

Aref voices Iran's readiness for talks on sanctions removal



Mohammad Reza Aref
IRNA

International Desk

Iran's Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said Tehran is ready for negotiations to remove sanctions illegally imposed on the country for its nuclear program. Addressing a meeting held at the Foreign Ministry on foreign economic relations on Monday, Aref said that the Islamic Republic is not interested in the continuation of the sanctions which the United States reimposed on Iran after its unilateral withdrawal from the Iran 2015 nuclear agreement. "We have not chosen sanctions. The import of medicine and basic goods is prevented by the sanctioning countries, although

they say that their target is the Iranian government, but this is not the case. The people are the first to suffer from this issue (sanctions)," Aref said. He called on the international community to pursue the lifting of the sanctions. In 2015, Iran and world powers – including France, Britain and Germany – reached an agreement that saw the easing of international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. But the United States, during US President Donald Trump's first term in office, unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions. Tehran adhered to the deal un-

til Washington's withdrawal, and then began rolling back on its commitments after witnessing the other parties' failure to secure its interest under the agreement. However, Iran's new government has repeatedly announced its readiness to begin negotiations aimed at removing the sanctions. Iran has already held two rounds of talks with the three European parties to the deal since November and is scheduled to hold another one on January 13. Despite Iran's efforts to reach a new agreement with the West on its nuclear program and the sanctions, France, which is also part of the negotiations, has said

that European partners to the nuclear deal should consider reimposing sanctions if there is no progress with Tehran. French President Emmanuel Macron warned on Monday that Iran's nuclear program is nearing the point of no return. "In the coming months we will have to ask ourselves whether to use ... the (snapback) mechanism to restore sanctions," Macron said, referring to October 2025 when the 2015 accord formally expires. The so-called snapback mechanism allows for the return of anti-Iran sanctions suspended under the deal. Macron also described Iran as the main "strategic and security challenge" for France and Europe.

Iran, Russia to ink historic cooperation agreement in mid-January

'Important documents' to be signed during Pezeshkian's visit to Tajikistan

The presidents of Iran and Russia will sign a comprehensive agreement for long-term cooperation in Moscow in mid-January, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said. Speaking to reporters at his weekly press conference in Tehran on Monday, Baghaei said the agreement has different aspects. "An important part of the agreement includes trade, economy, energy and the environment sectors as well as issues pertaining to defense and security matters," he added, Press TV reported.

He noted that Iran and Russia had approved the document in early summer and were waiting for the right time to sign the deal by the two countries' presidents.

Pointing to bilateral negotiations about the agreement at different times in the past, Baghaei stressed the need to update the previous document to further strengthen Tehran-Moscow relations.

Iran and Russia, as two close and strategic allies, have over the past years deepened their relations in various fields, despite being under heavy Western sanctions.

In 2001, Tehran and Moscow signed a long-term cooperation deal, officially known as the Treaty of the Foundation of Mutual Relations and the Principles of Cooperation. It was initially set for 10 years but was extended up until 2026.

Now, the two capitals are making final arrangements for the comprehensive partnership pact, which may determine their bilateral ties in all fields for the next 20 years.



Esmail Baghaei
mfa.gov.ir

Pezeshkian's visit to Tajikistan

Baghaei also referred to an upcoming two-day visit by the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Tajikistan, saying that during this visit, important documents in the economic, commercial, and cultural fields will be signed by the both sides.

The spokesperson also said Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani is scheduled to visit Tehran at the invitation of Pezeshkian in line with diplomatic interactions between the two countries.

The Iraqi premier and Iranian president will discuss ways to promote mutual relations in various fields and the implementation of the agreements previously signed by the two countries, he added. "The developments in the region, especially in Syria, will definitely be among the topics on the agenda of this trip given their importance and sensitivity," Baghaei said.

European leaders hit back in Elon Musk meddling row

European leaders expressed growing frustration with tech billionaire Elon Musk on Monday, as a major row escalated between members of Britain's government and US president-elect Donald Trump's key ally.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer slammed those "spreading lies and misinformation" following days of incendiary posts by Musk on his X platform over historical sex offences against children in northern England, AFP reported.

Musk, who is set for a role in Trump's administration, then accused the center-left Labour leader of being "deeply complicit in the mass rapes" and "utterly despicable".

European leaders including French President Emmanuel Macron have also weighed in against Musk.

He said the SpaceX boss was "directly intervening in elections", including in Germany where Chancellor Olaf Scholz has condemned the Tesla boss for backing an extreme-right party.

Scholz on Saturday condemned Musk for "erratic" comments after the billionaire labelled the German leader an "incompetent fool" and came out in support of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) ahead of



Elon Musk
GETTY IMAGES

snap elections on February 23. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said Monday he found it "worrying" that someone with so much wealth and influence was getting involved in the politics of European countries.

Much of Musk's focus in recent days has been on Britain and historical scandals involving grooming gangs that first emerged during Starmer's 2008-2013 tenure as the country's top prosecutor.

The comments pose a major challenge for Starmer's government, as it tries to fend off growing support for the far-right while also seeking to maintain good relations with Trump's incoming administration.

Musk's tirade, which included demands for a new public inquiry into the scandal, has prompted some UK opposition politicians to join in the

criticism and call for a fresh national probe.

The issue has long been seized upon by far-right figures including the imprisoned Tommy Robinson, one of Britain's best known far-right agitators, whom Musk has praised and said should be released from jail.

Responding to media questions on the topic, Starmer insisted he was "not going to individualise this to Elon Musk" but said "a line has been crossed" with some of the online criticism.

The grooming scandal involved the widespread abuse of girls in northern English towns, including Rochdale, Rotherham and Oldham.

A series of court cases eventually led to the conviction of dozens of men, mostly of South Asian origin. The victims were vulnerable, mostly white, girls.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran should negotiate ...

Trump's focus for securing American interests lies elsewhere, on issues that may not be as important to Iran. Therefore, new negotiations between Iran and the West should be tailored to these fresh circumstances. Global relations have changed since Iran signed the JCPOA in 2015. It might be necessary to go back to the drawing board and Iran should pursue its national interests based on global changes, and naturally, it needs to have some give

and take. The sanctions and the benefits of lifting them should be the crux of the negotiations. Iran wants to cash in on the benefits of lifting sanctions, such as the removal of sanctions on the banking system, oil sales and Iranian shipping companies, from the other side. It should demand the benefits of sanctions relief in the short term. If Iranian foreign policy officials conduct negotiations in a way that preserves the country's national interests, the world

is ready to roll out these changes. Tehran should get down to brass tacks with Washington to lift sanctions. The reality is that the sanctions Iran is grappling with are mainly imposed by the US, which are the most diverse and complex in their kind. Therefore, the main party in Iran's negotiations should be the US. One of the significant changes on the global stage is that Europe's role is fading. Although Iran is negotiating with Europe, the idea that Iran

can seal a deal with the US through Europe is a pipe dream. Iran should engage with the US. However, the Islamic Republic should also stand its ground. Iran's foreign minister has recently made it clear that Iran is ready to return to its JCPOA commitments regarding enrichment and more, provided the West also pulls its weight under the nuclear deal. But Iran should bear in mind that negotiating with Europe will not lead to a complete lifting of sanctions.