

France condemns failed Iran satellite launch, urges halt to missile tests

Author:

Wed, 2019-01-16 23:36

PARIS, LONDON: France on Wednesday condemned a failed Iranian satellite launch that it said used technology applicable to long-range missiles and urged Tehran to stop all ballistic tests which are not in line with UN resolutions.

It was the latest in a string of French comments expressing irritation at Iran's ongoing ballistic missile program despite attempts over the last two years by France and other European powers to open talks on the subject with Iranian authorities.

"The Iranian ballistic program is a source of concern for the international community and France," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Agnes von der Muhll said.

Iran's bid to send a satellite into orbit failed on Tuesday as the space vehicle, named Payam, did not reach adequate speed in the third stage of the launch.

Ignoring US and European warnings to avoid such activity, President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the Islamic Republic would be ready for a new satellite launch in a few months. "We have achieved great success in building satellites and launching them. That means we are on the right track," Rouhani was quoted as saying by state media.

"The remaining problems are minor, will be resolved in a few months, and we will soon be ready for a new launch."

Iran, which considers its space program a matter of national pride, has said its space-vehicle launches and missile tests are not violations of UN resolutions and would continue.

Iran has repeatedly denied any intent to develop nuclear weapons and curbed its disputed uranium enrichment program under a 2015 deal with world powers.

But the pact is now at risk after President Donald Trump withdrew the US from it, in part because it did not cover Iran's ballistic missile program, and reimposed tough sanctions on Tehran.

Western concern

Western powers are concerned that the long-range ballistic technology used to put satellites into orbit could also be used to launch nuclear warheads.

"We call on Iran not to proceed with new ballistic missile tests designed to be able to carry nuclear weapons, including space launchers, and urge Iran to respect its obligations under all UN Security Council resolutions," von der

Muhll said.

The US warned Iran this month against undertaking three planned rocket launches that it said would violate a UN Security Council resolution because they use ballistic missile technology.



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Iran satellite launch flops UN Security Council to meet on Iran missile test

[Yemen rivals start talks in Jordan on prisoner deal](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-01-16 23:23

AMMAN: Yemen's warring sides started talks on Wednesday in the Jordanian capital Amman about a deal to free thousands of prisoners as part of UN-led peace efforts, two UN sources said.

Delegates from the Iran-backed Houthi militia and the Yemeni government had

arrived in Amman earlier. They will discuss the implementation of a deal agreed in UN-led talks in Sweden in December that would allow thousands of families to be reunited.

“The meetings of the two sides with us began,” a UN source not authorized to speak publicly told Reuters.

Western nations, some of which supply arms and intelligence to an Arab military coalition backing the government, had pressed the two sides to agree on confidence-building steps to pave the way for a wider truce and a political process to end the war, which has killed tens of thousands of people.

The deal to free prisoners was part of confidence-building measures that included a plan to withdraw from the contested port city of Hodeidah, a lifeline for millions facing famine, and place it under the control of an interim entity.

The two sides exchanged lists of some 15,000 prisoners for a swap agreed at the start of the Sweden talks and delegates said it would be conducted via the militant-held Sanaa airport in north Yemen and the government-held Sayun airport in the south.

The process would be overseen by the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The operation will require the Arab coalition to guarantee that air space is secure for flights, the ICRC said.



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Jordan to host Yemen talks on prisoner exchange
UN Security Council approves Hodeidah ceasefire monitoring force in Yemen

[Iraq-Iran football match prompts awkward silence from Tehran-backed politicians in Baghdad](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-01-16 22:28

BAGHDAD: A much-anticipated football match between Iran and Iraq on Wednesday ended in an anticlimactic 0-0 draw. But in Baghdad, the Asian Cup clash proved fertile ground for Iraqi fans to poke fun at the crisis-ridden new government and express their rejection of Iranian influence in their country.

Many criticized Iran-backed political leaders in the build-up to the match for remaining silent and not encouraging the Iraqi national team against Iran.

Some even accused forces sponsored by Tehran of supporting the Iranian team instead of their own national players.

The game in Dubai was played against the backdrop of a tense political stand off in Iraq between pro and anti-Iran parties.

Iran has sought to deepen its influence in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. It supports armed factions and political parties, and increased its military involvement during the Daesh occupation of large parts of the country.

Iran-backed parliamentary blocs have been at loggerheads with rival groups for control of key government positions since an election in May.

Government figures and many MPs remained silent about the match, despite racing to encourage and congratulate the national team during previous games.

One senior Iraqi official told Arab News that the failure of some politicians to get behind the Iraqi team was “embarrassing”.

“Most of our political leaders have been silent as they are all busy praying that the Iraqi team will not win,” the official said. “How can they congratulate Iraqis on a victory against Iran?” he added sarcastically.

Fans were similarly bemused, posting scathing comments on social media.

"Today is the match between our team and the team of our lords," Jaafar Al-Kinani, wrote on his Facebook page. "We ask God to help us determine which team we have to support."

"I will support the referee. I cannot encourage any of the teams for fear of angering the other team," Mustafa Nassir, wrote on his page.

Other fans posted more sincere calls for Iraqis to get behind their team despite the politics.

"All Iraqis will encourage the Iraqi team, even those close to Iran," Ziyad Al-Dulaimaim, an activist from the Sunni-dominated western province of Anbar, wrote. "In 2007, our regions were under Al-Qaeda militants' control and when the Iraqi team won the championship, everyone took to the street to celebrate, including the gunmen."

Both Iraq and Iran had already qualified for the next round when they played on Wednesday. But a win against a strong team like Iran would have revived Iraqi hopes that they could reach the final.

In the build up to the match, many of the giant screens in Baghdad replayed previous Iraqi victories over Iran.

The last was in 2015 in the semifinal of the same tournament, when Iraq won in a penalty shootout.

Cafes and clubs prepared for the match by offering free entry for families and decorating their facades with Iraqi flags. Thousands of Iraqis watched the match outside on the streets.

Both Iraq and Iran have won the Asian Cup in recent years. Iraq famously won in 2007 just four years after the fall of Saddam Hussein in a victory that came as the country was wracked by violence.



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Iran ready for Iraq after beating Vietnam
Iran-backed militias accused of reign of fear in Iraqi Basra

[Al-Azhar reinstates female student expelled over hug](#)

Tue, 2019-01-15 23:21

CAIRO: Egypt's Al-Azhar University on Monday reversed an earlier decision to expel a student after she was filmed hugging a male friend.

A video that went viral earlier this month shows a man bearing a bouquet of flowers, kneeling before a woman and then hugging her.

A university spokesman, Ahmed Zarie, said the woman was expelled because the video had sparked outcry and she had given the institution a "bad

reputation.”

But there was an intervention from the country’s top cleric, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, who called on the university to reconsider.

He cited the student’s age and her educational future, although he described her conduct outside campus as unacceptable and unbecoming.

Days later the university said it would scrap the punishment and instead stop her from sitting exams this term.

The woman protested her innocence. “I did not even know he would come (to the university),” she told local media Ahl Masr. “My friends asked me to close my eyes and when I saw him he had flowers. One of the students shot the incident and later I was surprised with what happened in the media.”

The video was shot at Mansoura University in the north, where the man in the video is a student, according to news agency AFP.

“We are almost engaged and I won’t leave her until we get married,” said the man in a separate video. He was expelled from Mansour University for two years over the hug.

The hugging video, and the reaction to it, prompted a debate online and also the hashtag “love is not a crime.”

One of the most popular tweets supported the woman.

“I am supporting the female student in Mansoura. I am ready to defend her, and I have many colleagues who will fight against her expulsion decision,” said lawyer Mohamed Abdel Aziz.

Another tweet, from Ahmed El-Sonbaty, said: “Love is not a crime but a blatant act and wrongdoing is a crime.”

One social media user asked why only the woman was being blamed, condemning society and the media’s double standards and hypocrisy.

“It’s all nonsense!” tweeted Youmna Sheta, from Mansoura. “Public and talk shows labeled the poor girl to be ‘the hug girl’ while they left the guy without a label! As if the hug is an action taken by only one person!”

She said that students were being targeted while other groups, who published photos that featured hugging and drinking, were left alone.



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Egypt's top cleric urges rethink over student expelled for hug Pope embraces Al-Azhar imam in sign of renewed relations

[Police fire tear gas to disperse protesters in Khartoum](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-15 22:58

KHARTOUM: Crowds of people chanting "Peace, justice, freedom" returned to the street in the Sudanese capital on Tuesday as authorities deployed hundreds of police to disperse them, witnesses said.

They said police fired tear gas to disperse the protesters in Khartoum.

Deadly protests have rocked Sudan since Dec. 19 when angry demonstrators rallied in towns and villages against a government decision to raise the price of bread.

At least 24 people have died in the protests, which swiftly turned into nationwide anti-government rallies in which demonstrators called on President Omar Bashir to step down.

On Tuesday, men and women gathered in the capital's southern business district of El-Kalakla, witnesses said.

They chanted "Peace, freedom, justice" and "We are fighters, we will achieve our mission."

Reinforcements joined riot police who had already deployed in the district and other areas of Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman after organizers called for anti-government rallies.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA) that is spearheading the rallies have urged protesters to continue with their near daily demonstrations this week, calling it as the "Week of Uprising."

Rights groups say more than 1,000 people have been arrested since the protests began, including opposition leaders, activists and journalists as well as demonstrators.

Although the unrest was triggered by the rise in the price of bread, Sudan has faced a mounting economic crisis in the past year, including an acute shortage of foreign currency.

Repeated shortages of food and fuel have been reported across cities, while the cost of food and medicine has more than doubled.

Once seen as the breadbasket of the Arab world, the protesters say that many years of mismanagement have turned Sudan into a failed state.

They blame Bashir for South Sudan's secession and for Sudan being placed on a US list of countries that sponsor terrorism.

The opposition comprises several political parties whose leaders are in Sudan, and several armed groups led mainly from abroad or from conflict zones in southern or western Sudan.

Members of opposition parties have joined the protests, which are mainly led by the SPA. With a weekly program of demonstrations circulated on social media, the SPA has eclipsed the traditional opposition parties.

Bashir is the head of the Islamic Movement party, which has a similar ideology to the global Islamist organization, the Muslim Brotherhood.

He also has direct control over security forces, including the feared Rapid Support Force comprising former militias loyal to the ruling party, which he has often used to crush dissent.

But his position has been eroded by the economic crisis that sent inflation soaring to around 70 percent.

Bashir's supporters fear the protests may embolden small but influential factions within the ruling party who oppose changing the constitution to allow the president to seek a new term in office in 2020.



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Sudan protests will not change government: Bashir Hundreds rally in Sudan's capital for Al-Bashir's ouster