

# Iran, US signal optimism as peace deal draws closer

## International Desk

Iran is cautiously pursuing a possible peace agreement with the United States as both sides expressed optimism about the chances of concluding the deal in the coming days.

While Pakistan's prime minister, whose country has mediated the agreement, said on Saturday that Tehran and Washington could finalize the deal within as little as 24 hours, Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei underlined that the expected memorandum would not be signed on Sunday.

"We have to wait and see about the exact time of signing; although it will not be tomorrow," Baqaei said during a press conference in Hamedan on Saturday.

"We are responsible for pursuing this diplomatic process with skepticism; because the experience of a year and a half of negotiations with the American side, along with their breaches of commitment and atrocities during previous talks, necessitates that we take every step with caution and extreme prudence," the Iranian official said.

He added that the memorandum focuses on the ending of the war on all fronts and it has been decided that there will be no discussion on the Iranian nuclear issue at this



Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (L) meets Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad, Pakistan, on April 11, 2026.

● IRNA

inside Iran as the only viable option.

In the second phase, negotiations would also focus on removal of the US's sanctions, the official added. Araghchi noted that Lebanon has never been excluded from Iran's strategic considerations.

According to the official, a definitive conclusion of the war must feature the Israeli regime's withdrawal from the areas it has occupied in Lebanon.

## Removal of US blockade, reconstruction plan

The foreign minister said the first clause of the proposed agreement concerns the lifting of the illegal naval blockade imposed by the US against Iran.

He said the potential agreement would additionally include an economic reconstruction plan to address war-related damages.

Iran and the United States have engaged in weeks of indirect negotiations seeking to bring an end to the war sparked by US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

stage.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a post on X said, "We are closer to a peace deal than ever before." "With finalization likely expected in the next 24 hours, Pakistan is preparing for the electronic signing of the peace deal immediately after, followed by technical level talks next week."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a televised interview on Friday outlined the structure of the potential memorandum of understanding.

Diplomatic efforts are now in their final stages and are based on a 14-point mem-

orandum of understanding that has been discussed in the media, Araghchi said.

## Two-phase negotiation framework

According to Araghchi, the process is divided into two stages, namely realization of an initial memorandum of understanding between Iran and the US, and a second phase that is expected to feature negotiations leading to a potential final agreement. He added that Iran's frozen assets would be released upon signing of the agreement, adding that the signing process might take place in a digital format in a day

or two.

The second phase is expected to last around 60 days but might be extended if both sides were satisfied with progress, Araghchi noted.

## Nuclear issue, sanctions left for 2<sup>nd</sup> phase

The foreign minister underlined that sensitive topics, including the nuclear issue featuring uranium enrichment and highly-enriched uranium, have been postponed to the second stage. He also stated that Iran's position on the highly-enriched materials is that it should exclusively be diluted

## Ayatollah Khamenei grants clemency to 139 death row prisoners



Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei

● IRNA

## National Desk

The spokesperson for the Iranian Judiciary Ali Asghar Jahangir said on Saturday that Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei has agreed to commute the sentences of 139 prisoners on death row.

The pardon was granted at the request of the country's Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejei. Jahangir said that Ayatollah Khamenei granted the amnesty on the basis of Islamic compassion, stressing that the decision comes whilst many countries refuse to grant clemency during wars and crises.

He emphasized that Iranian prisoners convicted of undermining national security and involvement in foreign-backed January riots and acts of sabotage were excluded from the amnesty list.

Article 110 of the Constitution grants the Leader the right to pardon or reduce the sentences of convicts upon a recommendation from the head of the Judiciary.

The clemency, however, does not apply to certain types of convicts, including those who have been sentenced for their role in the armed struggle against the country, armed or organized drug trafficking, armed robbery, arms smuggling, abduction, bribery, and embezzlement.

Back in June 5, the Leader had also pardoned or commuted the sentences of more than 2,000 convicts.

The clemency applies to inmates convicted by general and revolutionary courts, military tribunals, and government penal institutions. Such pardons are routinely announced on major religious and national occasions.

## Martyred Leader's funeral slated for July 4; burial on July 9

### National Desk

Funeral for martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei will begin in Tehran on July 4 and conclude with his burial in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad on July 9, according to the office responsible for preserving and publishing the works of Ayatollah Khamenei. According to a statement issued by the office, farewell ceremonies for the martyred Leader will be held at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla on July 4 and 5.

A funeral procession in Tehran is scheduled for July 6, while another procession will take place in the holy city of Qom on July 7.

The final funeral ceremony will be held in the holy city of Mashhad on July 9. The statement said the martyred Leader will be laid to rest at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS).

The organizers invited "all noble and dear people, the free people of the world, followers of the school of Islam, and those interested in Iran" to attend the ceremonies and bid farewell to the martyred Leader.

Ayatollah Khamenei was assassinated by the US and Israeli militaries at his residence in Tehran on February 28, when they launched a bloody war of aggression against Iran that also saw the assassination of several top military commanders.

Days later, Iran's Assembly of Experts, a body of 88 clerics, elected Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, 56 years old, as the third Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei is the son of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.



Martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei

## Israel ratchets up assaults on southern Lebanon, orders evacuations

### International Desk

Israel carried out new air strikes in the south of Lebanon on Saturday after ordering people to leave about 20 locations including the city of Nabatieh as part of its military campaign against Hezbollah resistance movement.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) said Israeli airstrikes hit several areas covered by the warning, including the villages of Rihan and Sujud, located not far from Nabatieh, and other areas not mentioned in the evacuation notice. It said an Israeli strike killed a local official in Rihan, lo-



cated in the southern region of Jezzine.

The Israeli army warned residents in 24 locations, both in and around Nabatieh and nearer to the coast, to "evacuate your homes immediately and move to the north of the Zahrani River", around 45 kilometers from

the southern border with Israel.

Last month it declared all areas south of the river "combat zones", and has been heavily striking the area. Fighters from the Hezbollah resistance movement also on Saturday struck and destroyed technical devices

belonging to Israeli forces with two kamikaze drones on the outskirts of the Jal al-Dei military post in Nabatieh. Hezbollah fighters also destroyed an Israeli Merkava tank in the southeastern outskirts of the town of Yahmour al-Shaqif. The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah began in March after the Lebanese group launched military operations against the Israeli regime in response to the regime's aggression against Iran.

The war has claimed at least 3,700 lives since March 2, according to the latest figures released by Lebanon's Health Ministry.



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