

[Ahead of Middle East visit, Blinken says no sign Iran will comply with nuclear terms](#)

Sun, 2021-05-23 16:29

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday said the United States has not seen yet whether Iran will do what it must to come into compliance with its nuclear commitments in order to have sanctions removed. Iran President Hassan Rouhani last week said the United States was ready to lift trade sanction, although a senior Iranian official contradicted him, and European diplomats said very difficult issues remained.

Indirect talks have been underway in Vienna as the Biden administration seeks a path forward with Iran, including how Tehran can resume compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

"Iran, I think, knows what it needs to do to come back into compliance on the nuclear side, and what we haven't yet seen is whether Iran is ready and willing to make a decision to do what it has to do. That's the test and we don't yet have an answer," Blinken told ABC News' "This Week With George Stephanopoulos" program.

With a fifth round of discussions ahead, Blinken said, "the first thing that we need to do is put the nuclear problem back in the box." The talks, he added, helped clarify what both sides needed to do to move forward.

The United States abandoned the international pact in 2018 under former Republican US President Donald Trump, who reimposed sanctions on Iran's oil, banking and shipping sectors.

Democratic President Joe Biden, who succeeded Trump in January, has said he believes Iran is seriously engaging in talks but that it remained unclear what steps Tehran would actually take to comply with the deal, cemented when Biden was vice president under former President Barack Obama.



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[US Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#)

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Iran rolling blackouts blamed on heat, drought, crypto-miningBlinken reveals uncertainty clouding US-Iran nuclear talks

[Iran rolling blackouts blamed on heat, drought, crypto-mining](#)

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Sun, 2021-05-23 12:45

TEHRAN: Iran has started rolling blackouts, local media reported Sunday, which officials blamed on heat, drought impacting hydropower generation, and surging electricity demand blamed in part on crypto-currency mining. Power cuts in the peak summer months are not uncommon in Iran, but a

government report this month said precipitation was down 43 percent compared to the country's long-term average, warning of reduced water supplies for the year.

Tehran and several other cities have been hit by unannounced power cuts that sparked complaints from consumers, disrupted businesses and damaged household appliances, Iran's state television reported.

Rolling blackouts for the capital, Alborz and Khorasan Razavi provinces were announced by provincial power distribution companies, with neighborhoods losing power for at least two hours until evening.

Tehran had experienced brief unplanned outages on Saturday, said AFP correspondents after power cuts had also hit other major cities such as Shiraz and Isfahan from Friday, according to IRNA and ISNA news agencies. The national grid is overburdened from drought as well as "rising temperature and consumption and a new phenomenon called crypto-currencies," ISNA quoted national electricity company director Mohammad Hassan Motevalizadeh as saying.

Iranian officials have regularly blamed "illegal" crypto miners for using vast amounts of electricity through the so-called blockchain process used to generate valuable digital assets like bitcoin.

Electricity company spokesman Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi said Saturday the company cut power to four "overusing" government bodies, while registered crypto mining farms had voluntarily shut down operations to ease the burden. Tehran's blackout on Saturday also impacted two chess players competing in an Asian championship held online when the chess federation building lost power with no backup.

"Two of Iran's best lost (due to) a sudden power cut," IRNA quoted federation chief Mohsen Samizadeh as saying.

The competition's organizer on the Iranian side, Shadi Paridar, told ISNA that the players "returned to their hotel with tears in their eyes."

State TV said matches continued on Sunday with backup generators.



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Iran uses crypto mining to lessen impact of sanctions, study finds
Crypto-miners take down Iran electric grids, prompting crackdown

[Israel reopens borders to small groups of foreign tourists](#)

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Sun, 2021-05-23 10:33

JERUSALEM: Israel reopened its borders to foreign tourists on Sunday after a fall in COVID-19 infections but said it would take time for visitors to start arriving and to revive the tourism industry.

Under an easing of coronavirus restrictions, the government went ahead with a plan to start letting in small groups of tourists from countries using vaccines it has approved.

Foreign airlines are also resuming flights they suspended when Palestinian militants began rocket attacks on Israel this month. A cease-fire has now halted the fighting, helping the government meet Sunday's target date for starting the plan.

But registration for the Tourism Ministry's plan opened only last week, so the number of visitors will initially be limited.

"It is unlikely that the first groups will arrive before the beginning of June," a Tourism Ministry spokeswoman said.

Tourism in 2019 hit a record high of 4.55 million visitors, contributing 23 billion shekels (\$7.1 billion) to Israel's economy, mainly via small and mid-sized businesses.

Under a pilot program due to continue until June 15, Israel gave the green light to visits by 20 groups of between 5 and 30 tourists from countries including the United States, Britain and Germany.

Another 20 groups were chosen to be on standby if any of the first 20 tour operators did not meet Israel's conditions.

Tourism minister Orit Farkash-Hacohen said the ministry was working to allow more tourists to enter to "rehabilitate the tourism industry and bring hundreds of thousands of people back into the workforce."

Israeli authorities believe that initially limiting tourism to small groups is the best way to monitor and contain the spread of COVID-19, especially new variants. The plan is to boost the number of groups in June and allow individual tourists to start visiting in July.

Visitors will need to show negative PCR tests before flying and to undergo further tests on arrival.

Israel has fully vaccinated about 55 percent of its population and COVID-19 cases have dropped sharply.

El Al Israel Airlines Chairman David Brodet said separately on Sunday that he would step down. The government approved a \$210 million bailout package for El Al this month that was conditional on steep spending cuts and the airline's owners injecting more cash.



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UAE says it is ready to facilitate Israel-Palestinian peace efforts
Israeli police allow Jews to visit flashpoint Jerusalem site

[Egypt counters third virus wave with biggest vaccination center in Mideast](#)

Sat, 2021-05-22 22:23

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Health is intensifying efforts to control the fierce third wave of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) through the largest vaccination center in the Middle East.

All of Cairo's Exhibition Center area has been dedicated to the vaccine site,

which will be able to vaccinate 10,000 people a day, the ministry said.

The center features 96 clinics where citizens enter their data and have their vital signs recorded. It takes no longer than 10 minutes to get vaccinated.

A special room has been set up where people rest for 30 minutes after getting the jab in case there are any complications.

There is also a waiting hall with a capacity of 500 in addition to a spacious parking lot. The center operates from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. on all days except Fridays. With this center, the total number of vaccination sites in Egypt has reached 400.

The ministry aims to inoculate 400 citizens daily in each of the centers across the country, said a spokesman, adding that all the centers have proper ventilation.



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Egypt looking to restore tourism from Spain
Tributes pour in for Egyptian comedy icon Samir Ghanem

Tunisia PM visits Libya seeking economic cooperation

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Sat, 2021-05-22 18:17

TRIPOLI: The prime minister of Tunisia, which is struggling with a deep economic crisis, called Saturday for a relaunch of economic cooperation with Libya at the start of a two-day visit.

"Our economies complement each other, and what is good for Libya is also good for Tunisia," Mechichi said after landing in the capital of the oil-rich neighboring country.

He was accompanied by several government ministers and around 100 business leaders expected to take part in a joint economic forum in Tripoli.

Ten years since Tunisia's 2011 revolution, the North African country faces political and economic crises compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures.

Unemployment has risen to 18 percent, with predictions it could reach 20 percent by the end of the year, according to a joint study by the government and United Nations.

The IMF expects the country will see GDP growth of 3.8 percent this year, after an unprecedented 8.9 percent contraction in 2020.

"We will not abandon Tunisia to face alone the effects of the coronavirus pandemic or its political and security situation," said Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

He said Libya would remove restrictions on imports from Tunisia and Tunisian workers in the country would be given official papers.

Libya and Tunisia also signed an accord aimed at "facilitating commercial trade and the movement of citizens" between the two states.

Libya descended into chaos following the 2011 revolution that toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The turmoil sharply reduced cross-border trade and turned Libya into a launchpad for a series of bloody jihadist attacks in Tunisia.

But ties have improved since Dbeibah was sworn in earlier this year under a UN-led process to restore stability in Libya.

Tunisian President Kais Saied visited Libya in March, and TunisAir announced Tuesday it has resumed flights to Libya.





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Tunisia orders lockdown amid 'worst' ever health crisis
UN chief: Foreign fighters in Libya are violating ceasefire