



Workers wave as a truck of The Red Cross and Turkey's Red Crescent leaves to send supplies to Iran, in Ankara



Security personnel stand guard near the expected venue of the US-Iran talks in the Red Zone area of Islamabad

Israel approves 34 new West Bank settlements: media, NGO  
AFP | Ramallah

Israel has approved the establishment of 34 new settlements in the occupied West Bank, according to Israeli media reports and the watchdog Peace Now, which said the decision was taken "secretly" in early April.

"The security cabinet secretly decided to establish 34 new settlements," Peace Now said in a statement released late on Thursday.

The 34 settlements come on top of 68 others already approved since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government came to power in 2022.

The decision has not been officially published by any government body, and the defense ministry, in charge of settlements in the occupied West Bank, declined to respond to questions.

"We are not addressing this issue," a spokesperson for the ministry said.

# Vance warns Iran before talks

US vice president cautions Tehran as fragile ceasefire faces mounting strain

● Vance warns Iran against playing Washington

● US accuses Tehran of blocking oil shipments

● Two-week truce falters

AFP | Washington

US Vice President JD Vance warned Iran yesterday against trying to "play" Washington, as he set off for talks in Islamabad aimed at transforming a fragile ceasefire into a lasting peace deal.

Despite the temporary truce, deep divisions persist, with mounting concerns that Tehran has failed to uphold key commitments while attempting to deflect responsibility onto other actors.

Vance stressed that while the



US Vice President JD Vance speaks to reporters before boarding Air Force Two

United States remains open to diplomacy, any attempt by Iran to manipulate the process would be met with a firm response.

"If the Iranians are willing to negotiate in good faith, we're certainly willing to extend the open hand," he said, warning that any effort to "play" the United States

would quickly be rejected.

Since the ceasefire took effect, US President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticised Iran's handling of the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, accusing Tehran of failing to restore normal shipping operations despite its commitments.

## Trump says Iran has 'no cards' beyond Hormuz control

President Donald Trump said yesterday that Iran has "no cards" in upcoming talks with the United States -- apart from Tehran's effective stranglehold on the crucial Strait of Hormuz shipping channel.

"The Iranians don't seem

to realize they have no cards, other than a short term extortion of the World by using International Waterways. The only reason they are alive today is to negotiate!" Trump said on his Truth Social network.

**"If the Iranians are willing to negotiate in good faith, we're certainly willing to extend the open hand"**

JD VANCE

The waterway -- a critical artery for global energy supplies -- remains heavily restricted, with only limited vessel movement, raising concerns that Iran is using its control over the strait as

leverage in negotiations.

Rather than adhering strictly to the agreed framework, Iran has sought to broaden the scope of the ceasefire by linking its participation in talks to unrelated regional developments, particularly Israeli military operations in Lebanon -- a move widely seen as an attempt to shift focus away from its own obligations.

Iranian officials have also dismissed the Islamabad talks as "meaningless," further reinforcing doubts about Tehran's willingness to engage constructively in the diplomatic process.

# Artemis astronauts gird for re-entry and splashdown

AFP | Washington

The Artemis II astronauts conducted a historic lunar flyby, gathered invaluable data and took in unprecedented Moon views, but one of the most crucial moments of their 10-day mission is still to come: yesterday's splashdown.

Earlier this week, Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch along with Canadian Jeremy Hansen voyaged further from Earth than any human before, in a mission considered a key stepping stone towards eventual crewed lunar landings, and more.

They are scheduled to splash down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of San Diego at 5:07



Christina Koch (L), Jeremy Hansen (top), Reid Wiseman (R), and Victor Glover (bottom) posing for a group photo inside the Orion spacecraft

pm local time (0007 GMT), after which NASA and the military will

ship.

Their journey has been rich in milestones and already resulted in stunning photographs that have captivated the imaginations of people on Earth.

But until the astronauts are home safe, it's too early to talk about success, NASA's Associate Administrator Amit Kshatriya told a briefing Thursday.

"When we can start celebrating is when we have a crew safely in the medbay of the ship," the high-ranking official said. "That's really when we can allow the emotions to take over, and, you know, start talking about success."

"We need to have the crew home before we do that."

## Vital heat shield

The stakes are particularly high given concerns that arose during Artemis I, a 2022 uncrewed test flight to the Moon and back that saw the Orion heat shield erode in unexpected ways.

The heat shield is vital: During their reentry, the Orion spacecraft will face temperatures peaking around 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit (2,760 degrees Celsius), or half as hot as the surface of the Sun.

The astronauts will come hurtling back at a maximum velocity of 34,965 feet (10,657 meters) per second -- more than 30 times the speed of sound.

The heat shield is meant to slowly erode -- "ablate," as NASA

puts it -- to protect the capsule, a process that during Artemis I was disrupted.

To minimize any risk to the crew, NASA has changed the reentry path they had used in that test mission, after determining it had played a role in the complications.

"We have high confidence in the system and the heat shield and the parachutes and the recovery systems we put together," Kshatriya said. "The engineering supports it, the Artemis I flight data supports it. All of our ground test supports it. Our analysis supports it."

"And tomorrow, the crew is going to put their lives behind that confidence."