

'Intense' Iran nuclear talks resume as Germany calls for rapid progress

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VIENNA: Indirect talks between Tehran and Washington on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal resumed in Vienna on Saturday as the European Union said negotiations were "intense" and Germany called for rapid progress.

The sixth round of talks kicked off as usual with a meeting of remaining parties to the deal – Iran, Russia, China, France, Britain, Germany and the European Union – in the basement of a luxury hotel.

The US delegation to the talks, known as the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is based in a hotel across the street as Iran refuses face-to-face meetings.

The talks' chief coordinator, EU foreign policy official Enrique Mora, who is leading the shuttle diplomacy between Iran and the United States, has said he expects a deal in this round of talks. Other envoys, however, are more cautious, saying many difficult issues are yet to be resolved.

"We are making progress but the negotiations are intense and a number of issues (remain), including on how steps are to be implemented," an EU spokesman said in a statement to reporters, adding that the aim was "to find ways to get very close to a final agreement in the coming days."

The deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, imposed strict limits on Iran's nuclear activities designed to extend the time Tehran would need to obtain enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, if it chose to, to at least a year from two to three months.

Iran denies ever pursuing nuclear weapons, saying its aims are solely peaceful.

President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the deal in 2018 and reimposed economic sanctions lifted by the deal. Iran responded by breaching many of those limits, producing more enriched uranium than allowed and enriching to higher purity levels, recently to near weapons grade.

"Playing for time is in no-one's interest," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who is not at the talks, told Reuters, urging all sides to show flexibility and pragmatism.

China's top envoy said the main sticking point was US sanctions. "Our message to them (the United States) is that they should stop shilly-shallying by moving decisively to sanction-lifting," China's ambassador to the UN nuclear watchdog, Wang Qun, told reporters.

On the steps Iran must take to return to compliance with the deal, Wang said: "To a great extent, the major issues have been worked out as a matter of principle, though I think there are some fixes (left)."



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Iran sends warships to Atlantic amid Venezuela concerns

[Egypt, Sudan connecting Khartoum with Cairo-Cape Town rail line](#)

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Sat, 2021-06-12 17:56

CAIRO: Egypt is working with Sudan to connect the Cairo-Cape Town railway route to the Sudanese capital Khartoum, Kamel El-Wazir, Egypt's transport minister, has said.

Speaking on Saturday at a forum for heads of African investment agencies in Sharm El-Sheikh, El-Wazir said that Egypt has taken "huge steps" to boost

connectivity in Africa through infrastructure.

He said that the Egyptian government is constructing the Cairo-Cape Town railway line to connect Egypt with other African countries.

El-Wazir said that the Ministry of Transport is executing 360-kilometer rail lines inside Egyptian territory, in addition to a six-kilometer line across Nasser Lake to Wadi Halfa in Sudan.

The government is executing another line to connect the monorail stretching from Matrouh governorate with a special link to El-Saloum city, he said.

Egypt is also coordinating with the Libyan government to extend a railway line to the city of Benghazi, he said.

Efforts exerted to develop land transport networks, railways, as well as sea and land ports have improved Egypt's rank in the Road Quality Index featured in the Ease of Doing Business' latest report, El-Wazir said.

The report also underlined Egypt's readiness to transfer its expertise in making smart roads to other African countries.

Dhieu Mathok Diing, South Sudanese minister of investment, said that his government hopes that South Sudan will be connected to Egypt via a railway line in two to three years after the Egypt-Sudan link is completed.

Diing said that Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's announcement that he is committed to the African agenda for development, as well as Egypt's launching of the Cairo-Cape Town railway line and the Investment Promotion conference are decisions that demonstrate Egypt's keenness to develop African countries.

He said that South Sudan has "high hopes" for the Cairo-Cape Town railway line, adding that the areas which will be included in the project inside South Sudan have been developed.

Diing said: "Cooperation among Africa's great economic powers like Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria with the rest of African countries makes us believe that we can achieve growth, development and African integration."



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[Houthis fire 55 Iranian-made ballistic missiles at Marib since start of 2021: Yemen information minister](#)

Sat, 2021-06-12 17:40

AMMAN: Yemen's Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani criticized on Saturday the Houthi militia targeting of residential neighborhoods, displacement camps and civilians in Marib with more than 55 Iranian-made ballistic missiles since the start of the year.

He said that statistics confirm the militia, which is backed by Iran, has

also launched 12 drones, three Katyusha rockets, six projectiles, and seven explosives from Jan. 1 to June 10.

Al-Eryani added that the statistics also recorded 344 civilian casualties during the same period from Houthi attacks on Marib governorate. 104 civilians, three women, and 15 children have been killed, while 180 civilians, 12 women, and 30 children have been wounded with varying severity of injuries due to the continuous shelling, he said in a series of tweets. The Iran-baked Houthis launched a major offensive to capture the oil and gas-rich province from the internationally recognized government in February, sparking widespread condemnation as the province has been serving as a safe haven for tens of thousands of internally displaced people who have been fleeing the fighting since the beginning of the conflict.

"The terrorist Houthi militia's bombing of residential neighborhoods, civilian objects and displacement camps in the districts of Marib governorate, since the beginning of its massive military escalation, are systematic and deliberate killing of civilians, a violation of international laws and conventions, and amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity," Al-Eryani said.

He added that the international community, the UN and the permanent members of the Security Council are required to assume their legal and moral responsibilities, and to pressure the militia to stop the daily killing of civilians with revenge motives, in which women and children fall victim. He also pressed the body to re-classify the Houthis as a terrorist organization and prosecute its leaders as war criminals.

Last Saturday, a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis killed at least 21 people, including a 5-year-old girl, and wounded dozens of others in the government-held city

The missile hit a gas station in the Rawdha neighborhood in central Marib, and shortly after the Iran-backed militia launched an explosive-laden drone which destroyed two ambulances that had rushed to the area to transfer the injured to hospitals.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Yemen said the Kingdom and the Arab coalition are constantly working with the two parties to the Riyadh Agreement to complete its implementation.

"We are counting on everyone to put the interests of the Yemeni people above all else, and expedite the return of the Yemeni government to Aden to enable it to perform its duties to alleviate the suffering of the people and complete the implementation of all aspects of the agreement," said Mohammed Al-Jaber.



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8 killed, 27 wounded after Houthis launch missile, drone strikes on Marib
Houthi blamed for deadly Marib gas station attack, killing 21, jeopardizing Yemen peace-making efforts

[Iran sends warships to Atlantic amid Venezuela concerns](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-06-11 19:55

DUBAI: An Iranian destroyer and support vessel are now sailing in the Atlantic Ocean in a rare mission far from the Islamic Republic, Iran's state TV reported on Thursday, without offering the vessels' final destination. The trip by the new domestically built destroyer Sahand and the intelligence-gathering vessel Makran comes amid U.S. media reports, citing anonymous American officials, saying the ships were bound for Venezuela. The Associated

Press could not immediately confirm the ships' destination.

The vessels departed last month from Iran's southern port of Bandar Abbas, said Adm. Habibollah Sayyari, Iran's deputy army chief. He described their mission as the Iranian navy's longest and most challenging voyage yet, without elaborating.

Iranian state TV released a short clip of the destroyer cruising through the Atlantic's rough seas. The video likely was shot from the Makran, a converted commercial oil tanker with a mobile launch platform for helicopters.

"The Navy is improving its seafaring capacity and proving its long-term durability in unfavorable seas and the Atlantic's unfavorable weather conditions," Sayyari said, adding that the warships would not call at any country's port during the mission.

Images from Maxar Technologies dated April 28 appear to show seven Iranian fast-attack craft typically associated with its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on the deck of the Makran. Satellite images from Planet Labs Inc. suggest it left a port at Bandar Abbas sometime after April 29. It wasn't immediately clear where the Makran and the destroyer are now.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price would not speculate on what the vessels were carrying, saying only "that if this is an effort to transfer weapons or otherwise to violate its international obligations we would be prepared to respond."

"We have seen the press reports regarding this movement," Price said. "We're prepared to leverage our applicable authorities, including sanctions, against any actor that enables Iran's ongoing provision of weapons to violent partners into proxies."

The website Politico first reported in late May, citing anonymous officials, that the ships' final destination may be Venezuela. Iran maintains close ties to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, and has shipped gasoline and other products to the country amid a U.S. sanctions campaign targeting fuel-starved Caracas. Venezuela is believed to have paid Iran, under U.S. sanctions of its own, for the shipments.

A top aide to Maduro has denied press reports that the ships will dock there. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive geopolitical issues.

During a news conference May 31, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh declined to say where the Makran was going.

"Iran is always present in international waters and it has this right based on international law and it can be present in international waters," he said. "No country is able to violate this right, and I warn that no one makes miscalculations. Those who sit in glass houses should be careful."

The fast-attack craft aboard the Makran are the type that the Guard uses in its tense encounters with U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz. It's not immediately clear what Venezuela's plans would be for those ships.

"If the boats are delivered, they may form the core of an asymmetrical warfare force within Venezuela's armed forces," the U.S. Naval Institute said in an earlier published analysis. "This could be focused on disrupting shipping as a means of countering superior naval forces. Shipping routes to and from the Panama Canal are near the Venezuelan coast."

Earlier this month, fires sank Iran's largest warship, the 207-meter (679-foot) Kharg, which was used to resupply other ships in the fleet at sea and

conduct training exercises. Officials offered no cause for the blaze, which follows a series of mysterious explosions that began in 2019 targeting commercial ships in Mideast waterways. The unusual voyage comes ahead of Iran's June 18 presidential election, which will see voters select a successor for the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani.



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Iranian Guard holds anti-warship ballistic missile drill

[Yemen calls on international community to protect civilians](#)

Fri, 2021-06-11 18:56

ALEXANDRIA: Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has accused the Iran-

backed Houthis of seeking to undermine peace efforts with recent missile strikes on the city of Marib. Hadi and a number of NGOs have called on the international community to protect Yemeni civilians from militia strikes, which have claimed dozens of lives in the last week.

Hadi said that Houthi missile and drone strikes on the densely populated city of Marib would destroy attempts to establish peace in Yemen and accused the Houthis of working on behalf of Iran.

“While the international community is working sincerely to find hope and opportunities for peace, the coup militias continue to escalate and claim innocent ... lives, ignoring any efforts to spare Yemeni blood and serving Iran’s destructive projects in the region,” Hadi said in a statement carried by Yemen’s official news agency, SABA.

On Thursday, Houthi forces fired a barrage of missiles and explosive-laden drones at Marib, killing eight civilians and wounding 27 others.

The missiles and drones reportedly ripped through a mosque filled with worshippers and a prison, and later targeted ambulances.

On June 6, a missile and a rigged drone hit a gas station in Marib, killing 21 civilians including a five-year-old child, sparking outrage inside and outside Yemen.

Marib Governor Sultan Al-Arada said the Houthis’ escalating missile and drone strikes on the city prove that the rebels have no serious interest in peace initiatives to end the war in Yemen, SABA reported.

The Yemeni government on Friday renewed its support for the Saudi Initiative and the current UN-brokered peace plan, known as the Joint Declaration, and other initiatives aimed at ending the war, stressing that the government has offered concessions to pave the way for a peace settlement.

In a statement, Yemen’s Foreign Ministry said the Houthis had specified conditions for reopening Sanaa airport under the UN-brokered peace deal and that the militias are seeking to turn the airport into an entry point for military experts and weapons.

The ministry was referring to the Houthis’ demand for unchecked, unlimited flights to Sanaa airport from destinations including Iran, Syria and Lebanon, and vice-versa.

“Yemen’s government has made sufficient concessions to guarantee the safe travel of all citizens, and not to turn this airport into a point for security and military services and the smuggling of (military) experts,” the ministry said.

On Friday, an Omani delegation left Houthi-held Sanaa having failed to convince the Houthis to accept the UN peace deal. The delegation met with senior rebel officials, including Abdel Malik Al-Houthi.

Meanwhile, American and European officials have once again called on the

Houthis to halt their military operations across Yemen and to engage positively with peace efforts.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said America would continue pressurizing the Houthis until they cease hostilities and agree to peace plans.

“The conflict in Yemen must end and bring relief to Yemeni people. It’s time for the Houthis to accept a ceasefire and engage in real negotiations. The United States will maintain pressure on the Houthis, including through sanctions,” Price tweeted.

Josep Borrell Fontelles, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs, said after a meeting with Yemen’s Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak that the EU stands by the Yemeni government and its people and backs the current peace efforts led by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths.

“Met with Yemen FM @BinmubarakAhmed. Expressed full EU support to Government and people of Yemen. Stressed EU work with @OSE_Yemen for immediate ceasefire and political talks. Good discussion on the importance of humanitarian access and an inclusive peace process” Fontelles tweeted on Friday.





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8 killed, 27 wounded after Houthis launch missile, drone strikes on Marib
Yemen condemns Houthi attacks on Marib in letter to UN Security Council