

TIMELINE

Unravelling of the Iran nuclear deal

The 2015 deal with world powers to limit Iran's military nuclear development started unravelling when the United States quit in May 2018, with Iran progressively rolling back its commitments. Here is a timeline:

- US PULLOUT**
On May 8, 2018, President Donald Trump unilaterally pulls the United States out of the accord and announces the re-imposition of sanctions against Iran and companies with ties to it. "We cannot prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb under the decaying and rotten structure of the current agreement," he says. Iran has always denied its nuclear programme has any military dimension.
- US SANCTIONS**
On August 7, Washington imposes sanctions targeting access to US banknotes and key industries such as cars and carpets. New sanctions on November 5 hit Iran's vital oil sector and central bank transactions. Major international firms halt their activities or projects in Iran. In May 2019 Washington ends its sanctions exemptions on eight countries buying Iranian crude.
- IRAN STARTS WALK-BACK**
Iran on May 8, 2019 announces its first step back from the deal, saying it will suspend commitments on limiting the amount of heavy water and enriched uranium it possesses. Trump announces new measures against its steel and mining sectors. On July 1, Iran says it has exceeded the 300-kilogram limit on its enriched uranium reserves. Six days later, it confirms it has also breached the accord's uranium enrichment cap of 3.67 percent.



- 'HIGHEST SANCTIONS'**
On September 4, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani lifts all limits on nuclear research and development. Tensions soar after a wave of aerial attacks on September 14 on two major Saudi oil facilities, blamed on Tehran. It denies involvement. On September 20, Trump announces new sanctions on Iran's central bank, calling them "the highest sanctions ever imposed on a country".
- IRAN TAKES MORE STEPS**
On September 26, the IAEA nuclear watchdog says Iran has started using advanced centrifuges to enrich uranium. On November 4, Tehran says its enrichment has reached five kilograms per day, more than a tenfold increase, and announces it has developed two new advanced centrifuges. It comes after the expiry of a Tehran deadline for the remaining parties to the deal to create a mechanism for foreign firms to continuing doing business in Iran. On November 7, Iran resumes uranium enrichment at its underground Fordo plant -- its fourth walkback from the accord.
- 'FIFTH PHASE'**
On January 5, 2020, Iran announces its fifth step back from the deal, saying it will forgo a "limit on the number of centrifuges" while stressing it will continue cooperation with the IAEA. The announcement comes after a US drone strike killed top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq, sparking fury in Iran. "Iran's nuclear programme no longer faces any limitation in the operational field," it says.

SOURCE: AFP



Iranian mourners take part in a funeral procession in the capital Tehran yesterday, for slain military commander Qasem Soleimani (banner L), Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (banner R), and other victims of a US attack. *Inset*, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (L) weeping as he recites a prayer in front of the coffin of slain Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani. PHOTO: AFP



Turkey begins deploying troops to Libya

Says Erdogan

AFP, Ankara
Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday said Turkish soldiers had begun deploying to Libya after parliament approved such a move last week. "Our soldiers' duty there is coordination. They will develop the operation centre there. Our soldiers are gradually going right now," he told CNN Turk broadcaster during an interview.

The Turkish parliament passed a bill allowing the government to send troops to Libya aimed at shoring up the UN-recognised government in Tripoli. The Tripoli government has come under sustained attack since military strongman general Khalifa Haftar launched his offensive in April. Haftar is backed by Turkey's regional rivals, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, while the UN-backed government has the support of Ankara and its ally Qatar. Erdogan said Turkey's objective was "not to fight", but "to support the legitimate government and avoid a humanitarian tragedy". He added that Turkey would not be deploying its own combat forces. "Right now, we will have different units serving as a combatant force," he said, without giving details on who the fighters would be and where they would come from. Senior Turkish military personnel would coordinate the "fighting force", Erdogan explained, sharing their experience and information to support Tripoli.

Anti-US sentiment persists

Soleimani killing offers chance for Iran rulers to rally support

AFP, Paris

The killing of Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani in a US air strike offers a chance for Iran's clerical rulers to rally popular support at an extremely delicate time for the Islamic republic in the wake of unusually fierce protests. Yet while there has been a genuine outpouring of emotion and anti-American sentiment among Iranians after the killing of Soleimani in Baghdad, the economic hardships that prompted last November's protests are still in place, analysts say. The protests, which came as US sanctions cripple Iran's economy, were seen as one of the biggest challenges for its leaders since the Islamic Revolution that ousted the shah in 1979 and led to a long-term rupture in US ties. People have packed the streets in cities across Iran for ceremonies commemorating Soleimani, the mastermind of Iran's operations in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and seen by some as the de facto number two after supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "There's a rally around the flag within the regime. Soleimani had good relations with many regime officials from all sides of the political spectrum," said Ariane Tabatabai, an associate political scientist at the Rand Corporation, a

policy think tank in California. "But within the population, the grievances that led to the November protests are still there," she added, saying Iran's leaders could use it as a "further excuse" to crack down on dissent. Western rights groups have said the protests, which began on November 15 in response to a surprise petrol price hike, were quashed with ferocious force.

Iran's rulers have chance to deflect blows of anti-govt protest: ex-French envoy

Soleimani was the face of Iranian defence against outside adversaries

Officials in Iran have yet to issue an overall death toll for the days of unrest, but Amnesty International says more than 300 people were killed in the crackdown. According to Ray Taykeh, senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, Iran's economy "has essentially

collapsed", with the country now "struggling to meet its domestic budgetary needs". But throughout its four-decade history, the Islamic republic has mobilised support by focusing on the twin elements of consistent revolutionary fervour and confrontation with the United States. The killing of Soleimani only fuels this narrative. There have been massive turnouts at the ceremonies for Soleimani not just in Tehran but also cities like Ahvaz, which saw major unrest in November. "They (Iran's rulers) have the chance to deflect the blows. Not for a very long time but there will be a popular emotion" said Francois Nicoulaud, a former French ambassador to Tehran. "In the Iranian imagination, he had a great profile as a soldier." Soleimani was widely popular, famed for suddenly popping up in Middle East conflict zones and credited within the country for helping defeat Islamic State jihadists in Syria and Iraq. But Tabatabai said that among younger Iranians, Soleimani was the "face of Iranian defence against outside adversaries" but also "the face of an organisation responsible for repression and atrocities".



Kangaroos move close to a residential area from bushland in Merimbula, in Australia's New South Wales state yesterday. Massive bushfires have flared up in the vast country's southeast in a months-long crisis, killing nearly half a billion native animals in New South Wales state alone. PHOTO: AFP

'Real likelihood' Iran will try to hit US troops: Pompeo

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday that Iran will probably try to attack American troops after a US strike killed a top Iranian commander. "We think there is a real likelihood Iran will make a mistake and make a decision to go after some of our forces, military forces in Iraq or soldiers in northeast Syria," he told Fox News in remarks aired Sunday. His comments came as the military advisor to Iran's supreme leader said there would be a "military" response "against military sites" by Tehran after the US killing of Qasem Soleimani, the powerful commander of Iran's Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of its Revolutionary Guards. "It would be a big mistake for Iran to go after them," Pompeo said. The US has about 60,000 troops in the region, including around 5,200 in Iraq. Washington ordered thousands more soldiers to the Middle East on Friday after Soleimani's killing.

"We're preparing for all kinds of various responses," including cyber attacks, Pompeo said. The chief of the Iran-backed Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah on Sunday also singled out the US army as a target for reprisals after the killing of Soleimani and a senior Iraqi commander. "The American army killed them and it will pay the price," said Hassan Nasrallah. Outraged by the deadly American drone strike, Iraq's parliament on Sunday urged the government to end the presence of US-led coalition forces in the country. They have been there since 2014, when Baghdad invited them in to support local troops fighting the Islamic State group. The Iraqi cabinet would have to approve any decision but the premier had earlier indicated support for a troop ouster. "We are confident that the Iraqi people want the United States to continue to be there to fight the counterterrorism campaign," Pompeo said.



Rain brings slight relief

Reserve troops deployed in three states to tackle crisis

AGENCIES
Australia saw its first glimpse of respite after months of deadly fires this weekend when rain and cooler temperatures moved in. Two more people are missing in remote parts of the Australian state of New South Wales and communities have been warned more dangerous blazes could yet hit this week. The rain -- though welcomed by those still battling out of control fires that have so far scorched an area roughly the size of Croatia -- brought challenges for fire crews attempting to complete strategic burns in preparation for higher temperatures that will return in the coming days. The Rural Fire Service warned the damp weather would not put out the largest and most dangerous fires before conditions deteriorated again. Reserve troops fanned out across fire-ravaged regions in three Australian states yesterday, as the government pledged \$1.4 billion over two years to help recover from the devastating months-long crisis.

Catastrophic bushfires have turned swathes of land into smouldering, blackened hellscapes and destroyed an area about the size of the island of Ireland, according to official figures, with authorities warning the disaster still has weeks or months to run. Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose government has been criticised for its slow response to the emergency, pledged Aus\$2 billion (\$1.4 billion) of taxpayer money for a national recovery fund. "It's a long road ahead and we will be with these communities every step of the way as they rebuild," Morrison said. Firefighters joined by fresh teams from the US and Canada were taking advantage of rainy and cooler conditions to tackle out-of-control blazes ahead of rising temperatures forecast later this week. In the biggest-ever call up of reserves, military teams were deployed across eastern Australia to help emergency services assess the damage, restore power and deliver supplies of food, water and fuel to cut-off communities.

AUSTRALIA BUSHFIRE

Govt pledges \$1.4b recovery fund to help recover from crisis
Firefighters warn the damp weather would not put out largest fires

Return to 'right path'

Beijing's new top envoy tells Hong Kong protesters

AFP, Hong Kong

Beijing's new top envoy to Hong Kong said he hoped the protest ravaged city would "return to the right path" as he took up his post yesterday. Luo Huining replaced Wang Zhimin as head of Beijing's Liaison Office in Hong Kong -- the most significant personnel change by China since violent pro-democracy protests erupted in the city nearly seven months ago. The 65-year-old Luo delivered a short statement to reporters in Mandarin -- not the city's lingua franca Cantonese. He gave little clue as to whether Beijing's approach towards the city would change as it convulses with popular anger against mainland rule. "In the past six months, Hong Kong's situation has made everybody's heart wrench. Everyone earnestly hopes that Hong Kong can return to the right path," Luo said, declining to take questions from reporters. Millions have come out on the streets since June last year in a wave of protests sparked by opposition to a now-abandoned

proposal to allow extraditions to mainland China. But they soon morphed into wider demands for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability in the starkest challenge to Beijing since the former British colony was returned to Chinese rule in 1997. While the huge protest marches have been largely peaceful, smaller groups of hardline protesters have repeatedly battled riot police with more than 6,500 arrested. Luo struck a conciliatory tone in saying Hong Kong had made an "important contribution to (China's) opening up and modernisation". And in a brief reference to the political violence he quoted President Xi Jinping's New Year speech saying "without a harmonious and stable environment, how can there be a home where people can live and work happily". The Liaison Office, whose director is the highest-ranking Chinese political official in Hong Kong, was targeted in July by protesters throwing eggs and graffitiing the building.

Hard-fought Delhi polls set for Feb 8

New Delhi will hold elections next month, officials said yesterday, in a key popularity test for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party as it reels from nationwide protests over a new citizenship law. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party swept to a second term last year in national elections but the Indian capital has been governed since 2013 by the left-wing grassroots Common Man Party (AAP). Under pressure from a weak economy, the BJP has also fared badly in a string of recent regional elections, most recently in Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, and in Jharkhand in the east. New legislation loosening citizenship rules for persecuted minorities, but not if they are Muslim, has sparked almost a month of protests and violence that has killed more than 25 people.

Rivals claim post of Venezuela speaker



Opposition leader Juan Guaido and a rival lawmaker, Luis Parra, both claimed to be Venezuela's parliament speaker on Sunday following two separate votes and accusations of a "parliamentary coup." Guaido was re-elected speaker by opposition lawmakers in a session held at a newspaper office after police blocked him from entering the National Assembly legislature. In his absence, corruption-tainted Parra proclaimed himself speaker after claiming to have been elected with 81 votes in the 167-member chamber. Guaido received the votes of around 100 lawmakers. Guaido vowed to "enforce" the constitution in his dual role as parliament speaker and "acting president".

Weinstein sex crimes trial set to open

Harvey Weinstein's high-profile sex crimes trial opened yesterday, more than two years after a slew of allegations against the once-mighty Hollywood producer triggered the #MeToo movement that led to the downfall of dozens of powerful men. The disgraced movie mogul faces life in prison if convicted in a New York state court of predatory sexual assault charges, in a trial expected to last six weeks. Almost 90 women, including Angelina Jolie and Gwyneth Paltrow, have accused the 67-year-old of sexual misconduct since The New York Times detailed claims against him in October 2017.

SOURCE: AFP