

Iran insists on guarantees for nuclear fuel supply

AFP, Tehran

A top Iranian official reiterated yesterday Tehran wanted a guaranteed supply of atomic fuel for its research reactor, as world powers expressed disappointment over its continued nuclear defiance.

Iran's envoy to the UN atomic watchdog, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, also repeated that Tehran was ready to hold more negotiations over the supply of fuel for the internationally-supervised reactor located in the Iranian capital.

"The main issue is how to get a guarantee for the timely supply of fuel which Iran needs," Soltanieh was quoted as saying by ISNA news agency.

"We are ready to have negotiations with a positive approach, but because of lack of confidence with the West, we need to have those guarantees."

His comments come days after Iran rejected a deal brokered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which proposed Tehran sending most of its stock of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Russia and France for converting into fuel for the research reactor.

Iran dismissed the deal but said it was ready for a simultaneous exchange inside

borders of the Islamic republic of its LEU for nuclear fuel supplied by the West.

Western powers are strongly backing the IAEA-drafted deal as they fear Iran could enrich its LEU further to higher levels and use it in making atomic weapons, a charge vociferously denied by the Islamic republic.

Enrichment of uranium lies at the heart of the controversy over Iran's nuclear programme as the material can be used to power reactors as well as to make the fissile core of an atom bomb.

Soltanieh also said that as per rules of the IAEA, the member countries can enrich uranium to any levels.

"There is no limit to enrichment for members of the IAEA. There is no ceiling," he said.

The member countries are however required to declare to the agency their enrichment levels and the agency has to verify it.

Soltanieh clarified that Iran's main enrichment plant in the central city of Natanz was enriching uranium up to five percent purity level.

Iran is building a second uranium enrichment plant near the Shiite holy city of Qom and its disclosure in September

triggered outrage in the West, after which world powers threatened Tehran could face fresh sanctions if it did not come clean on its nuclear programme.

The Islamic republic is already under three sets of UN sanctions for defiantly enriching uranium at Natanz.

The six world powers - Britain, Russia, China, Germany, France and the United States - expressed disappointment at a meeting in Brussels on Friday over Tehran's continued defiance.

"Iran has not responded positively to the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) proposed agreement for the provision of nuclear fuel for its Tehran research reactor," they said after a meeting on Friday.

But the United States said it hopes Iran will still accept the IAEA-drafted fuel deal.

US State Department deputy spokesman Robert Wood said that the United States and the other five powers were not yet "at the point" of closing the window on dialogue.

Speaking to reporters in Washington on Friday, Wood said that the six powers would hold another meeting to discuss "next steps" but added that no date for a meeting had yet been determined.

Historic healthcare bill crosses Senate hurdle

AP, Washington

A bruising debate on healthcare awaits the Senate after Thanksgiving now that the historic legislation has cleared a key hurdle over the opposition of Republicans eager to inflict a punishing defeat on President Barack Obama.

The bill would extend coverage to roughly 31 million who lack it, crack down on insurance company practices that deny or dilute benefits and curtail the growth of spending on medical care nationally.

In the final minutes of a daylong session, Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, accused Republicans of trying to stifle a historic debate the nation needed.

The Republican leader, Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, said the vote was anything but procedural casting it as a referendum on the bill itself, which he said would raise taxes, cut Medicare and create a "massive and unsustainable debt."

Two final Democratic holdouts, Sens. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas,

announced they would join in clearing the way for a full debate.

"It is clear to me that doing nothing is not an option," said Landrieu, who won \$100 million in the legislation to help her state pay the costs of health care for the poor.

Landrieu and Lincoln, who faces a tough re-election next year, both stressed they were not committing in advance to vote for the legislation that ultimately emerges from next month's debate.

Of particular contentiousness to moderates is a provision for the government to sell insurance in competition with private companies, subject to state approval. A part of Reid's bill expected to come under significant pressure as the debate unfolds.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said the president was gratified by the vote, which he says "brings us one step closer to ending insurance company abuses, reining in spiralling health care costs, providing stability and security to those with health insurance, and extending quality health coverage to those who lack it."



PHOTO: AFP

This photo taken from Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne shows guardian Moira Kelly, left, with Daniella Noble, right, the woman who found conjoined twins Trishna, bottom, and Krishna at a Dhaka orphanage in 2007. The twins appeared yesterday to have beaten the odds with their miracle story of survival, both awaking from landmark separation surgery happy and well.



Iran reformer sentenced to 6 years in jail

AP, Tehran

A top reformer has been sentenced to six years in jail after he stood trial on charges of fomenting unrest to topple the Iranian regime.

Lawyer Saleh Nikbakht said Sunday that former vice president Mohammad Ali Abtahi has 20 days to appeal the verdict.

Abtahi made televised confessions after his arrest in which he admitted provoking people to riot. His family and fellow reformers said the confessions were obtained under duress.

Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator, had 14 lovers at the same time, the diaries of his long-term mistress reveal.

Clarettta Petacci was the daughter of a Vatican doctor, who met Mussolini in 1932 when she was 20 and became his mistress four years later.

Her journal published last week describes the period from 1932 to 1938.

The Times quoted Mauro Suttori, who edited the diaries for his book *Secret Mussolini*, as saying: "The diaries are an intimate chronicle, minute by minute, of the daily life of the founder of fascism."

Petacci was sure that Mussolini, who was married and had five children, had numerous other affairs so she made him call her up nearly a dozen times in a day. In her diary she has written the times of the calls and their conversation.



Mussolini 'had 14 lovers at a time'

ANI, London

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Palestinians check the damage caused by an Israeli air strike on a metal workshop in Jabalia refugee camp, northern Gaza Strip yesterday. Three Israeli air strikes - one on smuggling tunnels and two on metal workshops - in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip overnight wounded eight Palestinians, one of them seriously.

Photo: AFP

Hamas led groups to halt firing rockets into Israel

AP, Gaza City

Hamas's armed wing yesterday said that armed groups in its Gaza Strip stronghold had finalised a deal to stop firing rockets into Israel, but said they would respond to Israeli raids.

"The agreement between (Ezzedine) Al-Qassam (Brigades) and other factions to stop rocket (fire) is not a sign of

weakness," the group said in a statement.

The agreement is "aimed at keeping together the internal front and the supreme national interest of the Palestinian people."

It warned, however, that the groups would respond in the case of Israeli strikes on the territory.

"Al-Qassam Brigades will

not stand idly by in case of a Zionist escalation and will defend ourselves with all our force."

The statement was released a day after a rocket was fired into Israel from Gaza, landing without causing injuries or damage, and hours after the army responded with three air raids that wounded eight Palestinians.

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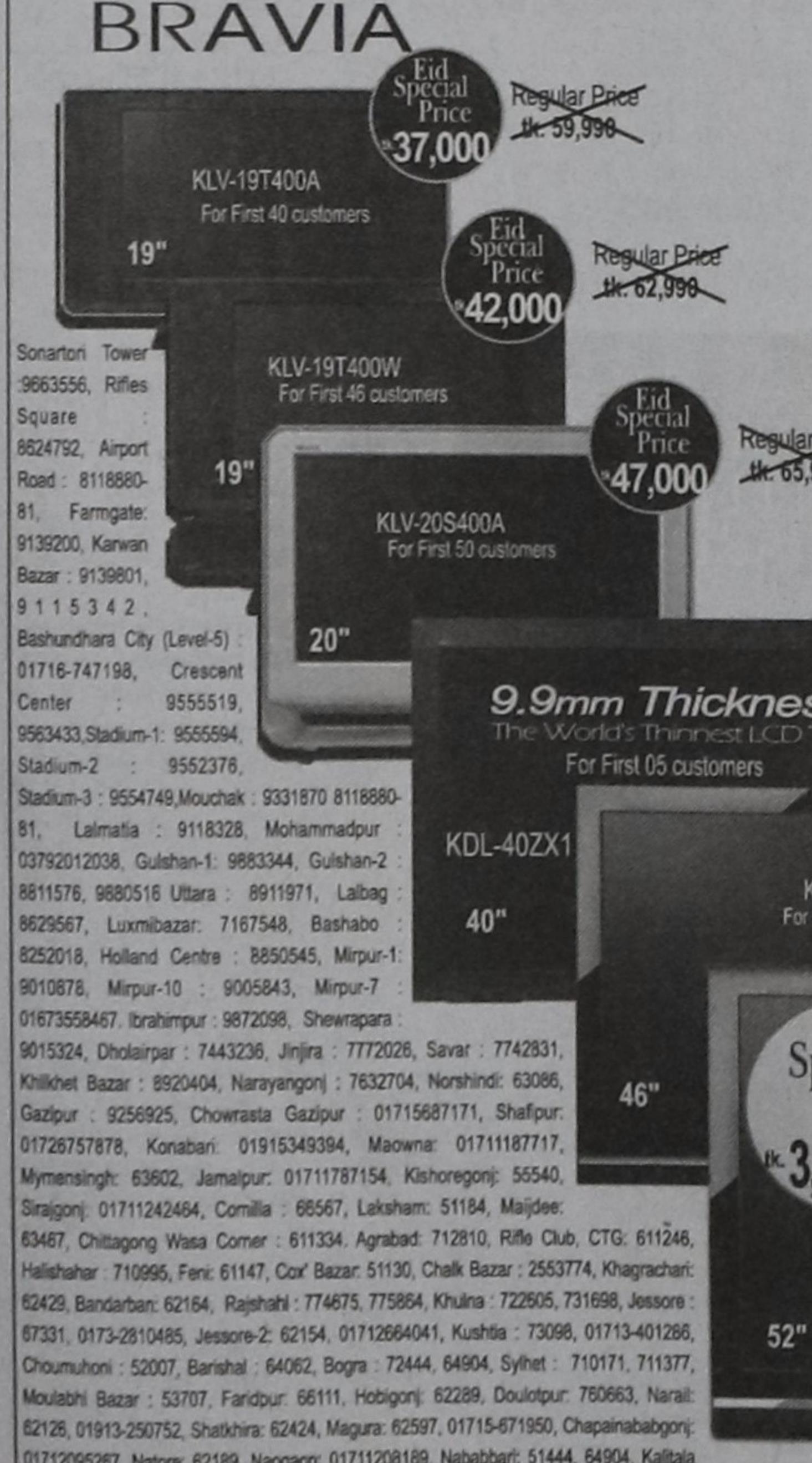
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