deck from a high altitude.

"Therefore, it is likely that the explosive projectile have been fired from a flying object."

Some Israeli media also reported on Friday that the occupying regime could be behind the terrorist attack.

The attack came a day after the Wall Street Journal reported that since 2019, the Zionist regime has been using naval weapons, including water mines, to strike vessels which were either Iranian, or carried Iranian cargo.

The Israeli attacks started in late 2019 and targeted both Iranian vessels, and other ships with Iranian cargo, the report said, citing U.S. and regional officials.

Late last month, an Israeli-owned cargo ship said it had come under attack while it was in the Sea of Oman, claiming that it suffered holes in both sides of its hull.

The regime's hawkish prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to blame Iran for the alleged incident, an accusation Tehran categorically rejected.

Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi said in a letter to the UN Security Council that the incident "has all the characteristics of a complicated false flag operation by actors in order to pursue their malign policies and to advance their illegitimate objectives."

Iran's Economy Out of Recession

Central Bank Governor:



This file photo shows a view of the Iranian capital, Tehran.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Central Bank Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said Saturday Iran's economy has emerged from nearly three years of recession amid U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic.

"According to the Economic Accounts Department of the Central Bank, Iran's economic growth, which had been positive in the second quarter of this year (last summer), was also positive in the third quarter," he wrote in an Instagram

post.

Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3.9 percent with oil and by 2.9 percent without oil in the quarter to December 20, he said.

"Thus, one can definitely announce the transition of the Iranian economy from the difficult period of sanctions and the recession associated with it to a period of renewed economic growth," said Hemmati.

Iran has been hit hard by a series of unprecedented U.S.

sanctions since the middle of 2018 when the former U.S. regime decided to pull out of an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program.

Sanctions have largely targeted Iran's exports of crude as its main source of earning hard currency. However, the bans have triggered a sweeping reform program in the Iranian economy as the government continues to diversify its revenues away from oil by encouraging increased activity in

manufacturing and agriculture sectors.

Hemmati hailed the fact that Iran had recorded two quarters of economic growth at a time when many countries are grappling with a deep recession.

He said the latest Central Bank data on the GDP growth and the performance of various sectors of the economy during the quarter to late December will be published next week.

Iranian crude oil exports to China are surging and expected to hit record highs in March despite the U.S. sanctions on the country's oil industry, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

Chinese imports of Iranian crude oil are expected to hit 856,000 barrels a day in March, the most in almost two years and up 129 percent from last month, the financial news provider said.

Iranian shipments to the province of Shandong, which accounts for a quarter of China's refining capacity, have surged so much this month they're causing congestion at ports and filling up storage tanks, it said.

(Continued on Page 7)

U.S. Ramps Up Economic War on China

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has designated five Chinese companies as posing a threat to national security under a 2019 law aimed at protecting U.S. communications networks.

The FCC said the companies included Huawei Technologies Co, ZTE Corp, Hytera Communications Corp, Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Co and Zhejiang Dahua Technology Co.

A 2019 law requires the FCC to identify companies producing telecommunications equipment and services "that have been found to pose an unacceptable risk to U.S. national security."

Acting FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said in a statement: "This list provides meaningful guidance that will ensure that as next-generation networks are built across the country, they do not repeat the mistakes of the past or use equipment or services that will

pose a threat to U.S. national security or the security and safety of Americans."

The 2019 law used criteria from a defense authorization bill that previously identified the five Chinese companies. In August 2020, the U.S. government issued regulations barring agencies from buying goods or services from any of the five Chinese companies.

In 2019, the United States placed Huawei, Hikvision and other firms on its economic blacklist.

Last year, the FCC designated Huawei and ZTE as a national security threat to communications networks - a declaration barring U.S. firms from tapping an \$8.3 billion government fund to purchase equipment from the companies.

In February, Huawei challenged the declaration in a petition filed with the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

(Continued on Page 7)

UK Raising Nuke Warheads in 'Provocative Move'

LONDON (Guardian) -- Downing Street's integrated review of defense and foreign policy is expected next week to signal a potential increase of the number of Trident nuclear warheads for the first time since the end of the cold war.

Whitehall sources indicated that a cap on total warhead numbers - currently set at 180 - is expected to increase, although the exact figure is not yet known, in a move that analysts said was diplomatically provocative.

The UK's stockpile of nuclear weapons peaked at about 500 in the late 1970s, but had been gradually decreasing ever since as the perceived threat from the Soviet Union and now Russia had been assumed to be decreasing.

The last strategic military review, in 2015, committed the UK to "reduce the overall nuclear weapon stockpile to no

more than 180 warheads" by the mid 2020s - and reducing the numbers of operationally available warheads to 120.

Each warhead is estimated to have an explosive power of 100 kilotons. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima at the end of the second world war was about 15 kilotons.

The full reasons for the anticipated move are not yet clear but it comes amid speculation it is designed to help persuade the US to co-fund aspects of a Trident replacement warhead for the 2030s. Its costs, too, are uncertain.

"If this is confirmed, this would be a highly provocative move," said David Cullen, the director of the Nuclear Information Service. "The UK has repeatedly pointed to its reducing warhead stockpile as evidence that it is fulfilling

(Continued on Page 7)