

New Centrifuges by 2011

The new generation of Iran's uranium-enrichment centrifuges will be ready by March 2011, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said on Friday.

Speaking to Fars News Agency on Friday, Ali Akbar Salehi added that the new centrifuges—named IR3 and IR4—are currently under production and would be ready for use by the end of the next Iranian year (March 20, 2011).

"We have entered next generation centrifuges into the uranium enrichment cycle and they are speedily undergoing tests," he said.

Iran has been planning since last year to upgrade the technology of its centrifuges to speed up uranium enrichment.

Salehi said 6,000 centrifuges were now operating at the Natanz uranium-enrichment site in central Iran.

The Bushehr plant was supposed to be completed 10 years ago, but work has been delayed by Russia for various reasons, mainly political considerations.

Tehran has complained over Russian delays, as the country has expressed doubts about Moscow's sincerity in completing the plant.

Salehi, however, said work on the Bushehr plant is progressing faster than planned and that it was three months away from launch.

Guaranteeing the safety of Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, the AEOI chief said, "Plant safety is among AEOI's top priorities and we would never sacrifice safety over progress."

Salehi announced that Norway has offered to cooperate with Iran over the safety of Bushehr plant and expressed hope that Japan would also do the same.

Referring to current efforts regarding nuclear fusion technology, he said, "Efforts were made in this regard in the past, but the AEOI is now focusing attention on it, despite the fact that it may take decades for our efforts to bear fruit."

Asked whether Tehran is willing to seek the cooperation of countries such as Japan that possess the technology to build a fusion research laboratory, he said, "Tokyo is ready to fully cooperate with Iran in all nuclear fields. The issue would be brought up in the upcoming visit to Japan by the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (Saeed Jalili)."

Commenting on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's order for the construction of 10 new uranium enrichment facilities in Iran, Salehi said, "The president gave us a two-month deadline to present him with a report in this regard, but we hope the report would be prepared sooner."

President Ahmadinejad's order came after the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA)—under heavy western pressures—issued a resolution last month, demanding the Islamic Republic stop the construction of its second uranium enrichment facility at Fordow about 160 km southwest of Tehran.

This is while Iran had informed the UN nuclear watchdog on the under-construction facility about 12 months earlier than it was obliged to according to IAEA regulations. The agency's inspectors have visited the site twice this year.

Iran insists it has the right to pursue peaceful nuclear development as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and an IAEA member, and rejects western claims that it is working on a secret military nuclear program.

The UN nuclear watchdog has also repeatedly confirmed the civilian nature of Iran's nuclear program in its recent reports.

On construction work at the 360-megawatt nuclear power plant in Dakhovain in southern Iran, Salehi said the initial design stage is progressing well.

Salehi pointed to Israeli efforts to pressure Iran to pull out of NPT and said "we will not pull out of the NPT, as we consider the treaty in our interests, despite its flaws".



Protestors Condemn Insult To Imam Khomeini



Protestors took to the streets after this week's Friday prayers ceremony to condemn the insult to Imam Khomeini during Student Day riots on Dec. 7.

Demonstrators in different Iranian cities have condemned the insult to the late Founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The demonstrators, who took to streets after this week's Friday prayers ceremony, condemned the insult to Imam Khomeini during Student Day riots on Dec. 7. IRNA reported.

The Student Day marks the anniversary of the killing of three Tehran University students on Dec. 7, 1953, by troops loyal to the last monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The event took place during a protest staged by the students of Tehran University against a visit by the then US President Richard Nixon.

The CIA had in the same year blocked the democratic process in Iran by toppling the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and reinstalling an unpopular monarch.

Every year, since the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, university students hold rallies condemning the US policies toward Iran.

This year, the event saw some rioters, claiming to be supporters of defeated reformist presidential candidates in the country's mid-June presidential election, tear a picture of Imam Khomeini.

The TV footage of a torn-up poster of Imam Khomeini unleashed a storm of anger throughout the country.

Statement

At the end of the Friday rallies, demonstrators issued a statement in which they condemned the desecration and pledged their allegiance to the ideals of Imam Khomeini and the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

"The path of Imam will not cease," the statement said, reiterating that the ideals of Imam Khomeini will remain alive despite such an insult.

The statement described the Islamic Republic as an invaluable legacy of Imam Khomeini, which influenced huge developments in the world.

"The Islamic Revolution had become a front for the world's oppressed nations to fight the domineering powers, prompting the arrogant world powers to focus their efforts on tarnishing Iran's image and targeting the ideals of the late Imam Khomeini," it noted.

Pointing to the post-June election unrests in Iran, the statement said, "Unfortunately, dur-

ing the past few months and in the post-election riots, some of our former 'brothers' who had gained fame thanks to the Islamic Revolution and the late Imam Khomeini, transcended the harshest enemies of the Islamic Revolution in preparing the ground for sacrilege against the ideals of the late Imam Khomeini."

It reiterated Ayatollah Khamenei's remarks that "these people have encouraged our weakening enemies and gave them a fresh start (in their efforts against the Islamic Republic)".

The statement concluded by underscoring the "hatred of all demonstrators against the sacrilegious act of a group of people disguised as 'students' and stressed that such acts were doomed".

The protesters called on judiciary officials to identify the desecrators and confront them.

Ayatollah Khamenei on Sunday condemned the desecration, saying such acts were encouraged by the foreign media.

Tehran General Prosecutor Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi said on Sunday that the perpetrators of the incident had been identified.

Enemies Getting Nowhere

Prior to the demonstrations, substitute Friday prayer leader of Tehran, Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani, said the enemies' efforts against the Islamic Republic would lead nowhere.

"I would not tell them (enemies) anything; neither do I give them any advice. Thirty years have passed the victory of the Islamic Revolution and that must have provided them with a good explanation.

All their plots (against the Islamic Republic) have failed," IRNA quoted Ayatollah Emami-Kashani as stating.

Addressing those demonstrating against the Islamic Revolution, the prayer leader said, "Those who hold rallies should know what the result of their move is? They should know that by doing so, they are helping enemies implement their plots."

Commenting on post-election events, the cleric said such issues are common and take place everywhere in the world.

"There are always winners and losers (in an election) and this often leads to disputes," he said.

Ayatollah Emami-Kashani urged the Iranian nation to unite under the guidance of the Leader of Islamic Revolution.

Call for Realistic Approach Toward Afghanistan

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said countries involved in the Afghanistan crisis should pursue a comprehensive and realistic approach to find a way out of the present predicament.

"All the states involved in the Afghanistan war need to research and pursue comprehensive and realistic approaches to find a solution to the crisis-ridden country," said Mottaki in a meeting with his Danish counterpart Per Stig Moeller on the sidelines of the Copenhagen meeting, PressTV reported.

"The major allies, who are entangled in Afghanistan crisis should back the new regional approach regarding the crisis now engulfing parts of neighboring Pakistan," he added.

York landmarks in 2001, the United States launched an offensive against Afghanistan in an attempt to eradicate militancy in the country and capture Al-Qaeda Leader Osama bin Laden.

The prolonged fighting has claimed many civilian lives, making the Al-Qaeda group and the Taliban regain power in the region.

The Danish foreign minister welcomed the proposed regional initiative, describing it as realistic and compatible with the region's conditions.

Moeller expressed hope the allies in the Afghan war would fully back the approach.

The two diplomats also exchanged views on Middle East developments, Iran's nuclear issue and major regional and international topics.

Joint Oman Defense Meeting Scheduled

Iran and Oman will hold a meeting next week to promote bilateral defense cooperation.

The Iranian Defense Ministry announced that Tehran will host the 8th Iran-Oman Defense Cooperation Commission meeting next week, IRNA reported.

Omani officials are scheduled to meet with Iran's high-ranking defense officials on issues of mutual interests and review expansion of defense cooperation during their stay in Tehran.

The annual meetings of the joint defense commission are held in Tehran or Muscat on a rotation basis.

Iran and Oman have also expanded bilateral cooperation in the field of energy since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad first took office in 2005.

On Tuesday, Ahmadinejad said Tehran and Muscat have common interests and enemies, calling for expansion of ties and cooperation between the two countries.

Iran Invited to Afghan Confab in London

Iran, along with Afghanistan's other neighboring countries, has been invited to attend an international conference on Afghanistan scheduled for next month in London, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband confirmed.

Miliband told BBC on Friday that the invitation for the conference called by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown on January 28 had been extended to his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki, IRNA reported.

The meeting is seen "as a chance for the whole region and the wider international community to support the decent government in Afghanistan and that's what we need to do", Miliband said.

Brown said on Monday 68 international delegations have been invited to London for the conference.

Pointing to the presence of thousands of NATO forces in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion of the country in 2001, the British premier said, "All 43 powers engaged in the international coalition will attend, together with other regional and Muslim partners as well as international organizations."

Brown also said the gathering will be led by the secretaries-general of the United Nations and NATO, adding that it was also the 'right' of Afghanistan's regional neighbors to attend.

"London must also encourage a new set of relationships between Afghanistan and its neighbors, and, in particular, better joint working with Pakistan," he said.

Afghanistan's security situation has been deteriorating while poppy cultivation in the country has increased dramatically since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

This is while some 90,000 NATO forces are currently in Afghanistan and preparations have been made to increase the number to 135,000 and then 170,000 in the coming years.

Political Turmoil Hits...

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Pakistan's main opposition, the Pakistan Muslim League-N of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has called on the president to resign.

Mukhtar told local television that his name was on the "exit list" restricting travel and that the federal investigation authorities had said he could not leave the country.

He told Geo TV that he had been planning to visit China for three days on an official visit in connection with the delivery of a warship.

"It was in connection with a corruption case but there is no corruption case against me—it is only an inquiry which is pending against me for the past 12 years."

He said he would "strongly defend" himself in court.

The amnesty was introduced by Musharraf in order to allow Zardari's late wife, Benazir Bhutto, to return to the country and stand for office, with the aim of a possible power-sharing deal with Musharraf.

She returned to Pakistan from abroad after the so-called National Reconciliation Ordinance was signed into law, but was assassinated soon after.

UN: Israel Short...

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Serry added that the situation in Gaza remains desperate, with thousands still homeless following the Israel's offensive against the Palestinian lands.

"The situation is serious. We need, we urgently need, to see some progress in the New Year. For that, we need Israeli measures which would continue to enable the Palestinians to continue their important work," Serry told reporters after briefing the Council.

"We continue to appeal to the government of Israel to allow the United Nations actually to start doing some real reconstruction, genuine reconstruction, in Gaza," Serry continued.

In the meantime, "UN agencies are doing what they can to help the population in the coming winter", he added.