

Iran air defense missiles must be taken seriously: Experts



TEHRAN: An Iranian woman walks past a mural illustrating ancient Persian poetry yesterday. — AFP

Tehran to ditch more nuke curbs as Trump...

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interpreted Iran's 'patience' with weakness and inaction realise that Iran's answer to the American drone's violation of its airspace will be no different than its reaction to devious political efforts to limit Iranian people's absolute rights," he added.

The statements came as US national security adviser John Bolton, on a visit to Iran's arch-enemy Israel, said Washington had "held the door open to real negotiations" but that "in response, Iran's silence has been deafening". Bolton also warned Iran against disrupting a Bahrain conference on Middle East peace that got underway yesterday night. "Iran has engaged over the past couple of months in a long series of unprovoked and unjustifiable attacks," he said. "In that kind of environment, threatening the conference in Bahrain is always a possibility," he said. "It would be a big mistake for Iran to continue this kind of behavior."

In a series of tweets, Trump warned Iran against any attack on US interests. "Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration," said the US president. Iran and the US broke off diplomatic relations in 1980 over the hostage crisis at the US embassy in Tehran following Iran's Islamic revolution. Since quitting the nuclear deal and reimposing sanctions on Iran, Trump has moved to choke the country's economy, blacklisted its Revolutionary Guards as a "terrorist

organization" and nearly launched a military strike in retaliation to Iran downing the US spy drone.

Zarif said the drone had violated Iranian airspace, a claim the US denies. But Russia, a key ally of Tehran, backed Zarif's version of events. Washington has also blamed Iran for mid-June attacks on two tankers in sensitive Gulf waters, a claim Iran hotly refutes. Trump has said he is ready to negotiate with Iran "with no preconditions" and that Iran could have a "phenomenal future". "We do not ask for conflict," he said, adding that depending on Iran's response, sanctions could end tomorrow or "years from now."

But Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said the new sanctions meant "permanent closure of the path to diplomacy with Trump's desperate government". Rouhani also mocked the logic of blacklisting the supreme leader, who has few assets and no plans to visit the US. "To sanction (the supreme leader) for what? Not to travel to America? That's cute," he said. Rouhani noted there had been chances for talks between the two sides.

Zarif met former US secretary of state Rex Tillerson several times before Washington unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear deal in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions. "You do not seek to negotiate. If you did, we could have," Rouhani said. Zarif, a political moderate, was a key architect of the deal under which Iran agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. But both he and Rouhani have accused Washington of waging an "economic war" on Iran since pulling out of the accord. Amid a flurry of diplomatic activity, the UN Security Council on Monday issued a unanimous call for dialogue to address the standoff between the United States and Iran. China yesterday urged "calm and restraint" as tensions grew. — Agencies

No-confidence motion filed against...

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retired people from the social security agency. The grilling was placed on the agenda of the first session in the next term starting in October but the minister surprised the Assembly yesterday by asking that his grilling be debated immediately, and the Assembly agreed.

The minister categorically denied that he had promised during a grilling two weeks ago to abolish the controversial interest because this can be done only through legislation. But Hayef and at least one lawmaker insisted that the minister made the pledge as part of efforts to convince Hayef to withdraw his name from a list of lawmakers who had planned to file a no-confidence motion against the minister after the first grilling.

Hayef withdrew his name at the last minute and foiled the motion, because he was the tenth MP on the list who signed the motion. Under Kuwaiti law, 10 MPs are needed to file a no-confidence motion against ministers. Ghanem said some circles have been circulating that the Assembly will be dissolved as a way of con-

vincing more MPs to support the no-confidence motion. He said dissolving the Assembly is in the hands of HH the Amir, adding he is confident the Assembly, elected in 2016, will complete its four-year term.

Hajraf denied reports that he had submitted his resignation, saying that the grilling had finished and he did not quit. Ghanem said the voting on the motion will take place on July 3 in accordance with the law, and after that the Assembly's term will come to an end, which means that the closing date has been delayed by one day.

During the debate, Hayef accused the minister of providing MPs with false information and pledges over the cancellation of the interest, and that he failed to fulfill his promise. The minister categorically denied that he had made the promise, saying that he cannot concede public funds and any measure like this needs a law from the Assembly.

After the grilling, the Assembly debated and approved the budgets and final accounts of eight government bodies that include the authorities of ports, industry, telecom, roads, youth and printing the Holy Quran, in addition to the budgets of the Assembly and the Credit Bank. MPs however clashed over demands by some to abolish the Quran printing authority, saying it was functioning. Islamist MPs strongly defended the authority and recounted its achievements. The Assembly continues to debate budgets today.

unities, we must say: Diversity is a richness, never a threat. A deep and sustained spirit of mutual respect and receptivity can transcend posts and tweets fired off in a split second. We must never forget, after all, that each of us is an "other" to someone, somewhere. There can be no illusion of safety when hate is widespread.

As part of one humanity, it is our duty to look after each other. Of course, all action aimed at addressing and confronting hate speech must be consistent with fundamental human rights. Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, which is prohibited under international law.

We need to treat hate speech as we treat every malicious act: by condemning it, refusing to amplify it, countering it with the truth, and encouraging the perpetrators to change their behaviour. Now is the time to step up to stamp out anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred, persecution of Christians and all other forms of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Governments, civil society, the private sector and the media all have important roles to play. Political and religious leaders have a special responsibility to promote peaceful coexistence. Hatred is a danger to everyone - and so fighting it must be a job for everyone. Together, we can put out the wildfire of hate and uphold the values that bind us together as a single human family.

DUBAI: The shooting down last week of a sophisticated US drone by an Iranian missile demonstrates that Tehran's air defense capabilities can pose a challenge to US air superiority, experts say. The Global Hawk, an advanced US navy surveillance drone, was flying at high altitude - it can reach 60,000 feet (18 km) - early Friday local time when it was struck by a ground-to-air missile by Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards.

"The shooting down of the drone shows Iran is revealing a capability and choosing to message it to the United States," said Becca Wasser, an analyst at Rand Corp. "The fact that Iran was able to shoot down the drone demonstrates that they have developed or purchased fairly significant capabilities and are skilled at employing these systems." Wasser noted an Iranian claim that it had used a home-made surface-to-air missile (SAM) system to shoot down the drone. "If true, this would be significant because it is a domestically produced capability that Iran could replicate and potentially provide to proxy groups throughout the region to threaten US and partner militaries," she told AFP.

According to the Military Balance - an annual publication by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) - Iran has 32 batteries of Russian-made S-300 ground-to-air missiles that have been delivered by Moscow since 2016. They are seen as posing a serious threat. The Islamic Republic has also developed Iranian versions of these missile systems, including the Bavar 373, SAM Tabas and SAM Raad which are regularly displayed at military parades. The Revolutionary Guards claim that they shot down the US drone with a Khorad 3 missile, a version of the SAM Raad.

Senior Iranian officials and military officers have welcomed the strike and warned against a possible US retaliation. "The enemy dispatched its most advanced, smartest and most sophisticated surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft to the forbidden area and everyone saw the shooting down of this unmanned

aircraft," Iran's navy commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi said on Monday. "I say confidently that this crushing response can be repeated and the enemy knows this," he said.

The former head of a French intelligence service, who asked to remain anonymous, said that if the US air force sends large numbers of aircraft over Iran, they should be prepared for some losses, because Iranian forces will be prepared. "That said, in the case of the drone, it may not have had sufficient counter-measures - to deceive, deflect or outmaneuver the missile - and the Americans thought that the Iranians would not dare" shoot it down, he told AFP.

Dan Gettinger, co-director at the Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College, New York, said the Global Hawk is a large plane that flies slowly. The plane "is not a stealthy aircraft - it's very large" with a wingspan of 40 m, similar to a Boeing 737, Gettinger said. The drone's fate is "definitely going to be taken into account in future operations," Gettinger told AFP. He said the incident is also reminiscent of the time the Soviet Union shot down a U-2 spy plane in 1960. That event, targeting a piloted craft, "is a large part of the reason why the US started developing drones in the first place", Gettinger said.

Experts however say that the latest incident does not mean Iran is capable of building a firewall against the air force of the world's largest military, whose superior firepower and electronic warfare capabilities are overwhelming. At the end of 2015, just after Moscow agreed to sell the S-300 systems to Tehran, a move Israel tried in vain to prevent, the head of the Israeli Air Force General Amir Eshel said the missiles posed "a significant but not insurmountable challenge".

Douglas Barrie, senior fellow for military aerospace at IISS, said Iran had shown it is capable of shooting down a large drone. But, he said, "this is a long way from being able to sustain air defense operations in the face of a significant attack involving missile strikes and counter-measures to degrade its air defenses." — AFP

Homeless Syrians sell furniture...

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the former construction worker, who fled the village of Tramlah with his wife and six children. "I sold all our home's furniture for just 50,000 Syrian pounds," he said, dressed in a faded grey t-shirt fraying around the collar. After transport costs, he was left with only half that amount to feed his family, he said. Abu Abdu accused buyers of "cheating us, exploiting the displaced," but said he had no other choice. "Everything's so expensive... and there are no organizations looking out for us," he said.

The Idlib region is supposed to be protected by a buffer zone deal signed by Russia and rebel backer Turkey in September. But the accord was never properly implemented as militants refused to withdraw from the

planned cordon. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an alliance led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, took over administrative control of the region in January.

In the town of Atareb - about 30 km from Atme, in Aleppo province - Abu Hussein received a new delivery at his shop of second-hand household appliances and furniture. "Every day, more than ten cars arrive loaded up with items the displaced try to sell us," said the 35-year-old. "This means we have to pay relatively low prices, because the supply is so high" and it's hard to then sell them all, he said.

Back in Atme, 50-year-old Waleeda Derwish said she hoped she would find someone to buy her fridge, washing machine and television, to help her provide for her eight children. The widow transported the electrical items to "save them from bombing or looting" in Maaret Hurma, she said, a bright blue scarf wrapped around her wrinkled face. Now the appliances represent the family's only lifeline, she said. "I'm forced to sell them. How else are we supposed to live?" — AFP

Kushner pitches 'Opportunity of...

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Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's directives. Ghanem's remarks were made regarding an emergency statement issued on Monday by the National Assembly calling on the government to boycott the Bahrain workshop.

This statement represents the Kuwaiti people, and the government has translated its content on the ground, Ghanem said. "All of us follow His Highness the Amir's directives in this matter that we are proud of," he noted. He stressed that the statement issued by MPs expresses principles of the Kuwaiti society, and its historical, sharia and constitutional commitment, in line with the desire of the Kuwaiti people and most Arab nations in this regard.

Ghanem thanked the Kuwaiti government for its honorable stances towards Arab and Muslim issues, lauding its decision on boycotting any meetings in which any Zionist entity attends. He also commended the Kuwaiti government's stances at the UN Security Council.

The Palestinian Authority and its rival Hamas have both denounced Kushner's so-called "Peace to Prosperity" initiative, saying it amounts to a bid by the unabashedly pro-Israel Trump to buy them off in return for not enjoying their own state. Saeb Erekat, secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said that the Trump administration "is insinuating that they know what is best for the Palestinian people" without addressing the underlying issue of Israeli occupation. "Such inciting campaigns aim at making the people and leadership of Palestine accept the dictations, threats and tyranny of both the US and Israel - and they are doomed to fail," the veteran Palestinian negotiator said in a statement earlier yesterday.

Hundreds of Palestinians took to the streets in the occupied West Bank to denounce the conference, burning pictures near Hebron of Trump and the king of Bahrain. In unprecedented scenes, the kingdom welcomed dozens of Israelis including academics and journalists despite the lack of diplomatic relations. The United States has hailed the workshop as bringing together the Israelis with Gulf Arabs due to their mutual hostility towards Iran.

Netanyahu, who has also criticized the Palestinian boycott, has spoken in recent months of annexing parts of the West Bank, a move that could effectively end hopes of a two-state solution. The Trump administration has hinted that its political plan will not mention a Palestinian state - a sharp shift from the goal of years of US diplomacy. Trump has already taken landmark steps to support Israel including recognizing bitterly contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and Kushner is a family

friend of Netanyahu.

Saudi Arabia, which sent its finance minister, in a statement said it supported "all international efforts aiming to achieve prosperity in the region". But it also called for a "comprehensive and just peace" and reiterated its call for an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. Jordan and Egypt, the only two Arab nations to have signed peace deals with Israel, were attending but only sent mid-level officials.

Prominent figures taking part in the Bahrain conference included International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde, World Bank President David Malpass and former British prime minister Tony Blair. Richard LeBaron, a former US diplomat in the Middle East, said that the Trump administration fully expected that the Palestinians would stay away. But Bahrain allows Kushner to portray Palestinian leaders as not caring about their own people as he keeps advancing Israeli interests, said LeBaron, now a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank. "The 'failure' of the Manama workshop will be success for the Trump strategy," he wrote in an analysis. "It will permit Kushner and his colleagues to claim that they tried their best to address the situation and allow them to blame others for not cooperating."

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on UN member states yesterday to fund the agency that works to help Palestinian refugees as he opened a donors' conference for the body, which is boycotted by the US. The conference was being held the same day the Trump administration was presenting in Bahrain the economic part of the long awaited Middle East peace plan. More than a year ago the Trump administration stopped sending money to the UN agency for the Palestinians, called UNRWA and called for it to be dissolved, saying it was no longer justified 70 years after the start of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the creation of Israel.

"Today, I humbly ask all donors to maintain their support for UNRWA at last year's level," said Guterres. "We know what is at risk: education for a half million children; 8 million healthcare visits a year; emergency relief for 1.5 million. In Gaza alone, one million Palestine refugees depend on UNRWA for food," he said. Last year, UNRWA relied on extra money from member states and internal savings to cover a \$446 million budgetary hole. This year it unveiled a budget of \$1.2 billion, unchanged from 2018.

Unless enough money is pledged yesterday, the agency could fall back into the red by the end of the month, Guterres warned. And that could mean delaying school openings in late August or September, the agency says. Founded in 1949, UNRWA runs schools and provides health care for some five million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Israel and the United States do not like the fact that Palestinian refugees can pass on refugee status to their children and want to reduce the number of people receiving aid from UNRWA. The Palestinians say this violates their rights. — Agencies

The wildfire of hate speech...

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We recognize hate speech as an attack on tolerance, inclusion, diversity and the very essence of our human rights norms and principles. More broadly, it undermines social cohesion, erodes shared values, and can lay the foundation for violence, setting back the cause of peace, stability, sustainable development and human dignity.

In recent decades, hate speech has been a precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide, from Rwanda to Bosnia to Cambodia. I fear that the world is reaching another acute moment in battling the demon of hate. That is why I have launched two United Nations initiatives in response. First, I have just unveiled a Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech to coordinate efforts across the whole United Nations system, addressing the root causes and making our response more effective.

Second, we are developing an Action Plan for the UN to be fully engaged in efforts to support safeguard religious sites and ensure the safety of houses of worship. To those who insist on using fear to divide com-