

VP: Iran ready to ease Japanese concerns for continuing business

Iran stands ready to address the concerns of Japanese companies willing to continue business with the country, even as the United States presses its allies to get tough on Iran and to stop importing its oil, a top government official said.

"We are ready to negotiate with Japanese companies who are interested in continuing their business in Iran for reaching new solutions in order to ease their concerns," First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri told Kyodo News in an interview on Tuesday.

"The Japanese government and companies have always had their own ways to bypass US pressures and we hope again they use their initiatives to stay as a major oil importer from Iran," he added. Japan is among eight nations that have received six-month waivers from US sanctions on importing Iranian oil, which went into effect on Nov. 4, to give them more time to reduce their imports to zero.

"Anytime he is willing to pay a visit to Iran, Tehran is ready to welcome and host him," he added.

Jahangiri praised Japan's stand in supporting global peace after World War II, but called it to use its power and influence to put an end to "US unilateralism" in the world.

"Japan must stand against US unilateralism, which is threatening independent countries and might go beyond Iran's nuclear issue to encompass other issues around the globe," he said.

Regarding the impact of US sanctions on Iran's oil exports, the vice president said it has "found new customers and sold our oil to them."

While he did not reveal the identity of the "new customers," he said his government has started "serious negotiations" for selling more oil to Russia, China, and other Asian countries, for example.

Jahangiri anticipated that Iran would restore its oil exports to the level of before Nov. 4, even after expiration of the six-month waivers. He called the stated US goal of getting all nations to reduce their imports of Iranian oil to zero "very dangerous," but at the same time "very unlikely."

"I assure the world that if Iran would be deprived of its main source of income, we would not remain silent and will take appropriate measures at the right time."

Iranian, Italian MPs vow to bolster educational cooperation

Iranian and Italian parliamentarians held a meeting in the European country's capital on Wednesday and vowed to broaden educational and academic cooperation between the two countries.

An Iranian parliamentary delegation arrived in Rome on Tuesday to discuss academic cooperation with Italy, Fars News Agency reported.

Head of the Iranian delegation Assadollah Abbasi said that Italy is a major destination for Iranian students and called for promotion of cooperation in this regard.

During the meeting, President of Italy's Commission for Culture, Education and Science of the Chamber of Deputies in the XVIII Legislature Luigi Gallo welcomed cooperation with Iran's education centers, promising to resolve the problems facing Iranian students in Italy.



Zarif: Arms suppliers to ME cannot ask Iran to abandon defensive weapon



National Desk

Iran's foreign minister said countries that are speaking about Iran's defensive power are those that send billions of dollars of arms to the Middle East, which has led to insecurity in the region.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said that those countries that have sent this large volume of weapons to the region cannot ask a "great and independent" country such as Iran to abandon its defensive weapons, IRNA reported.

He underlined that Iran's defensive power is not negotiable, adding that the country will continue its policy in this regard.

"Resolution 2231 of the United Nations Security Council has not put limitations on Iran's missile program," Zarif told reporters on the sidelines of the cabinet meeting in Tehran.

On December 4, the UN Security Council held a meeting behind closed doors, called by the United States, France, and the UK to discuss Iran's

latest alleged missile test, which they claimed may have been in violation of UN Resolution 2231. The session ended with no statement.

The Iranian foreign minister said that the US is making such "baseless" claims because it wants to cover up its own violations of the UNSC resolution after withdrawing from the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement.

Iran's mission to the UN in a statement released on Tuesday said all ballistic missile-related activities of the Islamic Republic are in full conformity with the relevant provisions of UN Resolution 2231, which endorses the nuclear deal.

The mission described the US as the gross violator of the resolution, emphasizing that "portraying Iran's ballistic missile program as inconsistent with Resolution 2231, or as a regional threat, is a deceptive and hostile policy of the US."

It further noted that the US unlawfully put the nuclear agreement, and is in absolute violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

UK ambassador to Tehran supports Yemen peace talks in Stockholm

Britain's Ambassador to Iran Rob Macaire voiced support for the upcoming round of UN-initiated talks in Sweden aimed at ending the war on Yemen, stressing that there is no military solution to the conflict in the Arab country.

In a statement on Wednesday, Macaire hailed the Stockholm talks as an opportunity for the warring parties to make progress towards ending the conflict through dialogue and negotiations, Tasnim News Agency reported.

"As we have consistently made clear, there can be no military solution to the conflict. A political settlement is the only

way to bring long-term stability, security and lasting peace to Yemen," the statement said.

The British ambassador said in the statement that the humanitarian crisis and the suffering of Yemeni civilians is deeply concerning for the UK. The halt in fighting in Hodeida is a positive step in protecting civilians and building confidence among both sides.

"We must do all we can to support the parties in de-escalating and reducing tensions and creating a conducive environment for the talks," he added.

Macaire pointed to the important role



the regional countries have to play in supporting these talks.

"We welcome international support for UN special envoy of the secretary general

for Yemen, Martin Griffiths. We will continue to encourage both sides of the conflict to engage constructively in the Stockholm talks, to bring this conflict to an end. We urge all those with influence in the region to do the same," he said.

Yemen is in the grip of a humanitarian disaster with millions facing starvation and disease after years of war on the country.

The Saudi-led war in Yemen started in March 2015 as an attempt to crush the Houthi movement and reinstall former president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi.

Trade official: India to pay Iran entirely in rupees

The deal was signed between Iran and P5+1 in July 2015.

India eventually managed to get exemptions from the US sanctions on Iran's oil exports.

This is while major efforts are underway by the two countries' officials to facilitate financial transactions between the two countries. This comes as the two sides' trade and private sectors have understood the situation very well, devised ways to continue trade cooperation with each other, and are optimistic about seeing better days.

In an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Parham Rezaei, the deputy-president of Indo-Iran Chamber of Commerce and Industry expounded on the status quo of trade transactions between the two states and latest developments in this field following the reimposition of US sanctions.

IRAN DAILY: Could you please tell us the latest on current Iran-India trade ties and the volume of trade?

PARHAM REZAEI: The value of non-oil exports from Iran to India in the last year of the Iranian calendar (starting March 2017) stood at \$1.7 billion. This is while exports reached \$611 million during the first half of the current year. Iran's import of non-oil goods from India reached \$1.5 billion last year, with imports reaching \$538 million for the first six months of this year. Iran's annual oil exports to India, however, have been around \$11 billion. These figures point to the positive balance of trade for Iran.

The two sides meet each other's needs for a variety of goods. In other words, there is no competition in this regard. The main goods imported from India are rice, tea, and spices. A part of the imports are also industrial machinery, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

This year, however, we are witnessing a hiatus of exports to India which is due to our trade infrastructures undergoing changes. Our banking system is now more consistent with international principles. All these factors have led to some changes in

the level of trade between the two sides. The Foreign Exchange Integrated System, NIMA, was inaugurated. Prior to that, some of our traders used foreign exchange houses to do their business and register orders. These transactions were usually done without any foreign currency transferred. But now it is not this way.

The transfer of currencies must be done through the banking system and the currency needed must be procured through the Central Bank and NIMA. Our exporters must provide their currencies through the NIMA system.

The US wanted to cut Iran's oil exports to zero when it imposed its second batch of sanctions on November 4 and exerted pressure on India to stop buying Iranian oil. Why didn't this plan work?

Indian refineries are very dependent on Iranian oil. It is not possible for India to cut buying Iranian oil to zero because it has to revamp many of its refineries and this would take time.

So India obtained waivers so that in case the sanctions stay in place it can gradually decrease buying Iranian oil. But India has no problems buying Iranian oil for now.

How are Iran-India financial and oil transactions conducted?

Before the reimposition of sanctions we received the money in rupees and euros. However, it is very likely that from now on all our transactions will be in rupees. Talks are underway between the two sides in this regard. Our exports to India will not be hindered if all transactions are conducted in rupees. Currently, many countries are reaching agreements to use national currencies for their oil and non-oil trade with Iran.

What role does India's UCO Bank play in facilitating transactions between the two countries during the period when Iran is under (US) sanctions?

Prior to the signing of the JCPOA, when

Iran was under international sanctions, UCO Bank began playing a role in financial transactions between the two states by arranging for payments between them. When Iranian businessmen wanted to import goods from India, they would deposit a sum of money in an account at the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) as the payment for the imports and the same amount of money was paid to the exporter or seller in India in other currencies. The same trend is being followed at present.

In addition, in the next few months, Iran's Bank Pasargad will obtain the permit for conducting activities in India and during the first six months of 2019 will open a branch in Mumbai to officially carry out a part of financial transactions between the two states. This will help resolve a portion of the problems currently besetting Iranian businessmen in India.

Nevertheless, Bank Pasargad will do its job in India in concord with the policies developed by the South Asian country. Although the Iranian bank will not be able to operate in accord with the CBI's policies, it will definitely manage to be of great contribution to the financial transactions between the two countries, particularly those pertaining to Iranian exporters of techno-engineering services who need banking guarantees to do business outside Iran.

To what extent will Iran's membership in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on money laundering help facilitate trade between the two countries?

Since a few years ago, most of the general outlines of the parliamentary bills on Iran's membership in the FATF have been approved. Although there are differences over one or two paragraphs, it is highly unlikely that the bills on Iran joining the intergovernmental organization would be rejected.

Nevertheless, to be able to enter the global markets, we have to promote transparency in our transactions. We will definitely require FATF's membership to be able to have trade ties with other countries.

Are Indians interested in investing in Iranian projects? What measures have been taken to this end?

Within a few weeks, the Indian operator appointed for the development project of Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, in south-eastern Iran, will begin its operations. The development of the port has been handed over to the Indian operator under a 10-year BOT (build-operate-transfer) contract. The Indian operator has not thus far initiated the project due to a number of problems pertaining to banking permits and administrative procedures. However, now that these problems have been solved, it will officially begin its activities in the port within a few weeks.

To this end, nine ships carrying wheat shipments from India to Afghanistan moored at Chabahar Port and unloaded the cargo.

The cargoes were, hence, sent to Afghanistan via road; thus the project has been initiated and, moreover, has produced favorable results.

In the year to March 2017, an agreement was signed among Iran, India and Afghanistan which was approved by the Iranian Parliament a year later. As per this agreement, a joint committee will be set up by the three countries during the next few months to expand trilateral transactions.

Chabahar Free Zone can be a very good trade hub for Afghanistan in terms of shipping.

I maintain that very good trade transactions can be conducted through Chabahar. The port has a bright future. At present, a large number of Indians are expressing interest in investing in Chabahar's development projects as the port is a free zone and they can either have 100 percent ownership, or joint ownership with Iran, in producing various goods there.

Chabahar is a special strategic zone which provides the opportunity to sell goods produced there, both to mainland Iran, or through the country to Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States while bearing very low costs.