

Beat: Business

Iran says no plans to upgrade UK ties to ambassador level

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USPA News - The Iranian government has no plans to upgrade its diplomatic relationship with the United Kingdom to the ambassador level, despite Britain's announcement that it will soon reopen its embassy in Tehran, an Iranian official said on Wednesday. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs, Majid Takht-e-Ravanchi, stated at the sidelines of trilateral meetings with the European Union (EU) and the United States that "the upgrading of Iran-UK ties to the ambassador level has not been decided yet," Iran's Press TV reported.

Iran reopened its embassy in London in February with a non-resident chargé d'affaires, followed by Britain's announcement on Tuesday that it will soon reopen its embassy in Iran's capital. But "changing non-resident chargé d'affaires to resident ones and then to ambassadors" depends on both sides, and changing the bilateral relations to the ambassador level is not being discussed at this time, Takht-e-Ravanchi said. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said Tuesday that the government was working to reopen its embassy in Tehran. The primary concern as to whether to reopen the embassy in Tehran was the "assurance that our staff would be safe and secure, and confidence that they would be able to carry out their functions without hindrance," he said. "Iran is an important country in a volatile region, and maintaining embassies around the world, even under difficult conditions, is a central pillar of the UK's global diplomatic approach," Hague explained in a written statement to ministers on Tuesday, more than 2.5 years after Britain closed its embassy in Tehran. The foreign secretary said there was a variety of "practical issues" that needed to be attended to before getting started, but "it is our intention to reopen the embassy in Tehran with a small initial presence as soon as these practical arrangements have been made," he said. A possible date for the re-opening of the embassy is not yet known. Diplomatic relations between Iran and Britain reached a new low in November 2011 when hundreds of Iranian protesters stormed the British embassy and another British diplomatic compound in Tehran. Britain claimed the attack could not have happened without consent from Iranian authorities, and in response closed the embassy. Hague also ordered the closure of the Iranian Embassy in London and expelled all its diplomats, but Iran's relationship with the West has improved since last year's election of President Hassan Rouhani. In the aftermath of the embassy closures in 2011, the Iranian government added the "UK in Iran" website of Britain's foreign ministry to its list of censored websites, provoking further outrage. Britain's media regulator Ofcom then revoked the license of Press TV, followed by Iran's blocking of the UK government's "UK for Iranians" website in March 2012.

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