

Iran still blocking access to military sites: IAEA

AFP, Vienna

Iran is still blocking UN nuclear inspectors from crucial military sites, the UN atomic watchdog agency reported yesterday, saying full Iranian cooperation was overdue.

"Iran's full transparency is indispensable and overdue," Mohamed Elbaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said in a report released here.

He said this was despite the access Iran has provided during the past two months, after the UN body threatened to take Tehran to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions over non-compliance with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The report has been sent to the 35 member countries on the IAEA's board of governors, which is to meet next Thursday to consider whether to refer Iran to the Security Council.

Separately, Iran confirmed Friday it had resumed converting new quantities of uranium, in a move in defiance of an IAEA resolution to stop such nuclear fuelwork.

Its top nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, said in Tehran that had begun a new round of converting uranium ore into the gas that is the precursor for making enriched uranium, which can be fuel for civilian power reactors or the raw material for atom bombs.

Iran insists it has a right to develop nuclear fuel for a civilian program designed to produce electricity but the United States and the European Union fear Tehran is pursuing a clandestine atomic weapons programme.

The IAEA report said Tehran must give more "information and documentation related to the procurement of dual use equipment," material which can be used for either military or civilian work.

It also said Iran must provide access "to relevant military owned workshops and research and development locations."

These workshops and locations that were part of a physics research center were dismantled and the site where they were located, Lavizan-Shian in Tehran, was dug up before IAEA inspectors visited the razed area.

Earlier this month, Iran let IAEA inspectors visit the sensitive Parchin military site, but the agency "is still awaiting additional information and permission to undertake additional visits," the report said.

"These should also include interviews on the acquisition of certain dual use materials and equipment, and the taking of environmental samples."

It said Iran had given documentation on offers that it had in 1987 from an international black market and had allowed two interviews with "individuals" involved in Iran's talks with this illicit procurement network.

The report said there were also documents "on the casting and machining of enriched, natural and depleted uranium metal into hemispherical forms," which would be essential in shaping an atom bomb.

Other documents concerned P-1 centrifuges used in enriching uranium and blueprints for making cascades of centrifuges, including "a small plant of 2,000 centrifuges and six cascades of 168 machines, which is how enrichment takes place."

'Fish threatened as climate change warms waters'

AFP, Geneva

Fish are under growing threat as climate change fuels a rise in temperatures in rivers, lakes and the world's oceans, the environmental group WWF warned yesterday.

In a report, WWF International said that hotter water means less food, less offspring, less oxygen and more disease for marine and freshwater fish, and that other species, including humans, will feel the impact.

"The balance is set to tip, as climate change continues the pressure on fish populations already strained by overfishing, pollution and habitat loss," said Katherine Short of the WWF's Global Marine Programme.

"We must act to protect fish," she said. "They are one of our most valuable biological, nutritional and economic assets."

The report said that warmer temperatures are expected to stunt the

growth of some fish, resulting in fewer offspring.

Fish metabolisms normally speed up in line with temperature increases, accelerating competition for food -- and insufficient food supplies can slow growth and reproduction rates, the WWF study said.

In addition, some temperate fish such as salmon, catfish and sturgeon cannot spawn at all if winter temperatures do not drop below a certain level, the study said.

In lakes in particular, warmer temperatures hamper the circulation of the oxygen that fish need to breathe. Fish filter oxygen from water, but the amount of oxygen dissolved in water decreases as temperatures rise.

The impact on other species is another cause for concern, the WWF said.

Warming could cause fish to move to deeper, cooler waters as they seek to maintain the temperature normal for their habitat, and this can leave other species in dire straits.

In the Gulf of Alaska in 1993, as fish moved into cooler waters, around 120,000 sea birds starved to death as they were unable to dive deep enough to reach their relocated prey, the WWF noted.

Worldwide, marine and freshwater fisheries generate more than 130 billion dollars annually, employ at least 200 million people, and feed billions reliant on fish as an important source of protein.