

Iran's Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli left Tehran for Dushanbe on Monday to hold talks with Tajik officials on expansion of bilateral relations between the two countries, IRNA reported.

Iran's COVID-19 vaccine 90% effective in initial human trials

Iran's CovIran Barekat, the country's first domestically-developed COVID-19 vaccine, has shown 90-percent effectiveness, as confirmed by the first phase of human trials of the inoculation.

Mohamad Reza Salehi, who heads clinical trials for CovIran Barekat, said the results of immunogenicity tests on 35 people who volunteered to take part in the first phase of human trials of the vaccine were better than expected, Press TV reported.

"Preliminary results show that about 90 percent of the people who received two doses of the vaccine exhibit evidence of immunity," he told IRNA, noting that more testing is needed for more precise results.

CovIran Barekat was named after the pharmaceutical group that developed it.

Last month, the head of the production team of the Iranian coronavirus vaccine at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini said CovIran Barekat also works against the variant of coronavirus that first emerged in the UK.



MEHR

Iran launched human trials of the vaccine late December after successfully completing the initial steps, including tests on animals, and obtaining the necessary approvals.

By early this month, all 56 volunteers in the first phase of the vaccine's human trials, had received both doses.

According to Salehi, the second phase of human trials is expected to start before the end of the current Iranian calendar year on March 20 and last through May.

Iranian scientists have been working on developing another domestic vaccine against the coronavirus, which is also in the human trial phase.

The second COVID-19 vaccine is a product of the Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute. Razi COV-Pars - an mRNA recombinant vaccine - is administered via injection and inhalation.

In parallel with efforts to develop homemade vaccines, Iran officially began the nationwide vaccination campaign against COVID-19 with the Russian Sputnik V vaccine earlier this month, delivering jabs to frontline health workers in the first phase.

Iran's Health Minister Saeid Namaki said on Monday that 100,000 health workers will be vaccinated starting Tuesday as part of the second phase of the inoculation campaign. He added that 250,000 vaccine doses developed by China will be delivered to Iran next week.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said later that China had donated 250,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine to Iran.

Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari announced on Monday that the number of COVID-19 cases in Iran reached 1,582,275, with 8,263 new cases reported in a 24-hour period.

She added that 89 more patients died of the virus, bringing the total number of deaths to 59,572.



Unity among sanctions-hit countries only way to counter US unilateralism: Rouhani

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said unity among the countries that have been targeted by US sanctions is the only way to counter "unilateral and illegal" measures taken by Washington.

Rouhani made the remarks in a Sunday phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in which he announced Tehran's support for Ankara in the face of US sanctions, according to Press TV.

"The only way to counteract the illegal and unilateral measures taken by the United States is unity and empathy among countries that have been sanctioned," Rouhani said.

Pointing to unlawful measures taken by the administration of former US president Donald Trump, he added, "Lifting sanctions [imposed] by the US is a legal and rational demand by Iran, which we have repeatedly emphasized, and if it happens, Iran will return to its commitments [under a 2015 nuclear agreement]."

As has been repeatedly announced, Iran will employ an "action against action" policy in the face of the new US administration, Rouhani said.

In 2015, Iran and six world states - namely, the US, Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany - signed a historic nuclear deal - the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - which was ratified in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

However, under Trump, the US unilaterally pulled out of the JCPOA in May 2018 and reinstated the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted by the deal.

The Trump administration also launched what it called a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, targeting the Iranian nation with the "toughest ever" restrictive measures.

"President Erdogan, who stated that he wished the new US administration would abandon unilateral sanctions on Iran and lift restrictions on the prosperity of



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) greets Iran's President Hassan Rouhani before a meeting in Ankara on September 16, 2019.

Iranian people, said the statements on the issue in recent days had led to a new window of opportunity," Rouhani said in a statement, according to Reuters.

"Erdogan said it was the most reasonable course of action for all parties to meet at the point of making the Comprehensive Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action op-

erational again, and that it is important to keep the door for dialogue open despite all difficulties."

"Sanctioned by Washington last year for its purchase of Russian defense systems, Ankara has repeatedly called for a lifting of US sanctions on Iran and a return to the JCPOA.

Zarif: Saudi war on Yemen doomed to fail



IRNA

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen is doomed to failure, and that the kingdom will not be able to impose its will on the Yemeni people through negotiations either.

"Saudi Arabia cannot either achieve military victory in Yemen or obtain what it has failed through military means via negotiations," Zarif told Lebanon's al-Manar television network on Sunday.

He recalled how the kingdom estimated in the beginning of the war that it would come out victorious within just three weeks. Six years have passed without Riyadh being able to achieve that goal, Zarif added, according to Press TV.

Riyadh will not be able to get its own way through talks either, the foreign minister said and invited the Persian Gulf's littoral states to sit down for talks and address the regional affairs together.

The Islamic Republic wants to see calm and security restored in Yemen, he said.

Back in 2016, Zarif forwarded Iran's proposal for the return of peace to Yemen. The proposal called for the cessation of the Saudi-led attacks, the removal of a Saudi-led siege, the transfer of humanitarian supplies to Yemen, and the holding of intra-Yemeni talks.

Earlier in February, United Nations envoy Martin Griffiths traveled to Tehran to consult with Iranian officials about the situation in the war-ravaged country and a potential resolution of the conflict.

The kingdom led its allies into the war in March 2015 to restore power to Yemen's former pro-Riyadh officials who had fled the country amid a power struggle and refused to stay behind to negotiate a solution.

Tens of thousands of Yemenis have died in the course of the war and the country has been pushed close to the brink of outright famine.

The Yemeni defense forces comprising the Army and Popular Committees, though, have continued resisting the aggressors.

Ayatollah Jannati reelected as head of Iran's Assembly of Experts

Members of Iran's Assembly of Experts reelected Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati as the chairman of the body, which is empowered to appoint and dismiss the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and supervise his performance.

In a meeting on Monday, members of the Assembly of Experts also reelected Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahedi Kermani as the first deputy, and Ebrahim Raiesi, who is also the head of the Judiciary, as the second deputy of the assembly, Press-TV reported.

Speaking at the event, Ayatollah Jannati paid homage to Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated during a US strike in Iraq on January 3, 2020, directly ordered by former US president Donald Trump.

"May God damn Trump and America and those who played a role in the assassination of this beloved martyr and made a nation suffer his loss," he said.

The Americans did not dare respond to Iran's attack against Ain al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq, where US forces were stationed, said Ayatollah Jannati, who is also the head of the Guardian Council, an oversight body which examines the qualifications of candidates in elections.

Five days after the assassination of General Soleimani, who was in Baghdad on an official visit at the

time, Iran retaliated by firing dozens of missiles at Ain al-Asad Air Base in Al-Anbar Governorate, western Iraq, as well as another US air base in Erbil, declaring that the attacks were part of its promised "tough revenge" for the assassination.

He noted that while the United States' power is declining and coming to an end, Iran is gaining strength "and the future is ours".

"Our strength comes from the



Chairman of Iran's Assembly of Experts Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati speaks during a meeting of the body held in Tehran on February 22, 2021.

Trump, who had threatened to attack Iran's positions in case of any attack by the Islamic Republic, backed down after Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) went on with the retaliation, which turned out to be a painful humiliation for him and his hawkish administration.

"Trump disgraced America and showed that they are not committed to anything," Ayatollah Jannati

strength of God, and the weakness of America is beyond our imagination," he said, adding, "Today, they [American rulers] are at each other's throats."

Trump ordered the assassination of General Soleimani as part of his "maximum pressure" policy against Tehran, which included harsh economic sanctions and reckless military provocations.

Any US-Iran communication over exchange of prisoners has been via Swiss Embassy: Khatibzadeh

Any communication between Tehran and Washington about exchange of prisoners has been conducted via the Swiss Embassy that handles US interests rather than through direct contact, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Sunday.

Saeed Khatibzadeh was reacting to remarks on Sunday by White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan, who said the United States had begun to communicate with Iran over Tehran's detention of US citizens, according to Re-

uters.

"This news is not true as stated and there is no direct dialogue between Iran and the United States in any field," Khatibzadeh said, adding that some messages regarding this issue have been exchanged with American officials via the Swiss Embassy in Tehran.

Switzerland represents US interests in Iran because Washington and Tehran have no diplomatic ties. "Our priority is the release of Iranian prisoners in the United States," Khatibzadeh said.

Khatibzadeh said there are a number of Iranian prisoners in the United States who have been detained on false charges without going through due process, and securing their freedom has always been a priority for the government, Tasnim News Agency reported.

Tehran has repeatedly said it is ready for a full prisoner exchange with the United States. It says Iranians detained in the United States, mostly for breaking sanctions, are being unjustly held.