


DUBAI (Dispatches) -- Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Baqeri Kani met with senior Emirati officials on Wednesday during a visit to the United Arab Emirates, state news agency WAM reported, in a rare visit that comes as Abu Dhabi moves to reduce tensions with rival Tehran. WAM said Baqeri Kani, who is Iran's deputy foreign minister, met with the diplomatic adviser to the UAE president, Anwar Gargash, and Emirati minister of state for foreign affairs Khalifa Shaheen Almarar. The discussions stressed the importance of strengthening relations "on the basis of good neighborliness and mutual respect", working for greater regional stability and prosperity and developing bilateral economic and commercial ties, WAM said. Gargash earlier this month said that the UAE was taking steps to de-escalate tensions with Iran.

TEHRAN -- Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Wednesday dismissed U.S. officials' remarks about "mutual return" to the 2015 nuclear deal, noting that Tehran, unlike Washington, has never left the JCPOA. "The U.S. still manufactures fake news," Khatibzadeh tweeted. "Orchestrating photo op to sell fake narrative about need for 'mutual return to JCPOA' doesn't change reality that unlike the U.S., Iran never left the deal." He also said, "Spin won't get the U.S. anywhere. Wise decisions—like ending max failure—just may."

Basij Marks 42nd Birthday



Moscow: U.S. to Draw More Division Lines at Summit for Democracy



Iran U-15 Football Team Wins CAFA Championship



Apple Files Lawsuit Against NSO Over Spyware



Court Orders Bahrain to Pay Damages to Iran

TEHRAN -- Bahrain has been ordered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague to pay over 200 million euros in damages plus costs to two Iranian banks for the unlawful expropriation of their banking venture in Manama in an act of "political retribution".

Iran's largest lenders Bank Melli and Bank Saderat had sued the tiny Persian Gulf country before the international arbitration court in the Netherlands for confiscating nearly \$1.3 billion worth of Iranian funds.

The funds belonged to Future Bank established as a joint venture between Bahrain's Ahli United Bank and the two Iranian lenders in 2004 when Bahraini leaders were seeking to mend strained relations with their vastly larger neighbor to the north.

In January 2016, however, Bahrain's central bank said it was taking steps to close down Future Bank after Manama cut diplomatic ties with Tehran, following its neighbor Saudi Arabia in severing relations with the Islamic Republic.

In July this year, Bahrain's top court upheld a money-laundering verdict against Future Bank, the Central Bank of Iran and other Iranian banks. The ruling, issued in April 2018, included jail terms of up to 10 years for Future Bank officials and confiscation of funds.

Iranian officials rejected the allegations, asserting that Future Bank was a victim of an international political conflict, instigated by Persian Gulf neighbors and other countries seeking to isolate Iran.

In a written summation to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, the kingdom had asserted that "Bahrain has never faced violations of this magnitude".

The international tribunal, however, decided Monday that the Iranian institutions had been the target of "politi-

cal retribution" and ordered Bahrain to pay over 200 million euros in damages plus costs to the banks, London-based Global Arbitration Review, a magazine dedicated to commercial arbitration, reported.

Iran's former central bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati confirmed the news on Wednesday, hailing it as a victory for the country.

"A legal victory: With the many years of effort we have had, an international arbitration tribunal has condemned the Bahraini government, which had expropriated Bank Melli and Bank Saderat of their venture in Future Bank of Bahrain with a political motivation and violation of international laws, to paying more than 200 million euros in damages and arbitration costs," he tweeted.

The accusations against Iran emerged from an intensive investigation that began after Bahraini regulators formally closed Future Bank in 2015. The closure prompted Future Bank's two Iranian shareholders to file a complaint in The Hague accusing Bahrain of improperly shutting down the bank and demanding the return of frozen assets.

Bahrain's case was supported by U.S. officials who said the "findings" were troubling at a time when Future Bank was under intense scrutiny by American and Bahraini government agencies.

As part of its draconian sanctions regime, the U.S. has accused Bank Melli and Bank Saderat of helping finance Iran's nuclear program and what it says is a terrorism network, in reference to resistance groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah.

The U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain where its majority-Shia population has close cultural and religious ties to Iran, but the kingdom's ruling family has closely aligned itself with Saudi Arabia.

Since 2011, the Bahraini regime

Worrying Behavior Ahead of Vienna Talks



Police cars are seen near the entrance of the Grand Hotel in Vienna on April 6, 2021, where diplomats of the EU, China, Russia and Iran would hold talks.

TEHRAN -- Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdollahian says Washington's "contradictory behavior" is a major obstacle to the Vienna talks this month aimed at putting the accord back on track.

Iran, he told his Swiss counterpart Ignazio Cassis over phone, is "ready and serious to reach a good and immediate agreement" in the talks that would

start in Vienna on November 29, "but at the same time it is distrustful of U.S. behavior".

"On the one hand, the U.S. pretends to be interested in returning to the JCPOA, but on the other, it has imposed sanctions on Iranian individuals and companies in two stages over the past few weeks. America's contradictory behavior is one of

the main obstacles to the negotiations," he added, referring to nuclear deal by the acronym of its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The top Iranian diplomat also emphasized that the Islamic Republic would judge the U.S. based on its behavior.

Envoys from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries — Britain,

France, Russia, and China plus Germany — are expected to hold the seventh round of discussions.

U.S. special envoy Rob Malley said Tuesday the United States would not "sit idly" on Iran if it dragged its feet on returning to a nuclear accord in talks resuming next week.

"If they start getting too close, too close for comfort, then of course we will not be prepared to sit idly," he said.

Malley said, "We're prepared to get back into the deal and to lift all of the sanctions that are inconsistent with the deal. So if Iran wants to get back into the deal, it has a way to do that."

"If it doesn't want to get back into the deal, if it continues to do what it appears to be doing now, which is to drag its feet at the nuclear diplomatic table and accelerate its pace when it comes to its nuclear program, if that's the path it chooses, we'll have to respond accordingly."

Iran insists the U.S., as the party which abandoned the nuclear deal, has to take the first step to

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COVID-19 Cases Break Records in Europe

BRUSSELS/PRAQUE (Reuters) -- Coronavirus infections broke records in parts of Europe on Wednesday, with the continent once again the epicenter of a pandemic that has prompted new curbs on movement and made health experts think again about booster vaccination shots.

Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Hungary all reported new highs in daily infections as winter grips Europe and people gather indoors in the run-up to Christmas, providing a perfect breeding ground for COVID-19.

The disease has swept the world in the two years since it was first identified in central China, infecting more than 258 million people and killing 5.4 million.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the EU public health agency, recommended vaccine

boosters for all adults, with priority for those over 40, in a major shift from its previous guidance which suggested the extra doses should be considered for older frail people and those with weakened immune systems.

Many EU countries have already begun giving booster doses to their populations but are using different criteria to make priorities and different intervals between the first shots and boosters.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, acknowledging that Europe was again at the epicenter of the pandemic, warned against a "false sense of security" over the protection offered by vaccines.

"No country is out of the woods," he told reporters, adding that he hoped a consensus can be found at a World Trade Organization ministerial meet-

ing next week for an IP waiver for pandemic vaccines, already supported by more than 100 countries.

Sweden will begin gradually rolling out boosters to all adults, government and health officials said. Booster shots of mRNA vaccine have been offered to people aged 65 or above, with an eye to eventually extending the shots to other groups.

"We are faced with an uncertain winter," Health Minister Lena Hallengren told a news conference. "You can contribute by staying home if you're sick or by getting vaccinated if you haven't already, and taking your booster when you're offered it."

Slovakia reported its highest daily rise in cases on Wednesday when the government approved a two-week lockdown, broadcaster TA3 and other media reported, citing Economy

Minister Richard Sulik, to quell the world's fastest surge in infections.

Neighboring Austria has already locked down its population this week for at least 10 days, becoming the first to reimpose such restrictions. It will also require the whole population to be vaccinated from Feb. 1, infuriating many in a country where skepticism about state mandates affecting individual freedoms runs high.

The Czech Republic reported its highest daily rise in infections, with cases surpassing 25,000 for the first time and putting further strain on hospitals. The government is looking to institute mandatory vaccines for people over 60 and some professions, like healthcare workers.

The Netherlands recorded more than 23,700 coronavirus

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