

## Iran working on uranium enrichment: IAEA

*One hardly blame them. They will need fuel and a little work now may also force others to help.*

Google (Reuters)  
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Iran is forging ahead with a nuclear fuel enrichment program in defiance of world pressure and is stonewalling U.N. probes spurred by fears it secretly wants atomic weapons, a U.N. watchdog report said on Monday.

The report by International Atomic Energy Agency director Mohamed ElBaradei was circulated to IAEA board members before they meet on March 6 to discuss it. The report will be forwarded to the U.N. Security Council, which can impose sanctions.

"It is regrettable and a matter of concern that the uncertainties related to the scope and nature of Iran's nuclear program have not been clarified after three years of intensive agency verification," said the report, obtained by Reuters.

It said Iran had begun testing a cascade of 20 centrifuges at its Natanz pilot uranium-enrichment plant, pressing ahead with efforts to purify nuclear fuel.

Iran had also begun substantial renovations of Natanz's system handling UF<sub>6</sub> gas, which is converted by centrifuges into enriched atomic fuel. It said the cascade of 20 centrifuge machines began to undergo vacuum testing on February 22.

The report came as the West reacted with deep skepticism to a tentative Russia-Iran deal on uranium enrichment intended to help resolve the dispute.

The head of Iran's nuclear program said on Sunday that Tehran had reached a "basic" agreement with Moscow on a proposed joint venture to enrich uranium in Russia. But Russian officials were afterwards reported as saying Iran had so far made no commitment to renounce home-grown nuclear enrichment, as demanded by Russia and the major Western powers.

France and Germany said the outline deal represented no significant progress and the United States also expressed reservations.

ElBaradei's report said Iran had also produced 85 metric tonnes of UF<sub>6</sub> gas at its uranium-conversion facility in Isfahan since September 2005, which would be enough for several atomic bombs once Iran masters full-scale enrichment technology.

It said, however, that investigations has not uncovered any hard evidence that any nuclear materials had been diverted into bomb-making.

A February 4 IAEA board resolution reporting Iran to the Security Council over concerns it may be secretly seeking atomic bombs had demanded Tehran stop impeding agency inquiries.

"To clarify these uncertainties, Iran's full transparency is still essential," ElBaradei's report said.

"Without full transparency that extends beyond the formal legal requirements of the (IAEA) safeguards agreement ... the agency's ability to reconstruct the history of Iran's past program and verify the correctness and completeness of the statements made by Iran, particularly with regard to its centrifuge (nuclear fuel) enrichment program, will be limited, and questions about the past and current direction of Iran's nuclear program will continue to be raised," it said.

Officials close to the IAEA probes said Iran had done very little to heed the IAEA board apart from providing slightly more, but inconclusive, information about alleged civilian-military links in nuclear work and about equipment connected to a military-run installation razed by Iran before inspectors could reach it.

"We are not yet at the point to be able to conclude that this is a (peaceful nuclear program)," said a senior official close to the IAEA investigations.

Another official close to the inquiry said: "Iran is still inching forward and, coupled with the resumption of uranium enrichment work, it makes the whole atmosphere much more negative."

The report said environmental samples taken at the Parchin military installation had found no traces of nuclear materials.

Parchin is a facility where the West suspected Iran was secretly working on nuclear weapons technology.