

Defiant Iran resumes nuclear research

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A defiant Iran on Tuesday resumed sensitive nuclear research after a two-year suspension, despite warnings from the White House that Iran was risking a 'serious escalation' in the international dispute over its nuclear programme by reopening an atomic research centre.

"Today, with the authorisation given by the IAEA to its inspectors (to supervise the action)... seals from a number of research centres were removed," said Mohammad Saidi, deputy head of Iran's Atomic Energy Agency said, referring to the International Atomic Energy Agency. "As of today these centres resume their activities," Saidi told reporters. "The research will be carried out in all the centres that we told the IAEA about, and we will restart our work." "The production of nuclear fuel is still in suspension and we hope to reach a conclusion over it in the near future, and also reach a clear agreement with the Europeans in this regard," Saidi said.

In Vienna, the IAEA confirmed that Iran removed seals at its Natanz atomic research facility under the supervision of its inspectors. "The Iranians have begun removing (U.N.) seals at Natanz in the presence of IAEA inspectors," said a spokeswoman for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna. The head of the UN's nuclear watchdog, Mohamed ElBaradei, informed his agency's governing board, however, that Iran intends to begin "small-scale" uranium enrichment work, contradicting previous statements by Tehran.

"Iran plans to install a small-scale gas ultracentrifuge cascade in its pilot fuel enrichment plant at Natanz," a Western diplomat said, reading from ElBaradei's report to the 35-nation board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Citing the report, the diplomat said that during its research work on centrifuges, Iran planned to feed a small amount of uranium hexafluoride.

On Tuesday, Moscow said its offer to enrich uranium jointly with Iran at a site on Russian territory remained valid. Talks on the compromise proposal are due to resume next month after breaking off at the weekend without agreement. agencies