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New York Times
February 25, 2006

Iran Is Said To Start Enriching Fuel, On Very Small Scale

By Elaine Sciolino and David E. Sanger

PARIS, Feb. 24 — International nuclear inspectors are expected to report next week that Iran has started producing enriched uranium on a very small scale, indicating that it is striving to solve technological problems in its nuclear program, European officials said Friday.

Only a month after Iran defied Europe and the International Atomic Energy Agency and declared it would restart what it termed research on enrichment, it has put 10 centrifuges into operation at the vast uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, according to the officials.

But it would take a year for more than a thousand machines to produce enough material for one weapon, and it is unclear how long it will take Iran to work out the problems of tying those machines into a "cascade" that could produce bomb-grade fuel.

American and European officials said they viewed Iran's action as largely a political statement — an effort, in the words of one senior American official, "to get something in operation in hopes that the world will just get used to it."

At a meeting of the I.A.E.A. board on March 6, Bush administration officials plan to cite the move as evidence that Tehran is moving as fast as it can to master the fuel cycle. That would yield the technical knowledge, but not necessarily the capacity, to produce highly enriched uranium for a weapon.

The 10 centrifuges, which European officials say are connected in a "mini-cascade," had been sealed as part of a voluntary agreement in November 2004 between Iran and the Europeans that had frozen Iran's nuclear enrichment-related activities. That agreement fell apart last month.

But Iran's efforts to reconstitute its operation are still just beginning. The Institute for Science and International Security, which monitors Iran, said Thursday that "Iran still needs to repair and operate its first 164-machine test cascade at the Natanz pilot plant," and that it has to overcome considerable hurdles. "One of the reasons Iran spun many centrifuges is that they broke, or did not work as expected."

The new centrifuges have been run in full view of nuclear inspectors, a sign that Iran is trying to make a political statement by openly challenging the international community.

In Washington on Friday, President Bush made no reference to the specific development, but once again branded Iran the world's primary sponsor of terrorism, and warned that the United States would never let the country develop nuclear weapons.

"A nontransparent society that is the world's premier state sponsor of terror cannot be allowed to possess the world's most dangerous weapons," he said in a speech defending his strategy in fighting terrorism.

Senior administration officials were quick to latch on to the news of the operating centrifuges as proof that Iran was trying to buy time in producing cascades. But some officials in Europe, including some with direct knowledge of Iran's activities, said the United States was exaggerating the importance of the development.

"On its own, I don't think this is a big deal," said one official in Vienna.

The report next week by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, based in Vienna, is expected to be forwarded to the United Nations Security Council after the agency's 35-nation board meets. Officials in Vienna and Washington say they expect the report to include a number of worrisome developments besides the news about the centrifuges.

It is likely to include information disclosed in an interim agency report last month that concluded there was evidence suggesting links between Iran's ostensibly peaceful nuclear program and its military work on high explosives and missiles. That report referred to a secretive Iranian entity called the Green Salt Project, which worked on uranium processing, high explosives and a missile warhead design.

Olli Heinonen, a deputy director general for the nuclear agency, is heading this weekend to Tehran, where officials have pledged to cooperate more fully with the agency in anticipation of next week's reports.

He and his team will also press longstanding demands, including access to the head of a former military site in Tehran, information about Iran's dealings with an international nuclear black market that supplied it with atomic technology, and information about possible work related to nuclear weapons.

On Feb. 4, under pressure from the United States and three European countries that had forged the 2004 agreement with Iran — France, Britain and Germany — the agency's board voted to report Iran to the Security Council, a move that reflected increasing suspicion that Iran was determined to develop nuclear weapons.

The board has delayed any action in the Security Council, however, until it has the opportunity to review the new report on March 6.

Elaine Sciolino reported from Paris for this article, and David E. Sanger from Washington.

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/25/international/middleeast/25iran.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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London Sunday Times

February 26, 2006

UN Nuclear Watchdog Accuses Iran Of Making Fuel For Bombs

By Peter Conradi

IRAN is believed to have begun small-scale enrichment of uranium, raising the stakes in its dispute with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over the extent of its nuclear ambitions.

A report to be published by the United Nations nuclear watchdog tomorrow is expected to claim that scientists at Iran's plant in Natanz have set up a "cascade" of 10 centrifuges to produce enriched uranium — the fuel for nuclear power plants or bombs.

Iran is a long way from the 50,000 centrifuges it would need for full-scale enrichment, but experts said that getting a small number of them to work together meant it had overcome some technical hurdles.

The report, by Mohamed ElBaradei, director-general of the IAEA, will also accuse Tehran of continuing to deny inspectors access to crucial people and sites linked to its 20-year-old nuclear programme.

ElBaradei's findings will set the tone for discussions at the UN security council next month which American officials believe could lead to sanctions against Iran this summer.

Tehran's relations with the international community hit a low point this month when the IAEA voted overwhelmingly to report it to the security council, expressing doubts that its nuclear programme was "exclusively for peaceful purposes".

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the country's volatile president, responded by vowing to resume "commercial scale" enrichment, suspended in 2004.

International concerns over Iran's intentions have been increased by the emergence in recent weeks of documents that for the first time appear to provide scraps of evidence of a covert weapons programme.

Attention is focusing on the so-called Green Salt Project, a previously undeclared scheme to process uranium. The project was linked to tests on high explosives and missile design, suggesting a "military nuclear dimension", the IAEA said. Inspectors travelled to Tehran this weekend to obtain more information.

It is thought that some of the clandestine work was done at a plant in Lavisan, near Tehran, under the auspices of a body known as the Physics Research Centre. Iran denied IAEA inspectors access to Lavisan until 2004 by which time the buildings had been demolished.

Tehran is believed to have persisted in its refusal to allow inspectors to interview up to five research centre officials. "This is a shame because we believe these are high-ranking military officials actively involved in a nuclear weapons programme," said a US official.

Diplomatic efforts have continued to persuade Tehran to agree not to enrich uranium itself but to be supplied with the material by Russia. Iran wants to be allowed to conduct some enrichment on its territory.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-2058769,00.html>

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Chicago Tribune

February 25, 2006

Experts Say Bush Needs Nuke Pact

By Mark Silva, Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- If President Bush comes home from India without a deal on nuclear power, he could be forfeiting for years to come any controls on the atomic arsenal of a fast-growing power.

The potential for a nuclear agreement with India represents "a radical step, a historical step," said Robert Blackwill, a recent U.S. ambassador to India whose powerhouse lobbying firm of Barbour Griffith & Rogers is pressing India's case in Washington.

India already has agreed to separate nuclear electrical power generators, which provide fuel for its nuclear weaponry, from its military program as part of a deal with Bush made last summer. But in the run-up to Bush's visit next week to New Delhi, the State Department has attempted to broker an agreement with India over the details of that separation--a deal crucial to overcoming congressional opposition to the pact.

"The best time to make these breakthroughs is when the political leaders are engaged," Blackwill said. "If it gets turned back to the bureaucracies, we'll never have an agreement."

India never signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which permits member nations to pursue nuclear technology for electrical power under the oversight of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency. U.S. law prohibits the sale of nuclear technology to nations that are not part of the treaty or have tested a nuclear bomb. India tested bombs in 1974 and 1998.

In an attempt to win support for an exception, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed last summer to separate India's military nuclear weaponry program from a civilian nuclear program that opened its first reactor in 1956--and to place civilian facilities under strict IAEA safeguards. Singh also agreed to a moratorium on weapons testing.

"It is a unique agreement, but I don't think it is a risky agreement," said Ronen Sen, India's ambassador to the U.S., maintaining that India is as concerned as Americans are about the weapons proliferation. "Now we are doubly concerned, because a new dimension has been added. That is the fear of weapons of mass destruction ending up in the wrong hands--terrorist organizations."

Yet as the Bush administration has pressed in recent days for a new agreement to announce next week, India's insistence on keeping fast-breeder nuclear reactors within the military remains a barrier. The U.S. wants all of India's power-generating reactors and fast-breeder reactors in a civilian program under IAEA supervision.

The difference is crucial: If India keeps just a couple of its 22 reactors within its military program, it still could produce "two or three" bombs a year, according to Robert Einhorn of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. With breeder reactors, he said, it could produce "scores" of new weapons.

Critics in the U.S. question the need for such an exception in the face of India's defiance of an international treaty. The White House has encountered "a stronger reaction against it than they expected," Einhorn said. "In India, too, there has been a backlash. . . . Members of the Singh administration think India is kowtowing to the U.S."

Some in India suspect another motivation on Bush's part: Creation of a new market for a nuclear construction industry that has been stymied with no new reactors built in the U.S. since the 1970s.

"The Bush administration is keen to revive the U.S. civilian nuclear industry," said Brahma Chellaney, professor of strategic studies at The Center for Policy Research in New Delhi. "It seems to me the only way the nuclear power industry in the U.S. can be revived is to get India to place some multibillion-dollar nuclear reactor contracts."

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0602250090feb25.1.7234183.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>

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New York Times

February 27, 2006

Iran Moves Toward Deal With Russia On Uranium

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN, Feb. 26 — The top nuclear officials of Iran and Russia announced Sunday that they had reached initial agreement on a deal to enrich Iranian uranium on Russian soil and said that talks would continue over the details. The announcement came as international pressure on Iran to give up its nuclear program has intensified. The governing board of the International Atomic Energy Agency is to meet March 6 to discuss possible punitive measures against Iran, which recently restarted uranium enrichment in defiance of the agency and European and American ultimatums.

The agreement was announced after a meeting between Sergei V. Kiriyenko, the Russian nuclear chief, and Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization in Bushehr, where the Russians built Iran's first nuclear power plant.

"We held talks with the Russian side on Russia's proposal yesterday and today," said Mr. Aghazadeh, the ISNA student news agency reported. "The talks saw good progress."

Mr. Kiriyenko said the two countries "have almost no organizational, technical or financial problems" over the proposal. But he said, "It is just an element of a complex approach, and more work is needed in the area," ISNA reported.

Iran had rejected similar proposals for joint enrichment while it was in negotiations with European nations to halt its program in return for economic concessions. But since those talks broke off, the government has alternated between efforts to show that cooperation was still possible and open displays of defiance.

During his weekly news conference on Sunday, Hamidreza Assefi, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, reasserted that Iran had no intention to suspend its nuclear program, which it has insisted is geared toward producing electricity and not weapons.

"We are not worried at all," he said. "We will continue our work and will not suspend our research."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/27/international/middleeast/27iran.html>

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Los Angeles Times

February 27, 2006

Case Against Iran Differs From Iraq

This time, the U.N. nuclear agency is the key source of data. It has evidence that may back up suspicions of a secret weapons program.

By Alissa J. Rubin, Times Staff Writer

VIENNA — In stark contrast to U.S. allegations against Iraq three years ago that were based on secret intelligence, today's suspicions about Iranian nuclear ambitions draw on evidence made public by a U.N. agency, the same one that found no case against Saddam Hussein.

The information appears in a series of reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear monitoring arm, whose latest assessment of the material is due out early this week. The IAEA has credibility internationally as an impartial analyst, which may explain the greater consensus in the world community about the need for a concerted response to Iran.

"Since Iraq, who's going to believe intelligence? Who is going to believe anybody but a neutral agency?" said Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, the Egyptian ambassador to Austria and a vice chair of the IAEA board of governors.

U.S. officials agree that the agency's role on Iran has been crucial.

"If the information comes from the inspectors on the ground, it is more readily acceptable.... I think there are very few governments that have any doubts about Iran's intentions at this point," said Robert Joseph, the undersecretary of State for nuclear nonproliferation.

When the Security Council gets Iran's case next month, it will base any decision about sanctions on the agency's reports, which show a concerted effort to enrich uranium and signs of interest in learning how to make and detonate a nuclear bomb.

Although the reports hardly provide proof that Iran seeks the capability to make a nuclear weapon, they describe a number of activities that are difficult to square with purely civilian intentions.

Iran has argued that nuclear-armed countries, such as the United States and Britain, are casting Tehran's behavior in the worst light to stop its efforts to advance by gaining sophisticated technology. But experts from many nations say that Iran's failure to disclose its nuclear program for 18 years to the IAEA, as required under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, casts doubt on Tehran's explanations. Western countries say their intelligence dovetails with the IAEA reports, and in some cases goes further.

In the months before the Iraq invasion, information about nuclear, chemical and biological weapons gathered by U.S. and British intelligence sources formed the case for going to war. It turned out that some of the evidence was fabricated and some just plain wrong.

Gary Samore, a former advisor to President Clinton on nuclear nonproliferation, said of the case against Iran: "I don't think you have to trust the U.S. or the British.... Is Iran building an enrichment plant? Yes. Does it create a nuclear weapons option? Yes. So to me all these secret documents, they are interesting, but I think it's really irrelevant to the central issue. Iran is trying to develop an industrial-scale [uranium] enrichment facility."

The enrichment process converts raw uranium ore into fissionable material, the most difficult component of a nuclear weapon to obtain. The same basic process produces both low-level enriched uranium, which can be used for nuclear reactors that generate electricity, and, with technical adjustments and additional processing, the highly enriched uranium used for bombs.

The IAEA reports leave open the possibility that Iran may still have a secret program, this one with military connections, to enrich uranium. In particular, there is some evidence that Iran tried to obtain sophisticated, ultra-fast centrifuge machines known as P-2s, which could cut in half the time it takes to make highly enriched uranium.

"The risk is [if] they have a P-2 program we don't know about.... Then they could have the bomb in a year," said a senior U.S. diplomat who declined to be identified.

There is also evidence that Iran had plans to develop a second processing facility to convert raw uranium into "green salt," an intermediary stage before it is turned into a gas that can be fed into centrifuges. Those plans were found in a military facility, making them all the more suspect. Iran previously refused to answer questions about green salt, but over the weekend IAEA inspectors flew to Iran because Tehran finally said it was prepared to explain the design plans.

Iranian officials deny any interest in making a nuclear weapon and have told IAEA inspectors that all nuclear activities are managed by a civilian government agency.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the IAEA director-general, resists drawing any conclusions other than those based strictly on the scientific data unearthed by his inspection teams. His agency's information remains less than conclusive; Iran has repeatedly stymied IAEA inspectors in their effort to understand how far the country's nuclear program has progressed toward perfecting the technology for enriching uranium and toward figuring out how to turn the enriched uranium into a weapon.

But enough questions remain that at an emergency meeting of the IAEA board of governors this month, ElBaradei could offer no assurances that Iran's aspirations were solely peaceful. ElBaradei said Iran posed no "imminent threat," hardly a ringing endorsement.

Iran's record of secrecy and its reluctance to answer questions from U.N. nuclear inspectors have heightened distrust.

"You can certainly say suspicions are mounting," said a Western diplomat familiar with the evidence under review by the IAEA, but not authorized to speak publicly about the program.

The difficulty for the United States and the European Union is that they read Iran's record as pointing inexorably in one sinister direction, whereas most nonaligned and Muslim countries see Iran as struggling to retain its right to civilian enrichment despite some unsettling transgressions.

Russia and China, two crucial players on the Security Council, reluctantly went along with referring Iran to the council this month, but have made it clear that they do not view Iran's actions as egregious enough to warrant sanctions.

Moscow is holding talks with Tehran over building a joint uranium-enrichment facility on Russian soil. The EU and the U.S. say that would be acceptable as long as Iran completely gives up domestic development of nuclear fuel technology.

Iranian officials said Sunday that a deal with Russia was close. But Russian officials, including Foreign Minister Sergei V. Lavrov, cautioned that negotiations were far from complete and that the Iranians had yet to agree to a moratorium on domestic fuel cycle development.

"We've never had a smoking gun like a [secret enrichment] facility to point the IAEA to," a U.S. diplomat said.

"Test documents and blueprints and designs, human sources and intercepts say that Iran is eager to obtain its own fissile material, but we're lacking what the Russians and Chinese would consider conclusive."

David Albright, a former IAEA weapons inspector who closely tracks Iran, urged caution in drawing conclusions.

He agreed that even with the intelligence gathered by the United States, the evidence was not "a smoking gun."

"Maybe everybody's instincts are right" that Iran seeks nuclear weapons capability, he said, but because

"international law is involved, [and] sanctions, possible military action, it should be based on very solid information."

Iran's aspiration to a civilian nuclear program is within its rights as a signatory of the nonproliferation treaty, the 1968 agreement that allows the development of nuclear technology to generate electricity and for other peaceful purposes. However, the treaty prohibits the acquisition of technology for weapons systems unless the country already had nuclear weapons when it signed the treaty, which Iran did not. And regardless, all countries must report any activities associated with uranium enrichment to the IAEA.

The IAEA has been investigating two military sites in Iran. One is Lavisan-Shian near Tehran; the other is Parchin.

After several rounds of questions and visits to Parchin, IAEA inspectors appear satisfied that the Iranians did not conduct any nuclear activity there.

Lavisian-Shian is another story. A vast site that was razed shortly after Iran's clandestine nuclear program was revealed, Lavisian was operated by the Defense Ministry. Iranian officials said the site's flattening was part of a long-planned agreement with the city of Tehran, but turning the earth repeatedly also makes it almost impossible to detect traces of enriched uranium.

One of the facilities on the military site was the Physics Research Center. According to IAEA documents, the center imported large quantities of dual-use materials, including magnets and fluorine handling equipment that can be used for uranium enrichment. Weapons inspectors have asked for access to the equipment and to the man who headed the center, but the Iranians have yet to give access to either.

A second piece of evidence suggesting a military connection was a 15-page document that described how to purify uranium gas to the point that it becomes a dense metal and how to cast it into the hemispheric forms that can be affixed to a missile. The document was found in a box along with hundreds of other papers that Iran turned over to the inspectors.

"No one is sure whether they meant to turn it over, or just didn't realize it was in the papers they were giving them," a Western diplomat in Vienna said.

The significance of the document is that it is the rough design for a bomb. "To make a bomb, you put two hemispheres together into a ball and you have this circular core, and then you surround it with detonators," said Mark Fitzpatrick, a nonproliferation expert at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies and a former State Department advisor on nonproliferation.

Iran contends, however, that the network of rogue Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, from which it obtained models and centrifuge equipment for setting up a uranium-enrichment facility, threw in the weapons design as an extra. Although that is implausible to the Americans and other Western intelligence sources, other experts say it could be true.

The IAEA noted that the document lacked dimensions or other specifications, suggesting that it was far from specific design material. Former weapons inspector Albright, who has examined the design information Khan's network gave to other countries, says that Iran's hemisphere document is similar to weapons design information, but far less detailed and complete.

"The document has a distinctive character," Albright said. "It looks like what was found in South Africa ... part of a much bigger set of documents used by the Khan network. The question is, did Iran get the whole set?"

U.S. government officials and other Western intelligence sources underscore, however, that Iran has had the material for more than 15 years and that it is impossible to rule out that it has done further research into how to make enriched uranium.

"There is no real peaceful use for hemispheric uranium," said a U.S. diplomat who has reviewed the document.

Some of the most recent intelligence shared with the IAEA by the United States included the drawings of the suspected green-salt facility. They were found with designs for modifying the nose cone of Iran's Shahab-3 missile so that it could accommodate a hemisphere that U.S. intelligence sources believe is consistent with a nuclear bomb.

IAEA analysts are worried about the possibility that the Iranians have moved beyond the design stage, although even designs for a facility that processes uranium must be disclosed to the agency under the nonproliferation treaty. "A green-salt facility would be very problematic because it has to do with nuclear material that is not declared to the IAEA," said a diplomat in Vienna familiar with the agency's thinking. "That Iran might not have declared uranium enrichment to the IAEA is bad enough, but undeclared activity on a military site is even worse — it's a smoking gun."

Western intelligence sources have also said they found drawings of what appeared to be a 400-yard-deep shaft that they believe was to be used to test a nuclear weapon. Several miles away was a control-and-communications facility. "It makes no sense for conventional weapons," said an American diplomat who has seen the material. "It makes no sense for testing anything other than small nuclear explosives."

Times staff writers Paul Richter in Washington and Kim Murphy in Moscow contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iran27feb27.1.5360456.story>

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Philadelphia Inquirer

February 27, 2006

Bush Trip Signals Acceptance Of India's Nuclear Weapons

Strategic issues, such as China, prompt a change. To critics, it sends wrong idea to Iran and others.

By Ron Hutcheson, Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - More than three decades after India successfully tested a nuclear device, President Bush will travel to New Delhi tomorrow to welcome India into the world's exclusive nuclear club.

His willingness to acknowledge reality might seem to be a small step, but it could prove to be as significant as President Richard Nixon's decision to open relations with communist China. Just as Nixon cultivated China to counter the Soviet Union, India could serve as a regional check on China's growing clout.

"The rise of China and India will be the defining geopolitical reality of the 21st century. That's pretty important company to be keeping," said Rick Inderfurth, a South Asia specialist at George Washington University and a former member of the National Security Council staff.

Ending India's status as a nuclear renegade also would clear the way for closer economic ties and give American businesses better access to a country that's poised to overtake China as the world's most populous nation before 2050.

Critics, however, say that Bush's overture is a grave mistake that would reward bad behavior and encourage other countries to develop nuclear weapons in defiance of international agreements.

Pakistan, another nuclear rogue and the final stop on Bush's South Asia trip, has served notice that it, too, would like to be forgiven its past transgressions. That's out of the question for now, given the fact that Pakistani nuclear technology has been smuggled to virtually every country that agreed to pay for it. Even so, Bush will pay his respects to Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, who enlisted in the war on terrorism in defiance of Islamic extremists.

The deal with India, endorsed in general terms by Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, would put India's civilian nuclear program under international controls but exempt its weapons program from outside scrutiny. The two leaders hope to fill in details of the agreement during Bush's visit.

India would gain access to commercial nuclear technology and equipment that are now off limits because of its pariah status. American companies could get in on deals that are now forbidden by U.S. law and by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Average Americans also have a stake in the agreement. Boosting India's supply of nuclear energy would reduce its demand for oil and help keep world oil prices down.

But granting India nuclear respectability would upend the international system designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Opponents contend that carving out an exception for India is particularly ill-advised when the Bush administration is leading efforts to curb nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran.

"America cannot credibly preach nuclear temperance from a barstool," said Rep. Edward J. Markey (D., Mass.), who has introduced legislation to block any deal with India. "We can't tell Iran, a country that has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, that they can't have enrichment technologies while simultaneously carving out a special exemption from nuclear proliferation laws for India, a nation that has refused to sign the treaty."

India entered the nuclear age in 1974, when scientists exploded a device 330 feet beneath the Indian desert. Indian leaders insisted at the time that they had no intention of developing a nuclear weapon. That fiction ended in 1998 when India conducted more tests and declared: "India is now a nuclear weapons state."

In addition to India and Pakistan, Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States have nuclear weapons. Israel also is assumed to have them, although it won't acknowledge the fact. North Korea claims that it has at least one nuclear weapon.

India's covert nuclear program brought international condemnation and put a new strain on U.S.-India relations. The ill will goes back to the Cold War, when India was technically "nonaligned" with either superpower but tilted toward the Soviet Union.

Now Bush, following up on a groundbreaking visit to India by President Bill Clinton in 2000, is ready to forgive and forget.

"There's common interests that have helped change the relationship," he told a group of Indian journalists at the White House on Wednesday. "The world changes. It's never static."

That's certainly true of India, a country of 1.1 billion people that has one of the world's fastest growing economies. An estimated 300 million people - more than the entire U.S. population - have made it into India's middle class. Demand for consumer goods and energy is soaring.

"India's going to have an impact on a lot of things that matter to us, whether we like it or not," said Mike Green, a former White House adviser who is affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a center-right Washington think tank.

<http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/news/13970300.htm>

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Washington Post

February 28, 2006

Pg. 10

IAEA: Iran Advancing Uranium Enrichment

Report Noncommittal On Pursuit of Arms

By Molly Moore and Dafna Linzer, Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, Feb. 27 -- Iran is advancing its uranium enrichment program, but the U.N. atomic monitoring organization still cannot determine whether the country is secretly developing nuclear weapons, according to an agency report made public on Monday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency "has not seen any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices," Director General Mohamed ElBaradei said in a report to the IAEA's board. But the agency was not "in a position to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran," the report added.

ElBaradei distributed the assessment to the 35 board members on Monday in advance of a meeting in Vienna next week to debate plans for exerting greater international pressure on Tehran to halt any nuclear developments that could facilitate production of weapons. The report's contents were shared with reporters by diplomats monitoring the debate.

ElBaradei's report criticizes Iran for failing to reveal "the scope and nature" of its nuclear program despite three years of IAEA monitoring efforts. At the same time, the report noted that Iran had made some incremental efforts to meet the agency's requests for information.

Last Sunday, Tehran permitted an IAEA official to meet with an Iranian official involved in purchases of nuclear-related equipment that could be used for either civilian or military purposes, the report said. Iran allowed inspectors access to some, but not all, of that equipment, the report added.

According to the report, Iran has begun testing about 20 centrifuges used in enriching fuel and is making improvements at its Natanz nuclear facility, about 150 miles south of Tehran. Nuclear experts generally say Iran is years away from being able to carry out the industrial-scale uranium enrichment that would allow it to build a nuclear weapon or explosive device.

The report also said that earlier this week Iranian officials had dismissed as forgeries documents indicating their engineers were planning a small-scale facility to produce uranium gas. The documents were contained in a laptop computer obtained by U.S. intelligence in 2004. Portions of those and other documents purporting to show that Iran was trying to modify ballistic missiles to carry nuclear warheads were shared with the IAEA last year.

The documents' authenticity has not been independently verified.

Inspectors reported that although Iran obtained instructions in the late 1980s for the production of uranium metal -- a substance used to protect the core of a nuclear bomb-- Iranian scientists did not appear to have used them. Iran offered written proof in support of previous claims that it had purchased some sensitive equipment through official channels and not from a nuclear black market run out of Pakistan, the report said.

The report described unexplained "inconsistencies" regarding plutonium experiments conducted at least several years ago and said Iran had acknowledged purchasing other equipment it had previously denied possessing. Recent inspections of large facilities revealed that the Iranians were having technical or financial difficulties completing a heavy-water reactor in the town of Arak and a fuel manufacturing plant in Isfahan. The IAEA board voted this month to report Iran to the U.N. Security Council for "many failures and breaches of its obligations to comply" with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and because of an "absence of confidence that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes resulting from the history of concealment."

Linzer reported from Washington.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/27/AR2006022701326.html>

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Homeland Security: DHS Is Taking Steps to Enhance Security at Chemical Facilities, but Additional Authority Is Needed.

GAO-06-150, January 27.

<http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-150>

Highlights - <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d06150high.pdf>

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