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IAEA seeks 'common ground' with Iran

Tehran is demanding all sanctions imposed or reimposed on it be lifted

TEHRAN: The UN nuclear watchdog said yesterday it was seeking "common ground" with Iran days after reporting that the Islamic republic had sharply increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi made the remarks following talks with officials in Tehran ahead of negotiations next week aimed at salvaging the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

His visit comes after the IAEA said Iran had boosted its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to many times in excess of the limit laid down in the landmark accord. "Our work has been intense since the morning," Grossi said at a joint news conference in Tehran with Mohammad Eslami, the chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

"We are continuing at this point the negotiations with a view to find a common ground," he said. "There are other issues that we are working on and... it is very important to put this into the perspective of the peaceful nuclear programme of Iran."

"We are multiplying our efforts with a view to conclude our exchanges today." In a brief statement, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said "establishing a clear framework for cooperation between the IAEA and the agency is one of the main topics of discussion".

The talks come ahead of the scheduled resumption on Monday of negotiations between Tehran and world powers aimed at saving the 2015 deal that gave Iran sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear programme. On November 12, Grossi had described as "astonishing" his lack of contact with the new Iranian government of ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi.

Days later, Tehran responded by announcing it had invited the watchdog chief to visit. There was no mention of Grossi's visit in Iran's ultraconservative newspapers yesterday.

Demand to lift sanctions

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh expressed hopes on Monday that his visit would be "constructive". "We have always advised the IAEA to stay on the path of technical cooperation, and to not let certain countries pursue their political orientations on behalf of the IAEA," he said.

Iran began easing its commitments under the deal in 2019, a year after then president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the accord and began imposing crippling sanctions. Trump's successor Joe Biden wants to bring Washington back into the agreement, which is known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Tehran is demanding all sanctions imposed or reimposed on it by the US since 2017 be lifted. The IAEA said last Wednesday in a report seen by AFP that Iran had boosted its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to 2,489.7 kilograms. The total amount now includes 113.8 kg enriched to 20 percent, up from 84.3 kg in September, and 17.7 kg enriched up to 60 percent, up from 10 kg, it said.

The United States warned later that Iran was reaching the point of no return for reviving the nuclear deal. "The time will come if Iran continues at this pace with the advancements they've made, (it) will make it impossible even if we were going to go back to the JCPOA to recapture the benefits,"



TEHRAN: A handout picture provided by Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) shows the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi (C-R) and the Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Mohammad Eslami (C-L) giving a press conference in the capital Tehran. —AFP

the US envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, said on Friday. The November 29 talks will be held in Vienna, where the IAEA is based. The remaining parties to the deal—Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia—will join the talks while the United States will participate indirectly. —AFP

Broken dreams of desperate migrants fleeing for Saudi

HARGEISA, Somalia: The people smugglers promised Fentahun Derebe passage to Saudi Arabia, where the young Ethiopian could make more money than he had ever dreamed of, then return home to start a business.

Instead, after he reached the coast of Somalia, the smugglers demanded more money and dumped the 19-year-old when he couldn't pay up. Broke and alone, Fentahun had no option but to walk back the way he came — a journey many hundreds of kilometres through the desert.

"People told me I would get a good job, and change my life. They told me it would be easy. But it didn't turn out like that at all," the soft-spoken teenager told AFP in Hargeisa, a transit hub along the smuggling route where many migrants wind up stranded. As attempts to cross the Mediterranean have intensified, and a migrant crisis has erupted on the EU border, another of the world's busiest smuggling routes is quietly swinging back into gear away from the spotlight.

Fentahun is among thousands of migrants trying to leave Africa — but his destination isn't Europe, but the Arabian Peninsula. This so-called "Eastern Route" is perilous and sometimes fatal, with migrants crossing scorching desert, rough seas and active war zones in search of economic opportunity. The journey takes migrants — mainly Ethiopians, but also some Somalis — from the Horn of Africa across the Gulf of Aden to war-torn Yemen.

From there they traverse vast stretches of hostile territory in the hope of reaching Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and finding work.

Eastern promise

Most don't make it. Tens of thousands of migrants are stuck in Yemen, unable to pay for a return trip, held hostage by smugglers or detained by local authorities.

Some meet tragic and grisly ends along the way. In March, a fire in an overcrowded detention facility in Yemen's capital killed dozens of



HARGEISA, Somalia: Ethiopian migrants sit behind several items during an assistance packages distribution for migrants at an International Organization for Migration (IOM) center in the city of Hargeisa, Somaliland. —AFP

migrants. That same month, 20 drowned when smugglers tossed people overboard en route to Yemen, fearing their vessel was overloaded.

But many never leave Africa at all, swindled long before even setting sail.

"They told me it would cost \$500 to get on the boat. I didn't even have \$100. I was shocked," said Fentahun, who left Gondar in northern Ethiopia when he had barely finished high school. The Eastern Route offers two gateways to Yemen: One via Obock in Djibouti, but more often from Bosaso in northern Somalia. Djibouti patrols its coastline and tracks migrants but governance is weaker in Somalia, in part making the Bosaso option more popular.

But it is the longer and more dangerous of the two, passing through isolated, lawless and arid parts of Somalia, and daytime temperatures reach excruciating highs.

On the month-long walk between Bosaso and Hargeisa, Fentahun said he passed many migrants in dire straits. Some had been robbed or physically abused, and all were desperately short on food and water. "I was afraid... It wasn't safe along the way," he said. Farhan Omer, a staffer at an IOM support centre in Hargeisa, said many on the road were unaccompanied teenagers: "Some have no shoes," he said.

programme claimed palace insiders dripped the media with negative stories about the initially popular Harry and Meghan, as a power battle played out behind the palace walls.

Buckingham Palace, Clarence House and Kensington Palace—respectively representing Queen Elizabeth II, her son Prince Charles and grandson William—were further angered that the BBC had refused to show them the documentary before it was broadcast, according to reports. "A free, responsible and open press is of vital importance to a healthy democracy," said the joint statement by the three royal households, which was included in the programme.

"However, too often it is overblown and unfounded claims from unnamed sources that are presented as facts and it is disappointing when anyone, including the BBC, gives them credibility." The programme also discussed Meghan's alleged bullying of palace staff, interviewing a lawyer for the former "Suits" star who

denied the claims.

Buckingham Palace is investigating the allegations internally. Meghan's lawyer appeared on the programme to deny the claims. Citing media intrusion, Harry and Meghan quit royal life last year and now live in the United States, where they have signed a series of lucrative deals and spoken out on a range of issues, including disinformation.

They have also openly criticised Britain's most famous family, including accusing an unnamed senior member of racism. This month, Meghan apologised to a UK court after admitting to being involved in a favourable biography of her short tenure as a frontline royal, having previously denied it.

The apology came as part of an appeal by Associated Newspapers—whose titles include the Daily Mail—against a High Court ruling that it breached the Duchess of Sussex's privacy, by publishing parts of a letter she had written to her estranged father. —AFP

South Korean ex-dictator Chun Doo-hwan dies

SEOUL: South Korean ex-dictator Chun Doo-hwan, who brutally crushed opponents until mass demonstrations forced him out, died yesterday, his longtime aide announced. The former president died at his home in Seoul. Min Jeong-ki told reporters outside the Chun residence. He was 90.

He oversaw the country's economic rise and secured the 1988 Olympics for Seoul. He was the first South Korean president to hand over power peacefully. A general in the South Korean military, Chun took power in a coup after the 1979 assassination of strongman Park Chung-hee.

He was president from 1980 to 1988, ruling with an iron fist and brutally crushing his opponents. Chun remains among South Korea's most reviled figures. He is known as the "Butcher of Gwangju" for ordering his troops to put down an uprising against his rule in the southwestern city.

In 1996, he was convicted of treason and condemned to death, in part over what happened at Gwangju, but his execution was commuted on appeal and he was released following a presidential pardon. The official toll for the dead or missing at Gwangju is around 200 people, but activists say it may have been three times as high.

Chun and far-right politicians in South Korea dismissed it as a "riot". The former dictator denied any direct involvement in the suppression of the uprising. After his death, the South Korean president's office expressed regret that there was "no sincere apology" from Chun. —AFP

UK royals attack 'overblown' BBC documentary

LONDON: Britain's leading royals have united in a rare joint statement to criticise the BBC over a documentary that claimed a behind-the-scenes briefing war before Prince Harry and his wife Meghan quit frontline duties. "The Princes and the Press" dwell on how Harry and his elder brother William handled the press as they rose to adult prominence in the royal family following the death of their mother Diana in 1997.

The first of two episodes, which aired Monday night, suggested that Harry in particular had a hostile attitude to the media, which only worsened with critical coverage of Meghan Markle after he started dating the US actress in 2016. The

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Mr Goldy Chadha & Family

Key Account Manager
on the sad demise of his father



Gurcharan Singh Chadha

who passed away in Dubai
on November 23, 2021

May his soul Rest in Peace