

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- An earthquake of magnitude 5.1 struck Iran's western province of Lorestan on Wednesday, but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

The quake was at a depth of 7 km (4.4 miles), and took place near the city of Firouzabad. Reports said four rescue teams have been dispatched to the area. Crisscrossed by several major fault lines, Iran is one of the most earthquake-prone countries in the world.

TEHRAN (Tasnim) -- The Iranian Foreign Ministry's special envoy for Afghanistan on Wednesday held phone talks with officials of the Taliban's political office in Qatar. Muhammad Ebrahim Taherian and the Taliban officials at the Doha office discussed the ongoing developments in Afghanistan, upcoming processes in intra-Afghan negotiations, and efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus in Afghanistan. Taherian traveled to Kabul in April to hold meetings with senior Afghan authorities on a range of political and economic issues.

Viewpoint

Path of Progress to the Pleiades is Adherence to Qur'anic Guidelines

'Eaten' Makes It to Stuttgart Animation Festival



Iran Beach Soccer Still Fifth in World Ranking



Zionist Regime Plans Thousands of Illegal Settlement Homes



President Rouhani:

Iran to Give 'Crushing Response' If Arms Ban Extended

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday pledged a "crushing response" if the United States goes ahead with plans to extend an embargo on Iranian trade of conventional arms, which the United Nations is set to lift later this year.

Under Iran's deal with world powers to accept limits to its nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions, a UN weapons embargo is due to expire in October. The United States, which exited the deal in 2018, says it wants to extend the embargo.

In a speech on Wednesday, Rouhani repeated Iran's longstanding criticism of Washington's decision to exit the nuclear deal, which he called a "stupid mistake".

"If America wants to return to the deal, it should lift all the sanctions on Tehran and compensate for the reimposition of sanctions," said Rouhani. "Iran will give a crushing response if the arms embargo on Tehran is extended," he added.

Rouhani said the lifting of the embargo was "an inseparable part" of the nuclear accord.

"If it is ever reimposed... they know well what severe consequences and what historical defeat awaits them if they make such a mistake."

Iran has gradually rolled back its commitments under the accord in response to the U.S. decision to quit, but says it wants the agreement to remain in place. It has criticized European parties to the deal for failing to salvage the pact by shielding its economy from U.S. sanctions.

"Iran's nuclear steps are reversible if other parties to the deal fulfill their obligations and preserve Tehran's interests under the pact," Rouhani said.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani warned Sunday that the deal would "die forever" if the embargo is extended.

Tehran has in the past threatened to retaliate against any reimposition of UN sanctions by withdrawing from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Washington has said it would use a legal argument based on an interpretation of

UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that it remains a "participant" in the nuclear deal despite renouncing it, and can extend the arms embargo on Tehran or see more stringent sanctions reimposed.

Iran, for its part, accuses the U.S. of violating the resolution over its 2018 withdrawal. "There is no longer a JCPOA for America," Rouhani said.

He added that the U.S. "should know, and some other countries too, that Iran will in no way accept a violation of Resolution 2231", while stressing that lifting the embargo is Iran's "inalienable right".

Rouhani said Iran would not use weapons it purchases to "add fuel to the fire" but to "extinguish flames" by not allowing conflicts to take place.

"Iran considers the lifting of the arms embargo an obvious right," he said during a Cabinet meeting.

Before the embargo, Iran had said it was exporting arms to dozens of countries. The country has been seeking a military self-sufficiency program since 1992, producing an array of weapons, including missiles, torpedoes, submarines and jetfighters.

Ayatollah Khamenei: Satellite Launch Shows Production Leap Possible



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei attends a video call with representatives of a number of manufacturing companies on May 6, 2020

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday Iran's launching of a satellite into orbit proves that the country is also able to achieve a leap in production.

"Some people keep saying it's impossible and we can't, but we can," Ayatollah Khamenei said in a video conference with seven active manufacturers from different parts of the country on the occasion of Labor Week.

"When we can launch a satellite into space with a speed of 7,500 meters per second and put a sat-

ellite into orbit, or in the defense industry make so much great advancements, we can achieve a surge in production too," he said.

"The Iranian wisdom and thought that can build a satellite and set the target for the next satellite at an orbit of 36,000 kilometers, certainly enjoys the same spirit, innovation, and creativity needed to produce cars with a consumption of 5 liters per 100 km and for production in other sectors," the Leader added.

During the video conference, managers and a number of exemplary laborers delivered reports on the status of production and about

their achievements as well as the problems they face.

They also put forward solutions and proposals for solving the existing problems in order to materialize a leap in production.

The Leader meets with laborers every year on the occasion of Labor Week, but this year the meeting was held via a video conference in line with the social distancing protocols amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Ayatollah Khamenei said an economy made robust through enhanced production can fend for itself and counter various intrusive

elements such as sanctions.

The Leader drew an analogy between a country's economic apparatus and the human body, noting how both require a healthy defense mechanism to repel incoming viruses.

"This very coronavirus entered people's bodies, but many did not fall ill because of a strong immune system."

"If we liken the economy to human body, the defense system that provides the economy with security is production," the Leader pointed out. "In other words, the element that can neutralize invasive viruses and microbes targeting the economy and keep it healthy is production," Ayatollah Khamenei stated.

"If production is appropriate and growing, it can protect the country's economy against natural viruses and artificial viruses such as sanctions or oil price fluctuations and various shocks," he added.

Ayatollah Khamenei also called for improvement of labor relations and "genuine cooperation" between employees and their employers in order to improve production.

"The labor force should increase their skills and sense of responsibility; employers should increase the workers share from the income of the business," he said.

"A key point is respecting workers' rights," said Ayatollah Khamenei. "Fair and punctual payments and job security, which I've always stressed, are very important. Some

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Bloc's Survival Under Threat

EU Faces 'Recession of Historic Proportions'

BRUSSELS (AP) -- The European Union predicted Wednesday "a recession of historic proportions this year," with a drop in output of more than 7%, as it released its first official forecast of the damage the coronavirus crisis is inflicting on the bloc's economy. The 27-nation EU economy is predicted to contract by 7.5% this year, before growing by about 6% in 2021. The group of 19 nations using the euro as their currency will see an even greater decline, a record 7.75%, this year, and grow by 6.25% in 2021, the European Commission said in its spring economic forecast.

"It is now quite clear that the EU has entered the deepest economic recession in its history," EU Economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni told reporters in Brussels. As the virus hit, "economic activity in the EU dropped by around one third practically overnight," he said.

More than 1.1 million people have contracted the virus across Europe and more than 137,000 have died, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control. Unclear outbreak data, low testing rates and the strain on healthcare systems mean the true scale of the pan-

demic is no doubt much greater.

With the spread slowing in most European countries, people are cautiously venturing out from confinement and gradually returning to work, but strict health measures remain in place amid concern of a second wave of outbreaks, and any return to something like normal life is at least months away.

The pandemic has hurt consumer spending, industrial output, investment, trade, capital flows and supply chains. It has also hit jobs. The unemployment rate across the 27-nation EU is forecast to rise from 6.7% in 2019 to 9% in 2020 but then fall to around 8% in 2021, the commission said. Beyond that, Gentiloni said, "we will have a massive drop in hours worked."

Inflation is also set to be significantly weaker as consumer prices fall amid a sharp weakening of demand and drop in oil prices. Investment, too, is likely to contract, with firms expected to postpone or cancel their investment plans amid the uncertainty. Exporters will not be spared, with continued disruption to movements of people, goods and services likely.

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Hindus Use Misinformation to Fuel Anti-Muslim Hatred

NEW DELHI (AFP) -- Gayur Hassan's Hindu neighbors came at night, throwing stones at his family's home in a northern Indian village and setting his workshop on fire. All because his son "liked" a social media post.

The Facebook post that Hassan's 19-year-old son endorsed had denounced the targeting of India's Muslim minority since the nation of 1.3 billion went into a coronavirus lockdown in late March.

According to the police who arrested two men, his family was threatened with further retribution unless they shaved off their beards and stopped wearing skull caps.

"My forefathers lived here and I was born here," Hassan, 55, told AFP by phone from Keorak, their village where a dozen Muslim families live among about 150 Hindu households.

"We lived like a family and religion was never an issue here," the welder said. But now there is "an atmosphere of fear and hate everywhere".

The attack on the Hassan family was just the latest ugly incident in the wake of a torrent of coronavirus misinformation that is stoking hostility towards India's Muslims.

Hindu nationalists are using the coronavirus to foment hatred against Muslims, using online platforms and some mainstream media to accuse them of spreading the disease.

Critics partly blame Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who they accuse of seeking to remake India as a Hindu nation, undermining the pluralist roots of the country.

Over the past two months AFP's fact check team has debunked hundreds of social media posts that falsely targeted Muslims in regards to the coronavirus pandemic in India. Fake and dubious videos have proliferated showing Muslims licking fruit for sale and violating lockdown rules.

In one post debunked by AFP, a photo was shared on Facebook and Twitter with a false claim that it showed Indian Muslims flouting social distancing rules by praying on a rooftop. In fact, the photo showed people praying in Dubai.

Hundreds of thousands of online posts have also used the hashtag #CoronaJihad, some of which have been shared by members of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

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