

Sanctions removal as Iran's main demand in every negotiation: *FM* spox

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the termination of "unlawful and cruel" sanctions is the fundamental demand of the Islamic Republic in every negotiation. Baqaei was speaking at his weekly press conference on Monday following two rounds of indirect talks between Iran and the United States on the nuclear issue, Press TV reported. "All sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran are unjustifiable, unlawful and cruel. Therefore, we do not distinguish between the sanctions which have been imposed on us under different pretexts and titles," he said. He added that Iran pursues the removal of these sanctions in every negotiation as its fundamental demand just in a way that leads to tangible and completely effective outcomes.

He noted that Iran should be able to carry out its economic, trade and banking activities, stressing the need for necessary guarantees that the previous negative experience would not be repeated any more. Baqaei reiterated that Iran must be assured that its indirect talks with the US would lead to enduring specific outcomes and that the opposite sides would seriously fulfill their commitments. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Steve Witkoff, the US president's special envoy for West Asia affairs, led two rounds of indirect talks about Iran's nuclear program and the termination of US sanctions in the Omani capital of Muscat and the Italian capital, Rome, on April 12 and 19, respectively. The high-level talks mediated by Omani Foreign Minister

Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi. Speaking at the end of the second round of talks on Saturday, Araghchi said Tehran and Washington had reached a "better understanding" on certain principles and goals. Iran and the US agreed to open expert-level technical discussions in Oman on April 23. A third round of high-level indirect negotiations between Araghchi and Witkoff would kick off in Oman on April 26 to evaluate the results of the expert meetings and see how close they will be to an agreement. The Iranian spokesperson hailed Oman's professional role as the host and mediation of the talks between Tehran and Washington. He said Oman had proposed that the second round of the negotiations should be held "in a place other than



Muscat", adding that the three parties agreed on the venue.

He also commended the Italian government for its positive cooperation.

Pontiff passes away at 88

Pezeshkian: Pope Francis will remain in hearts of all awakened consciences and freedom-seekers

International Desk

Pope Francis, the first Latin American leader of the Roman Catholic Church, passed away, the Vatican said on Monday.

He was 88, and had suffered a serious bout of double pneumonia this year, but his death came as a shock after he had been driven around St. Peter's Square in an open-air pope-mobile to greet cheering crowds on Easter Sunday.

"Dear brothers and sisters, it is with profound sadness I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis," Cardinal Kevin Farrell announced on the Vatican's TV channel.

"At 7:35 (0535 GMT) this morning the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the house of the Father."

A spokesman said his body might be moved to St. Peter's Basilica as early as Wednesday morning to allow the faithful to pay their respects. No date has been set for the funeral.

Tributes for Francis poured in from around the world, with many leaders praising his humility and care for the poor.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian offered his condolences over the death of Pope Francis and praised his condemnation of "genocide" by Israel in Gaza.

"With sorrow, I offer my condolences on the passing of Pope Francis, the leader and spiritual guide of the world's Catholics," Pezeshkian said in a statement posted on his official website.

The president of Iran said the pon-



tiff's name and memory would remain "in the hearts of all awakened consciences and freedom-seekers" for his humanitarian stances, including the "condemnation of the genocide committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza."

Earlier on Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and the Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei also offered condolences to all Christians around the world.

Francis had on Sunday made his first prolonged public appearance since being discharged from hospital on March 23 after a 38-day stay for pneumonia.

In an Easter Sunday message read aloud by an aide as the pope looked on from the main balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, the pontiff had reiterated his call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

World leaders paid tribute to the pope, praised his efforts to reform the worldwide church and offered condolences to the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope on March 13, 2013, surprising many Church watchers who had seen the Argentine cleric, known for his concern for the poor, as an outsider.

He sought to project simplicity into the grand role and never took possession of the ornate papal apartments in the Apostolic Palace used by his predecessors, saying he preferred to live in a community setting for his "psychological health."

He initiated changes within the Vatican, emphasizing transparency, accountability and financial reform, and appointed more women to senior posts in its hierarchy. However, Francis was also viewed as a haphazard leader, often blindsiding Vatican officials with his off-the-cuff comments.

He struggled to get a grip on the Church's crisis over sexual abuse by clerics and he inherited a Church torn by infighting in the Vatican bureaucracy, and was elected with a clear mandate to restore order.

Iran FM to visit China today for consultations on nuclear talks

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi will visit China on Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry said, ahead of a third round of nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington due on Saturday in Oman.

The visit to China comes after a trip to Russia last week, where he discussed the latest developments in talks between Tehran and Washington over Iran's nuclear program. After the visit to Russia, Araghchi told state TV that Tehran always closely consults with its friends, Russia and China, over the nuclear issue.

"It is natural that we will consult and brief China over the latest developments in Iran-US indirect talks," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said, adding that Beijing can play a constructive role in this process.

China was a signatory to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).



The landmark accord was also signed by four other permanent UN Security Council members - Britain, France, Russia, and the United States - along with Germany and the European Union.

Those countries were party to the agreement and so "consultations must continue with them," Baqaei said.

A third round of US-Iranian talks, mediated by Oman and involving Araghchi and Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, are due to take place in the capital Muscat on Saturday.

Iranian official warns of continuous inclusion on FATF blacklist

National Desk

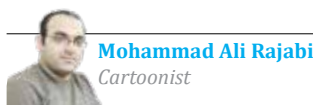
Iranian Deputy Finance Minister Hadi Khani warned of the consequences of the continuous inclusion of the country on the blacklist of the global money laundering watchdog FATF.

He said that removal of Iran from the FATF blacklist would take away the tool of US hostile measures against the Islamic Republic. Khani said that Iran's economic partners - China, the UAE, and Turkey - are set to undergo FATF supervision for their measures vis-à-vis the

economic activities of individuals whose countries are on the FATF blacklist and reside on their soil.

"As a result, we are witnessing an intensification of supervisory measures by our most important trading partners against us, which is an example of the US abusing our inclusion on the blacklist to pressure Iran," he said.

Iran's Expediency Council has begun re-examining the anti-money laundering and terrorism financing conventions adopted by the global financial crime watchdog FATF.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

Deal within reach ...

As is well understood, every negotiation rests on a set of agreed principles and a basic framework. Both parties must get on the same page regarding this structure before they can drill down into the details. This framework forms the very first step toward any potential agreement. From the standpoint of the Islamic Republic, the overarching framework in the ongoing negotiations is that the talks must zero in solely on nuclear matters. Iran seeks recognition from the US of its right to

enrich uranium, as well as the removal of sanctions. Naturally, the opposing side has laid out its own framework, which includes the expectation that Iran will not pursue nuclear weapon capabilities. The assessment of these positions will set the preliminary structure of the negotiations, and discussions will follow through within this agreed scope.

If the talks stick to the issues outlined in this framework, then a deal is indeed possible. The Islamic Republic is prepared to put forward a

process that lays to rest concerns about potential nuclear weapons development. In turn, the US must take steps to roll back the cruel economic sanctions imposed in recent years, including those targeting oil, finance, transport, insurance, and more.

However, should the Americans try to slip in topics beyond the nuclear issue—such as missile-related matters—it is only natural that the Islamic Republic will refuse to engage on anything outside the agreed nuclear parameters.

