

US says expecting sixth and further rounds of Iran nuclear talks

Thu, 2021-06-03 21:38

WASHINGTON: The United States expects to have a sixth round of indirect talks on reviving compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and probably more, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Thursday.

The European Union envoy coordinating the talks on Wednesday said he believed a deal would be struck at the next round starting next week, but other senior diplomats have said the most difficult decisions still lie ahead.

Price said hurdles remained after the fifth round of talks that concluded on Wednesday and offered a more cautious outlook than the EU official, even as he did not rule out the possibility of an agreement in the next round.

“We expect there will be a sixth. I think there’s just about every expectation that there will be subsequent rounds beyond that,” Price told reporters. He said the hurdles included the fact that the talks are indirect – Iran refuses direct discussions with the United States – and the issues complex.

“There is no lack of distrust between and among Iran and the other partners and allies with whom we’re working on this,” he added.

Former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018, arguing it gave Iran excessive sanctions relief for inadequate nuclear curbs.

US President Joe Biden wants to restore the pact’s nuclear limits and, if possible, extend them.



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Oil refinery fire in Iran capital under control
UN nuclear watchdog chief 'concerned' over undeclared Iran sites

[Palestinians see little difference in old and new Israeli leaders](#)

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Thu, 2021-06-03 21:18

RAMALLAH/GAZA: Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza on Thursday mostly dismissed a change in Israeli government, saying the nationalist leader due to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would likely pursue the same right-wing agenda.

Naftali Bennett, a former official in Israel's main West Bank settler organization, would be Israel's new leader under a patchwork coalition struck on Wednesday.

"There is no difference between one Israeli leader and another," said Ahmed Rezik, 29, a government worker in Gaza.

"They are good or bad for their nation. And when it comes to us, they are all bad, and they all refuse to give the Palestinians their rights and their land."

Bassem Al-Salhi, a representative for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said Bennett was no less extreme than Netanyahu, adding: "He will make sure to express how extreme he is in the government."

Hamas, the Islamist group which controls the Gaza Strip, said it made no difference who governs Israel.

"Palestinians have seen dozens of Israeli governments throughout history, right, left, center, as they call it. But all of them have been hostile when it comes to the rights of our Palestinian people and they all had hostile policies of expansionism," spokesman Hazem Qassem said.

In what would be a first in Israel, a governing coalition would include an Islamist party elected by members of Israel's 21 percent Arab minority, who are Palestinian by culture and heritage and Israeli by citizenship.

Its leader, Mansour Abbas, said the coalition agreement would bring more than 53 billion shekels (\$16 billion) to improve infrastructure and combat violent crime in Arab towns..

But he has been criticized in the West Bank and Gaza for siding with what they see as the enemy.

“He is a traitor. What will he do when they ask him to vote on launching a new war on Gaza?” said Badri Karam, 21, in Gaza.
“Will he accept it, being a part of the killing of Palestinians?”



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Visiting Israeli defense chief seeks to reaffirm US support
Red Cross chief urges Israel, Palestinians to end cycle of violence

[US envoy announces new Syria aid, seeks delivery access](#)

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Thu, 2021-06-03 20:35

ANKARA: The US Ambassador to the United Nations announced on Thursday nearly \$240 million in humanitarian funding to support the people of Syria, Syrian refugees and countries hosting them.

The ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, also called for access through international crossings to allow the delivery of aid.

She made the announcement during a visit to the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing between Turkey and Syria – the sole remaining point of access for humanitarian aid to enter the conflict-ravaged country.

The ambassador is in Turkey on a four-day visit seeking to ensure that humanitarian aid can be delivered to Syria across borders – a program which Russia, Syria's closest ally, has severely limited in recent years, insisting that the Syrian government should control all assistance to millions in need. The international crossing points were reduced to a single border crossing from Turkey to Syria's rebel-held northwest at Russia's insistence.

"I'm proud to announce the United States is providing nearly \$240 million in additional humanitarian funding for the people of Syria and for the communities that host them," Thomas-Greenfield said, according to a statement from her office. "Right now, more than 13 million Syrian people are in dire need of assistance. That's the population of Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington D.C. combined."

She added: "Four in five people in northwest Syria need humanitarian assistance. For millions of civilians in Idlib, this is their lifeline. Over the last year and a half, some members of the Security Council succeeded in shamefully closing two other crossings into Syria... Bab Al-Hawa is literally all that's left."

The United States is seeking the reauthorization of UN access at Bab Al-Hawa and the reopening of other border crossings before the current UN Security Council mandate for humanitarian aid deliveries expires on July 10. There is strong support in the 15-member council for maintaining and even adding border crossings, but Russia holds the key.

"This isn't a complicated issue. We want the UN to bring food to starving children and protection to homeless families. We want the UN to be able to deliver vaccines in the middle of a global pandemic. We want the suffering to stop," Thomas-Greenfield said.

She met Wednesday with Ibrahim Kalin, a top aide to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey hosts some 4 million refugees.

The talks come ahead of US President Joe Biden's first meeting with Erdogan on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Brussels on June 14.

Ties between Ankara and Washington, which once considered each other as strategic partners, steadily deteriorated in recent years over differences on Syria, Turkey's cooperation with Russia and Turkish naval interventions in the eastern Mediterranean, which US officials have described as destabilizing.

The US Agency for International Development, or USAID, said the new US funding announced by Thomas-Greenfield, would support aid agencies providing assistance, "including food for displaced families in Syria and the region" and support bakeries in Syria.

It would also provide psychosocial support and other services for children, rehabilitate water and sanitation systems and provide cash or vouchers to

help Syrians meet basic needs.

USAID said the United States was the world's largest donor to the Syria crisis, and has provided more than \$13 billion since the start of the conflict.



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US ambassador to UN demands information on Syria detainees
US announces nearly \$600m in humanitarian aid to Syrians

[Iran and Central African Republic lose voting rights in UN General Assembly](#)

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Wed, 2021-06-02 19:25

UNITED NATIONS: Iran and the Central African Republic are in arrears on paying their dues to the United Nations' operating budget and will lose their voting rights in the 193-member General Assembly, the UN chief said in a letter circulated Wednesday.

In the letter to General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said three other African countries – Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe, and Somalia – are also in arrears. But he said the assembly passed a resolution saying they can still vote in the current session which ends in September.

The UN Charter states that members whose arrears equal or exceed the amount of their contributions for the preceding two full years lose their voting rights. But it also gives the General Assembly the authority to decide "that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the control of the member," and in that case a country can continue to vote.

According to the secretary-general's letter, the minimum payments needed to restore voting rights are \$16,251,298 for Iran and \$29,395 for the Central African Republic.

Comoros needs to pay \$871,632, Sao Tome and Principe \$829,888, and Somalia \$1,443,640 to reduce their arrears and avoid a possible cutoff of voting rights after September, the letter says.



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Israeli defense minister heads to US to discuss Iran talks
Massive fire breaks out at oil refinery near Iran's capital

Israeli defense minister heads to US to discuss Iran talks

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Wed, 2021-06-02 18:52

JERUSALEM: Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz was heading to the United States for a one-day visit on Thursday to discuss ongoing efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal, which Israel opposes.

He was to meet his counterpart Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan "for strategic dialogue on the emerging nuclear agreement with Iran," his office said.

Global powers have been meeting in Vienna since early April in a bid to bring Washington back to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, which the United States left under then president Donald Trump in 2018.

The US withdrawal and re-imposition of sanctions led to Iran stepping up its nuclear activities.

US President Joe Biden, has signalled his readiness to revive the nuclear deal.

Israel opposes the deal, which it says could enable the Islamic republic to develop nuclear arms.

Tehran maintains that its nuclear program is peaceful.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday reiterated that Israel would not hesitate to risk its good ties with its closest ally the US to defend itself against a nuclear-armed Iran.

"If we need to choose – and I hope it will not happen – between friction with our great friend, the US, and getting rid of an existential threat, getting rid of an existential threat will prevail," he said.

Following Netanyahu's remarks, Gantz said that while Iran was a "threat to regional security and global peace," the United States was "Israel's most important ally."

Gantz – who is now part of an alliance of Israeli politicians seeking to topple Netanyahu – added in a statement: "Even if differences arise, they will be resolved through direct dialogue, behind closed doors, not through provocative statements that serve to harm Israeli security."

During his Washington trip, Gantz was also to discuss Israel's "qualitative military edge" and maintaining "Middle East stability," the defense minister's office said.

"The officials will further review the Israel ministry of defense's plan for achieving long-term quiet in Gaza" and recovering Israel's soldiers missing

in action and hostages, his office said.

In the latest 11-day flare-up between Israel and the rulers of the coastal enclave, Hamas, Israeli strikes killed 254 Palestinians, including 66 children, health officials there said.

Rockets and other fire from Gaza from May 10 to 21 claimed 13 lives in Israel, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, medics said.



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UN Gaza relief chief called in by bosses after comments over Israeli air strikes
Hours left for Netanyahu's foes to build new Israeli government