

Iran To Israel: Don't You Dare Take Foolish Measures Against Our Interests In Syria

Agencies

Tehran: Iran has warned Israel against any act of aggression targeting its interests in Syria and the region, saying it will not hesitate to give a crushing response to any "foolish" act by the Tel Aviv regime.



"The Islamic Republic of Iran will give a crushing response to any act of aggression or foolish move by the regime (Israel) against our country's interests in Syria and the region, which will make them regret [their measure]," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Wednesday.

Mousavi said that Iran has been present in Syria upon an invitation by and based on an agreement with the Damascus government with the aim of combating US and Israel-backed terrorism, noting that the country will not back down when it comes to "safeguarding its national security and regional interests."

He said that Israel is charac-

terized over the past 70 years as a terrorist regime that has occupied the Palestinian land and parts of regional countries and pursued massacre, terrorism and acts of aggression.

He stressed that Iran will take Israel's threats and bellicose remarks to international circles.

The comments came in response to earlier remarks by the Israeli minister for military affairs Naftali Bennet who threatened to act against Iran in Syria.

He said that Israel will continue operating against Iran "until we achieve our final goal: expelling Iran out of Syria."

"We will continue to prevent Iranian presence on our northern border," Bennet said, and threatened Iran with attacks while accusing the Islamic Republic of trying to establish terrorist bases.

Iran has frequently announced that it has no forces operating on the ground in Syria and has been only offering military advisory assistance to Syria at the request of the Damascus government to enable its army to speed up its gains on various fronts against terror outfits.

While Iran has been helping Syria with anti-terror campaign, Israel has launched recurrent attacks on the Arab country in defiance of all international laws and regulations.

Israel claims the attacks are targeted at certain forces linked to Iran, but such raids are widely viewed as a means of support for the foreign-backed Takfiri terrorists, who have been suffering stinging defeats from the Syrian army in recent years.

Swiss Neutrality Tarnished By Spy Scandal, Warn Critics

Agencies

GENEVA: Outraged commentators warned on Wednesday that revelations the CIA and Germany's intelligence service had for decades used a Swiss encryption company for spying had seriously damaged Switzerland's cherished reputation for neutrality.

Critics voiced particular concern that Bern may have been at least tacitly complicit in the secret operation.

Switzerland, which takes pride in its neutral and non-aligned status, "was hosting a quasi-ally intelligence agency," the Tribune de Geneve daily said in an editorial.

Swiss officials "very likely" knew what was going on but "closed their eyes" in the name of neutrality, it added.

Home to the United Nations European headquarters and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Switzerland is recognised worldwide for its standing as an honest broker.

But media revelations on Tuesday told how for decades the US and West German intelligence services raked in the top-secret communications of governments around the world.

The Trojan horse they used was their hidden control of Swiss encryption company Crypto AG.

The company supplied devices for encoded communications to some 120 countries from after World War II to the beginning of this century, including Iran, South American governments, and India and Pakistan.

Unknown to those governments, Crypto was secretly acquired in 1970 by the US Central Intelligence Agency together with the then West Germany's BND Federal Intelligence Service.

Together they rigged Crypto's equipment to be able to easily break the codes and read the government's messages, according to reports by the Washington Post, German television ZTE and Swiss state media SRF.

Citing a classified internal CIA history of what was originally called operation "Thesaurus" and later "Rubicon," the reports said that in the 1980s the harvest from the Crypto machines supplied roughly 40 percent of all the foreign communications US code-breakers processed for intelligence.

The spy agencies were thus able to gather precious information during major crises such as the hostage crisis at the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 the 1982 Falklands War between Argentina and Britain.

plan to end Darfur conflict



Egypt Fatwa Bans Ertugrul, Turkish Soaps

Agencies

Cairo: Egypt's Dar Al-Iftaa has published a statement accusing Turkey of trying to create an "area of influence" for itself in the Middle East using its soft power, according to Yeni afak English.



The Global Fatwa Index (GFI) of Egypt's Dar Al-Iftaa is one of the Middle East's oldest and most influential bodies responsible for issuing fatwas, or religious edicts, on all aspects of worship and life.

The recent statement targeted the globally-popular drama "Resurrection: Ertugrul",

claiming that it aims to revive the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and regain sovereignty over Arab countries which were previously under Ottoman rule, and therefore, should not be watched.

GFI stated: "They [Erdogan and his followers] export

is what [Turkish President] Erdogan reaps from material and political gains."

It also claimed that the Turkish president would do anything to spread his power across the world, even using cultural or artistic products.

Set around the deeds of 13th-century Ertugrul Gazi, a warrior and the father of Osman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire, it depicts the struggle between a minority group of Turkish nomads in Anatolia against a myriad of adversaries.

Viewers have watched Ertugrul battle crusaders, Mongols, Christian Byzantines and more.

Concerned about the impact these shows are having among its population, Saudi Arabia's Dubai-based media group MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Centre) has removed Turkish shows from its biggest TV networks in 2018, in what Turkish ministers have described as "clear censorship".

Media organisations claim that the motivation behind this was political, but experts say that the main purpose is to diminish Turkey's soft power in the region and undermine its credibility in the eyes of Arab nations.

Despite all these efforts, millions across the Arab world have still been watching Turkish series, especially online. Estimates show that TV series revenues will hit \$1 billion in 2023, reported 5PillarsUK.

They [Erdogan and his followers] export to the people and nations the idea that they are the leaders of the caliphate, responsible for supporting Muslims worldwide and being their salvation from oppression and injustice, while also seeking to implement Islamic law. They hide the fact that their main drive in these colonial campaigns is what [Turkish President] Erdogan reaps from material and political gains

Air Pollution Costs \$2.9tr a Year: Report

Agencies

PARIS: The global cost of air pollution caused by fossil fuels is \$8 billion a day, or roughly 3.3 percent of the entire world's economic output, an environmental research group said on Wednesday.

The report from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) and Greenpeace Southeast Asia is the first to assess the global cost of air pollution specifically from burning oil, gas and coal.

"We found that the China Mainland, the United States and India bear the highest costs from fossil fuel air pollution worldwide, an estimated \$900 billion, \$600 billion and \$150 billion per year, respectively," the report said.

Particles thrown off by fos-

and our economies that takes millions of lives and costs us trillions of dollars," said Minwoo Son, clean air campaigner at Greenpeace East Asia.

The global cost for 2018 was \$2.9 trillion, the report estimated. "But this is a problem that we know how to solve: by transitioning to renewable energy sources, phasing out diesel and petrol cars, and building public transport." The 44-page report breaks down the global burden of fossil fuel-driven air pollution — measured in economic costs and premature deaths — by type of pollutant and by country.

Each year the global economy takes a \$350 billion hit from nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) — a byproduct of fossil fuel combustion in vehicles and power plants — and a further \$380 bil-



lion hit from ozone, according to middle-ground estimates.

By far the most costly pollutant is microscopic fine particulate matter (PM 2.5), which accounts for more than two trillion dollars per year in damages, measured in health impacts, missed work days and years lost to premature death.

The global breakdown for premature deaths each year was 500,000 for NO₂, one million for ozone, and three million for PM 2.5.

Some 40,000 children die every year before their fifth birthday due to PM 2.5, which also leads to two million premature births annually and twice as many cases of asthma.

Living in the New Delhi area of India is like smoking 10 cigarettes a day, earlier research has shown.

"Air pollution from fossil fuels is a threat to our health

WHO Says 'Way Too Early' To Predict End Of Novel Coronavirus

Agencies

Geneva: The UN health agency on Wednesday cautioned it was "way too early" to say whether COVID-19 might have peaked or when it might end, following a drop in new cases.

"I think it's way too early to try to predict the beginning, the middle or the end of this epidemic right now," Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme, told reporters.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "The number of newly reported cases from China has stabilised in the past week but that has to be interpreted with extreme caution. "This outbreak could go in

any direction," he added.

Tedros also praised Cambodia for agreeing to take in the Westerdam, a US cruise ship that has been rejected at several Asian ports over coronavirus fears.

"This is an example of the international solidarity we have consistently been calling for," he said.

"Outbreaks can bring out the best and worst in people. Stigmatising individuals or entire nations does nothing but harm the response.

"Instead of directing all our energy against the outbreak, stigma diverts our attention and turns people against each other," he added. (AFP)

NEWSMAKERS

Sudan's Omar al-Bashir to be handed over to ICC

Former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and others wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) are to be handed over to the Hague, where he is wanted on charges of genocide and war crimes.

Hassan al-Taashi, a member of Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council, said on Tuesday that an agreement had been made in Juba with Darfuri rebels that will see all those wanted for war crimes handed to the ICC.

"Those who have been indicted by the ICC, they have to go there," said Taashi.

Bashir, who was ousted by anti-government protests in April 2019, was sentenced to two years in detention after being found guilty of corruption and receiving illegal gifts by a Sudanese court in December.

'Important step': Sudan's government and rebels agree on



Bashir is primarily wanted over actions taken during the conflict in Darfur. The UN has said the conflict left at least 300,000 people dead and displaced 2.5 million others.

Taashi's remarks came as a government delegation met with rebel groups in the South Sudanese capital of Juba. He said

there had already been several mechanisms agreed for achieving peace in the region.

"First, all those who have been indicted by ICC should appear before the ICC," he said. "Second, a special court be set up to investigate crimes committed in Darfur."

Besides Bashir, other government officials such as former minister Abdul Rahim Mohamed Hussein, governor of South Kordofan state Ahmed Haroun and militia leader Ali Kouhshib were indicted by the ICC.

People displaced by the conflict in North Darfur state reacted to the news by saying they are preparing for what they described as "a victory of justice".

For its part, the former ruling party and supporters of Bashir have warned of serious consequences, describing the former president's surrender as an international deal.

First wife gatecrashes hubby's 3rd wedding in Pakistan



A Pakistani man was rescued by the police after his first wife gatecrashed his third wedding and brutally thrashed him and tore up his clothes in front of guests here, a media report said on Wednesday.

Madiha and her relatives barged into the wedding reception venue of Asif Rafiq in Karachi's Sakhi Hassan Chowranghi area on Monday night and claimed that was married to him in 2014. The Express Tribune reported.

She claimed that Rafiq had married another woman, a Jinnah University employee, without her consent and apologised to her after she objected to his second marriage, promising to stay only with her, the report said.

Madiha and her family brutally thrashed Rafiq during the reception and tore his clothes, the report said, adding that the police also beat him up after detaining him.

Rafiq tried to escape from the police station but was chased by Madiha's family, forcing him to hide under a parked bus. He was caught and beaten up again before being rescued by some people, it said.

According to Rafiq, he had divorced Madiha and therefore does not require anyone's permission to remarry, saying: "It is my right to marry four women at the same time".

Meanwhile, the police asked Madiha and Rafiq to approach the court as it was a civil dispute.

Norway to extradite Muslim preacher to Italy

NORWAY: Norway's government on Wednesday gave the go-ahead to extradite a fundamentalist Islamic preacher to Italy, where he has been sentenced to prison for leading a jihadist network.

63-year-old Iraqi Kurdish man — known as Mullah Krekar, but named Najumuddin Faraj Ahmad — was arrested in July 2019 after he was convicted in his absence by an Italian court and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

The Italian court found him guilty of having led a now dismantled jihadist network, Rawti Shax, a Kurdish movement with alleged links to the militant Islamic State group and which is suspected of planning attacks in the West.

Krekar arrived in Norway in 1991 as a refugee.

The Norwegian judiciary, including the Supreme Court, has authorised the extradition, requested by the Italian authorities in July 2019, three times and the Norwegian justice ministry on Wednesday gave final authorisation to move forward.

