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[Home](#) > [Today's Paper](#) > [World](#)

'Plots against the Iranian people will be strangled': Iran's army warns US

TEHRAN: Iran's armed forces chief of staff on Tuesday warned the US of a robust reaction if it continued to threaten Iranian interests.

"They will receive a firm and strong response to an unbelievable degree in the places and interests where they are based in the region and around the world," said Major General Mohammad Bagheri, according to the official IRNA news agency.

"The vain and useless imaginings of the US president will never be realised," he said. Washington and Tehran have been trading angry threats since Sunday, when Iranian President Hassan Rouhani warned the US "not to play with the lion's tail" and that conflict with Iran would be the "mother of all wars".

His US counterpart Donald Trump responded with an all-caps tirade on Twitter: "Never, ever threaten the United States again or you will suffer consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered before."

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Bagheri said Iran had "never instigated war" and "wanted peace and stability in the region". But, he added: "All plots against the Iranian people will be strangled at birth and the enemies will receive an unforgettable lesson."

Meanwhile, some young Iranians are determined to modernise their country and rescue it from economic collapse. But facing relentless US pressure and increasing hardship, many of the educated elite simply want to leave.

On an up-market balcony in Tehran, shaded from a roasting summer sun, a string of entrepreneurs are filming success stories and advice for the next generation of start-up wannabes. For a country supposedly on the brink of economic meltdown, the mood is surprisingly upbeat.

"We are experts in adapting to times of trouble," said Reza Ghiabi, CEO of a tech-focused consultancy firm, who calls himself an "unshakable responsible optimist". "Many Iranians had success in the past in Berlin, Silicon Valley and London, but our generation is tired of emigrating and being just an employee. Now we're trying to create something for ourselves," he told AFP.

Everyone knows the challenges are daunting: rampant unemployment, rising prices, a crashing currency. None of it is helped by the return of full-scale US sanctions next month following Washington's decision to abandon the 2015 nuclear deal, nor the bellicose threats between President Donald Trump and Iranian officials in recent days.

"We understand this is not a good situation, but we can't just wait for things to get better. We have to do it ourselves," said Alireza Khodaie, 30, who makes high-end shoes and is one of the organisers behind Tehran's inaugural Start-Up Week that begins on August 3.



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There are a few examples that offer hope for Iran's highly educated, globalised youth: the huge success of taxi app Snapp, a slew of hip new cafes and restaurants, and tech hubs fostering everything from music streaming services to online education portals.

The more business-friendly government of President Hassan Rouhani is less suspicious than its predecessors of these Western-influenced innovations.

"We've tried to be independent in the past, but we can't ignore the government, and there are now people who understand and listen. We want to be part of policy-making," said Khodaie. But that sort of optimism is fading among Iran's educated middle- and upper-classes, who see little prospect of political and economic change.

If officials in Washington hope that will lead to mass protests against the government, they are likely to be disappointed. The brutal response to past demonstrations, and fears that protests could degenerate into violent chaos like in Syria, have bred a weary resignation. Instead, most just want to leave.
