

IAEA chief arrives in Iran to discuss enrichment site

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By Parisa Hafezi

TEHRAN (Reuters) - The head of the U.N. nuclear agency arrived in Iran on Saturday for talks on a timetable for inspectors to visit a newly disclosed unfinished nuclear enrichment plant, state radio reported.

A senior Iranian nuclear official told Reuters that EIBaradei would discuss plans to allow International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to visit the site, as demanded by world powers. He said EIBaradei would not visit any nuclear site.

Iran agreed with six powers in Geneva Thursday to allow IAEA inspectors unfettered access to the plant, near the Shi'ite holy city of Qom, but did not set a time frame.

The West suspects the Islamic state is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Iran insists it needs the nuclear technology to generate power to meet booming domestic demand.

The New York Times reported on Saturday that a confidential analysis by IAEA staff had concluded that Iran has acquired "sufficient information to be able to design and produce" a nuclear bomb based on highly enriched uranium.

Western officials said Iran had agreed "in principle" on Thursday to ship out most of its enriched uranium for reprocessing in Russia and France. It would then be returned to power a Tehran reactor that makes medical isotopes.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization said in a statement that EIBaradei's visit was "not related to the Geneva meeting" but that there would be discussions on continued cooperation, particularly with regard to fuel for the Tehran reactor.

Iran has repeatedly rejected demands to halt uranium enrichment, which can have both military or civilian purposes, or even freeze it at current levels of output.

'FREEZE FOR FREEZE'

The talks in Geneva ended without agreement on the idea of "freeze for freeze" -- a suspension of further enrichment in return for a halt to additional U.N. sanctions against Iran.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said on Friday that this issue had not been discussed in Geneva, state television reported.

Tehran denies the West's accusations that it deliberately concealed the building of its second uranium enrichment plant.

EIBaradei has said Iran was "on the wrong side of the law" in failing to declare the plant as soon as plans were drawn up.

The New York Times said the internal IAEA report, titled "Possible Military Dimensions of Iran's Nuclear Program," described a complex program run by Iran's defense ministry "aimed at the development of a nuclear payload to be delivered using the Shahab 3 missile system."

The report said the program apparently started in 2002. It suggested "the Iranians have done a wide array of research and testing to perfect nuclear arms, like making high-voltage detonators, firing test explosives and designing warheads," the Times said, but it did not say how far they had progressed.

The Times said unnamed senior European officials had described the document's conclusions to the paper. It said the report was written earlier this year and had since been revised, and quoted one official as saying the text was "not ready for publication as an official document."

The Geneva meeting, to be followed by more talks in late October, eased tension over Iran's nuclear intentions. But Western powers said Iran needed to offer more transparency at the second meeting to prevent tougher U.N. sanctions.

The United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany all took part. Russia and China, major trade partners of Iran, have long opposed harsh sanctions against Iran.

EIBaradei was last in Iran in January 2008 to negotiate the implementation of Iranian steps, still incomplete, to clarify concerns about its nuclear program.

(Writing by Parisa Hafezi; editing by Kevin Liffey and Mohammad Zargham)