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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Vice President JD Vance, flanked by prominent Pakistani officials, arrives in Islamabad on Saturday for talks with Iranian officials.

Direct talks go on for hours as U.S., Iran seek war exit

SIGNS OF PROGRESS AMID SHAKY CEASEFIRE

Sides far apart on key issues, face significant obstacles

BY SUSANNAH GEORGE AND SHAIQ HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN — Direct U.S.-Iranian talks stretched into early Sunday here, as the two sides began to delve into technical details in the highest level of face-to-face engagement between leaders of the United States and Iran in decades.

The negotiations, led on the U.S. side by Vice President JD Vance, continued for several hours and were largely positive but went through “mood swings,” according to a Pakistani official briefed on the progress of the talks. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive closed-door deliberations.

After agreeing to a shaky ceasefire on Tuesday, Iran and the United States are now seeking to identify a more permanent end to the war. The two sides face significant obstacles as they remain far apart on key issues, but the fact that negotiators agreed to speak directly was welcomed as a positive sign by diplomats and officials in the region.

Talks moved to the technical level after both parties took their first break of the night, signaling progress in the initial phase, the Pakistani official said. However, the two sides also struggled to bridge differences over the future of the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran’s demand that the United States see negotiations on A14

Vance takes on high-profile, high-risk task

BY NATALIE ALLISON

Six weeks after President Donald Trump started a war in Iran that has proved difficult to end, he has turned to a new approach in negotiations: Putting front and center his vice president, JD Vance, whose reputation happens to be as the administration’s foremost war skeptic.

The peace talks mark Vance’s highest-profile assignment in the 14 months the administration has been in office. Vance has been a constant presence in war strategy meetings, White House officials say, and has spent much of the past week working the phones with negotiators. But the admitted “skeptic of foreign military interventions” had previously played a supporting role in Middle East affairs, behind Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Skeptic who wasn’t keen on Iran war now has the duty of finding a way out

A positive outcome for the United States this weekend — a meaningful step toward ending the deadly and costly war — could boost Vance’s stock not only in the administration, but as he works out his own political plans ahead of the 2028 presidential contest.

By contrast, more failed negotiations and continued war could serve as an albatross for the ambitious vice president — and for a White House with declining approval ratings.

With multiple parties already charging each other with ceasefire violations, a deal is unlikely

to be easily negotiated regardless of who is leading the U.S. side, foreign policy experts said.

While Vance prepared for the talks Friday on Air Force Two en route to Pakistan, the two-week ceasefire remained as “fragile” as the vice president had described it earlier in the week. The Strait of Hormuz remained blocked — with Iranian state media saying the strait was closed to “99% of ships” following Israel’s attacks on Lebanon — despite Trump saying Iran had agreed to reopen it.

Iran’s top negotiator, parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, meanwhile insisted that negotiations would not begin without a ceasefire in Lebanon and the release of Iran’s blocked assets.

Vance in recent weeks has been in touch with officials in Pakistan, who are mediating the ne-

gotiations. The Pakistani team encouraged the U.S. to have Vance in the lead role for the meeting, in Islamabad, according to two White House officials. Trump subsequently asked Vance to lead the negotiations.

Vance will be joined at the negotiating table by Witkoff and Kushner — with support from officials at the National Security Council, State Department and Defense Department, the White House said. He is expected to return to Washington on Sunday.

Two officials in the administration suggested that dispatching Vance will not only put a fresh face at the table with Iran, but also help show the U.S. is operating in good faith after previous rounds of negotiations ended with Trump ordering airstrikes.

“The most important aspect of having Vance in the talks is sim-

SEE VANCE ON A15

Students of ‘just war’ debate Trump’s rhetoric

Threat to annihilate a culture animates classrooms

BY MICHELLE BOORSTEIN AND DANIELLE DOUGLAS-GABRIEL

They were making their way through the formalities of “just war” theory, which for centuries has tried to tame a seemingly impossible question — Is war moral? — into something of a practical checklist: Are the war’s goals clear? Was there an explicit, grave threat? Is victory likely? Will good clearly outweigh destruction?

The air conditioner hummed. Sitting in a horseshoe shape on the Washington, D.C., campus of the Catholic University of America, the 26 students enrolled in Politics 226, a 90-minute long course on peace and the morality

of war, took notes and politely raised their hands.

Then a slide appeared: Does the U.S. intervention in Iran meet “just war” criteria? A few minutes later, a student mentioned President Donald Trump’s recent social media post threatening to wipe out Iranian civilization.

“Yes, *what about* that tweet?” asked the professor, Maryann Cusimano Love, chair of Catholic’s Politics Department and a consultant for the Vatican on issues of nuclear and artificial intelligence weapons, among other things.

Hands shot up around the room.

SEE CLASS ON A8

Swalwell staff supports women who claim abuse

Calif. Democrat, facing investigation, is pressed to end run for governor

BY MAEGAN VAZQUEZ, DAN MERICA AND DREW HARWELL

Senior staff of California gubernatorial candidate Eric Swalwell on Saturday condemned allegations of sexual misconduct against the Democratic congressman as “abhorrent” hours after the Manhattan district attorney’s office confirmed it is investigating a sexual assault accusation of a former staff member.

The latest fallout for his cratering campaign followed media reports Friday of alleged sexual assault and misconduct by Swalwell against multiple women.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that a former employee in Swalwell’s congressional office accused him of sexual assault. Hours later, CNN reported that three other women had alleged other types of sexual misconduct by him. Both outlets appear to have included the account of an unnamed woman who said that Swalwell forcibly had sex with her in his New York City hotel room after they went out for drinks in April 2024.

The Washington Post has not been able to independently confirm the allegations against Swalwell, who is among the candidates leading in some polls of the crowded gubernatorial race. He has vehemently denied allegations of sexual assault and suggested they were politically motivated.

In an extraordinary joint statement issued Saturday, Swalwell’s senior campaign and congressional staff wrote that they were “horrified” by the allegations.

“We stand with our former colleague, and the other women who have come forward. We believe you should stand with them, too,” the statement said. “The behavior detailed in these reports is abhorrent, beneath the dignity of those serving in public office and betrays the trust of all Californians.”

The staff said that “any decision of staff members to remain in their roles in the interim should not be viewed as support for Eric Swalwell,” adding that “not everyone ... can immediately forfeit their income and benefits without significant personal risk or consequence.”

In a separate statement in response to the alleged incident involving a staffer in New York, a spokesperson for the Manhattan district attorney urged “survi-

SEE SWALWELL ON A9



President George H.W. Bush, a Republican, and liberal Democrats were willing to compromise.

A kinder and gentler art of the deal

In 1990, a bipartisan Congress passed historic bills. Then it cracked apart.

BY MICHAEL KRANISH

On March 12, 1990, 8-year-old Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins took off her leg braces, abandoned her wheelchair and crawled up the marble steps of the U.S. Capitol. The next day, she joined a group of advocates who rolled into the Rotunda and chained themselves together to push for disabilities legislation, chanting “Access is a civil right!” Police in riot gear used chain cutters to dislodge the protesters and arrested them.

The following month, amid reports of smog-

choked cities and historic levels of “acid rain” that was killing forests and lakes, more than 300,000 people rallied on the National Mall and at the Capitol to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Earth Day and call for passage of one of the most sweeping environmental bills in the nation’s history.

Meanwhile, the murder of six priests in El Salvador in November 1989 was leading to calls

SEE BIPARTISANSHIP ON A5

Biden-like: Trump wants credit on economy. A2

Ballroom work can go on for now, judges rule

Trump has claimed that halting the project poses a risk to national security

BY DAN DIAMOND, JONATHAN EDWARDS AND MAEGAN VAZQUEZ

A federal appeals court said the White House can temporarily continue construction on President Donald Trump’s planned White House ballroom while punting a central question — if pausing the \$400 million project threatens the president, as Trump claims — back to the federal judge who halted the project last month.

In its order issued Saturday, a three-judge panel at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit ruled 2-1 that U.S. District Judge Richard Leon should clarify a series of national security-related questions that could affect ongoing construction. The panel also said that the White House could keep working on the project until April 17, granting the administration three extra days before Leon’s pause takes effect.

Leon, an appointee of Presi-

SEE BALLROOM ON A2

SPORTS

At the Masters, a rising pro is guided by a middle school math teacher. B1

BUSINESS

A former Tesla president shares how he survived working under Musk. B7



SPRING HOME BUYERS GUIDE

Uncertainty in the world has stymied the typically hot market this season.

THE REGION

Descendants renew fight to save historic Black cemeteries in D.C. B13



ARTS & STYLE

The “Lost in Translation” hotel in Tokyo retains its allure even decades later.

TRAVEL

Pants optional: A tourist tries to navigate Berlin’s famous club scene.

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