

2015 IRAN  
NUKE DEAL

Iran yesterday, a year to the day after the US withdrew from the accord, said it has decided to suspend some of its commitments under the deal. It said it had stopped observing limits on its enriched uranium stocks with immediate effect and would abandon restrictions on the level of enrichment too if the remaining parties to the agreement fail to deliver on sanctions relief within 60 days. Here is some background on the accord:

**LONG ROAD:** Negotiations start in June 2013 between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. The final deal is reached on July 14, 2015 after 21 months of tough discussions.

**THE AIM:** The goal of the deal is to render it practically impossible for Iran to build an atomic bomb, while at the same time allowing it to pursue a civil nuclear programme. As part of the agreement, Tehran pledges to reduce its nuclear capacities for several years. It agrees to slash the number of centrifuges, which are used to enrich uranium for nuclear fuel but can also be used in the production of an atomic bomb, from more than 19,000 to 5,060 and to maintain that level for a decade. It also agrees to modify its heavy water reactor in Arak under international supervision to make it impossible to produce plutonium for military use. The deal came into effect on January 16, 2016.

**INSPECTORS, SANCTIONS RELIEF:** The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is charged with regular inspections of facilities such as uranium mines and centrifuge workshops for up to 25 years. The IAEA says Tehran is sticking to the terms of the deal. UN embargoes on the sale of conventional arms and on ballistic missiles to Iran are however maintained up to 2020 and 2023 respectively.

**US EXIT:** In October 2017, Trump refuses to certify that Iran is respecting its commitments on the agreement, but stops short of reimposing sanctions or abandoning the deal. On May 8, he announces the United States is pulling out of the agreement and will reimpose sanctions on Iran as well as all companies with ties to the Islamic republic. On August 7, Washington reimposes the first set of sanctions targeting access to US banknotes and key industries such as cars and carpets. A second tranche of sanctions kicks in on November 5, this time targeting Iran's vital oil sector and central bank transactions. From May 2, Washington ends temporary sanctions waivers it had granted to the eight main purchasers of Iranian oil, raising the pressure on holdouts China, India and Turkey to find other suppliers.

SOURCE: AFP

# Iran partially retreats on nuke deal

Steps taken as Washington tightens sanctions, sends aircraft carrier to the region

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday said it had stopped respecting limits on its nuclear activities agreed under a 2015 deal with major powers until they find a way to bypass renewed US sanctions. The well trailed announcement came as Washington stepped up its rhetoric against Tehran, accusing it of planning "imminent" attacks and deploying an aircraft carrier strike group with several nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to the region.

Iran said it was responding to the sweeping unilateral sanctions that Washington has reimposed since it quit the agreement one year ago, which have dealt a severe blow to the Iranian economy.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council said it no longer considered itself bound by the agreed restrictions on stocks of enriched uranium and heavy water. It said after 60 days, if the remaining parties to the agreement -- Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia -- fail to start delivering on their commitments to

Russia, China say nuclear pact must be upheld

France, Germany urge Iran not to take any aggressive steps

Tehran says Europe did nothing to honour accord



sanctions relief, it would also stop abiding by restrictions on the level to which Iran can enrich uranium and modifications to its Arak heavy water reactor that were designed to prevent the production of plutonium.

President Hassan Rouhani underlined that the ultimatum was intended to rescue the nuclear deal from his US counterpart Donald Trump who has repeatedly called for it to be scrapped since he pulled out on May 8, 2018.

"We felt the (deal) needed surgery and that the year-long sedatives have not delivered any result. This surgery is meant to save the (deal) not destroy it," Rouhani said at a cabinet meeting broadcast live on state television. Robert Kelley, a former UN nuclear

inspector now with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, said Iran was simply seeking to "save face" after "striking a deal which was not respected by the other side."

Under the landmark deal agreed by Trump's predecessor Barack Obama, the parties to the agreement were supposed to lift nuclear-related sanctions on Iran in return for it reining in its activities to ease fears it was seeking the capability to produce an atomic bomb.

But the promised sanctions relief has failed to materialise as European and Asian banks and oil companies have moved swiftly to abide by the renewed US sanctions for fear of financial or commercial repercussions.

Rouhani slammed European countries for seeing the US as the world's "sheriff" and said this keeps them from making "firm decisions for their own national interests."

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who was in Moscow on an official visit, accused European governments of not fulfilling their obligations under the nuclear deal.

"Our friends in Russia and China maintained very good relations with us in this year but the rest of the... participants did not meet any of their obligations," Zarif said.

France, Britain, Germany called on Tehran to uphold the deal.

China underlined that it "resolutely opposes" the unilateral US sanctions on Iran but called on all parties to uphold the nuclear deal.

Russia said it remained committed to the nuclear deal and denounced what it called "unreasonable pressure" on Iran.

On the eve of the Iranian announcement, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made an unannounced visit to Baghdad, an ally of both Washington and Tehran.

Pompeo said he made the trip because Iranian forces are "escalating their activity" and said the threat of attacks was "very specific", without giving further detail.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a fierce opponent of the nuclear deal, seized on the Iranian announcement as evidence that it was pressing ahead with its nuclear programme.

## NEWSIN brief

### South Africans vote in test for ruling ANC

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africans began voting yesterday in national elections which the ruling ANC, in power since 1994, is favourite to win despite corruption scandals, sluggish economic growth and record unemployment. The ANC has won all five previous elections, and is tipped to come out on top again albeit with a reduced majority. Support for the ANC has fallen in every election since 2004 with the party winning 54 percent in 2016 local elections, compared with 62 percent in 2014's national vote.

### 514 foreign IS members convicted in Iraq: court

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi judiciary has tried and sentenced 514 foreigners since the start of 2018 for joining the Islamic State group, the country's Supreme Court announced yesterday. Another 11 were acquitted and released, it said. The statement referred to "different nationalities" but did not list any specific countries. It said interrogations were taking about six months for those simply accused of IS membership, but anyone accused of actively taking part in the jihadist group's operations could be questioned for up to a year.

### 2 killed as car ploughs into nursery kids

REUTERS, Tokyo

Two children were killed and a dozen injured, two critically, in Japan yesterday after a car involved in an accident with another vehicle skidded into a nursery school group out for a walk with their teachers, NHK national television said. All of the children and two of their teachers were taken to hospital for treatment, NHK added, but two - a boy and a girl, both two years old - died soon after. The two drivers, both women - one aged 62 and the other 52 - were arrested, it said.

### CHRISTIAN WOMAN IN BLASPHEMY ROW

## Asia Bibi leaves Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Asia Bibi, the Christian woman at the centre of a decade-long blasphemy row, has left Pakistan, local media said yesterday, months after her death sentence was overturned to mass protests by Islamist hardliners.

If confirmed, it will be the latest chapter in a saga that has sparked violent demonstrations and high-profile assassinations while spotlighting rising religious extremism across wide sections of Pakistani society.

It was not clear when Bibi may have left or where she may have gone. Her daughters are believed to have already fled to Canada.

Her departure was reported by Dawn, Pakistan's biggest English-language newspaper, and Geo News, one of the country's largest private broadcasters. Both cited unnamed official and unofficial sources.

Pakistani officials did not confirm the reports to AFP. The case is extraordinarily sensitive, and multiple

previous claims about her departure ended up being false.

"It is a great relief that this shameful ordeal has finally come to an end and Asia Bibi and her family are safe," said Omar Waraich, deputy South Asia director at Amnesty International.

"She should never have been



imprisoned in the first place, let alone endure the constant threats to her life. This case horrifyingly illustrates the dangers of Pakistan's blasphemy laws and the urgent need to repeal them."

Bibi -- a labourer from central Punjab province -- was first convicted of blasphemy in 2010 and was on death row until her acquittal last year.



Afghan security forces take position during an attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### Venezuela to prosecute MPs who backed failed uprising

Venezuela will prosecute seven lawmakers who backed last week's failed uprising orchestrated by opposition leader Juan Guaido, the country's Supreme Court ruled Tuesday, as Washington removed sanctions against Caracas' sacked spy chief for backing the revolt. The court, which announced the ruling in a statement, said it asked Attorney General Tarek William Saab to handle the "criminal investigation" into opposition deputies for "high treason" and "conspiracy." Soon after the announcement, the Constituent Assembly -- which effectively acts as a regime rubber stamp -- stripped the seven lawmakers of their parliamentary immunity. Guaido, who is recognized as Venezuela's interim president by more than 50 countries and was himself stripped of his immunity on April 2, denounced the decision. The government's "only response... is to persecute, because they no longer govern, because they no longer have command," he said.

### China, India boost global booze binge: study

The world consumed ten percent more alcohol per adult in 2017 than in 1990, due in large part to heavier and more widespread drinking in China and India, researchers said Wednesday. On current trends, global consumption per capita will rise another 17 percent over the next decade, they reported in The Lancet. By 2030 half of all adults worldwide will drink alcohol, and almost a quarter will binge drink at least once a month, according to projections covering 189 countries. "The world is not on track to achieve global targets to reduce harmful alcohol use," the authors said, calling for more aggressive counter-measures such as higher taxes and a ban on advertising. The World Health Organization (WHO) goal is to reduce "harmful alcohol use" 10 percent by 2025. Alcohol is linked to over 200 diseases and accounts for more than three million deaths -- 75 percent of them men -- each year, the WHO has said.



### White House rejects Congress demand for full Russia report

The White House defiantly asserted executive privilege and refused to comply with "unlawful and reckless" demands by congressional Democrats to turn over an unredacted version of the special counsel's Russia report. "Neither the White House nor Attorney General (Bill) Barr will comply with Chairman (Jerry) Nadler's unlawful and reckless demands," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement, referring to the Democratic head of the House Judiciary Committee. The statement was released just as Nadler began a committee hearing launching contempt proceedings against Barr for refusing to turn over the complete, unredacted report and its underlying evidence. "This decision represents a clear escalation in the Trump administration's blanket defiance," Nadler said at the start of the hearing. SOURCE: AFP

### FINAL ELECTION RESULTS

## Thai junta-backed party needs allies

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's army-backed party needs only a small number of allies to get enough votes to allow coup leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha to cling to power, according to final election results released late yesterday that were immediately challenged by anti-junta rivals.

The junta-linked Palang Pracharat party now has 115 seats in the lower house, only 11 votes shy of a majority in the combined parliament thanks to 250 military-appointed senators.

The results were announced more than a month after the March 24 vote, the first election since the military seized power in a 2014 coup. It was held under new rules crafted by the generals, including the creation of appointed senators who can vote for prime minister.

Despite the booked-in advantage, the lower house results leave Palang Pracharat needing a little help from coalition partners. The most obvious candidates are Bhumjaitai and the Democrat Party, which both have more than 50 lower house seats.

Officials from both parties said yesterday they have yet to reach a decision. A number of smaller parties are also up for grabs. Palang Pracharat could not immediately be reached for comment.

A whopping 27 parties will have seats when parliament convenes within 15 days. Yesterday's results are likely to set off horsetrading, negotiations and challenges.

## Iceland turns CO2 to rock

AFP, On The Hengill Volcano

In the heart of Iceland's volcano country, 21st-century alchemists are transforming carbon dioxide into rock for eternity, cleaning the air of harmful emissions that cause global warming.

The technology mimics, in accelerated format, a natural process that can take thousands of years, injecting CO2 into porous basalt rock where it mineralises, capturing it forever.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is promoting various carbon capture and storage (CCS) methods in a bid to limit the rise in average temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In Iceland's CarbFix project researchers and engineers from utility company Reykjavik Energy, the University of Iceland, France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and Columbia University in the United States work.

In Iceland, a country of geysers,

glaciers and volcanoes, at least half of the energy produced comes from geothermal sources. That's a bonanza for CarbFix researchers, who've turned the Hellisheidi geothermal power plant -- one of the world's biggest -- into their own laboratory.

### FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE



The plant, located on the Hengill volcano in southwestern Iceland, sits on a layer of basalt rock formed from cooled lava, and has access to virtually unlimited amounts of water.

The plant pumps up the water underneath the volcano to run six turbines providing electricity and heat to the capital, Reykjavik, about 30

kilometres (18 miles) away.

The CO2 from the plant is meanwhile captured from the steam, liquified into condensate, then dissolved in large amounts of water.

"So basically we are just making soda water out of the CO2," says project director Edda Sif Aradottir. The fizzy water is piped several kilometres to an area where grey, igloo-shaped domes dot a lunar-like landscape.

Here the fizzy water is injected under high pressure into the rock 1,000 metres (3,300 feet) under the ground.

The solution fills the rock's cavities and begins the solidification process -- a chemical reaction that occurs when the gas comes in contact with the calcium, magnesium and iron in the basalt.

Once the CO2 is turned to rock, it's pretty much captured there for good.

The CarbFix project reduces the plant's carbon dioxide emissions by a third, which amounts to 12,000 tonnes of CO2 captured and stored at a cost of about \$25 a tonne.