

International

US 'warmongering' a failure, Iran says, as Bolton ousted

'Removal of moustache person from the White House means little'

TEHRAN: President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that the United States' "warmongering" was a failure, as Iran welcomed the sacking of hawkish US national security adviser John Bolton. Rouhani also dismissed the prospect of a meeting with President Donald Trump at a time his US administration is continuing to slap more crippling sanctions on the Islamic republic.

"The Americans must understand that bellicosity and warmongering don't work in their favor. Both... must be abandoned," Rouhani told a meeting of his cabinet, according to the government's Twitter account. "The enemy imposed 'maximum pressure' on us. Our response is to resist and confront this," he said, referring to the US campaign of economic sanctions.

Arch-foes Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads since May last year when Trump unilaterally withdrew from a 2015 nuclear deal and began reimposing the punitive measures. Iran has riposted by scaling back its commitments to the landmark accord, which gave it the promise of relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its atomic program. On Tuesday, Trump announced his decision to dismiss Bolton. It was a move an adviser to Iran's president, Hesameddin Ashena, hailed as a "clear sign of the defeat of America's maximum pressure strategy" against Tehran.

'Commitment for commitment'

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin stressed the US would maintain the strategy. But they added that Trump was willing to meet Rouhani without preconditions. The idea of a Trump-Rouhani meeting was floated last

month by French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been spearheading European efforts to de-escalate tensions. Rouhani said in response that Iran was ready to comply with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action only if the Americans did so too. "We have said many times that our policy... is one of peaceful (nuclear) technology, and that our approach in the JCPOA is commitment for commitment," he said.

"We have taken the third step... If it is essential and necessary in the future, we will take other steps." Iran said on Saturday it was firing up advanced centrifuges to enrich uranium at a faster rate-its third step back from the 2015 nuclear deal. It had announced on July 1 that its stockpile of enriched uranium had increased to beyond the deal's 300-kilogram threshold, and a week later that it had exceeded a 3.67-percent cap on the purity of its stocks.

'Moustache removal'

Iran's UN representative Majid Takht-Ravanchi poured cold water on any talk of a Trump-Rouhani meeting. The envoy said a meeting could take place only if Washington ended its "economic terrorism" and that it would have to be held in the framework of the group of major powers that negotiated the nuclear deal. "As long as the US government's economic terrorism and such cruel sanctions are imposed on the Iranian people, there is no room for negotiations," he was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA.

The diplomat said Trump's decision to dismiss Bolton—a hardliner accused of pushing Trump towards war against Iran—was a matter for the Americans. "The removal of John Bolton is an internal affair and we



JORDAN VALLEY: In this file photo, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-US National Security Advisor John Bolton (right) visit an old army outpost overlooking the Jordan Valley between the Israeli city of Beit Shean and the West Bank city of Jericho. —AFP

don't take stands on domestic issues," Takht-Ravanchi said. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested little would change with Bolton's removal. "As the world... was breathing a sigh of relief" over his ouster "Pompeo and Mnuchin declared further escalation of #EconomicTerrorism against Iran," he tweeted.

"Thirst for war-maximum pressure-should go with the warmonger-in-chief," he said, referring to Trump.

One analyst cast doubt yesterday on speculation that Bolton's removal could boost the chances of a meeting happening at the UN General Assembly later this month. "Such a meeting will not take place. The removal of a moustache person from the White House means little," tweeted Mohammad Marandi, head of the American studies department at Tehran University. —AFP

Japan's Abe shakes up cabinet, brings in rising star

TOKYO: Japan's Shinzo Abe yesterday appointed new foreign and defense ministers and promoted a popular rising political star, in a cabinet reshuffle that fuelled speculation over the prime minister's successor. The spectacular appointment as environment minister of the telegenic Shinjiro Koizumi, the 38-year-old son of much-loved former PM Junichiro, set tongues wagging in Tokyo political classes as the Abe era draws to a close.

"Abe intends to start an open race to pick the next prime minister or even the one after that," said SMBC Nikko Securities chief market economist Yoshimasa Maruyama. A darling of the Japanese media, Koizumi received blanket coverage for his recent marriage to television broadcaster Christel Takigawa, which was announced at the prime minister's office. He is the third-youngest minister appointed to the cabinet in Japan since the end of World War II, in a country where seniority is prized in politics and many other walks of life.

Despite intense media spotlight, he has been coy on expressing his view on the issues of the day and there will be close scrutiny over his policies on nuclear power, particularly on whether he will break with his father's anti-nuclear stance. "I hope Mr Shinjiro Koizumi will tackle global issues such as ocean plastics and climate change not with worn-out approaches but with the new ideas of the young generation," Abe said. "He is more seasoned than I was in my 10th year" (since being elected). I hope he will secure results," said the prime minister.



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (front center) walks down the stairs with his new cabinet at his official residence in Tokyo following a cabinet reshuffle yesterday. — AFP

'New challenge'

Abe is set to become Japan's longest-serving prime minister in November but is expected to step down at the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership election in 2021 and the jostling for position is already beginning. "We should take on the challenge to create a new country at a time when the whole of Japan is filled with positive feeling," Abe told reporters, noting that people were excited about the forthcoming Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Summer Olympics.

He reiterated his long-cherished ambition of amending Japan's post-war constitution to change the status of the country's Self Defense Forces. The Abe government is poised to hike its consumption tax from

eight percent to 10 percent on October 1, amid fears this could act as a brake on the world's third-largest economy. Japan's new foreign minister is Toshimitsu Motegi, who was promoted as a reward for his work in negotiating a trade deal with the United States, which he will continue.

Outgoing foreign minister Taro Kono was shifted to the defense portfolio, in a move seen as reinforcing Tokyo's hard line towards South Korea at a time of worsening ties between the two neighbors. Kono, who has amused commentators by interacting with people on social media—even offering relationship advice at times—struck a hard line during the recent spat with Seoul that has infected their trade and security ties. —AFP

Exhausted Central Africans leave exile for the unknowns

MONGOU MBA: Under the tarpaulin shading the back of the lorry, the heat is still stifling on a rough road for some 30 refugees travelling home to the strife-weary Central African Republic. Potholes rattle spines and send up fine grit that sticks to the sweaty bodies of exhausted adults and small children and animals, almost hidden in a tangle of limbs. Yet the men and women look relieved. They are glad to be homeward bound after tough years spent in the Republic of Congo, following agreements signed with neighboring countries by the government and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in July and August.

Albert Bekpa, a fisherman from the capital Bangui, made the most of the journey despite the discomfort. "This is a feast day!" he proclaimed, brandishing an elegantly carved walking stick, a treasure he has kept close since exile in 2014. His cries found echoes from outside. All along the track from the Congolese border to a UNHCR transit camp at Mongoumba, villagers turned out to hail their returning compatriots. Children waved palm branches and the elders stood up from their seats.

The United Nations estimates that more than a quarter of the 4.7 million inhabitants in the deeply poor and landlocked CAR fled abroad in the turmoil after an armed movement drawn from the Muslim minority ousted President Francois Bozize in 2013. Since then, the CAR has been ravaged by conflicts pitting a range of armed movements against the security forces and each other in a ragged civil war fuelled by ethnic factors, religious faith and a struggle to control resources.

'A legal framework'

The UNHCR estimates that more than 600,000 of the uprooted civilians still live abroad, mainly in



MONGOU MBA: Central African refugees coming back after years in Congo-Brazzaville stand at the rear of a truck in Mongoumba, at the Congo-Brazzaville border, about 100 km south of Bangui. — AFP

Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many refugees have returned on their own, particularly since the Bangui government, which is supported by a UN peacekeeping mission, signed peace pacts in February with 14 of the armed groups staking territorial claims.

For the past seven months, several provinces have seen relative calm. "Those who returned in spontaneous fashion had no support," said Stella Fatime, communications official with the UNHCR. "We needed to set a legal framework to guarantee that volunteers could return in dignity and safety." According to available figures, 4,983 refugees in the Republic of Congo have asked to be taken home since August 1 under one of the signed agreements. Valerie, a Christian trader from the mainly Muslim PK5 district of Bangui, wants to forget the clashes between communities that forced her to flee in 2013. "In the camps, we lived together very well," she said as the lorry arrived at Mongoumba. "We'll do the same at home." —AFP

Cameroonian president calls 'national dialogue'

YAOUNDE: Cameroon President Paul Biya has announced that he intends to hold a major "national dialogue" later this month in a bid to put an end to the conflict between security forces and armed separatists from the anglophone minority in the west. Over the past two years, the francophone-majority country has been mired in the unrest which has left more than 2,000 people dead as English-speaking separatists demand independence in the Northwest and Southwest regions.

More than 500,000 people have been forced from their homes as a result according to the Human Rights Watch group. "I have decided to convene, from the end of this month, a major national dialogue to allow us... to examine the ways and means to respond to the deeply-held aspirations of the populations in the Northwest and Southwest, but also in all the other component parts of our great nation," the 86-year-old president said in an address to the nation aired on national television and radio.

Biya, who has been in power for 37 years, reiterated his offer of a "pardon" to any separatists who voluntarily lay down their arms, while vowing that those who refuse to do so will face "the full force of the law" as well as the country's security and defense forces. He said the talks in late September would be presided over by Prime Minister Joseph Dion Ngute and will bring together representatives of numerous factions, including security forces and the armed separatists. —AFP

News in brief

Niger floods killed 57

NIAMEY: Deadly floods across Niger have left 57 people dead and affected more than 130,000 since they began in June, according to the latest government toll. Extreme weather is common in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries, but the capital and even desert areas in the North were hit during this year's rainy season, which typically lasts three months. Niger's government said in a statement late Tuesday the floods had resulted in 57 deaths and that 132,528 people had been affected. The rains had destroyed over 12,000 houses, killed more than 850 cattle and engulfed more than 2,000 hectares of crops. The south-east Maradi and south-central Zinder regions have been the hardest hit by the floods this year, with more than 65,000 and people affected. Last year, 56 people died in flooding which affected over 200,000 in total. —AFP

Indian police kill militant

NEW DELHI: Security forces in Indian Kashmir shot dead yesterday a suspected member of a Pakistan-based militant group who was accused of attacking the family of a fruit trader, the state police chief said. Tension is running high in Jammu and Kashmir since India withdrew the disputed Muslim-majority region's special rights in order to integrate it into the country, prompting protests. Last week, militants attacked the home of a fruit trader in Sopore, the region's main fruit-growing area, for carrying on with his business despite widespread protest boycotts, wounding his son, granddaughter and another family member, Indian authorities said. Yesterday, police killed a militant identified as Asif, who police said was a member of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, in Sopore, state police chief Dilbagh Singh said from Srinagar, the state capital. — Reuters

Heatstroke kills 2 in Japan

TOKYO: Heatstroke has killed two people in Japan, officials said yesterday, as nearly half a million homes struggled with electricity outages after a powerful typhoon battered Tokyo and the surrounding area. A 93-year-old woman and a 65-year-old man were found unconscious at their respective homes on Tuesday and were later confirmed dead by doctors, an official from Chiba prefecture east of Tokyo said. At least 48 other people were sent to hospital for symptoms of heatstroke Tuesday, she said, as the mercury hit above 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) in areas where electricity is still out after Typhoon Faxai hit on Monday. By yesterday morning, some 456,000 households were still without power. Tokyo Electric Co (TEPCO) said in a statement. "Please take refuge in cool places and drink water to avoid heatstroke," TEPCO said, apologizing to customers for the outage. — AFP

Pre-school panic in Sweden

STOCKHOLM: A young child sparked panic at his Swedish pre-school when he brought in a grenade he found on a military firing range to show his friends, local officials said yesterday. The child arrived with the grenade in his hand at the school in the southern town of Kristianstad on Tuesday. A teacher who saw the grenade contacted police. Police officers were able to determine it was a "dangerous" grenade the boy had picked up this summer at the Rinkaby firing range, located outside Kristianstad. They blocked off the area and the national bomb squad neutralised the ammunition at the scene several hours later. "We don't know how bad the damages would have been" if it had exploded, a police spokesman said. — AFP