



Ministry: Daily coronavirus cases skyrocket to some 21,000, over 250 cities coded red



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Daily output value of Bid Boland refinery at \$9.5m: CEO

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Rouhani: Vienna meeting opens 'new chapter' to save nuclear deal

JCPOA parties to continue talks Friday

Iran negotiator: US sanctions must be lifted in one step



Diplomats including Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araqchi (C) attend a JCPOA Joint Commission meeting in Vienna, Austria, on April 6, 2021.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (L) and his Kazakh counterpart Mukhtar Tleuberdi hold a press conference in Kazakhstan's capital Nur-Sultan on April 7, 2021.

Iran, Kazakhstan sign agreement to reinforce cooperation

Iran and Kazakhstan signed a 15-article document for cooperation aimed at reinforcing friendly, fraternal and neighborly relations between the two countries based on mutual respect and trust.

The agreement was inked in Kazakhstan's capital Nur-Sultan on Wednesday during a visit by Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to the Central Asian country.

The document aims to expand the existing cooperation between, find new areas of cooperation, and remove the obstacle on that path, Press TV reported.

After meeting his counterpart Mukhtar Tleuberdi, Zarif highlighted the many historical and cultural commonalities linking the two nations, thanking Kazakhstan for standing by the Islamic Republic on various global fronts.

"Historical, cultural, political and economic commonalities between Iran and Kazakhstan are very important and these bonds have intertwined us," Zarif said.

The top Iranian diplomat further thanked the government and people of Kazakhstan for their hospitality and expressed his satisfaction with his meeting.

"Excellent talks were held on important regional and international issues, and we thank Kazakhstan for its support of the Islamic Republic of Iran on international fronts," Zarif said.

He also praised the positive role Kazakh-

stan has played in various Iran-related issues such as the country's nuclear program as well as the Astana peace process on Syria — an initiative by Iran, Russia, and Turkey to mediate peace negotiations between representatives from the Damascus government and opposition groups in a series of rounds held in the Kazakh capital Astana, recently renamed as Nur-Sultan.

"We appreciate the pioneering role of the first president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev on various issues, including in efforts to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world, and fully support him," Zarif added.

He said regional issues, particularly the Afghan crisis, were also discussed in the meeting, during which the two sides emphasized the need to respect the will of the Afghan people, democracy and ethnic balance in the political future of the war-torn country.

During the talks, the two sides stressed the importance of Iran's presence in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and emphasis was laid on the peaceful use of the Caspian Sea, jointly by Iran and Kazakhstan.

Zarif is on an official visit to four Central Asian countries for talks on enhancing bilateral and regional cooperation.

He has already visited Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, with Turkmenistan being his next destination.

Iran to investigate cause of vessel blast in Red Sea

An Iranian freighter was hit by an explosion in the Red Sea, Tehran said Wednesday, a day after media reports said that the ship had been attacked with limpet mines.

The blast struck the Iranian commercial vessel MV Saviz off the coast of Djibouti on Tuesday morning, Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said, adding an inquiry had been opened into the cause.

"The accident caused no casualties and a technical investigation is under way to determine its circumstances and origin," the spokesman said, according to AFP.

"Our country will take all necessary steps through international bodies in this regard."

Khatibzadeh said the Saviz was a civilian vessel that had been deployed in coordination with the International Maritime Organization to protect shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Many foreign governments have stationed protection vessels in the area since a rash of attacks by Somali pirates between 2000 and 2010.

"This ship has been serving as Iran's logistics station — for technical and logistical support — in the Red Sea," the spokesman added.

Overnight Tasnim News Agency reported that the Saviz had been damaged by magnetic mines.

The Iranian media outlet said the ship had been stationed in the Red Sea for several years "in support of Iranian commandos deployed to

escort commercial vessels".

According to specialist website, MarineTraffic, the Saviz is a general cargo ship owned by Iran's state shipping firm IRISL.

In a similar incident last month, an Iranian cargo ship was damaged after it was targeted in an attack en route to Europe in the Mediterranean Sea.

Tehran said back then that such "acts of terror" are a clear example of naval piracy and run counter to international law on the safety of commercial vessels, Press TV wrote.

On February 25, an explosion struck Israeli-owned and the Bahamas-flagged ship, the MV Helios Ray, in the Sea of Oman near the strategic mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Iran of attacking the ship. Iran categorically rejected the charge.

Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi, in a letter addressed to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on March 5, warned of consequences of any possible miscalculated measure by Israel over the explosion.

"The incident has all the characteristic of a complicated false flag operation carried out by actors in order to pursue their malign policies and to advance their illegitimate objectives," Takht-Ravanchi said.



International Desk

President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday welcomed the beginning of a "new chapter" to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal signed between Iran and the world powers, one day after signatories to the accord held fresh talks in Vienna in an effort to revitalize it.

"We are witnessing a new chapter in reviving the JCPOA," Rouhani said in cabinet meeting, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — the official name of the Iran nuclear deal.

"Today, a unanimous voice is heard," said the president, adding that all concerned parties "have come to the conclusion that there is no better solution than the JCPOA and that there is no other way but the full implementation of the nuclear deal".

On Tuesday, representatives of Iran, Russia, China, France, Britain and the European Union held the 18th meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission in the Austrian capital during which they agreed to establish two working groups, one of which would focus on how

to get the US to lift the sanctions it imposed on Iran after departing the deal in May 2018.

The other working group will focus on how to get Tehran back into compliance with the limits set by the JCPOA on enrichment and stockpiles of enriched uranium.

The United States has been absent from the commission since former American president Donald Trump took Washington out of the JCPOA and reimposed and reinforced the sanctions that the nuclear accord had lifted.

The US was not present at Tuesday's discussions because Iran has refused to meet the US delegation so long as its sanctions remain in place.

Rouhani said the US wants to "repent" and reenter the nuclear deal.

"If the US demonstrates enough seriousness and necessary sincerity, that's all we ask... I think we'll be able to negotiate in a short time, if necessary, with the other parties to the deal," he said.

"The US can fulfill its commitments without negotiation."

The talks are to resume in Vien-

na on Friday.

The US gave an upbeat assessment of the opening session.

"We do see this as a constructive and certainly welcome step," State Department spokesman Ned Price said, according to AFP.

Enrique Mora, the deputy of European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell who chaired the Vienna meeting, described the event as "constructive".

A spokesperson for the French Foreign Ministry welcomed the resumption of Iran nuclear talks in Vienna, saying: "The ongoing negotiations should allow [the participants] to soon reach an agreement on the actions necessary to bring Iran and the United States back to full compliance with the nuclear agreement."

Sanctions must be lifted in one step

After the meeting, Iran's negotiator Seyyed Abbas Araqchi told Press TV that the United States must lift its sanctions altogether and in one step if it truly seeks to rejoin the JCPOA.

"That is quite logical and a very

reasonable demand by the Islamic Republic of Iran," Araqchi said. "They (Americans) have left the JCPOA, and they have imposed sanctions. So obviously if they want to come back, they will have to lift all those sanctions, all together, in one step."

The Iranian senior diplomat noted that Iran had never sought to avoid compliance with the nuclear accord, saying if Tehran was after such a goal, it would have left the deal far earlier after Washington quit it.

'Effective removal'

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also said on Wednesday the only path for the United States to rejoin the JCPOA is "effective removal of all sanctions".

"The only US 'path back' to the Deal is: full compliance & effective removal of ALL imposed, reimposed & relabeled sanctions," Saeed Khatibzadeh tweeted.

"Only after that, we'll stop our remedial measures," he added, pointing to the countermeasures taken by Iran one year after the US pullout.

Iran nuclear chief: Enrichment capacity hits 16,500 SWUs

National Desk

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi said on Wednesday that the country's uranium enrichment capacity has reached 16,500 separate work units (SWUs).

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting in Tehran, Salehi said Iran's enrichment capacity was about 13,000 SWUs before signing the 2015 nuclear deal which put curbs on the country's nuclear work.

SWU is the standard measure of the effort required to separate isotopes of uranium during an enrichment process. One SWU is equivalent to one kilogram of separative work.

"Currently the capacity stands at 16,500 SWUs," said the nuclear chief, adding Iran is now using advanced centrifuges IR4, IR6 and



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IR2M which have boosted the country's uranium enrichment capacity, IRNA reported.

Salehi said Iran has produced 55kg of uranium enriched to up to 20% and plans to increase to 120kg by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (ending on March 20, 2022).

Iran's Parliament passed a law last year that obliges the government to harden its nuclear stance, in reaction to former president Donald Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018.

The law required Iran to start enriching to 20% and stipulated that at least 120kg of uranium refined to that level be made each year, which amounts to 10kg a month, Reuters wrote.

Iran's production rate is already "up to 40%" faster than that, AEOI spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi indicated on Wednesday.

A quarterly report on Iran's nuclear activities by the UN nuclear watchdog in February said that as of Feb. 16, Iran had produced 17.6kg of uranium enriched up to 20%, with the next level down being enriched between 2% and 5%.