

Iran says missile programme will accelerate

Ankara

Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) said on Thursday its ballistic missile programme would accelerate despite U.S. and European Union pressure to suspend it, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported.

In a significant U.S. policy shift on Oct. 13, President Donald Trump disavowed Iran's compliance with a landmark 2015 nuclear deal and launched a more aggressive approach to the Islamic Republic over its missile development activity.

"Iran's ballistic missile programme will expand and it will continue with more



Representative image

speed in reaction to Trump's hostile approach towards this revolutionary organisation (the Guards)," the IRGC said in a statement published by

Tasnim.

The Trump administration has imposed new unilateral sanctions aimed at impairing Iran's missile programme. It

has called on Tehran not to develop missiles capable of delivering nuclear bombs. Iran says it has no such plans.

Tehran has repeatedly pledged to continue what it calls a defensive missile capability in defiance of Western criticism.

"Trump's anxiety and trembling voice in his speech was a sign of beginning of the era of failure for America's hegemony," Tasnim quoted IRGC chief commander Mohammad Ali Jafari as saying. "Boosting Iran's defence power remains our top priority."

Iran has one of the most advanced ballistic missile programmes in the Middle East, viewing it as an essential

precautionary defence against the United States and other adversaries, primarily Gulf Arab states and Israel.

"Imposing cruel sanctions against the Guards and hostile approach of the rogue and brute (U.S.) president shows the failure of America and the Zionist regime's (Israel) wicked policies in the region," the Guards statement said.

Signalling no respite in tension in the Middle East, where Shi'ite Muslim Iran has waged a long proxy war with U.S.-allied Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia, the Guards also vowed to continue confronting the United States and Israel.

"More decisive and stronger

than ever, the Guards will continue to defend Islamic Iran and its interests," the statement said, alluding to the Quds force, the Guards' overseas arm that operates in Iraq, Syria and Yemen among other places.

Trump's hardened Iran stance has united officials behind the IRGC.

"Today, Iranians, boys, girls, men, women, are all IRGC. Standing firm with those who defend us and the region against aggression and terror," U.S.-educated Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on his twitter account after Trump's speech. (Reuters)

Xi Jinping delivers a report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC)



Xi declares 'new era' for China as party congress opens

Beijing

President Xi Jinping declared China is entering a "new era" of challenges and opportunities on Wednesday as he opened a Communist Party congress expected to enhance his already formidable power.

Xi told some 2,300 delegates at the imposing Great Hall of the People that the party must "resolutely oppose" any actions that undermine its leadership as it steers a course through a high-stakes period in its development.

"The situation both domestic and abroad is undergoing profound and complex changes," said Xi, who is expected to secure a second five-year term as general secretary and stack leadership positions with loyalists during the twice-a-decade congress.

"China's development is still in a stage of important strategic opportunities. The prospects are bright, but the challenges are also severe," he said in a marathon speech that exceeded three hours and

was met by waves of applause. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era."

Speaking in front of a massive hammer and sickle, Xi touted his nationalistic "China dream" slogan, vowed to open the economy, promised to win the fight against poverty, and warned he would continue a "zero tolerance" campaign against corruption.

"Every one of us in the party must do more to uphold party leadership and the Chinese socialist system and resolutely oppose all statements and actions that undermine, distort or negate them," he said.

Considered China's most powerful leader since Deng Xiaoping or even Mao Zedong, Xi could use the congress to lay the foundation to stay atop the 89-million-strong party even longer than the normal 10 years, according to analysts.

That would break the unwritten two-term limit accepted by his immediate

predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao -- who were by Xi's side at the congress -- and end the era of "collective leadership" aimed at preventing the emergence of another Mao.

Another signal of Xi's rise to the pantheon of Chinese leadership would be if his name is added to the party constitution, an honour that has only been bestowed upon modern China's founder, Mao, and the father of economic reforms, Deng.

'Tigers and flies'

Potential rivals have been swept aside under Xi's vast anti-corruption drive, which punished 1.3 million Communist Party officials over five years.

Xi said the campaign has been "unswervingly fighting against 'tigers', 'beating flies', 'hunting foxes'" -- terms used for lower- and higher-ranking officials, as well as those who have fled abroad.

His rise has also been marked by a relentless crackdown on dissent, with

authorities even refusing to free Nobel peace prize laureate Liu Xiaobo as he lay dying of cancer in July.

On other fronts, Xi touted efforts to complete the army's modernisation by 2035 and build artificial islands in the disputed South China Sea

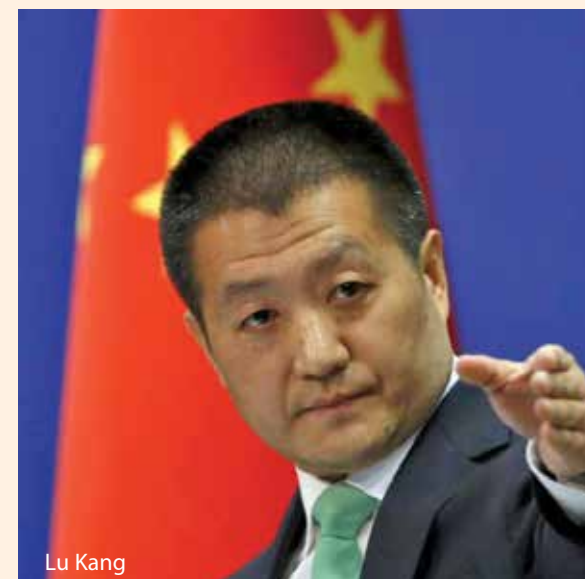
In a stern warning to self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing considers a rebel province, Xi said China has the "ability to defeat separatist attempts for Taiwan independence in any form".

Xi, who has championed globalisation in the face of President Donald Trump's "America First" policies, vowed to further open up China's economy.

Foreign companies complain that Xi's words have not been backed by deeds, as the state retains control over the economy.

US and European firms report being barred from certain sectors and forced to share their technologies with local competitors. (AFP)

US should shed bias: Chinese official



Lu Kang

Beijing

China today asked the US to shed its "biased views" and work with Beijing to uphold the momentum for a steady and sound relations, a day after the top American diplomat lashed out at the Chinese model of funding infrastructure projects and developmental activities.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang also said that Beijing is "happy" over the development of ties between India and America as long as they are conducive to regional peace.

In a major India-policy speech yesterday, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had highlighted the need for collaborating with New Delhi on offering alternative model of financing infrastructure projects and economic development to that of China whom he described as "predatory economics".

He had lashed out at the Chinese model of funding infrastructure projects and developmental activities, saying it does not create jobs and results in enormous level of debt.

Playing down Tillerson's criticism of China and his remarks to deepen ties with India, Lu told reporters here that the US should take more objective look at China's development.

"China steadfastly upheld the international order with the UN at the core and based on the purposes and principles of UN charter we will firmly uphold the multilateralism yet we will also firmly safeguard our own interests and rights," he said while responding to a question on Tillerson's remarks.

The US diplomat had branded China a "predatory rule breaker" specially in the South China Sea and leaving countries in debt.

China hopes that Washington can look China's development in an "objective way" as well as China's role in the international community, Lu said. (PTI)