

International

Britain sees a 'small window' to salvage Iran nuclear deal

With Iran deal teetering on brink, Europeans assess next steps

BRUSSELS: Britain said yesterday there was a "small window" of time to save the Iran nuclear deal, as Tehran signaled it would ramp up its nuclear program - seen by the West as a cover for making atomic bombs - if Europe failed to do more to salvage the pact. US-Iranian tensions have worsened since US President Donald Trump decided last year to abandon the nuclear deal under which Iran agreed to curtail its atomic program in return for relief from economic sanctions crippling its economy.

"Iran is still a good year away from developing a nuclear bomb. There is still some closing, but small window to keep the deal alive," Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt told reporters on arrival for a foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels. The Brussels gathering will seek to flesh out how to convince Iran and the United States to reduce tensions and start a dialogue amid fears that the 2015 deal is close to collapse.

In reaction to the re-imposition of tough US sanctions, which have notably targeted Iran's main oil revenue stream, Tehran has cut some of its nuclear commitments under the deal, leading the European parties to the pact, France, Britain and Germany, to warn it about not fully complying with the terms. When asked whether European powers would seek to penalize Iran for breaking parts of its nuclear commitments, Hunt said they would seek a meeting of the parties to deal with it.

"We will and there's something called a joint commission, which is the mechanism set up in the deal which is what happens when one side thinks the other side has breached it, that will happen very soon," he said. Iran denies ever having sought a nuclear weapon. In Tehran, Iran's nuclear agency said Iran would return to the situation before the nuclear deal unless European countries fulfilled their obligations.

'Give diplomacy a chance'

"These actions are not taken out of stubbornness but to give diplomacy a chance so the other side comes on its own and fulfills its duties," agency spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said. "And if the Europeans and America don't want to fulfill their commitments we will create a balance in this deal by reducing commitments and return the situation to four years ago." Iran says the European countries must do more to guarantee it the economic benefits it was meant to receive in return for curbs to its nuclear program under the deal.

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Europe had to stay united in trying to save the deal, and Tehran should reverse its decision not to comply with parts of it. "For us it's important now to remain in dialogue and to contribute to de-escalation," Germany's Europe Minister Michael Roth said echoing Le Drian. France, Germany and Britain have

sought to defuse the tensions, which culminated in a plan for US air strikes on Iran last month that Trump called off at the last minute.

French President Emmanuel Macron dispatched his top diplomat to Tehran last week to offer suggestions on how to freeze the current status quo to gain some time. Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, whose country is currently holding the EU Council presidency, said there would be a strong message for Iran. "Iran should stick to its commitments on the JCPOA (Iran deal). We don't accept the latest news that they are exceeding the limits of enriched materials," he said.

Trade mechanism

The Europeans are trying to set up their Instex mechanism, a conduit for barter-based trade with Iran, but an equivalent Iranian system has yet to start. Should the mechanism go ahead it would initially only deal in products such as pharmaceuticals and foods, which are not subject to US sanctions.

Diplomats have that in any case they fear US blowback, while Iran has repeatedly said Instex must include oil sales or provide substantial credit facilities for it to be beneficial. "We will do what we can to guarantee that there is no economic embargo against Iran and that European companies can continue working there," Josep Borrell, Spain's Foreign Minister and EU foreign chief nominee told reporters.



BRUSSELS: Britain's Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt (2nd left) talks with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok (left) and Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz (right) during a Foreign Affairs meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. — AFP

"It's very difficult because US laws applied in an extraterritorial manner, in a way that we don't recognise, make it difficult," he said, adding that Spain would join the Instex mechanism. Rouhani on Sunday reiterated Tehran's

stance that it would be ready to negotiate if the US lifted sanctions and returned to the nuclear deal. Trump has shown no sign of backing down for now. "The deal is on the brink," said a European diplomat. — Reuters

News in brief

4 die as train, car crash

AVENAY-VAL-D'OR: Three children and an adult were killed when a train smashed into their car yesterday at a level crossing in eastern France, the mayor of the local town said. Four people aboard the regional train were injured in the crash in Avenay-Val-d'Or in the Marne region, while the driver of the train is in shock, mayor Philippe Maussire told AFP at the scene. Maussire said that according to initial indications, the car driven by a female child carer with the three children as passengers had driven into the level crossing when the barrier was closed. The train linking the city of Reims with Epernay crashed into the car, he added. Reims prosecutors have opened an investigation but have yet to issue a statement. — AFP

May boogies to Abba

LONDON: Theresa May boogied away one of her last weekends as British prime minister, showing off some of her famously awkward dance moves to Abba hits such as "Dancing Queen" and "Mamma Mia" at a festival. In a video clip, she is shown dancing at the Henley Festival as her husband and other men in black tie swing their arms to the tunes. May, whose premierships was riven by crises over Brexit and who was cast as robotic by opponents, occasionally sought to bring some humor to the job by performing dances in public. She last year danced with school children in South Africa and then grooved onto stage at the Conservative Party conference to "Dancing Queen" - exhibiting a puzzling robotic hand movement that went viral on social media. — Reuters

Train collision kills 23

ISLAMABAD: The death toll from a train collision in central Pakistan rose to 23 yesterday after several people succumbed to their injuries overnight, officials said. The incident took place Thursday in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province when a passenger train coming from the eastern city of Lahore rammed into a goods train that had stopped at a crossing. The accident saw mangled carriages flipped on their sides and left debris strewn by the sides of the tracks as rescuers used cranes to enable them to pick through some of the twisted wreckage. "According to the latest updates available with us, the death toll rose to 23 overnight after more people died of their wounds in different hospitals," a senior Pakistan Railways official said. He said a total of 73 people were still being treated for injuries. — AFP

Radio station threatened

KABUL: A private radio station in Afghanistan has shut down after numerous threats from a suspected Taliban commander who objected to women working as presenters, officials at the radio station said yesterday. The incident comes as the Taliban are discussing a peace deal with the United States that could see them re-joining mainstream society, and that has brought new scrutiny of their attitudes to issues like women's rights and the media. The private radio station, Samaa, has been broadcasting political, religious, social and entertainment programs in the central province of Ghazni since 2013. Its 13 employees, including three women presenters, broadcast in Afghanistan's two main languages - Dari and Pashto. The radio station's director, Ramez Azimi, said Taliban commanders in the area had sent written warnings and telephoned in, to tell the radio station to stop employing women. — Reuters

Families hide as US authorities launch immigration raids

CALIFORNIA: US authorities launched small-scale operations seeking to arrest undocumented immigrants over the weekend in an apparent start to President Donald Trump's vow to launch mass deportation round-ups across the United States. The operation, which Trump revealed on Twitter last month, then postponed before telling reporters on Friday that it would proceed, was expected to target hundreds of recently arrived families in about 10 cities who had been ordered deported by an immigration judge.

The removal operations are meant to deter a surge in Central American families fleeing poverty and gang violence in their home countries, with many seeking asylum in the United States. Immigrants and their advocates were bracing for mass arrests, but by Sunday night there were only reports of low-profile operations in a few cities.

"We are doing targeted enforcement actions against specific individuals who have had their day in immigration court and have been ordered removed by an immigration judge," Acting Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Director Matt Albence told Fox News when asked for an update. Mary Bauer at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) said there were no confirmed operations in large Southern cities such as Atlanta.

There also were no reports of arrests from the American Immigration Council, which has lawyers on standby to give legal advice at the country's largest family migrant detention center in Dilley, Texas. "Immigrants and immigrant communities all over the country are in hiding

US officials warn of floods, tornadoes as Barry weakens

MANDEVILLE: Barry weakened further on Sunday as the storm churned across the US state of Louisiana, bringing along heavy rains and the possibility of flooding and tornadoes. There have been no reported deaths so far in Louisiana or neighboring states from Barry, which had briefly become the first hurricane of the Atlantic season before the National Hurricane Center downgraded it to a tropical storm and then a tropical depression.

Still, as the storm moved inland on a northern track, it packed a serious punch. Louisianans kept a wary eye on rivers and canals badly swollen by the torrential rainfall, following an extraordinarily wet season farther up the Mississippi River. This is "the wettest year we've had since 1895," Major General Richard Kaiser, who heads the Mississippi River Commission, said on Fox News. He said the broad river is "the highest it's been for a long time" - just below flood stage.

Bands of heavy rain continued to lash New Orleans, the state's biggest city, but its airport was able to resume normal service after canceling all flights on Saturday. Fears that the levee system protecting New Orleans could be compromised eased. Mayor LaToya Cantrell, who a day earlier had urged residents not to be complacent, said in a news conference Sunday that "we absolutely made it through the storm. We are lucky; we were spared."

Dangers remain

As of 4:00 pm Sunday (2100 GMT), the storm's maximum sustained winds had dropped to 35 miles (55 kilometers) per hour. It was located north-northeast of Shreveport in western Louisiana, moving towards Arkansas, the National Hurricane Center said. "Further weakening is expected as the center moves farther inland, and Barry is forecast to degenerate into a remnant low pressure system by Monday night," the NHC said.

US Senator Bill Cassidy said of the storm on Fox News: "We have seen worse." Evacuation orders had already been lifted in several locales including Plaquemines Parish, south of New Orleans, where up to 10,000 residents had been under orders to leave.

But on Sunday, National Guard members were still laying down sand-filled barriers in a bid to contain flooding after "severely high water" overtopped levees in the

and people are living in these terrified, terrorized ways, because that is the point of this whole action, whether enforcement actions take place or not," said Bauer, the SPLC's deputy legal director.

'Lights off, blinds down'

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said there were three ICE operations in his city on Saturday, with no reported arrests. He said there was no ICE activity in New York on Sunday. "This is a political act by this president, he's politicized a United States government agency to help him win re-election," said de Blasio, a Democratic candidate for the 2020 presidential race. In Denver, the Colorado Rapid Response Network of immigration activists said there were unconfirmed reports of ICE or police detaining three people on Sunday in the Potter Highlands area.

The Miami-based Florida Immigrant Coalition said immigrants were sheltering at home after ICE agents were seen near the city's international airport. No arrests were reported. "They've been stocking up on groceries and making plans to stay in their homes with the lights off and the blinds down," the group posted on Facebook. "Some are staying home from work." An ICE spokeswoman declined to comment on operations, citing the safety of the agency's personnel.

Albence told Fox News that enforcement operations would target families who entered the country illegally then mostly failed to attend court hearings to pursue an asylum claim. Immigration rights activists have said that in many cases immigrants do not receive proper notice of their court dates. The operations came as the Trump administration faces criticism for housing immigrants in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, and there are concerns about migrant children being separated from adults by US authorities.

"While we haven't heard of widespread sweeps, none of our communities should have to live in fear that parents



MANDEVILLE: Flood waters cover a neighborhood street after Tropical Storm Barry passed through in Mandeville, Louisiana. — AFP

Plaquemines town of Myrtle Grove, according to parish information officer Jade Duplessis. Pete Gaynor, acting administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, told Fox that "there are still life-threatening conditions." "The rain is the threat," he added, noting that floodwaters farther up the engorged Mississippi will be moving south in coming days. Many coastal areas remained on alert. Tornadoes were possible in parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas and Tennessee, the NHC said.

Rainfall estimates lowered further to between three and five inches over south-central Louisiana but rivers and canals are already near capacity. Across southern Louisiana, Barry's heavy winds scattered tree branches and knocked down power lines, leaving an estimated hundred thousand people without electricity. Reporters saw localized flooding and badly swollen waterways.

The eye of the storm made landfall Saturday at tiny Intracoastal City. Rivers overtopped their levees in several locations, including part of coastal Terrebonne Parish. The Atchafalaya River swallowed a waterfront pedestrian promenade in Morgan City. For many, the storm revived unpleasant memories of Hurricane Katrina. While thousands of Louisianans fled for safety as the storm approached, others hunkered down to ride it out, sometimes defying mandatory evacuation orders. — AFP



TEXAS: Jose, 27 (with his son Jose Daniel, 6) is searched by US Customs and Border Protection Agent Frank Pino in El Paso, Texas. — AFP

won't come home from work, or kids won't return from school," said Lauren Weiner, communications director for the American Civil Liberties Union, which sued this week to stop the arrests going ahead. In a typical week, ICE arrests thousands of immigrants who are staying in the country illegally, according to government data. Most of those arrests are made without advance publicity.

Amid protests outside ICE facilities, a 69-year-old gunman was shot dead by police early on Saturday after he attacked an immigration detention center in Tacoma, Washington and set fire to at least one vehicle outside. The suspect, who was armed with a rifle and incendiary devices, was identified on Sunday as Willem Van Spronsen, who was arrested last year for assaulting a police officer during a protest outside the same facility. — Reuters

French police arrest over 200 people after Algeria football win

PARIS: French police arrested over two hundred people on Sunday following Algeria's qualification for the final of the Africa Cup of Nations, which sparked scenes of joy as well as clashes with police in several large cities. Riotous celebrations erupted around France, which is home to large Algerian-origin communities, after the Algerian football team beat Nigeria 2-1 in the semi-final.

The interior ministry said 282 people had been arrested on Sunday night, "almost all" of them linked to the football match while some were detained on the sidelines of France's national Bastille Day celebrations. Fifty people were arrested in the French capital after clashes broke out between football fans and police on the Champs-Elysees avenue, which was littered with broken bikes and scooters on Monday morning.

There was also violence reported in Marseille and Lyon. After the final whistle, thousands of jubilant fans gathered in front of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, jumping and chanting "Long live Algeria." Many leaned out of car windows as they waved red, white and green flags, as police in helmets looked on. More than 200 people were disciplined for dangerous driving, Paris police said.

In the southern coastal city of Marseille, police attempted to stop football celebrations around the historic Old Port area where 15,000 people had gathered to watch Bastille Day fireworks. A few hundred fans of the "Fennecs", as the Algerian team is known, managed to reach the harbor after skipping police barriers. Officers ended up firing tear gas at fans who threw objects near the Porte d'Aix historic arch. Eight police officers suffered minor injuries, local authorities said.

In the eastern city of Lyon, dozens of cars were torched overnight. This often happens on the night of July 14 which celebrates the founding of the French republic. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner on Monday congratulated police and firemen for their "speedy reaction and professionalism" in response to the problems.

Of those arrested, 249 people were in custody yesterday. Paris and Marseille are home to large communities of French people of Algerian origin, a legacy of France's colonial rule in the gas-rich north African country. France's far-right National Rally party condemned the unrest, branding the celebrations the "July 14 of shame". — AFP