

Iran nuclear talks paused after Russian demands

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VIENNA: The EU said Friday that the talks it is chairing on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord must be paused, days after fresh demands from Russia complicated negotiations.

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted that the pause was "due to external factors," despite the fact that "a final text is essentially ready and on the table."

The current round of negotiations started in late November between Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran and Russia, with the US taking part indirectly. They had reached most of the way toward their aim – the revival of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which began unraveling when former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018.

However, last week Russia said it was demanding guarantees that the Western sanctions imposed on its economy following its invasion of Ukraine would not affect its trade with Iran.

As with the original JCPOA in 2015, Moscow had been expected to play a role in the implementation of any fresh deal, for example by receiving shipments of enriched uranium from Iran.

After he withdrew from the JCPOA, Trump went on to reimpose swingeing sanctions on the Iranian economy, including on its vital oil sector.

That prompted Iran to start disregarding the curbs laid down in the deal on its nuclear activity, including its stockpile of enriched uranium – now at more than 15 times its limit in the deal.

The JCPOA's aim was to ensure Iran would not be able to develop a nuclear weapon, which it has always denied wanting to do.

"Russia's gambit may be to delay the revival of the deal in order to avoid a flood of Iranian oil on the market" and the concomitant fall in prices, French academic and Iran specialist Clement Therme said.

"In keeping prices high, the Kremlin can use energy as a weapon against the West," he added.

As for Iran itself, "the Islamic Republic isn't in a position to counter the Russian strategy," he explained.

"Moscow is making use of Iran's weakness."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the pause in talks "could be a momentum for resolving any remaining issue."

"No external factor will affect our joint will to go forward for a collective agreement," he said in a tweet.

Russia's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, told reporters outside the hotel where the talks have been taking place that he rejected "attempts to put all the blame on the Russian Federation."

"The conclusion of the deal does not depend on Russia only," he said, saying

that other parties to the talks “need additional time.” He added that Russia was in favor of the “earliest conclusion” of the talks. Borrell said on Friday that he would “continue to be in touch with all #JCPOA participants and the US to overcome the current situation and to close the agreement.” He gave no further details on when the talks might resume.



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EU foreign policy chief says ‘pause’ needed in Iran talks
White House: Iran nuclear deal “close,” end of negotiations challenging

[Lebanese prosecutor bans five bank board chiefs from travel](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2022-03-10 21:15

BEIRUT: A Lebanese prosecutor on Thursday issued travel bans against the heads of the boards of five Lebanese banks as a precautionary measure as she investigates transactions by their banks, the prosecutor told Reuters. Judge Ghada Aoun issued the bans against Salim Sfeir of Bank of Beirut, Samir Hanna of Bank Audi, Antoun Sehnaoui of SGBL, Saad Azhari of Blom Bank, and Raya Hassan of Bankmed.

She has not charged any of them with a crime.

When contacted, Hassan told Reuters she was “speechless” and noted she had joined the bank after the transactions took place.

Azhari did not immediately respond to a request for comment, neither did officials from Bank Audi, SGBL and Bank of Beirut.



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[Ghada Aoun](#)

Lebanese bank closes over 30 British-held accounts after UK ruling-
depositors' groupUK court orders Lebanese banks to pay \$4m to saver

Two dead as UN, AU warn of 'grave danger' in Sudan

Author:

AFP

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1646933413685223000

Thu, 2022-03-10 20:34

KHARTOUM: Two protesters were shot dead during protests in Sudan on Thursday, as UN and African Union officials warned that the country was in "grave danger."

Hundreds took to the streets across Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, witnesses said.

Security forces shot dead one protester in Omdurman and another in Khartoum, pro-democracy doctors said.

At least 87 people have been killed and hundreds wounded during more than four months of protests demanding civilian rule and justice for those killed in previous demonstrations, according to medics.

"All indicators available to us at the UN and AU show that the country is in grave danger," said African Union envoy Mohamed Lebatt at a joint news conference in Khartoum with UN special representative Volker Perthes.

"We are deeply concerned about the state of the country," he said, calling for a resumption of the transition to full civilian rule.

The AU has suspended Sudan's membership since army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan led a coup in October.

The military takeover derailed a painstakingly negotiated transition between civilians and military leaders following the April 2019 ouster of dictator Omar Al-Bashir following massive street protests.

It triggered international condemnation and regular mass anti-coup protests. Hundreds of political figures and pro-democracy activists have been rounded up in the broadening crackdown.

On Thursday, Lebatt urged Sudan's key civilian factions to iron out their differences and seek a consensus.

"If they remain split, they will throw the country's future in the hands of the military institution," he said.



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Sudan's economy tumbles in post-coup deadlock Mothers and fathers protest to support Sudan's anti-coup youth

[Rival Libyan premier says he plans to be in Tripoli in days](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY and AHMED YOUNIS | AP

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Thu, 2022-03-10 19:14

TOBRUK, Libya: A rival Libyan prime minister says he plans to be in the country's capital and seat his government there in a matter of days – even

though a parallel administration opposing his is currently located in Tripoli.

Fathi Bashagha expressed his belief that the war-torn country could be unified without more fighting and that his government will focus on holding elections soon, the only way out of Libya's decade-old conflict.

However, his statement is likely to add to fears that Libya's two rival administrations are heading into a deeper confrontation and that the divisions signal a return to civil strife after more than a year of relative calm. On Thursday, the United Nations and the United States urged restraint and expressed concern over reports of armed groups deploying in and around Tripoli.

"The sole political solution in Libya is to hold presidential and parliamentary elections," Bashagha said in an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday in the eastern city of Tobruk.

A former air force pilot and businessman, Bashagha was named prime minister last month by the House of Representatives, which has been based in Tobruk. The lawmakers selected Bashagha to replace embattled Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, who is based in Tripoli, claiming Dbeibah's mandate had expired after Libya failed to hold its first presidential elections in December.

The failure to hold the vote, which was scheduled for December 2021 under a UN-led reconciliation effort, was a major blow to concerted international efforts to bring peace to the oil-rich North African nation. Bashagha's appointment increased tensions and raised the possibility of renewed fighting in a country largely ruled by lawless militias and armed groups with conflicting interests.

Libya has been wrecked by chaos since a NATO-backed uprising toppled then killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. For years, it has been split between rival administrations in the east and the west, each supported by an array of militias and foreign governments.

Dbeibah has refused to step down and insists he will hand over power only to an elected government. He has sought to rally the international community by proposing a roadmap for parliamentary elections in June.

Appointed himself by a UN-led process in March of 2021, Dbeibah has called the push to replace his government "reckless" and a "farce" orchestrated by the political class hanging on to power, saying it could lead to more war. He mobilized allied militias in the capital and has closed its airspace to domestic flights in an apparent move to prevent Bashagha and his government from landing there.

Bashagha ruled out the possibility of a return to violence, saying that efforts were ongoing to find a peaceful settlement to the stalemate and allow his government to work from the capital. He did not elaborate on why he expects to be in Tripoli soon.

"There will be no disputes, no civil wars. This situation (infighting) will not return again," Bashagha said. "We will be in Tripoli in the coming two or three days."

Both prime ministers hail from the western city of Misrata, which played a major role in the Qaddafi's overthrow and numerous bouts of civil fighting over the past decade, most recently in repelling a 2019 offensive on Tripoli by forces of east-based commander Khalifa Haftar.

The offensive failed after 14 months and an internationally brokered October

2020 cease-fire has kept a relative peace since. But long-running mistrust between eastern and western Libya remains.

Bashagha, who is also a former interior minister, has positioned himself as one of the most powerful figures in western Libya. He cultivated ties with Turkey, France and the United States, but also with Egypt and Russia – his nominal rivals during Haftar's campaign to capture Tripoli.

In recent months, he has grown an alliance with Haftar, something Bashagha has defended, saying that establishing ties with the powerful, but polarizing commander will help unify the country and spare it from sliding once again into war.

"For the first time, there is a true rapprochement between the east and west," he told the AP. "This is a good step."

Holding elections in Libya still faces many deep-rooted and unresolved challenges, including controversial candidates and disputed laws governing elections, as well as deep mistrust between rival factions.

Meanwhile, at least three ministers resigned Thursday from Dbeibah's Cabinet, citing their respect for the east-based parliament's appointment of Bashagha. In videos on social media, the ministers of social services, migration and human rights said they were ready to hand over their portfolios in order to spare Libyans further divisions.



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UN official calls for ending blockade of oil fields in Libya
Libya ceasefire under threat, warns Arab League chief

Houthi bomb-maker killed in northern Yemen clashes

Thu, 2022-03-10 16:50

AL-MUKALLA: A Houthi bomb-maker described as one of the militia's "most dangerous leaders" has been killed in fierce clashes in Yemen's northern province of Hajjah, officials and media reports said.

Abdul Aziz Ahmed Al-Abed, a mechanical engineer known for making bombs and preparing locally made land mines, was among a number of Houthi fighters who died in fighting in Hajjah's Haradh district.

Nasser Dagin, a pro-government deputy governor of Hajjah, described Al-Abed, who was born in the province, as "one of the most dangerous leaders," and said he was responsible for manufacturing land mines, IEDs and bombs that claimed the lives of thousands of Yemenis.

Houthi mourners claimed that Al-Abed had taken part in many rounds of fighting between the movement and its opponents in Amran, Saada and Abyan over the past decade, and was among the fighters who stormed the Yemeni capital Sanaa in late 2014.

Yemeni officials believe that the Houthis have planted more than 1 million mines across the country, mainly in the battlefields in Jouf, Hodeidah, Marib and Shabwa.

Al-Abed's death is a major blow to the Houthi militia, which has lost thousands of fighters, including high-ranking military leaders, in clashes with Yemeni government troops and the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen.

Houthi casualties have surged since the beginning of the year, when government troops, backed by coalition air cover and military logistics, launched an offensive to take control of Haradh district.

Funeral processions for dozens of Houthi fighters killed in action take place almost every day.

Al-Abed was killed as heavy fighting between government troops and the Houthis raged in the provinces of Marib and Hajjah.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said that army troops killed a number of Houthis fighters in the battle for a military location west of Marib.

Another group of Houthi fighters was reportedly killed during the army's shelling of Al-Faleha, south of Marib.

Official media also said that the army's heavy weapons, together with

coalition warplanes, struck Houthi-controlled areas in Haradh.



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[Abdul Aziz Ahmed Al-Abed](#)

Senior Houthi leader killed in clashes in Yemen's Al-Jawf province Senior Houthi leader killed in clashes with Yemeni army