

**Middle East war****Qatar gas shipment clears Strait of Hormuz after Pakistan-Iran talks**

Tanker carrying LNG throws energy lifeline to Islamabad



Vessels stranded in the Strait of Hormuz, pictured on May 6 © Stringer/Reuters

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A tanker carrying Qatari liquefied natural gas has passed through the Strait of Hormuz bound for Pakistan, the first of a planned series of shipments that would ease the energy crisis afflicting the south Asian nation at the centre of efforts to end the US-Israeli war on Iran.

The LNG cargo, the first from [Qatar](#) to make it through the strait since the start of the war, was dispatched after days of talks between Iranian, Pakistani and Qatari officials, according to three people briefed on the negotiations.

News of the passage on Sunday came as the fragility of the weeks-long ceasefire between the US and Iran was underscored when both Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates said they had intercepted drones entering their airspace.

Iranian state media said on Sunday that Tehran had passed to Pakistan its response to US proposals aimed at ending the war. The IRNA news agency said Iran's response emphasised that "at this stage, talks should be focused on ending the war in the region", but did not give further details.

The LNG carrier Al Kharaitiyat, which loaded in Qatar earlier this month, reached the Gulf of Oman on Sunday on its way to Port Qasim in Pakistan, according to ship tracking data from Kpler.

"Pakistan's leadership is trying to work out safe passage in discussions with Iran," said one Pakistani official briefed on the efforts, who asked for anonymity to discuss sensitive negotiations. "Our leadership sought consent from Iran and the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] on this."

Another person briefed on the matter said Iran had agreed to assist Pakistan to address its gas shortage, and the two sides co-ordinated the safe passage of the Al Kharaitiyat, which was carrying gas supplied under Pakistan's contract with Qatar, which supplies almost all of its LNG.

The person said the Iran-Pakistan deal would involve a "limited" number of LNG carriers.

In addition to the Al Kharaitiyat, Pakistan expects three other vessels with Qatari LNG to attempt to transit the Strait of Hormuz in the coming days, according to people familiar with Islamabad's planning. One such ship, the Mihzem, approached the strait on Sunday.

Pakistan has maintained good relations with Tehran while leading mediation efforts between the US and Iran in an effort to end the war.

Islamabad had been separately working on a system with Iran's leadership under which further Qatari LNG cargoes would be able to exit the Gulf, according to Pakistani and regional officials.

Iran has slowed to a trickle the flow of vessels through the Strait of Hormuz — through which about a fifth of the world's oil and gas normally passes — since the US and Israel launched their war against the Islamic republic on February 28. The US has also imposed a naval blockade to prevent ships entering or leaving Iranian ports.

# US and Iranian forces have clashed over control of the Strait of Hormuz

Port



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Sources: VesselFinder; FT research

Two Pakistan petroleum ministry officials said Islamabad received initial indications Iran might permit some Qatari shipments to pass through the strait after calls between Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Qatari counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani on Thursday.

Pakistan LNG, the country's state-owned procurement arm, cancelled two bids for spot cargoes that day on hopes of a deal to permit Qatari LNG shipments through the key waterway.

But as Islamabad faces surging summer power demand, officials on Saturday issued another spot market tender for two LNG cargoes to be delivered this month. In early April, Pakistan ran out of LNG, the fuel source for a quarter of its power generation, sparking up to seven hours of rolling blackouts until it secured spot cargoes late in the month.

The decision to seek spot cargoes was a backup option in case Al Kharaitiyat failed to cross the strait, one official said.

Qatar, the world's second-largest producer of LNG, suspended its production in March after its main gas facility, Ras Laffan, was hit by Iranian missile and drone strikes. Iran's effective closure of the strait has also prevented tankers transiting the waterway. QatarEnergy declared force majeure on its LNG contracts in early March.

Senior Iranian military officials warned that their forces were ready to return to war despite the ceasefire.

"There is simply no exchange of fire, but our forces continue the same level of alertness and monitoring of the enemy," Brigadier General Mohammad Akraminia, a spokesperson for Iran's army, told state news agency IRNA on Sunday. "We warn the enemy that any renewed aggression or miscalculations will certainly lead to surprises."

*Additional reporting by Najmeh Bozorgmehr in Tehran*

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