

IAEA Negotiations To Resume

Iran and the UN nuclear agency will resume talks on enhancing cooperation, Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh told IRNA that the second series of discussions that started last week for three days will resume in the next ten days.

Iran said the talks should be interpreted in the context of developing Iranian nuclear program, especially the fuel cycle and the agency's systematic monitoring.

Western scientists, who have seen slides of Iranian nuclear sites broadcast on national media, admired Iranians for the modern fuel cycle and the advanced centrifuges.

Soltanieh made no mention of an agreement announced by the IAEA after the first round that Iran would answer the allegations during May and instead said the latest meetings were in line with a more general accord from August 2007.

"Iran responded to all the ambiguities mentioned by the IAEA in line with the agreement (of August 2007) and is ready to respond to all the questions and ambiguities as part of its cooperation with the agency like any other state," he said.

The latest talks involved Soltanieh and other top officials from Iran's Atomic Energy Organization.

The IAEA was represented by its deputy director general, Olli Heinonen, while other officials remained to continue the discussions.

Iran got a clean health bill from the UN's nuclear agency on February 22 after Tehran reached an agreement on a Modality Plan according to which the agency had undertaken to verify the civilian nature of Iran's program upon answers to be provided by Iran to the outstanding issues during a specified time.

"The agency verifies that the answers provided by Iran supports the documentation," the IAEA report said.

IRNA Banned From Vienna Confab

IRNA's correspondent in Vienna was not allowed to take part in an anti-Iran conference that opened on Saturday.

Simone Dinah Hartmann, an official in charge of the conference, while denying permission to IRNA's reporter said, "The news agency belongs to the Islamic Republic of Iran, so its correspondent is not allowed to attend."

In response to the IRNA reporter's argument that it was against the right to information, Hartmann added that "she had no permission to attend the gathering even as an independent participant and without the title of reporter".

Meanwhile, several reporters also withdrew from the event in protest at the refusal to allow the IRNA correspondent in.

By sending emails to the secretariat, the Vienna University and union of reporters in Vienna, the reporters regretted the creation of obstacles in the way of free flow of information by the conference's officials.

Since the issue of human rights is one of the main topics on the event's agenda, the reporters said free dissemination of news and information is one of the primary rights of human beings.

They added that it was a shame that such a conference, which is to focus on human rights and freedom, prevented reporters from covering the event.

The reporters also said that preventing the correspondent from attending the confab because of her nationality was 'surprising'.

Announcing their withdrawal from the conference, the reporters reiterated that the conference's move was against press freedom.

Talks With US Premature



Wrecked ambulances sit at the site of a US air strike in Baghdad's Sadr City on May 3.

A senior member of Iran's negotiating team with the United States on Iraqi security demanded a halt to US attacks in Iraq before any new round of talks with Washington.

"If the US savage attacks against the Iraqi people are stopped, we will examine the US request for a fourth round of talks," the unnamed official was quoted as saying by Fars News Agency.

Iran and the United States held three rounds of talks on Iraq last year.

Iran, whose ties with Washington have been severed since 1980, strongly opposes the US military presence in Iraq.

An Iranian delegation traveled to Baghdad in March expecting a new round of talks which never took place. Iran said the United States cancelled the talks at the last minute,

but US officials said a date was never set.

"The Iraqi government and the United States have officially invited Iran for the fourth round," the Iranian official said.

"Under the current circumstances and given the US widespread attacks on the Iraqi people in different cities, Iran does not feel these negotiations are necessary."

In early April, the United States said it had informed the Iraqi government it was prepared to resume the long-delayed talks with Iran.

US ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and his Iranian counterpart Hassan Kazemi Qomi held face-to-face talks in May and July 2007, in the highest level public contact between the two sides for 27 years.

Officials from the two countries also met at the experts' level last August.

Russia Stresses Advantages Of Cooperation

Russia on Saturday said world powers are asking Tehran only to suspend uranium enrichment during the period of talks.

Following a meeting on Iran in London of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said no mention had been made of new sanctions and Tehran must be made to see the advantages of cooperation.



AOUST/LAVROV

"Our first conditions are the freezing, suspension of uranium enrichment. The approach of the six (powers) is that Iran should suspend enrichment only for the period in which talks continue," Lavrov told the Interfax and ITAR-TASS news agencies.

"There wasn't anything about new sanctions although our American colleagues

take the view that pressure on Iran must be maintained."

Lavrov further said it is necessary to explain to Iran the advantages of agreeing to start talks on the basis of one condition--the freezing of uranium enrichment.

The Islamic Republic insists its nuclear drive is peaceful and solely aimed at generating electricity for a growing population.

The six have been using a mix of incentives and sanctions to try to persuade Iran to rein in its nuclear work.

Following Friday's talks in London, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said the powers had "reviewed and updated" an offer made to Iran in June 2006, but that the contents of the new proposal would only be disclosed to the Islamic Republic.

"The proposals are in the areas of energy, trade, investment and regional security," he said.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said on Friday the proposals were more "precise and detailed" than before.

The six powers have offered technical, political and economic rewards to Tehran for suspending its nuclear program.

At the same time, the UN Security Council has adopted three resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran for its refusal to suspend its uranium enrichment activities.

Russia has relatively close ties to Iran and has generally taken a softer approach on the sanctions issue than the United States.

It is building Iran's first nuclear power station at Bushehr under a deal by which Moscow has supplied enriched uranium and will remove the fuel after use.

Deliveries of the enriched fuel were started last December and completed in January, based on an agreement that obliges Iran to return spent fuel after uranium enrichment.

Persian Press Watch

Price Hike

IRAN: Recently food prices experienced fluctuations, on the back of a twofold increase in the global prices of some essential commodities last year. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, food prices increased by 45 percent in the past nine months. The shortage of rice, wheat and corn in the market has been blamed on the increasing prices of food. Some other factors are also involved, including increasing demand for biofuel, rising oil and transport costs, and increasing consumption of dairy and meat products. The price hike should be tackled by officials in a coordinated manner and by addressing its root causes.

Reading Culture

KAYHAN: An important cultural event is presently underway in Tehran. The 21st Tehran International Book Fair is, in fact, the country's largest annual cultural event. It attracts thousands of book lovers annually from across the country, as well as publishers from other countries. History attests to the fact that civilizations are rooted in the cultural and intellectual development of its people. Undoubtedly, one of the objectives behind holding annual book fairs is to encourage people to read and buy more books to help boost culture. However, it seems that the annual book fair in Tehran has turned into an event that pursues only economic and business purposes. This is while book fairs in other countries bring together book lovers and authors to hold meetings, transfer experiences and sign contracts with publishers. According to the latest figures, book reading has declined among Iranians compared to Africans and other Asians. Iranian cultural officials and people should help increase the culture of book reading at the grassroots level.

Attitude

JOMHOURI-YE ESLAMI: Last year, members of the Cabinet had a meeting with the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. The leader expressed dissatisfaction over the government's cultural programs and called for greater attention to the cultural sector. The government increased the budget of the cultural sectors. While increasing the budget of the cultural sector is significant, the quality of cultural programs and the way cultural budgets are spent are more important. Recently, an official said 30 cultural projects will be inaugurated this year on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The first step toward removing hurdles on the way of promoting culture is to change the attitude toward the issue of culture.

