

Tehran dismisses UK claim of seizing Iranian weaponry shipment

Yemen says seizure claim senseless

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman refuted the allegations made by the British navy that a boat smuggling Iranian weapons has been seized off the coast of the Sea of Oman in a joint operation with the United States.

Rejecting the false claim in a statement on Friday, Nasser Kanaani said those countries that have supplied weapons worth billions of dollars to an invading coalition and have caused the death of people and destruction of Yemen, cannot acquit themselves of this wrongdoing by leveling accusations against others, Tasnim News Agency reported.

The spokesman said those countries that have been the main culprits behind warmongering throughout history and are the biggest arms suppliers to crisis-hit regions of the world are now trying to mislead the global public opinion through making false allegations and spreading lies. Kanaani noted that such governments had better end their opportunistic and profiteering policies toward the oppressive war in Yemen instead of giving misleading information and dodging their responsibility for the imposed war against the defenseless and oppressed Yemeni people. Britain's Royal Navy claimed on Thursday that an Iranian boat, traveling south from Iran at high speed during the hours of darkness, was intercepted by forces from British frigate HMS Lancaster before it could navigate back to Iranian territorial waters on February 23.

According to the Bahrain-based United States Fifth Fleet, the seizure took place along a route historically used to smuggle weapons to Yemen.

Iran has on several occasions dismissed Western claims of smuggling arms to Yemen, reaffirming its support for a political solution not a military one to the conflict in the Arab country.

'Nonsensical claims'

In separate remarks, Yemen's Deputy Information Minister Fahmi al-Yousefi also dismissed as "nonsense" claims by the British navy and a member of the ousted pro-Saudi government about the seizure of the boat smuggling Iranian weapons.

Yousefi made the comment in an exclusive interview with Radio Sputnik on Friday, saying the claims, initially made by the British navy and later echoed by Muammar al-Iryani, Yemeni information minister in the former government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, reflect the unwillingness of the other side to engage in dialogue and implement what has so far been agreed upon.

Iran, IAEA Stress Cooperation

Raeisi urges IAEA not to be affected by political powers



Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi (R) meets Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi (L) in Tehran on March 4, 2023. president.ir

Raeisi said the United States, Zionist regime and certain states have used the nuclear issue as a pretext to double their pressure on Iran's people, president.ir reported.

He added this comes as the Zionist regime is not even an IAEA member and does not abide by the agency's regulations. Raeisi expressed hope that the IAEA would, based on a professional and just behavior and the principle of impartiality, reflect the realities about Tehran's peaceful nuclear activities as well as the country's efforts to remove ambiguities and remain committed to the regulations. The Iranian president added Tehran has always had the highest level of cooperation with the agency based on its goodwill and commitment to keep its promises.

He pointed to the history of cooperation between

Iran and the agency, saying visits by the IAEA officials to Tehran are indicative of the Islamic Republic's firm determination to cooperate constructively with the agency.

Raeisi said Iran has remained committed to its obligations under a 2015 nuclear deal, as confirmed over 15 times in the IAEA reports, while the United States withdrew from the agreement in 2018 and the Europeans have failed to honor their obligations vis-à-vis Tehran ever since.

Grossi described his meetings with Iranian officials during the trip as very constructive and positive, saying he is certain that the visit will prepare the ground for future interaction and will lead to the enhancement of cooperation between the two sides. He added it is quite clear that which side is to blame for the present situation of the nuclear deal, add-

ing the ill-wishers do not want cooperation between Iran and the agency to be successful and the best way to respond them is to enhance bilateral cooperation.

Call for independent cooperation

Earlier on Saturday, the president of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) called on the IAEA to avoid being swayed by those who aim to hinder cooperation between the two sides.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks speaking at a joint press conference with Grossi after their meetings earlier in the day, Press TV reported.

"We must be able to resolve issues in a trustful manner and prevent the entry and penetration of the elements and agents whose purpose is to disrupt a normal and professional relationship," he added.

"The recent visit by Grossi, which started on Friday, is a message to establish communications and relations between Iran and the agency. Communications and reports must build trust," Eslami said.

He called on the IAEA to prepare for a sort of interaction, by which the agency "can always maintain its duties toward Iran's nuclear program within the framework of the safeguards agreements". Eslami also touched on Iran's scientific research and capabilities in the field of nuclear technology, saying the country is ready to share its achievements with other states.

The AEOI chief denied claims of Iran having en-

riched uranium to an 84 percent level, saying the country is enriching uranium up to 60 percent purity. Eslami called for the remaining signatories to a 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), to fulfill their obligations, saying, "Three European and some other countries are just focusing on Iran's JCPOA obligations while they too have commitments that they need to adhere to."

He said, "We came to an arrangement [with Grossi] to define our cooperation within the framework of the safeguards." Grossi, for his part, said any military attack on nuclear facilities is outlawed and condemned, responding to US and Israeli threats to target those in Iran.

The administration of US President Joe Biden has drawn closer to Israel in recent weeks, conducting large-scale joint military exercises with the regime. Last month, US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides said "all options are on the table" against Iran and that "Israel can and should do whatever they need to deal with, and we've got their back".

"There are two separate issues in this regard. First, attacks on nuclear power plants have unfortunately become common, and this is due to the war in Ukraine. Second, these attacks have been condemned during the agency's public conferences. So I think that attacks on nuclear facilities are totally condemned and illegal," Grossi said.

The IAEA chief added he

had "constructive discussions" with Iranian officials that could pave the way for the revival of the JCPOA to bring the US back to compliance and remove sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

"By having a constructive discussion, like what we are having now, and having good agreements, like I am sure we are going to have, we are going to be paving the way for important agreements," he said.

Grossi claimed that his "agency has never been used as a political tool and will never be used", reflecting on observations that the IAEA's reports on Iran are often based on feedback provided by the US, Israel and others.

"We did not work under the instructions of any country and have a Board of Governors that reviews our performance. We do not act on the words of others and it is necessary to talk and cooperate with each other."

In June 2022, Grossi paid a brief visit to Israel ahead of the agency's Board of Governors meeting which passed a resolution, drafted by the US and its allies, accusing Iran of not cooperating on "three undeclared sites". Tehran said it had answered all questions about the sites and the IAEA had been convinced.

"It is necessary and important that Iran and the agency have close relations, and the more these relations are on the part of Iran, the others cannot interfere with their influence. This shows that it is important for us to work together," Grossi said.

Iran-IAEA interaction basis

During the recent trip, the contentious 84% enrichment claim has been settled, and the issue of reconfiguring the Fordo centrifuges has been addressed. The IAEA still has questions about three undeclared sites,

which require further discussion, but progress has been made.

The establishment of an agreement between Iran and the IAEA could have a significant impact on the resumption of negotiations aimed at reviving

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and reaching a final deal. In a few days, the IAEA's Board of Governors will convene, and Grossi is expected to present a report on his meetings and agreements with Iran. If the report is positive,

it is unlikely that the Board of Governors will issue any resolution against Iran. However, if they do, Grossi's trip may be deemed a failure, which could further damage the trust-building process.

Nevertheless, based on the

statements of Grossi and AEOI chief Mohammad Eslami, the meetings in Tehran have been fruitful. Therefore, there is every reason to be optimistic that a positive atmosphere will prevail in the nuclear talks to revive the JCPOA after Grossi's report.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Belgian court upholds prisoner exchange deal with Iran

Belgium's Constitutional Court turned down a request for the annulment of a treaty with Iran, which authorizes the exchange of prisoners between the countries.

"The court rejects the action for annulment," the tribunal said in a press release on Friday, according to Press TV. In line with the deal, Iranians convicted in Belgium would be allowed to serve their sentences at home and vice versa.

The treaty could lead to the release of Assadollah Assadi,

an Iranian diplomat who has been illegally imprisoned in the European country.

In February 2021, a Belgian court sentenced Assadi to 20 years in prison after accusing him of plotting an alleged attack against the terrorist Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO).

The anti-Iran terrorist cult, the MKO, is responsible for killing over 17,000 Iranians through acts of terror since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Following the sentencing,

the Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the jail term as completely unlawful, in violation of Assadi's diplomatic immunity, and a result of Belgium's falling under the MKO's influence.

Belgium's Parliament ratified the treaty back last July.

The so-called "National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)," an umbrella group of anti-Iran outfits such as the MKO, has been trying to pose some legal challenges to it, alleging that Assadi should remain in prison.