

U.S. threatens to impose more sanctions on Iran

Advises European countries against doing business with Tehran; Russia, China reiterate opposition to punitive steps

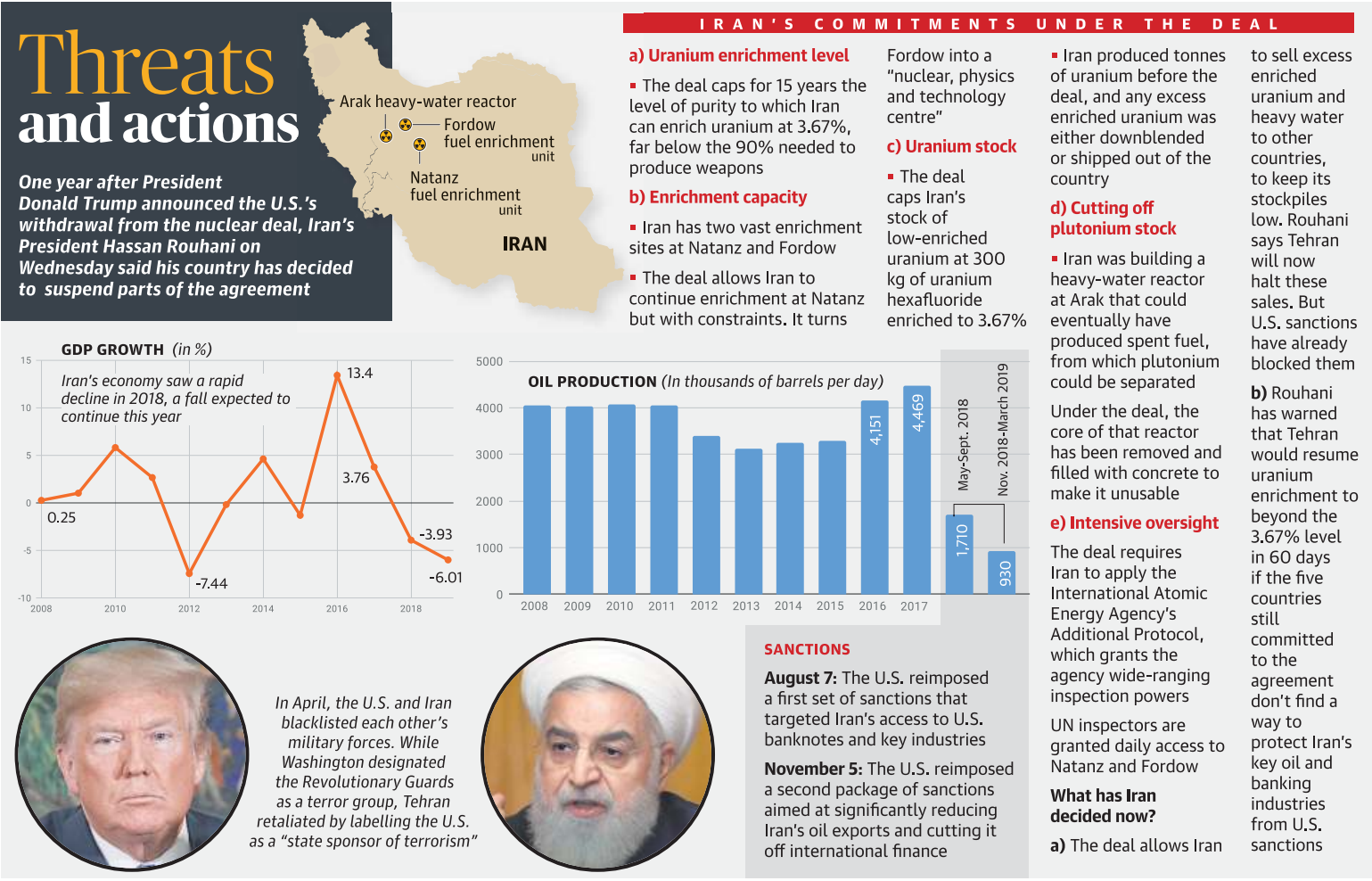
REUTERS
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The U.S. on Wednesday threatened to impose more sanctions on Iran “very soon” and warned Europe against doing business with Tehran via a system of non-dollar trade to circumvent U.S. sanctions.

The Iranian government announced earlier on Wednesday that it was reducing curbs to its nuclear programme with steps that stopped short of violating its 2015 accord with world powers for now, but threatening more action if countries did not shield it from sanctions.

Tehran’s halt of compliance with some parts of the nuclear deal was “nothing less than nuclear blackmail of Europe”, Tim Morrison, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Weapons of Mass Destruction, told a conference in Washington. “Now is the time for the community of nations to strongly condemn Iran’s nuclear misconduct and increase pressure on the regime to comply with U.S. demands,” Mr. Morrison said, adding that Washington was not “done” with sanctions on Iran. “Expect more sanctions soon. Very soon,” he said.

Special Purpose Vehicle
Mr. Morrison said the U.S. would move quickly against any attempt by European countries to undermine Washington’s sanctions pressure on Iran. He advised



them against using the so-called Special Purpose Vehicle to facilitate non-dollar trade to get around U.S. sanctions. “If you are a bank, an investor, an insurer or other business in Europe, you should know that getting involved in the Special Purpose Vehicle is a very poor business decision,” Mr. Morrison said.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced changes that experts said seemed tailored to ensure that Tehran avoids triggering the deal’s mechanism to punish it for violations, at least for now. Washington’s European allies opposed Mr. Trump’s decision to withdraw from the agreement and have failed so far to find ways to

blunt the economic impact of new U.S. sanctions, which include an all-out effort to block Iran’s oil exports to starve its economy. The Kremlin said on Wednesday that Russia remained committed to the Iran nuclear deal and denounced “unreasonable pressure” that led Tehran to suspend some of its commitments under

the agreement. Reiterating Moscow’s “commitment” to the agreement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denounced “ill-conceived and arbitrary decisions that put unreasonable pressure on Iran.” China called on all parties to uphold the nuclear pact. “Maintaining and implementing the comprehensive

agreement is the shared responsibility of all parties,” said Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang at a press briefing in Beijing. “We call on all relevant parties to exercise restraint, strengthen dialogue, and avoid escalating tensions,” he said, adding that China “resolutely opposes” unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Source: Reuters, AFP

Asia Bibi leaves Pakistan for Canada

She was acquitted of blasphemy last year

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was acquitted by the Supreme Court of blasphemy last year, has finally left Pakistan for Canada to be reunited with her family.

She had been falsely accused of blasphemy in 2009 and spent more than eight years in prison.

The Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), an Islamist political party, staged protests across Pakistan after Ms. Bibi’s acquittal and demanded that she be hanged. Ms. Bibi was kept in protective custody till she finally left the country.

TLP leader Khadim Rizvi and other activists were later arrested for creating unrest in the country and incitement to violence. Rizvi is still in jail.

Saroop Ijaz, a lawyer who works for the Human Rights Watch in Pakistan, said it is a relief that Ms. Bibi’s ordeal has come to an end. “However, it is a scandal that it took so long, particularly after the Supreme Court decision. Asia’s case spotlighted the failure of the justice system at all levels and the lack of political will to fix. Hopefully, that will change now,” Mr. Ijaz told *The Hindu*.

Rights defender

“I am very happy that Asia Bibi is safe and finally reunited with her family,” said Saif-ul-Malook, her lawyer. After her acquittal, the



A poster in Paris calling for the release of Asia Bibi in October 2014. •AFP

Netherlands gave Mr. Malook asylum as there were threats to his life for representing Ms. Bibi.

“I went there for a while but when Asia’s review petition came up, I gave up my asylum and came back to Pakistan to represent her,” he told *The Hindu*. Mr. Malook has been nominated for the prestigious Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award. “I didn’t take up Asia’s case for any accolades or awards. It was my duty as a human rights defender.”

Journalist Abbas Nasir tweeted: “As Asia Bibi finally reaches shores where she’ll be free and safe, I can visualise Salman Taseer wearing the widest of smiles wherever he is” to which late Punjab Governor Taseer’s wife Aamna Taseer responded by saying: “He would be very pleased. Justice finally!” Taseer was assassinated in January 2011 by his bodyguard Muntaz Qadri for defending Ms. Bibi.

Blast near Lahore Sufi shrine kills 10

Bomb went off at a police check post near Data Darbar

REUTERS
LAHORE

A bomb targeting Pakistani police outside a major Sufi shrine in the city of Lahore on Wednesday killed at least 10 people and wounded more than 20, officials said.

The blast, a day after the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramzan, went off at a police checkpoint near the Data Darbar, one of the largest Muslim shrines in South Asia, which attracts tens of thousands of visitors a year. “Police was the prime target in this attack. We are collecting forensic evidences to ascertain the nature of the blast,” said Ashfaq Khan, Deputy-Inspector General of police operations in Lahore.

4 policemen killed

A police spokesman said the death toll rose to 10, six of them civilians and four police, after a police officer died of his wounds. Officials earlier said eight police had died. At least 23 people were wounded.

Muhammad Farooq, a spokesman for the city’s rescue services, said at least seven of the wounded were in critical condition.

Police set up checkpoints on main roads leading to the



Shock and grief: A Pakistani woman whose son was killed in the blast targeting the Data Darbar in Lahore. •AP

shrine and hospitals were placed on alert, officials said. The attack was claimed by the Hizbul Ahrar, a splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban, a movement that has been fighting the government for years. In a statement, the group said the attack targeted police and had been timed to avoid civilian casualties. “This attack was carried out at a time when there were no civilians near the police,” said Abdul Aziz Yousafzai, a spokesman for the militant group.

Prime Minister Imran Khan issued a statement condemning the attack and asking the provincial govern-

ment to help the victims.

Sufis, who follow a mystical form of Islam that has been practised in South Asia for centuries, have been regularly attacked by hard-line Sunni Muslim militants in the past. In 2010, two suicide bombers struck the Data Darbar shrine killing 42 people and wounding 175, in an attack officials said was carried out by the Pakistani Taliban. The complex contains the shrine of Syed Ali bin-Osman Al-Hajvery, widely known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, an 11th century Sufi preacher originally from Ghazni in what is now Afghanistan.

Mueller report: Trump asserts executive privilege

Stops the release of the unredacted version to the House Judiciary Committee

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump exercised executive privilege to prevent the release of the unredacted Mueller report to the House Judiciary Committee.

The decision was conveyed on Wednesday morning by the Assistant Attorney-General Stephen Boyd, as the Judiciary Committee hearing and vote on holding Attorney-General William Barr in contempt of the House was under way.

“This is to advise you that the President has asserted executive privilege over the entirety of the subpoenaed materials,” Mr. Boyd wrote.

The House Judiciary Committee is investigating the President in connection with the actions described in the report on the investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections. Mr. Barr had released a redacted version of the 448-page report on April 18 but House Democrats wanted to see the entire report and un-

derlying evidence. “As we have repeatedly explained, the Attorney-General could not comply with your subpoena in its current form without violating the law, court rules, and court orders, and without threatening the independence of the Department of Justice’s prosecutorial functions.” Mr. Boyd said in his letter.

‘A clear escalation’

“This decision represents a clear escalation in the Trump administration’s

blanket defiance of Congress’s constitutionally mandated duties,” Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Jerrold Nadler said.

Wednesday’s decision by Mr. Trump is his first use of executive privilege, a principle that has been used by U.S. Presidents to withhold information – ostensibly on grounds of public or national interest – from Congress or other branches of the government. On Tuesday night, the Justice Department had warned Mr. Nadler

that it will consider asking Mr. Trump to assert executive privilege – a threat it followed through on Wednesday. “Such unreasonable demands, together with the Committee’s precipitous threat to hold the Attorney-General in contempt, are a transparent attempt to short-circuit the constitutionally mandated accommodation process and provoke an unnecessary conflict between our respective branches of government,” Mr. Boyd said.

ELSEWHERE



Harry, Meghan name their son Archie

WINDSOR
Britain’s Prince Harry and his wife Meghan announced on Wednesday that they had named their newborn son Archie as they showed him off to the world. In an Instagram post, the couple said the seventh-in-line to the throne would be known as Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor. REUTERS

South Africans vote in key test for ruling party

JOHANNESBURG
South Africans voted on Wednesday in nationwide polls all but certain to return the ruling African National Congress despite anger over corruption scandals, sluggish growth, and record unemployment. REUTERS

Taliban targets office of U.S.-backed aid group

Nine injured, 169 rescued from site

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

Taliban militants stormed a U.S.-funded aid group’s central Kabul compound in an ongoing attack on Tuesday, having targeted the organisation for promoting Western culture and the “inter-mixing” of men and women.

At least nine people were wounded in the latest attack to rock the Afghan capital, which came even as U.S. and Taliban officials were meeting in Qatar for talks aimed at bringing an end to Afghanistan’s war.

The assault began around midday, when a massive blast tore across Kabul. Interior Ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said attackers then entered the compound of Counterpart International, a non-profit group fund-

ed at least in part by the U.S. Agency for International Development. “The police have surrounded the area and a clearing operation is ongoing,” Mr. Rahimi said, later adding that in the hours following the initial blast, 169 people were rescued from the site.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid quickly claimed responsibility for the attack, saying Counterpart International was targeted because it promoted the “inter-mixing” of men and women. The aid group mentored “Kabul admin workers in various aspects of brutality, oppression, terror, anti-Islamic ideology & promotion of western culture,” tweeted Mr. Mujahid.

The huge explosion shook nearby buildings and shattered windows.