

IRAN, IAEA REACH DEAL ON INSPECTIONS

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Back to talks: Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, left, with the IAEA chief Rafael Grossi, right, in Tehran. AFPSTR

The UN nuclear watchdog chief announced on Sunday a “temporary solution” to allow Iranian facility inspections to continue after days of talks with officials, giving some much-needed breathing space for diplomatic negotiations.

However, Rafael Grossi admitted that under the new three-month arrangement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would not have the same level of access after a law comes into force on Tuesday limiting some inspections.

Mr. Grossi’s visit to Iran came amid stepped-up efforts between U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration, European powers and Tehran to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal that has been on the brink of collapse since former U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from it and went on to impose sanctions on the nation.

In December, Iran’s conservative-dominated Parliament passed the law demanding a suspension of some inspections if the U.S. failed to lift sanctions by this Sunday.

Mr. Grossi said that under the new “temporary technical understanding... there is less access, let’s face it”.

“But still we were able to retain the necessary degree of monitoring and verification work,” he added.

“What we agreed is something that is viable — it is useful to bridge this gap that we are having now, it salvages the situation now,” Mr. Grossi told reporters after landing back in Vienna, after a meeting with Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran on Sunday.

They confirmed that Iran will continue to allow access to UN inspectors to its declared nuclear sites.

No real-time access

But Iran will temporarily suspend so-called “voluntary transparency measures” — notably inspections of non-nuclear sites, including military sites suspected of nuclear-related activity.

Tehran will also deny the IAEA real-time access to footage from surveillance cameras installed at some sites and, if sanctions are not lifted within three months, delete it, Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization has said.

Mr. Zarif had signalled the Islamic republic wanted to avoid an “impasse” over inspections, but also warned it could further step away from its commitments if Washington does not lift sanctions.

Mr. Grossi had said earlier his hope in visiting Tehran was “to stabilise a situation which was very unstable”.

“I think this technical understanding does it so that other political discussions at other levels can take place, and most importantly we can avoid a situation in which we would have been, in practical terms, flying blind,” he added.

Iran hails agreement

Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi acknowledged on Saturday that his country’s inspection capability would be “reduced by about 20-30%” when Tuesday’s law came into effect.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry on Monday hailed the outcome, saying it complied with Parliament’s demands and “resulted in a very significant diplomatic achievement and a very significant technical achievement”.

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