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Iran accuses Israel of killing scientist and seeking 'chaos'

Khamenei vows retaliation • Ex-CIA chief slams 'criminal' assassination

Short burst of rain deluges streets



KUWAIT: A waterlogged street is seen in Fintas after heavy rainfall yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani yesterday accused arch-foe Israel of acting as a "mercenary" for the United States and seeking to create chaos, vowing Tehran would avenge the assassination of a top Iranian nuclear scientist. Islamic Republic's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for the perpetrators to be punished for Friday's killing, while Rouhani stressed the country would seek its revenge in "due time" and not be rushed into a "trap".

Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, who was dubbed by Israel the "father of Iran's nuclear program", died after being seriously wounded when assailants targeted his car and engaged in a gunfight with his bodyguards outside the capital Tehran on Friday, according to Iran's defense ministry. The assassination comes less than two months before US President-elect Joe Biden is due to take office, after a tumultuous four years of hawkish US foreign policy in the Middle East under President Donald Trump.

"They are thinking of creating chaos, but they should know that we have read their hands and they will not succeed," Iran's president said in televised remarks. He pinned the blame for the killing on "the wicked hands of the global arrogance, with the usurper Zionist regime as the mercenary". Iran generally uses the term "global arrogance" to refer to

the United States.

Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from a multilateral nuclear deal with the Islamic republic, which sought to contain its atomic ambitions, and has re-imposed crippling sanctions. But Biden has signaled his administration may be prepared to rejoin the accord. "This barbaric assassination shows that our enemies are in stressful weeks, during which they feel... their pressure declining, the global situation changing," the Iranian president added. "The nation of Iran is smarter than to fall in the trap of the conspiracy set by the Zionists," Rouhani said in televised remarks.

The United States slapped sanctions on Fakhri-zadeh in 2008 for "activities and transactions that contributed to the development of Iran's nuclear program", and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu once described him as the father of Iran's nuclear weapons program. Iran has repeatedly denied seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

The New York Times said an American official and two other intelligence officials confirmed Israel was behind the attack, without giving further details. "Iran's enemies should know, that the people of Iran and officials are braver than to leave this criminal act unanswered," Rouhani added, talking at

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US aircraft carrier deploys to Gulf

DUBAI: US aircraft carrier USS Nimitz was deployed to the Gulf this week, days before the killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist, although the US Navy said yesterday the deployment was not related to any specific threat. "There were no specific threats that triggered the return of the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group," Commander Rebecca Rebarich, spokeswoman for the US Navy's Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet, said in an emailed statement after the carrier deployed on Wednesday.

Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, the Iranian

scientist suspected by the West of masterminding a secret nuclear bomb programme, was killed in an ambush near Tehran on Friday, threatening to provoke a new confrontation between Iran and its foes in the last weeks of Donald Trump's presidency.

Rebarich said the redeployment was related to a US drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan. "This action ensures we have sufficient capability available to respond to any threat and to deter any adversary from acting against our troops during the force reduction," she said. — Reuters

Kurds look on as Israel befriends old Arab foes

ARBIL, Iraq: Decades ago, Iraq's Kurds and Israel shared a common enemy and what felt like being targeted in parallel persecutions. Today, Iraqi Kurds - long accused of cozy ties with the Jewish state - are watching on as Israel befriends historically hostile Arab countries. Just weeks after signing US-sponsored normalization deals with Israel, Bahraini officials are visiting Tel Aviv and cargo ships from the United Arab Emirates are docking at Haifa.

It has been a speedy turnaround for the Arab countries that had long sworn to isolate and boycott Israel until it makes peace with the Palestinians. And it's long overdue for many in northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, who said they had

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DUBAI: An Israeli man shows his passport while giving a thumbs-up upon arrival from Tel Aviv on Nov 26, 2020 on the first scheduled commercial flight following the normalization of ties between the UAE and Israel. — AFP

First locally-made Chinese nuclear reactor goes online

BEIJING: China has powered up its first domestically developed nuclear reactor - the Hualong One - a significant step in Beijing's attempts to become less dependent on Western allies for energy security and critical technology. The reactor, which was con-

nected to the national grid on Friday, can generate 10 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year and cut carbon emissions by 8.16 million tons, according to China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC).

"This marks China breaking the monopoly of foreign nuclear power technology and officially entering the technology's first batch of advanced countries," CNNC said in a statement. Nuclear plants supplied less than five percent of China's annual electricity needs in 2019, according to the National Energy Administration, but this share is expected to grow as Beijing attempts to become carbon neutral by 2060.

Reducing its dependence on Western allies in critical high-tech sectors such as power generation is a key goal in Beijing's "Made in China 2025" plan. Billions of dollars in state subsidies have been given to Chinese companies to speed the process - a move that has angered China's trade partners and sparked a protracted trade row with Washington.

Work on the Hualong One reactor started in 2015 and there are currently six other reactors under construction at home and abroad, state-owned plant operator CNNC said. The Hualong One, deployed at a plant in east China's Fujian province, will be put into commercial use by the end

of the year after undergoing tests.

China has 47 nuclear plants with a total generation capacity of 48.75 million kilowatts - the world's third highest after the United States and France. Beijing has invested billions of dollars to develop its nuclear energy sector in recent years as it struggles to wean its economy from coal. Thirteen nuclear plants are under construction, more than in any other country, despite environmental and safety concerns. In Aug 2016, officials were forced to shelve plans for a nuclear waste facility in Lianyungang, a city in eastern Jiangsu province, after a rare public protest by thousands of residents. — AFP

Gaza nuptials toned down in COVID era

GAZA CITY: To the sound of drums and flutes, a freshly coiffed Palestinian groom dances with his brothers, cousins and friends, anxiously waiting for his veiled bride to arrive in her shimmering gown. It might have been a normal Gaza wedding, except for the venue - not a luxurious seaside hall, but a narrow alley in the Al-Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City.

Welcome to Gaza's new pandemic-era

weddings: they are small because of strict crowd limits, they are held outdoors, and they finish early to beat the curfews. And they are a whole lot cheaper than usual. "I'm not entirely happy because I would have preferred to celebrate it in a wedding hall," said the groom, Mohammed Ahmed Ashour, wearing a blazer and burgundy tie.

But for his family, the 24-year-old merchant told AFP between dances, the pared-down nuptials have also brought welcome savings at a time of economic hardship. Weddings in the Palestinian coastal enclave are usually extravagant affairs, held in large halls that dot the Mediterranean coastline. Despite staggering poverty and unemployment rates of

around 50 percent even before the pandemic, many Gazans spend several thousand dollars on weddings.

This year the virus has further impacted the economy in the strip, which has been under Israeli blockade since 2007, and is currently spreading rapidly across Gaza. In recent weeks infections have multiplied and "the situation is getting out of control", warned Doctor Ahmad al-Jadba of Gaza City's Shifa hospital. On Friday, the Palestinian health ministry announced 922 new cases for the last 24 hours in Gaza, a daily record which takes the total number of people known to have been infected with the virus in the enclave to 18,333, including 86 deaths.

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GAZA: Palestinian groom Mohammed Ahmed Ashour (center) dances with male relatives and friends while waiting for his bride during his wedding ceremony on Nov 12, 2020. — AFP