

Iran, US set to hold technical talks in Oman

Trump says negotiations 'going very well'



Abbas Araghchi
● AFP

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, heading a diplomatic and technical-expert delegation, arrived in the Omani capital of Muscat on Friday, ahead of a third round of talks with the United States, including their first expert-level negotiations, scheduled for April 26. Esmail Baghaei, the spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, made the announcement on Friday evening and said Tehran and Washington had agreed to hold technical and expert-level sessions concurrent with the presence of senior negotiators from both sides.

"According to arrangements made by the Omani host and agreed upon by Iran and the US, technical meetings and indirect negotiations between the Iranian foreign minister and the US president's special envoy [Steve Witkoff] will take place on Saturday," Baghaei noted. Stressing that progress in the Iran-US talks depends on the other side's goodwill, seriousness, and realism, Baghaei said the Islamic Republic will draw on its experience, adjust its steps according to the behavior of the other party, and spare any efforts to uphold the legitimate rights and interests of the Iranian nation. Araghchi and Witkoff led two rounds of

indirect talks on Iran's nuclear program and the termination of US sanctions in Muscat and the Italian capital, Rome, on April 12 and 19.

The talks were mediated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi. Expert-level discussions on the technical details of a potential replacement to the 2015 nuclear deal were originally scheduled for April 23. However they were postponed to April 26, the date set for the third round of the indirect negotiations.

Iran's deputy foreign ministers Majid Takht-Ravanchi and Kazem Gharibabadi are said to be heading the Iranian technical delegation in Saturday's indirect expert-level talks with the US.

In 2015, Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with six world powers, including the European troika. However, the US's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 during the first term of American President Donald Trump and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

In 2019, Iran started to roll back the limits it had accepted under the JCPOA after the other parties, including the trio, failed to live up to their commitments.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly stressed that it has never functioned as the side to leave negotiations, while declaring it would respond positively to any potential positive steps by the counterparty.

'Ready to visit Paris, Berlin, London for diplomacy'

In a post on his X account on Thursday, Araghchi said he is "once again" proposing dialogue and a diplomatic path to France, Germany, and Britain on Iran's nuclear program and other shared interests.

He described the status quo of bilateral relations with each of the European troika a "lose-lose" situation, regretting that despite his call for diplomacy the trio has selected the "hard way."

"Iran's relations with the E3 (France, Germany, and Britain) have experienced ups and downs in recent history. Like it or not, they are currently down. Why? Each side has its own narrative. To me, placing blame is a futile exercise. What matters is that the status quo is lose-lose," Araghchi said.

Araghchi noted that during a meeting with the foreign ministers of the E3 and other European counterparts in New York last September, he offered dialogue and cooperation instead of confrontation. He told them that his proposal extended beyond the nuclear issue to include all areas of mutual interest and concern, but the Europeans have chosen the harder path, the minister recounted.

"I once again propose diplomacy. After my recent consultations in Moscow & Beijing, I am ready to take the first step with visits to Paris, Berlin & London. I was ready to do it before Iran commenced its indirect dialogue with the U.S., but the E3 opted out," Araghchi stressed.

"The ball is now in the E3's court. They have an opportunity to do away with the grip of Special Interest groups and forge a different path. How we act at this critical juncton is likely to define the foreseeable future," he added.

Trump hails positive talks with Iran

Speaking separately to reporters at the White House on Friday, the Republican US president reiterated his positive prognosis on the Tehran-Washington talks, saying, "Iran, I think, is going very well. We'll see what happens."

Trump also said he is open to meeting Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei or President Masoud Pezeshkian and that he thinks the two countries will strike a new deal on Tehran's nuclear program.

Asked in the interview if he was concerned Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu might drag the United States into a war with Iran, Trump said, "No." However, when asked if the US would join a war against Iran should Israel take action, he responded, "I may go in very willingly if we can't get a deal. If we don't make a deal, I'll be leading the pack."

In March, Iran responded to a letter from Trump in which he had urged to negotiate a new deal with Tehran. The Islamic Republic reportedly stated that it would not engage in direct talks under Washington's so-called maximum pressure and military threats but was open to indirect negotiations, as in the past.

Beijing defends Tehran's peaceful nuclear rights

Araghchi hails China, Russia as Iran's strategic partners

International Desk

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed Beijing's support for indirect talks between Iran and the United States, recognizing the Islamic Republic's right to use peaceful nuclear program ahead of its third round of high-stakes negotiations with Washington.

Wang said during a meeting with his visiting Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi in Beijing that his country opposes the use of force and "illegal" sanctions to try to resolve Iran's nuclear issue. "The Chinese side commends Iran's promise not to develop nuclear weapons and respects Iran's right to utilize nuclear energy peacefully," he added.

The top diplomat also noted that China is willing to deepen coordination and cooperation with Iran on international and regional affairs. Araghchi, for his part, hailed China as a friendly country, saying it played a very important and positive role in previous nuclear negotiations.

Both countries believe in resistance against the US hegemony and bullying in the global arena, he pointed out. Touching on the indirect talks with the US, Araghchi said Iran is "cautiously optimistic" due to contradictory messages coming from the opposite side in the news and media.

"There are many differences. We will enter into negotia-

tions seriously on Saturday, and if the other side is also serious, there is room for progress," he emphasized.

"I have repeatedly said that if the Americans' only demand is that Iran should not have nuclear weapons, this is achievable ..., but if they have other demands or impractical and illogical requests, then we will naturally run into problems." Later in a post on X, the Iranian foreign minister stressed that the country will continue to regard China as a "reliable partner worthy of trust" no matter how the international situation changes.

In the last two weeks, representatives from Iran and the US have engaged in two rounds of negotiations in Oman and Italy. The two sides are set to conduct expert-level technical negotiations on April 26.

China, Russia as Iran's strategic partners

The Iranian foreign minister hailed China and Russia as the country's two strategic partners and close friends, as he arrived in Beijing on Wednesday for consultations with top Chinese officials prior to the third round of indirect talks with the United States, which are mediated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi.

"China and Russia are two strategic partners and close friends who have stood by us in times of hardship. It is

natural that we have continuous and constant consultations with them in various areas, especially now that discussions with the United States are held indirectly," Abbas Araghchi told Iran's state media in the Chinese capital.

"It is necessary that we keep our friends in China fully informed about ongoing matters and consult with them."

Stressing that he had a similar meeting with senior Russian officials in Moscow last week, Araghchi expressed hope for good discussions in Beijing as he is to convey Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's message to Chinese authorities.

"China has played an important and constructive role in Iran's nuclear issue in the past, and certainly this role needs to continue. We will keep our consultations with China as a member of the Security Council, a member of the [IAEA's] Board of Governors, as well as a partner of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a country with a pedigree in nuclear matters," the top Iranian diplomat said.

"China has always held constructive positions on the nuclear issue of Iran, and we appreciate China's constructive and positive stance. Currently, China's position upholds the ongoing negotiations, and they have also expressed readiness to assist and cooperate, the details of which we will discuss today," he added.

UN envoys of Iran, Russia, China confer with Grossi in Vienna

International Desk

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN in Vienna said senior diplomats from Iran, Russia, and China had met with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s director general in the Austrian capital, emphasizing the need for sustained cooperation and dialogue to boost diplomatic efforts.

Iran's ambassador to United Nations organizations in Vienna, Reza Najafi, together with his Russian and Chinese counterparts, Mikhail Ulyanov and Li Song, met the head of the UN nuclear watchdog Director General Rafael Grossi on Thursday, the mission said on X.

"Amb. Najafi together with Amb. Li and Amb. Ulyanov jointly met IAEA DG, emphasizing the continuation of cooperation and dialogue to support the ongoing dip-

lomatic efforts and also highlight the opportunity for the IAEA to play a professional and constructive role in this regard," the mission said.

During the meeting, the senior diplomats said mutual respect and diplomatic engagement remain the only viable and practical path for resolving the nuclear issue.

The three countries said the IAEA and its chief possess the necessary potential and expertise to contribute constructively to this process, with the goal of supporting diplomatic efforts and addressing the issue in a positive and practical manner.

The meeting comes following the conclusion of the second round of Iran's indirect negotiations with United States in the Italian capital of Rome on April 19.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper La Repubblica on April 20, Grossi, for his part, had



expressed optimism about the ongoing indirect nuclear talks between Iran and the US, describing it as "a positive day for peace."

The third round of Iran-US indirect talks - expert-level technical negotiations - is scheduled to be held on Saturday - April 26 - in Muscat, the capital of Oman, where the first round was held.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly stressed that it has never functioned as the side to leave negotiations, while declaring it would respond positively to any potential positive steps by the counterparty.

Iran says Hezbollah disarmament Lebanon's internal affair, Tehran not to meddle

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Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Lebanon Mojtaba Amani said the disarmament of the Hezbollah resistance movement is an internal issue of the Arab country and that Tehran will not meddle in such affairs.

"The Lebanese government is obligated to consult with various parties regarding factions, the resistance and its weapons, and related issues. These issues are internal affairs of Lebanon, in which we do not interfere," Amani said.

"There is a legitimate party with decades of experience and weapons," he added, referring to the Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement.

"These issues are for the Lebanese government and its institutions to discuss and agree on any matter."

Iran's ambassador to Beirut had earlier dismissed media stories that he had been summoned by the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon over his comments regarding the new Lebanese government's push to disarm Hezbollah.

"Our relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon continue normally and there has been no talk of summoning," he said.

The ambassador said the "incorrect and deviated" reports about sour relations between Iran and Lebanon are part of a propaganda aimed at displaying the Israeli regime as a winner.

He underlined that Iran would respect any agreement among the Lebanese institutions, resistance and parties, saying, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is bound to support the oppressed, regardless of their faith or sect."

Rejecting the "illusion" that the resistance in Lebanon has been weakened, Amani said it has been the Zionist regime that has suffered defeats after failing to reach its ob-

jectives and has been forced to make a deal with Lebanon and Hamas.

Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said on Friday that the Hezbollah resistance movement will not hand over its weapons before Israel fulfills its ceasefire agreement obligations.

"We will not hand over the weapons now before the implementation of the terms requested from the enemy" as per the ceasefire agreement, Berri said in an interview.

"Our weapons are our cards which we will not give up without an actual implementation of the ceasefire agreement and consequently heading to a dialogue over their fate."

The remarks come amid the regime's daily violations of the ceasefire agreement that was clinched late last year with the aim of ending Tel Aviv's deadly escalation against Lebanon that had claimed the lives of around 4,000 people throughout more than a year.