

ONE YEAR ON, US OBSTACLES BLUNT HOPES FROM IRAN DEAL

TEHRAN: A year ago, a landmark nuclear deal with world powers led jubilant Iranians to dream of an end to isolation and economic hardship, but critics say US obstacles have soured those hopes. Despite many sanctions being lifted, the international banking system is still too nervous to work with Iran. At the same time, President Hassan Rouhani faces criticism for over-hyping the economic benefits of the accord as well as fierce opposition from hardliners who reject closer ties with the West.

Many in the Islamic republic and beyond trace the problems back to Washington. "Iran has done its part. The blockage comes from the Americans - the Europeans should put more pressure on them," said a European diplomat in Tehran, speaking on condition of anonymity. "There are political leaders in the United States who make Iran out to be the devil and have not understood the goal of this accord," he added. The deal reached on July 14, 2015 saw the US, Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia agree to lift some international sanctions in exchange for guarantees that Iran would not pursue nuclear weapons.

But even after it took effect in January, the US maintained primary sanctions linked to Iran's human rights record and ballistic missile testing - blocking Tehran from dollar transactions and leaving banks worried they could still be prosecuted for doing business with the country, despite repeated assurances from Washington that they will not. Oil production has soared back almost to pre-sanctions levels, but Rouhani's hopes of attracting \$30-\$50 billion in foreign investment each year increasingly look like wishful thinking.

'Intense Fight for Power'

Aside from a €400-million (\$441-million) joint venture announced last month between France's Peugeot-Citroen and its old partner Iran Khodro, investments have been slow to materialize despite a rush of business delegations. Planned sales of hundreds of Airbus and Boeing planes are stalled, with Republicans in Washington doing their utmost to derail the deals. "The accord opened up the possibility (of working in Iran), but it's still complicated to

get concrete results due to financing problems," said Romain Keraval, head of Business France's Tehran office.

Hardliners are having a field day with the meagre results, using the media to press home a narrative that the nuclear deal will not benefit ordinary citizens. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who supported the deal in order to end sanctions, continues to emphasize a "resistance economy" aimed at boosting domestic production and warns against Western "infiltration" through the agreement.

"There is a very intense fight for power happening," said the European diplomat. "The hardliners are doing everything they can to impede Rouhani's efforts to improve relations with the world. They see it as leading to more foreigners coming to Iran and 'spoiling' the country from within."

Many see the continued US sanctions as proof that Washington never wanted a real reset in relations, and only saw the nuclear deal as another way to manipulate Iran. "The US used this deal to put more pressure on us, trying to make us change our behavior in the Middle East or give up our ties with (Lebanese group) Hezbollah," said Amir Mohebbian, a Tehran-based political analyst with ties to politicians of all hues. "History has taught us we should not trust the United States."

Conservatives are at least taking heart from the chaos engulfing Western politics - from the divisive rise of Donald Trump in the US to Britain's dramatic decision to leave the EU. "They won't be able to gather together against us as they did in the past, especially when we are showing them a new face of flexibility," said Mohebbian.

'A Lot of Work to Do'

Rouhani faces a tough re-election bid next year, and with 11 percent of Iranians out of work, his advisors have been pleading for patience. "Sanctions had become a very big obstacle in the path of Iran's economy, but removing them was not by itself going to be the sole engine of economic growth," said Said Leylaz, an analyst close to the president. "We have a lot of work to do." — AFP



Two tourist sit along the sea wall in the Casco Viejo neighborhood of Panama City on Monday. Casco Viejo is the old colonial district of Panama City, with cobblestone streets and distinct colonial buildings.— AP

MP CALLS FOR ADDING HEZB, DAWA...

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its publication in the official gazette. Turajji urged the minister to speed up the implementation of the law, adding that the new legislation provides the minister with powers necessary to deal with the incorrect situation in the sports sector and for holding to account those responsible for the deterioration of sports in Kuwait.

The lawmaker said that those who contributed to the

suspension of Kuwaiti sports should be aware that they will not escape punishment. He said the new law will respond to demands by the Kuwaiti people to reform the situation in the sports sector.

Meanwhile, MP Ahmad Al-Qudhaibi vowed yesterday that he will hold the government to account in the next term over the delay in issuing the bylaws of the anti-corruption law. He said that the law, which was published in February, states that its bylaws should be issued within two months after its publication in the gazette.

20 KILLED IN ITALY TRAIN CRASH

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The collision happened on a bend in the track in open countryside and flung the front carriages of both trains into olive groves bordering the line, slinging bits of metal from the wreckage. "It's an apocalyptic scene, it was hard not to vomit on first sight," said local journalist Lucia Olivieri who works for Andria Live.it, adding that rescue workers feared people may still be trapped.

Riccardo Zingaro, head of traffic police in Andria, said the yellow and blue carriages of the commuter trains were "utterly crumpled". Local hospitals issued a request on social networks for blood donors to come forward to help the injured. Paramedics set up an impromptu medical center among the olive trees, with three helicopters airlifting out the most seriously hurt victims, including one young boy. There were also psychologists on hand to help survivors.

Many of the passengers on one of the trains had been students heading to lessons at the University of

Bari and travellers on their way to Bari international airport. Relatives had arrived at the scene looking for news of their loved ones. Investigators said at least one of the trains had been travelling very fast, and it was possible the collision was caused by human error. One of the four-carriage trains was supposed to have waited at a station for a green light before heading down the single track between the towns of Corato and Andria.

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi interrupted a speech in Milan to say the country would "not stop until we know what happened". "This is a moment for tears in which we need to work to recover the victims and wounded," he added. Renzi said he was returning immediately to Rome following the collision. The trains were operated by private railway company Ferrovie della Puglia rather than the national railway operator Trenitalia. Italy's last major transport incident in 2013 left 38 people dead after a coach ran off the road and plunged into a viaduct. In 2009, 29 people died after a train carrying gas derailed, sparking an explosion. — AFP

TRIBUNAL REJECTS CHINA'S SOUTH CHINA SEA...

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with exclusive economic zones provided for in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to which both countries are signatories.

"China had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights in the exclusive economic zone by interfering with Philippine fishing and petroleum exploration, by constructing artificial islands and failing to prevent Chinese fishermen from fishing in the zone," the PCA added. The tribunal further ruled that the disputed Spratly islands "cannot generate maritime zones collectively as a unit" as claimed by China.

Yesterday's judgement comes against the backdrop of frequent military brushes between China and its Asian neighbors the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, which ring the waters believed to hold untapped oil and gas reserves. The tensions have also alarmed the United States which has key defense treaties with many regional allies, and in a show of strength last week sent warships to patrol close to some of the reefs and islands claimed by China.

All eyes were watching for any possible reaction on the ground or in the water from the Asian political and military powerhouse after the foreign ministry swiftly denounced the decision. "The award is null and void and has no binding force," the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement after the ruling. "China neither accepts nor recognizes it." Beijing has repeatedly denied the tribunal's authority to rule on the dispute over the strategically vital region, and it refused the opportunity to defend its position in The Hague.

To bolster its position it has rapidly turned reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes. Beijing has held naval drills between the Paracels and the southern Chinese island of Hainan in recent days. Richard Heydarian, a political analyst at De La Salle University in Manila, said the judgement was a "clean sweep" for the Philippines, with the court deciding that China had "vio-

lated prevailing international law on multiple levels". "China has been branded as an outlaw in unequivocal terms. US, Japan and other major powers should now focus on enforcing this binding verdict if China fails to comply," he said.

The Philippines, which had lodged the suit in 2013, welcomed the "milestone decision". Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay said experts were studying the decision. "In the meantime, we call on all those concerned to exercise restraint and sobriety." The Philippine embassy in China has warned its citizens to beware of personal "threats" and avoid political debates. Nationalist demonstrations are not rare in China, sometimes apparently with the tacit backing of authorities. More than 20 Chinese police were positioned outside the embassy, with more in vans nearby - a significantly larger presence than usual - along with two lorries loaded with crowd control barriers, a possible indication that authorities expected protests.

Ahead of the decision, new Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte had signaled he did not want to antagonize China, saying he would not "taunt or flaunt" a favorable ruling and would seek a "soft landing" with China. But Chinese President Xi Jinping said earlier this month that Beijing would never compromise on sovereignty, adding: "We are not afraid of trouble." China had sought diplomatic support around the world, and foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said its latest backers in the case included Angola, Madagascar and Papua New Guinea.

One of the key issues was whether the land features in the area are islands capable of supporting human habitation - which under UNCLOS are entitled to territorial waters and an exclusive economic zone - or rocks, which only have territorial waters, or low-tide elevations, which get neither. "The ruling can reduce the scope of the South China Sea disputes, but will not solve them," said analysts Yanmei Xie and Tim Johnston of the International Crisis Group in a report ahead of the decision. The ruling was likely to "escalate the war of words", they said, but added: "Escalation to military standoffs is not inevitable." — AFP

POKEMON GO DRIVES PLAYERS INTO FRENZY

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Pokemon Go comes with warnings to players to remain aware of their surroundings. Fairchild told of being so engrossed in the game that he has walked into things on sidewalks. Some US authorities are advising players to avoid breaking the law by trespassing in places that aren't open to the public in the search for cartoon creatures, and saying that some players have been targeted by criminals.

"If you use this app (or other similar apps) or have children that do, we ask you to please use caution," the O'Fallon, Missouri Police Department said on its Facebook page. The department also warned that robbers were preying on players drawn to rich troves of Pokemon monsters in parking lots or other places where victims might be vulnerable. Pokemon monsters can be seen through smartphone cameras, with charac-

ters appearing in whatever real settings are in view. They are caught by hitting them with virtual balls tossed by swiping across touch screens.

"I'll walk up to a PokeStop and see all of these people standing around flicking their fingers across their phones," Garcia said. "It's comforting to know there are a lot of us nerdy types out there." Pokemon Go is not just heavily downloaded, it is being kept by players and, in the majority of cases, played daily on a scale that already rivals the use of Twitter, according to industry trackers. People are also spending money to buy virtual items. "I have always liked the idea of going around the real world to collect and catch Pokemon; it has been a dream of mine," Garcia said. Nintendo, Google and Pokemon Company all invested in Niantic after it spun off from the California-based Internet company. Nintendo has a stake in the Pokemon Company joint venture that holds the Pokemon copyright. — AFP

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