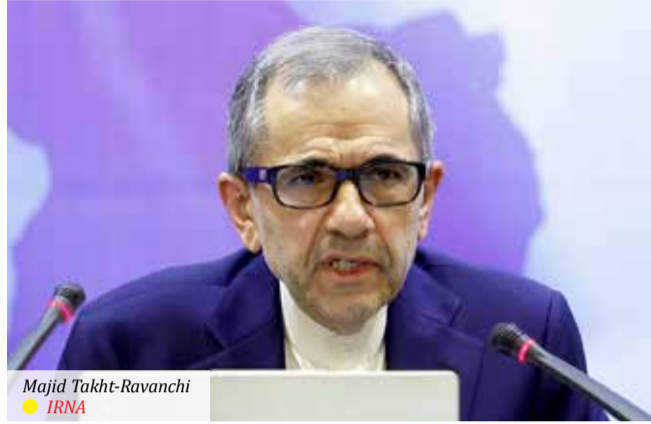


Tehran ready to negotiate within JCPOA framework: *Deputy FM*

Majid Takht-Ravanchi
IRNA

International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi said Tehran is ready to negotiate on its nuclear program within the framework of the 2015 deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive of Action (JCPOA), in order to remove sanctions illegally imposed on the country. In an interview with Italy's Radio Radicale, Takht-Ravanchi said Iran has repeatedly announced its readiness to negotiate despite the maximum

pressure policy which was adopted by the US President Donald Trump during his first term and continued under his successor's administration. Trump undertook the strategy after ordering the withdrawal of the US from the nuclear agreement in 2018. "At the time, the European countries that were still members of the JCPOA asked Iran not to withdraw from the deal in response to the US decision and told us that if Iran did not withdraw from its obligations under

the JCPOA, they would compensate for the damages caused by the US violation of the JCPOA", Takht-Ravanchi said. He said that Iran waited for a year, but the European countries failed to live up to their commitments. Therefore, Iran was forced to roll back the limits it had accepted under the landmark accord. 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 — Germany, France, Britain — since November and is scheduled to hold another one on January 13. "We are a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)", Takht-Ravanchi said, adding that, "Nuclear weapons have no place in the country's defense doctrine. Numerous reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) show that Iran has 100% fulfilled its commitments."

Committees formed to examine capital relocation: *Gov't spox*

'Joining FATF aimed at helping investors'

National Desk

Iran's government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani reiterated the issue of capital's relocation, saying that two committees have been formed to look into issues related to the hotly-debated plan.

Speaking during her weekly press conference on Tuesday, Mohajerani said that moving the capital from Tehran is not a new issue and has been discussed for more than three decades as there are growing concerns about its biological capacities such as water.

Mohajerani said that the government is trying to get help from academics, elites and experts in this field.

She said that coastal region of Makoran in southern Iran is considered as one of the options for the new capital. However, she underlined that the issue of the relocation of the capital is not high on the agenda for the government.

Since taking office in July, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has repeatedly raised the issue, citing economic inefficiencies and regional disparities.

"One of the reasons that has led us to consider relocating the capital is the imbalance between resources and expenditures in Tehran," he said earlier this month.



"Transporting raw materials from the south to the center, processing them, and then returning them south for export drains our competitive capacity. We must shift the country's economic and political center to the south and closer to the sea," he said.

For decades, the idea of relocating Iran's political and economic capital from Tehran, located in the heart of the central plateau, to another region — especially the southern coasts — has been a recurring topic. This proposal stems from the ongoing crises facing Tehran, including water shortages, excessive population density, traffic congestion, and air pollution.

Joining FATF

Regarding Iran's decision to re-examine the FATF conventions, Mohajerani said that the government is doing its utmost to help the investors. However, the spokesperson said that this is a long road which she hoped would be beneficial for the country's people.

Pezeshkian said on December 31 that Iran's Expediency Council, a body responsible for decision-making on overarching issues and policies of the country, will re-examine FATF conventions in a bid to allow Iran to officially accept them.

The comments came hours after Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnasser Hemmati said that the country's top leadership had allowed renewed discussions on FATF conventions in the Expediency Council several years after the body stopped such debates fearing that the conventions may undermine Iran's financial independence. FATF restrictions imposed on Iran's banking system will be removed once the country enacts the Palermo and the Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) conventions.

The Iranian Parliament has approved the Palermo and the CFT, but Iran's Guardian Council, which is responsible for vetting parliament legislation, has refused to ratify them, citing the need for some amendments.

IRGC launches military drills near Natanz nuclear facility

National Desk

The Aerospace Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched a large-scale military exercise in the central province of Isfahan.

The first stage of the exercise, codenamed Eqtedar (Authority) 1403, began on Tuesday on the periphery of the Natanz uranium enrichment facility upon the order of Brigadier General Qader Rahimzadeh, commander of the country's Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base.

During this phase of the military exercise, air defense units of the IRGC Aerospace Force are providing a complete protection of Shahid Ahmadi Roshan nuclear site, also known as Natanz site, against a multitude of aerial threats under critical electronic warfare conditions.

The air defense units managed to intercept and destroy a projectile mirroring the features of a hostile bunker buster dropped from a warplane with the homegrown Dey-9 air defense missile system.

The homegrown air defense system could track, intercept and destroy the bunker buster in less than 15 seconds at a distance of 17 kilometers away from the nuclear site.

The air defense division of the IRGC Aerospace Force employed point-defense tactics to protect the nuclear



site in Natanz by engaging with 30 aerial targets in the exercise.

The military drill came as a commander of Iran's Armed Forces on Sunday announced the beginning of two-month drills by the country's military across the country.

Brigadier General Ali Shadmani said for two months, Iran's sky, lands, and seas will host the Armed Forces' Eghtedar (Authority) Exercises. The drills are part of the ongoing exercises of the Armed Forces and are carried out annually, but this year, some of the drills were postponed in order to maintain and enhance the readiness of the Armed Forces.

Shadmani said on the ground, elite units of the Army's Ground Forces in the west and east of the country, special units of the ground forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)

in the west, southwest, and south of the country, and tens of thousands of voluntary forces will do counter-terrorism practices.

He added that in the sky, the Army's Air Force and Air Defense Force, along with the IRGC Aerospace Force, will practice air defense of important centers in the country using modern equipment and at the sea, the Army's Navy will hold exercises in the northern Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman, with the IRGC Navy focusing on the three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs as well as the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian military forces hold routine exercises according to a detailed schedule in various parts of the country in order to test their weaponry and equipment and evaluate their combat readiness.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran pursuing release of own frozen assets: *Araghchi*

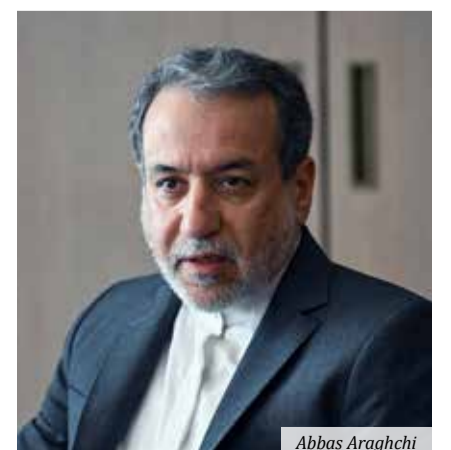
Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that the release of the country's frozen assets is a permanent priority for the Foreign Ministry and relevant institutions.

The top Iranian diplomat noted that some parts of the frozen assets have been released due to ongoing efforts while another portion remains blocked in several countries, IRNA reported.

Araghchi emphasized that administering the country's foreign economic relations under economic pressure requires special measures. Tens of billions of dollars owed

to Iran for oil and other exports have been frozen in bank accounts across the world since 2018, when US President Donald Trump abandoned an international nuclear deal with Iran and reinstated US sanctions. Almost \$2 billion of Iranian assets are frozen in the United States.

In August last year, some assets were released from South Korea and were transferred to accounts held by six Iranian banks in Qatar. Iranian Foreign Ministry continues to work on securing the release of other frozen funds through legal channels.



Abbas Araghchi