

ISRAEL AND LEBANON REACH AN AGREEMENT ON MARITIME BORDER

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Israel said on Tuesday it has reached a U.S.-brokered agreement with Lebanon to settle their long-disputed maritime border, hailing a “historic achievement” that potentially unlocks significant offshore gas production for both countries.

Negotiations between the neighbouring countries, which are still technically at war, had suffered repeated setbacks since their launch in 2020 but gained momentum in recent weeks with both sides eyeing revenue from potentially rich Mediterranean gas fields.

U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein floated a proposed final agreement earlier this month that Israel welcomed, but Lebanon had sought some adjustments subsequently.

Israel said last week it intended to reject Lebanon’s requested changes, even if that made a deal impossible, but negotiations continued, culminating in what both sides described as acceptable final terms.

Lebanon’s presidency said the proposed final text submitted by Hochstein was “satisfactory to Lebanon” and voiced hope that “the agreement on the demarcation will be announced as soon as possible”.

A major source of friction was the Karish gas field, which Israel insisted fell entirely within its waters and was not a subject of negotiation.

Lebanon reportedly claimed part of the field and Hezbollah, the powerful Iran-backed militant group that holds huge sway in Lebanon, threatened attacks if Israel began production at Karish.

Under terms leaked to the press, all of the Karish field would fall under Israeli control, while another potential gas field, Qana, would be divided but its exploitation would be under Lebanon’s control.

The Karish gas field was one of the major sources of friction between the two countries

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