

Iran unveils sub armed
with cruise missile

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday inaugurated a new domestically-built submarine armed with cruise missiles at a time of rising tensions with its arch-enemy the United States. The submarine weighs 600 tonnes and enjoys state-of-the-art weaponry, including torpedoes, naval mines and cruise missiles that could be launched from a submerged position, officials said.

Nauert ends bid to be
US ambassador to UN

AFP, Washington

Former Fox News anchor and State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said Saturday that she has withdrawn from consideration to be the next US ambassador to the United Nations. The UN post has been vacant since the start of the year after Nikki Haley, a former governor seen as a rising star in Republican politics, decided to leave after two years in the position.

Abe nominated Trump
for Nobel Peace Prize

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe nominated US President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize last autumn after receiving a request from the US government to do so, the Asahi newspaper reported yesterday. The report follows Trump's claim on Friday that Abe had nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize for opening talks and easing tensions with North Korea.

BITS OF HISTORY
(FEBRUARY 17)

1933: US Senate passes act ending prohibition.
1997: Pakistani President Farooq Leghari, who had sacked Benazir Bhutto's government, swore in Nawaz Sharif as new prime minister.



Indian Army soldiers in a vehicle patrol a street as a woman walks past during a curfew in Jammu, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

DEADLY ATTACK ON REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS

Iran summons
Pakistan's envoy

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran has summoned the Pakistani ambassador to protest about a suicide bombing that killed 27 of its elite Revolutionary Guards near the border earlier this week, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported yesterday.

The Sunni group Jaish al Adl (Army of Justice), which says it seeks greater rights and better living conditions for the ethnic minority Baluchis, claimed responsibility for the attack on Wednesday.

Iran says militant groups operate from safe havens in Pakistan and have repeatedly called on the neighboring country to crack down on them.

Iran on Saturday warned Pakistan that it would "pay heavy price" for allegedly harbouring the militants.

"Why do Pakistan's army and security body ... give refuge to these anti-revolutionary groups? Pakistan will no doubt pay a high price," Revolutionary Guards chief Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari said in remarks live on state television.

"Just in the past year, six or seven suicide attacks were neutralised but they were able to carry out this one," Jafari told the mourners, who packed a square in the central city of Isfahan and roads leading to it.

"We will avenge the blood of our martyrs from the Saudi and UAE governments and ask the President (Hassan Rouhani) ... to leave our hands free more than ever for reprisal operations," Jafari told the crowd, drawing chants of "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest).

Israel, US seeking war

Claims Iran FM, slams Washington's 'unhealthy' obsession with Tehran

REUTERS, Munich

Iran's foreign minister yesterday accused Israel of looking for war and warned that its actions and those of the United States were increasing the chances of a clash in the region.

Addressing the Munich Security Conference, Mohammad Javad Zarif, also criticised the US administration after Vice President Mike Pence this week called on European powers to pullout of the nuclear deal with Iran. Zarif urged France, Germany and Britain to do more to save that accord.

"Certainly, some people are looking for war ... Israel," Zarif said. "The risk (of war) is great. The risk will be even greater if you continue to turn a blind eye to severe violations of international law."

Accusing Israel of violating international law after bombing campaigns in Syria, Zarif criticised European powers for not calling out Israel and the United States for their behaviour in the region.

"Israeli behaviour is putting international law on the shelf, US behaviour is putting international law on the shelf," he said.

Zarif said the US had an "unhealthy" and "pathological obsession" with Iran and accused Pence of trying to bully his allies.

"All in the name of containing Iran, the US claims, and some blindly parrot, that it is Iran that is interfering in the region, but has it been asked whose region?" Zarif said.

"Look at the map, the US military has travelled 10,000 kilometres to dot all our borders with its bases. There is a joke that it is Iran that put itself in the middle of US bases."

Zarif, who said Iran was committed to the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers for now, also accused France, Britain

and Germany of not doing enough to ensure Tehran received the economic benefits of that accord.

Mid intense pressure, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday said his country is ready to work with all of its neighbours to secure peace in the Middle East in the face of US and Israeli aggression.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have been fighting proxy wars for years, backing opposing sides in con-

licts in Syria and Yemen.

"Iran is ready to work with regional states to preserve security in the Middle East," Rouhani said in a public speech in the southern Hormozgan province, broadcast live on state TV. "We want to establish brotherly ties with all countries of the region ... Iran has never started any aggression in the region."

Zarif says Europe falling
short on efforts to
save nuclear deal

Rouhani says Tehran
ready to improve ties
with Gulf states



Saudi crown prince kicks
off Asia tour in Pakistan

Set to sign investment deals for more than \$10b

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman arrived in Pakistan for a two-day state visit during which officials say he will sign investment deals worth more than \$10bn to shore up the South Asian nation's ailing economy.

Prince Mohammed, also known as MBS, arrived in Islamabad, yesterday, a day after he was originally scheduled to land. He was greeted by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and given a red-carpet welcome with 21-gun salute.

Major roads in Islamabad were blocked off for Prince Mohammed's arrival with more than a 1,000 police checkpoints set up. Entry into the fortified diplomatic zone was banned, and the airspace over the city was shut down.

Saudi and Pakistani flags were on display throughout the city, alongside portraits of

MBS and Khan.

Mobile phone and internet services were also blocked in parts of the city.

Analysts say the crown prince's trip is being treated by Islamabad as the biggest state visit since Chinese President Xi Jinping

in 2015, soon after Beijing announced plans to invest tens of billions of dollars on infrastructure in Pakistan as part of China's global Belt and Road initiative.

Prince Mohammed will become the first guest to stay at the prime minister's house, as Khan has refused to use the residence since coming into power last year in a

bid to save taxpayers' money.

In addition to holding talks with Khan, who has already visited Saudi Arabia twice since becoming prime minister last July, MBS is expected to meet the army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa and President Arif Alvi.




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People cross the Simon Bolivar International bridge from Cucuta, Colombia to San Antonio, Tachira, Venezuela on Saturday. Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido on Saturday called for nationwide protests next week to support volunteers planning to travel to the border with Colombia to bring in US humanitarian aid, the latest flashpoint in the country's political crisis. The announcement came as tons of US food aid was piling up along the border.

BREXIT IMPASSE
UK PM to talk
with every
EU leader

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday vowed to speak to every EU member state leader "over the coming days", as she wrote to Conservative MPs to appeal for unity over Brexit.

In the letter to her fractious colleagues, excerpts of which were released by Downing Street late Saturday, May urged the party to "move beyond what divides us".

The embattled British leader said ruling Tories need to sacrifice "personal preferences" for the "higher service of the national interest".

The plea came after May this week suffered another parliamentary defeat over Brexit, suggesting a shortlived period of party unity over reforming her draft EU divorce deal may not survive.

On Thursday night, MPs rejected a motion expressing support for May's efforts to seek changes to her under-fire agreement, after members of her own Conservative party abstained.

In her letter to lawmakers Saturday, the prime minister called the vote "disappointing" but insisted she would keep seeking to secure changes to the so-called backstop arrangement in the deal.

Her office revealed she planned "to speak to the leader of every EU member state in the coming days".

May confirmed she would return to Brussels next week for further talks with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

Britain is due to leave the EU on March 29, but its parliament last month rejected a draft divorce deal May negotiated with the bloc, prompting fears the country could crash out without a deal next month.

US won't protect you

Says Assad to Syrian Kurds; Trump urges Europe to take back jihadists

REUTERS, Beirut

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday warned the United States would not protect those depending on it, in reference to Kurdish fighters who control much of the north.

"We say to those groups who are betting on the Americans, the Americans will not protect you," he said without naming them. "The Americans will put you in their pockets so you can be tools in the barter, and they have started with (it)."

US President Donald Trump declared in December he would pull troops from Syria, raising more questions over the fate of Washington's Kurdish allies under the threat of Turkish attacks.

US forces have long supplied arms and training to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by the Kurdish YPG militia, the main US partner in the battle against Islamic State. The US presence helped the SDF seize swathes of north and east Syria, and has also been widely seen as a deterrent against Turkey which has vowed to crush the YPG.

Ankara sees the YPG as a security threat and an extension of the Kurdish PKK movement that has waged an insurgency on Turkish soil for decades.

The US move drove Syrian Kurdish leaders into fresh talks with Damascus and its key ally Moscow, hoping to agree a deal that could protect the SDF region and safeguard at least some of their gains.

"Nobody will protect you except your state," Assad said in a live televised speech yesterday. "If you do not prepare yourselves to defend your country, you will be nothing but slaves to (Turkey)."

SDF fighters are poised to capture Islamic State's last, tiny enclave on the Euphrates, the battle commander said on Saturday, bringing its self-declared caliphate to the brink of total defeat as US President Donald Trump spoke of "100 percent victory".

Trump on Saturday said the caliphate was "ready to fall and that the United States was asking European allies to take back more than 800 Islamic State fighters captured in Syria and put them on trial."



Saudi defends using
'female tracking' app

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia on Saturday defended a mobile app that allows men in the kingdom to track female relatives after rights groups and a US lawmaker criticised tech giants for offering it.

The Absher app provides services for "all members of the society... including women, the elderly, and people with special needs", the interior ministry said.

The free app is available on Android and Apple smartphones and allows users to renew passports, visas and eases a variety of other electronic services.

But critics have said the app enables abuse against women and girls by allowing men to track their movements.

Apple CEO Tim Cook told US National Public Radio earlier this week he had not heard of the app, but would "take a look at it".

US Senator Ron Wyden has called on both Apple and Google to remove the app, arguing on Twitter that it promotes "abusive practises against women".

Under Saudi law, women must have consent from a husband or immediate male relative to renew passports or leave the country.

The ministry criticised what it called a "systematic campaign aimed at questioning the purpose of the services".

It rejected what it described as "attempts to politicise" the tool.