

# Decisions need to be taken by West to reach deal: Iran negotiator

Author:

Thu, 2022-02-24 23:48

DUBAI: Western partners in nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna have to make decisions on crucial issues to help reach an agreement, Iranian officials said on Thursday on Twitter.

Reuters reported last week that a US-Iranian deal was taking shape to revive the pact, abandoned in 2018 by then-US President Donald Trump, who also reimposed extensive sanctions on Iran.

Iran's top security official, Ali Shamkhani, said it was possible to achieve a good agreement after significant progress in the negotiations in Vienna.

However, he added: "To resolve the remaining crucial issues, Western political decision-making is necessary to balance the accord."

Shamkhani is secretary of Iran's Supreme National Council, which reports directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Being near the finish line is no guarantee of crossing it" and sealing an accord, Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's chief negotiator at the Vienna talks, said in a tweet.

"It requires extra caution, much perseverance, additional creativity and a balanced approach to take the last step," he added.

Diplomats said a vague mention of other issues in a draft text of the agreement was a reference to the unfreezing of billions of dollars in Iranian funds in South Korean banks, and the release of Western prisoners held in Iran.

Iran on Wednesday urged Western powers to be "realistic" in the talks and said Bagheri Kani was returning to Tehran for consultations, suggesting a breakthrough was not imminent.



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## [Demand for Hebrew lessons jumps in Gaza as Israel eases work restrictions](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-23 23:58

GAZA: In a brightly lit classroom in Gaza, a teacher spells out Hebrew words on a whiteboard, followed attentively by Maher Al-Farra and dozens of other Palestinians hoping to take advantage of an opening up of employment opportunities in Israel.

Increased demand for the classes at the Nafha languages center follows a new offer of work permits by Israel as it has moved to calm border tensions following an 11-day war in May with Hamas, the group that rules the Gaza Strip.

It now offers 10,000 permits allowing Gaza residents to cross the border to

work in Israel – a new source of income to a region where 64 percent of the population is estimated to live in poverty and unemployment runs at 50 percent.

Ahmed Al-Faleet, the center's owner, said the number of people enlisted to learn Hebrew has increased fourfold to reach 160 students per course since Israel began giving work permits in the last quarter of 2021.

"These courses allow anyone who gets a permit to read signs, documents written in Hebrew, and communicate with soldiers on Israeli checkpoints. If an employer speaks only Hebrew it enables the worker to deal with him," he said.

Some 2.3 million Gazans live in the narrow coastal strip, largely unable to leave to seek work abroad and squeezed by 15 years of restrictions imposed by Israel, which has fought four wars with Hamas and other armed groups since 2008. Gaza also borders Egypt, which imposes its own restrictions on crossings.

Before a Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000, some 130,000 Gazans worked in Israel. Palestinians said Israel had in 2005 barred laborers after pulling troops and settlers from Gaza. No one expects the cautious increase in the number of work permits to end the long-running conflict between Israel and Hamas, who fought four wars since the group seized Gaza's control in 2007.

But for the dozens of workers and merchants enrolled in the class at Nafha, the change offers the prospect of earning, in Israel, the equivalent of a week's wages in Gaza. "I came here today to learn Hebrew so I can handle things at my work inside (Israel) easily," Farra said.

Israeli liaison officer Col. Moshe Tetro said the new jobs would improve Gaza's economy and "would also serve calm and security stability."

Eassam Daalis, a senior Hamas official, said Israel was eventually expected to offer 30,000 work permits, which economists say could allow workers to earn an average of 500 shekels (\$156) a day, equivalent to what some can earn a week working in Gaza.

"Every week I go back home happy to my family with 2,000 shekels (\$625). I also give to my mother and my father," said Jamil Abdallah, 31, from Jabalya in northern Gaza.

Gaza economist Mohammad Abu Jayyab noted that the offer of permits was one of a series of economic steps agreed under a political settlement brokered by Egyptian, Qatari and UN negotiators following the May war.



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## [UAE's nuclear plant is 'well protected', says regulator](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-23 23:28

DUBAI: The UAE's only nuclear power plant is "well-protected" against security threats, the regulator said on Wednesday, following a series of unprecedented drone and missile attacks on the Gulf state.

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis have claimed three drone and missile assaults on the UAE this year.

"The nuclear power plant is designed according to high security principles and we have issued regulations for physical and cybersecurity," Christer Viktorsson, director general of the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation, said.

“The sensitive parts of the power plant are well protected for any event,” he told reporters.

The UAE overall has “robust security,” he added.

The plant in Abu Dhabi, one of the UAE’s seven emirates and the nation’s capital, is the Arab world’s first nuclear power station and part of the oil producer’s aim to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

Barakah will have four reactors with 5,600 megawatts of total capacity – equivalent to 25 percent of the UAE’s needs.

The first unit began delivering 1400 MW to the national grid in April 2021.

Unit 2, which was licensed to operate in March 2021, is undergoing testing and expected to contribute 1400 MW to the national grid soon, Viktorsson said.

FANR expects to issue Unit 3’s operating license later this year, once plant operator Nawah Energy demonstrates regulatory requirements are met.

Nawah can then start an 8-9 month testing phase followed by national grid connection.



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Uruguay to pursue second energy transition backed by UAE partnerships, minister reveals UAE’s federal services revenue reaches \$7bn in 2021, says

## Early marriage blights lives of young girls in Lebanon's marginalized communities

Wed, 2022-02-23 23:09

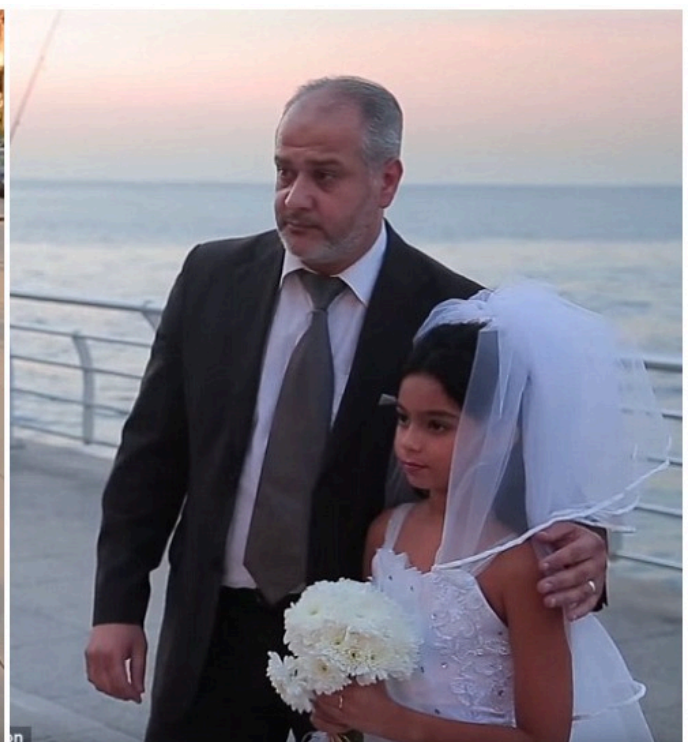
DUBAI: Nadia, 14, should be in school in her native Syria. Instead she is married to someone 13 years her senior in neighboring Lebanon.

She was married off by her father, Yasser, a Syrian refugee, on the promise of \$8,000, half upfront and the rest when the marriage contract was signed.

"Her suitor approached me when she was studying," Yasser told Arab News. "He promised he would treat her right and help me open a minimarket to better my finances. But he turned out to be a liar and an abuser."

Among refugees in Lebanon, Nadia's plight is not uncommon. Grinding poverty and a dearth of opportunities have forced many families to make similarly desperate decisions – in effect selling their daughters to secure a semblance of financial security.

Yasser regrets his decision. "Her husband won't let her talk to me," he said. "I called once. He overheard her saying baba (father) and then snatched the phone away. I felt like my heart was set on fire."



A campaign to highlight the plight of child brides went viral on social media thanks to a powerful image showing a middle-aged man posing with a 12-year-old girl on their wedding day. (Supplied)

In addition to the perils of poverty in exile, the estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon must also endure the myriad of challenges facing their host country amid its crippling economic crisis.

Add to that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, political paralysis and the ongoing violence in Syria that militate against the return of displaced families, and the options for many appear bleak.

Against such a backdrop, marrying off children is seen by some communities – including impoverished Lebanese – as one of the few avenues available to them.

Reem, who is Lebanese, was only 16 when she consented to an arranged marriage. She did not object to the idea because several of her friends and neighbors were also tying the knot at around the same time.

One of the main factors in her decision – which in reality was only partly her own to make – was a desire to ease the financial burden on her parents. Now, three years into her marriage, she feels trapped.



A Lebanese woman holds a placard as she participates in a march against marriage before the age of 18, in the capital Beirut. (AFP/File Photo)

"I wish I never went through it," she told Arab News. "What did I know? I have a daughter. Where will I go with her? I thought I was helping my parents

to have one less mouth to feed. Now it seems I added one.”

In Lebanon and Syria, children continue to be married off, with neither government paying much heed. Under Lebanon’s constitution, personal-status laws are decreed by each individual sect, combining common law with religious doctrine.

As a result, matters such as marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance are often governed by religious courts. Each of the major sects has a different legal age for marriage; for Catholics it is 14, Sunnis have raised it to 18, and Shiites have set it at 15.

According to the constitution: “The state guarantees that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected.”



Aya Majzoub, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, says the impact of child



marriage on young girls is “devastating.” (Supplied)

Civil society groups in Lebanon have long urged the government to introduce an all-encompassing personal-status law.

A report published by Human Rights Watch in 2017 said it would be a “common sense measure” to raise, without delay, the minimum age of marriage to 18 without any exceptions. Such a law was drafted that same year but never passed.

“The impact on girls is devastating,” Aya Majzoub, a researcher for HRW, told Arab News. “They are at heightened risk of marital rape, domestic violence and a range of health problems due to early childbearing.

“Lebanon’s parliament can help end this practice. The Lebanese government and local authorities should develop programs to prevent child marriages, such as empowering girls with information and support networks, as well as engaging parents and community members about the negative effects of child marriage.”

## **INNUMBERS**

**\* 12 million girls under the age of 18 married off worldwide every year. (HRW)**

**\* 13 million additional child marriages estimated to occur in next 10 years due to the pandemic. (UN)**

**\* 2030 is UN’s Sustainable Development Goal target year for eliminating marriage before age of 18**

The high number of children who have missed out on an education in Lebanon over the past two years, because of the pandemic and the economic crisis, has increased the likelihood of premature marriage, particularly among vulnerable refugee communities.

A recent report titled Searching For Hope published by UNICEF, the UN’s children’s agency, revealed that 31 percent of children in Lebanon are out of school and that enrollment in classes had dropped to 43 percent in the current academic year.

The figures are thought to be much worse among refugee communities, where in many cases children have little access to any education at all.

Aid agencies have made efforts to end the custom of underage marriage by raising awareness of the effects it has on girls’ lives and the potential for traumatic physical damage to pre-teens whose bodies are not sufficiently developed to endure the rigors of childbirth.

KAFA, which translates as “enough” in Arabic, is a Lebanese nongovernmental organization that was established in 2005 with the aim of eliminating all

forms of gender-based violence and exploitation.



Besides legal reforms and active public-awareness campaigns, aid agencies believe the key to ending child marriage is poverty reduction and providing vulnerable communities with economic security. (AFP/File Photo)

In 2016, it launched a campaign to highlight the plight of child brides. It also provides psychosocial support to survivors.

The campaign went viral on social media thanks to an extremely powerful image that showed a middle-aged man posing with a 12-year-old girl on their wedding day.

“Based on the abused women who come to our center, our statistics show that 20 percent of them were actually child brides,” Celine Al-Kik, supervisor of the KAFA support center, told Arab News.

“There is a link between violence and child marriages. We are permitted by law to intervene and provide legal assistance when the underage girl is kidnapped, and when her parents oppose her marriage when her suitor has her convinced.”

Besides legal reforms and active public-awareness campaigns, aid agencies believe the key to ending child marriage is poverty reduction and providing vulnerable communities with economic security.

“Families experiencing the economic crisis in Lebanon are increasingly resorting to marrying off young girls as a coping strategy for the deepening crisis,” Nana Ndeda, policy director with Save the Children, told Arab News.

“It is important that the economic drivers of child marriage are urgently addressed. Girls who marry are most likely to drop out of school and have limited access to decent work. Child marriage is a violation of human rights.”



Young Lebanese girls disguised as brides hold a placard as they participate in a march against marriage before the age of 18, in the capital Beirut on March 2, 2019. (AFP/ANWAR AMRO/File Photo)

Rawda Mazloum, a Syrian refugee, campaigns on the issues of women’s rights and gender-based violence in the camps of eastern Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley.

She organizes community workshops and partners with local nongovernmental organizations, such as KAFA, to try to raise awareness about the growing rates of child marriage, divorces and violence within the Syrian refugee community.

“The youngest girl I know of (who got married) was only 13,” Mazloum told Arab News. “Her parents, like the rest, were struggling. These girls often get abused. They are not aware of their rights as they are still children. They are victims of ignorance, poverty and war.”

As the crises on both sides of the Syrian-Lebanese border bleed into one another, the daily fight for survival, and the desperate decisions that come with it, is unlikely to end soon.

A report published in 2019 by Save The Children in Lebanon, titled No I Don’t, lists poverty, conflict and lack of education as the primary factors driving child marriage.



A report published by Human Rights Watch in 2017 said it would be a “common sense measure” to raise, without delay, the minimum age of marriage to 18 without any exceptions. (AFP/File Photo)

However, it notes that child marriage can also be a means by which families try to protect their daughters from sexual harassment.

Parents who have married off young daughters often say security is a key motivation. Indeed, when refugees and impoverished households live in densely populated spaces among many strangers, there is a higher perceived risk of sexual harassment and violence toward girls.

Providing a male figure who can offer protection is often a consideration. In the case of Yasser and his daughter Nadia, however, the opposite proved to be the case.

“I thought I was offering her a better alternative, a better life,” he told Arab News. “But he wasn’t serious about her. He used her for fun.”



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'Still a lot to do,' rights groups say after Philippines bans child marriage  
Philippines bans child marriage

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## [Iranian prisoner dies of heart attack after death penalty retracted](#)

Wed, 2022-02-23 23:02

LONDON: A 55-year-old Iranian convict died from a heart attack after being informed that his death penalty sentence was being retracted for a murder he committed 18 years ago because the victim's family forgave him.

Iranian newspaper Hamshahri said the man, Akbar, had been detained along with four others for premeditated murder.

He was convicted along with another man, Davood, who had reportedly already been executed for his involvement in the murder.

A dispute-resolution board mediated between the victim's family and Akbar. The family initially resisted granting clemency, but eventually gave their support after hearing of his poor health.

But as the family experienced a change of heart, Akbar's failed, with the overjoyed prisoner dying before he could taste freedom.



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