

Tehran Urges Europeans to Stop 'Blame Game'

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran's foreign ministry spokesman on Friday called on France, Germany, Britain to, instead of playing a blame game against Tehran, fully implement their commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal.

France, Germany, and Britain are expected to stop their political blame game against Iran in line with their obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a statement. He said the three European countries must instead return to the full implementation of the multilateral accord.

Kayhan International



Zionist Regime Expanding Secret Nuke Work: Iran

VIENNA (Dispatches) -- Iran's representative to Vienna-based international organizations on Friday raised the alarm at the occupying regime of Israel's highly secretive nuclear activities as a threat to global security, saying the world community should pressure the regime into joining the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) "swiftly" and "unconditionally." Addressing a meeting of the 35-nation Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Friday, Kazem Gharibabadi warned that the Zionist regime has been expanding its clandestine nuclear capabilities in entire disregard of international rules and norms, something that poses a serious threat to global peace and stability.

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Viewpoint

Hypocrisy of Human Rights

Leader's Aide: No Negotiations for Sake of Negotiations



Iran Futsal Still Best Asian Team, Sixth in World



Resistance Forces Won't Lay Down Weapons Amid Threat: Iraqi Leader



Tehran, Other Cities Adopt Tighter COVID Measures

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran will impose "severe restrictions" across many areas of the country on Saturday in an effort to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus, President Hassan Rouhani said.

The Islamic Republic has not imposed a full lockdown since it reported its first Covid-19 cases in February.

The country is the worst hit in the Middle East by the pandemic, and official deaths and infection figures have hit several new records in recent weeks.

"We are on the verge of a new stage of social responsibility over the growing spread of the coronavirus," Rouhani said during a televised cabinet meeting.

"As of Saturday, severe restrictions will be imposed in the country," he said.

The measures were designed to act as "a stark warning to society... so that we all return to strict social discipline."

Specific details on the new measures, first mentioned by Rouhani last Saturday, have yet to be announced.

According to health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari, all non-essential businesses and services would be closed in Iran's highest-risk areas including Tehran and most other cities.

Local media reports said they would include limiting inter-city travel, banning private vehicles from 9:00 pm to 4:00 am, closing educational centers, and reducing the public workforce to a third in high-risk areas.

Most of the expected measures have been applied previously for a limited time.

Lari on Friday confirmed 13,260 new cases of COVID-19 infection in the past 24 hours, raising the total number of cases to 828,377.

In a press briefing, she said the virus has killed 479 patients since Thursday noon, increasing the overall death toll to 43,896.

So far, she added, 589,025 patients have recovered from the disease or been discharged from the hospital.

Iran's Health Minister Saeed Namaki warned that the new restrictions were "the last chance for the (health) system to stand against" the virus.

If they were not observed, deaths would reach higher levels and that "means we will be in an abyss that we no longer can recover from," IRNA news agency quoted him as saying.

"We're facing a virus bomb, and the virus' spreading power has increased ten-fold," he added.

IRGC Launches Ocean-Going Shahid Roudaki



The warship is named after martyred naval commander Abdollah Roudaki, sailing through the waters in the Persian Gulf during its inauguration.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said it launched a heavy warship Thursday capable of carrying helicopters, drones and missile launchers amid ongoing tensions with the U.S.

Photographs of the ship, named after slain Persian Guard naval commander Abdollah Roudaki, showed it carrying truck-launched surface-to-surface missiles and anti-aircraft missiles. It also carried small fast boats, the kind the IRGC routinely uses in the Persian Gulf. Sailors manned deck-mounted machine guns.

The IRGC said the ship has a length of 150 meters. By comparison, a U.S. Nimitz-class aircraft carrier has a length of 332 meters (1,092 feet). The IRGC's ship does not have a runway, but includes a landing pad for a helicopter.

The vessel is equipped with three-dimensional phased-array radars, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, advanced communication systems for electronic warfare, and a Khordad 3 air defense system, all of which are designed and put into operation by Iranian experts.

The vessel — which resembles a floating marine city — can carry

out combat, logistical and intelligence-gathering missions in the ocean aimed at establishing stable security in maritime transportation lines and providing assistance to the commercial and fishing fleets belonging to the Islamic Republic and regional countries.

The commander of the IRGC's navy, Adm. Ali Reza Tangsiri, suggested his forces wanted to move beyond the waters of the Persian Gulf into deep-water patrolling. Typically, the IRGC covers the waters of the Persian Gulf, while Iran's navy patrols the Gulf of Oman and beyond.

"Presence and assignments in the Indian Ocean is our right," Tangsiri said.

The ship appears to be an answer to U.S. Navy patrols in the region by its Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, the Associated Press said. U.S. aircraft carriers routinely travel through Mideast waters. Iran sees those missions, as well as the occupying regime of Israel's expanding presence in the region, as provocative.

IRGC commander Major General Hussein Salami said the main mission of the Shahid Roudaki ocean-going warship was to ensure the security of sea routes and perform assistance, rescue and combat operations in special circumstances.

"Today we are witnessing a combat and logistic support ship join the IRGC's Navy that can both defend itself, defend our interests at sea, and play a role in securing our country's maritime lines near and far," he said.

"Some may have thought that the basis of our performance is close-range warfare, but we declare that both close-range combat in far-off areas and long-range combat are on our agenda."

The IRGC is not tied to "a specific geographical area" in defending the "vital interests" of the Islamic Republic, Gen. Salami said, in an apparent retort to Washington.

General Salami, quoted on the official IRGC website, Sepahnews, spoke after The New York Times on Monday claimed that Donald Trump had recently asked top aides about the possibility of striking Iran's nuclear facilities.

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Iran Slams U.S. 'Yellow Journalism' About Biden Contact

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran on Friday dismissed as "yellow journalism" a report by the New York Times about efforts by Iranian diplomats to have Washington "unconditionally" rejoin the nuclear agreement of 2015.

Some media outlets are pursuing a common method, particularly under the current circumstances, to resort to yellow journalism, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

The New York Times reported on Tuesday that Biden had promised to move quickly to rejoin the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), so long as Iran also comes back into compliance.

The paper claimed that Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi had "tried to pass on to Mr. Biden's advisers through intermediaries Tehran's insistence that the United States return to the Iran deal unconditionally before any talks resume."

The advisers have not confirmed receiving any messages from Iran, the Times said, and they will only deal with the issue after Biden's inauguration.

Khatibzadeh said it was a "totally fake" report and that the paper would continue to circulate more

fabricated news from now on.

He noted that Iran's representative office in New York had denied any kind of "direct or indirect contact" between Iranian and American diplomats.

U.S. President Donald Trump, a hawkish critic of the landmark deal, unilaterally withdrew Washington from the agreement in May 2018, and unleashed the "toughest ever" sanctions against the Islamic Republic in defiance of global criticism.

Washington reinstated the sanctions that it had lifted once it became a JCPOA member, and also started to cow others into committing to the bans and stopping their trade with Tehran.

The Islamic Republic, however, adopted antithetical economic measures under a directive by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei of "Resistive Economy," and also started to take nuclear countermeasures to reciprocate the United States and others' non-commitment to the JCPOA.

Trump, with two months left in office, is moving quickly to impose more sanctions against Iran. He even asked his advisers last week for options to launch a military strike against Iran but his aides dissuaded him.

Saudi Princes Recount 2017 Ordeal at Luxurious Hotel

LONDON (Guardian) -- In early November 2017, nearly 400 of Saudi Arabia's most powerful people, among them princes, tycoons and ministers, were rounded up and detained in the Ritz-Carlton hotel, in what became the biggest and most contentious purge in the modern kingdom's history.

The arrests shook the foundations of Saudi society, in an instant turning untouchable establishment figures into targets for arrest. Statuses were discarded, assets seized and business empires upended. A conventional pact between the state and its influential elite was shredded overnight.

Now, leading figures caught up in the detentions have revealed details of what they say took place. The former detainees, many of whom were stripped of fortunes, portray a scene of torture and coercion, and of royal court advisers leading chaotic attempts to understand the investments behind the wealth of the kingdom's most influential families, then seizing what they

could find.

The accounts of what occurred in the Ritz, provided through an intermediary, are from some of the most senior Saudi business figures, who claim to have been beaten and intimidated by security officers, under the supervision of two ministers, both close confidantes of the man who ordered the purge, the crown prince, Muhammad bin Salman.

The disclosures come on the third anniversary of the purge and ahead of the G20 summit in Riyadh this weekend, which the Covid-19 pandemic has turned from a global showpiece into a giant webinar. Prince Muhammad, the de facto ruler, will also from January face a new U.S. president who is likely to eschew the wholesale cover provided by the Trump administration in favor of a more conventional approach that pays some heed to human rights issues.

Advocates of the right for women to drive in Saudi Arabia among them Loujain al-Hathloul, remain

in prison in Riyadh, despite campaigns for their release. The summit, a theme of which is women's empowerment, has been flagged as a moment to offer clemency, but officials have remained unmoved.

The Ritz-Carlton detentions often started with a phone call, summoning targets for meetings with Prince Muhammad, or King Salman himself. In another case, two prominent businessmen said they were told to meet in a home and wait for a royal court adviser to join them. Instead, state security officials showed up, ushering them to a five-star prison, where guards and senior aides were waiting.

"On the first night, everyone was blindfolded and nearly everyone was subjected to what Egyptian intelligence calls the 'night of the beating'," said a source with intimate knowledge of what took place. "People were asked if they knew why they were there. No one did. Most were beaten, some of them badly. There were people tied to the walls, in stress positions. It

went on for hours, and all of those doing the torturing were Saudis.

"It was designed to soften them up. And then the next day, the interrogators arrived."

The detainees had by then been separated into rooms in the hotel that a year earlier had been the venue for the launch of Prince Muhammad's ambitious "Vision 2030" plan — an overhaul of Saudi society that was meant to open a rigid country to a world at that point intrigued by the breadth of his promised reforms.

"There is a misconception that they turned up all-knowing with pages of data and information," a source said, of the interrogators. "They didn't. They in fact knew very little and were winging it. They were OK on Saudi assets, but they were hopeless on the offshore stuff."

Some detainees spoke of being threatened with the release of private information, such as extramarital affairs, or business dealings (Continued on Page 7)