

## International

# No breakthrough: Iran rules out talks as US intensifies sanctions

## Iran leader says Europe untrustworthy, condemns 'hostility'

**UNITED NATIONS:** Iran's president has closed the door on meeting Donald Trump despite last-minute European efforts to ease tensions as the United States again ramped up punishing sanctions. French President Emmanuel Macron had shuttled between his US and Iranian counterparts over two days at the United Nations, trying to arrange a historic encounter that he hoped could reduce the risk of all-out war in the Middle East.

But Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, addressing the UN General Assembly, said he would refuse talks so long as the United States maintains its economic pressure. "I would like to announce that our response to any negotiation under sanctions is negative," Rouhani said. He dismissed the idea of a photo-op with Trump, who is fond of drama and held three made-for-television meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. "Memento photos are the final stage of negotiations, not the first one," he said.

He doubted the sincerity of the Trump administration to negotiate, pointing to officials' boasts of applying "the harshest sanctions in history" against Iran. "How can someone believe them when the silent killing of a great nation, and pressure on the lives of 83 million Iranians, especially women and children, are welcomed by American government officials?" "The Iranian nation will never, ever forget and forgive these crimes and these criminals," he said.

### Europe untrustworthy

Meanwhile, Iran's supreme leader accused European governments of "hostility" yesterday, saying their actions showed they cannot be trusted. "The Europeans present themselves as mediators and say many things, but they are all

hollow," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement on his official website. "The countries which hold up the flag of hostility towards the Islamic system should not be trusted, principally America but some of these European countries as well, as they have a clear hostility towards the Iranian nation."

"The very people who did the negotiations now say that the Europeans have not acted on any of their commitments, and this is the strongest reason not to trust them over anything," Khamenei said. His remarks follow a failed European push led by French President Emmanuel Macron to arrange a meeting between Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York this week.

### Targeting Iran through China

Trump had already ruled out easing economic pressure and, hours before Rouhani's speech, his administration said it was stepping up sanctions. In a proclamation posted on the White House website Wednesday, Trump authorized the restriction and suspension of entry of senior Iranian government officials and their immediate family into the United States, calling Tehran "a state sponsor of terrorism."

"Given that this behavior threatens peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond, I have determined that it is in the interest of the United States to take action," the proclamation said. On Trump's last scheduled day at the annual UN summit of world leaders, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States would punish Chinese companies and their chief executives for buying Iranian oil.

"We're telling China, and all nations - know



**TEHRAN:** A Shahab-3 surface-to-surface missile is pictured on display next to a portrait of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at a street exhibition by Iran's army and paramilitary Revolutionary Guard celebrating 'Defense Week' - marking the 39th anniversary of the start of 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, at the Baharestan Square in Tehran. — AFP

that we will sanction every violation of sanctionable activity," Pompeo told a pressure group opposed to Iran's clerical regime on the sidelines of the United Nations. "This is one of the largest sanctions actions the United States has taken against entities and individuals identified as transporting Iranian oil since our sanctions were re-imposed in November 2018," Pompeo said in a statement.

"This action is aimed to deny the Iranian

regime critical income to engage in foreign conflicts, advance its ballistic missile development, and fund terror around the world," he said. China, which is embroiled in a trade war as well as myriad other disputes with the United States, is believed to be the biggest foreign buyer of Iranian oil. The Trump administration in May said it would unilaterally force all countries to stop buying Iran's oil, its major export, sending tensions soaring. — AFP

## Turkey doctor gets 15 months for revealing pollution cancer risk

**ISTANBUL:** A Turkish scientist was sentenced to 15 months in prison yesterday for revealing the cancer risks posed by toxic pollution in western Turkey. The court in Istanbul found Dr Bulent Sik guilty of "disclosing classified information" to newspaper Cumhuriyet last year. He published the results of a study carried out with other scientists for the Ministry of Health between 2011 and 2015 that linked the presence of toxicity in soil, water and food to high rates of cancer in several western provinces. He approached the press after realizing that the government was not acting on the study's findings, according to Amnesty International.

"Rather than suppressing the findings and prosecuting Dr Sik, the Ministry of Health and other relevant authorities should be taking the necessary urgent action to tackle this environmental pollution and protect public health," said Amnesty's Turkey campaigner Milena Buyum ahead of the verdict. She said Amnesty would consider Dr Sik a prisoner of conscience if he was jailed. Dr Sik had faced up to 12 years in prison, but the court found him not guilty of "obtaining classified information". He remained free on Thursday pending an appeal. — AFP

## Israel's Netanyahu faces tough odds

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched into what could prove to be an impossible mission to form a new government yesterday after the president tasked him with doing so following deadlocked elections. The mandate from President Reuven Rivlin on Wednesday night gave Netanyahu a temporary victory, but he must now cobble together a coalition without a clear path to a majority.

He will attempt to do so while facing potential corruption charges pending a hearing scheduled for October 2-3, and there are warnings that Israel could soon find itself headed to yet another election — a third since April. When accepting the mandate, Netanyahu again called on his main opponent Benny Gantz to join him in a unity government, but his challenger dismissed the premier's negotiating tactics so far as unserious.

Gantz says he should be prime minister under a unity government since his centrist Blue and White party finished as the largest, while also insisting he will not serve in a government with a premier facing a serious indictment. Blue and White has sought to convince members of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud to replace him as leader and form a unity

government together, but there is no sign for now of that happening. The situation has led Netanyahu's critics to accuse him of effectively holding the country hostage, arguing that a unity coalition would be possible if he would step down. But Netanyahu points out he has the support of more smaller parties in parliament than Gantz and has vowed not to abandon them in coalition talks. He has given no indication he would willingly give up the post he has held for more than 13 years in all, a tenure that has made him Israel's longest-serving prime minister.

Blue and White's number two Yair Lapid said yesterday that "Netanyahu didn't win the election. He lost. 'Benny Gantz is a better person than him and will be a better prime minister than him,' Lapid wrote on Facebook. "More people voted for (Blue and White) than for the Likud. They did so because they believe it's time for a discourse on values and a change of direction." Likud's chief negotiator, Tourism Minister Yariv Levin, told Israeli radio yesterday the party was open to a rotating premierships.

"We realize that if we form a unity government, Netanyahu will not be prime minister for an entire term," he said. Likud members have sought to shift blame for a possible third election onto Gantz - a position Blue and White describe as absurd. "At the moment, the option of third elections is more likely," Levin said. Rivlin urged Gantz and Netanyahu to form a unity government before his announcement Wednesday, but was unable to lead them to a deal. — AFP