

UN reports of high grade uranium in Iran nuke site

Iran downplays find, pessimistic over more talks

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday downplayed a report by the UN atomic watchdog that uranium traces have been detected of a higher grade than any found before, as local media voiced doubts about the next round of talks on Tehran's nuclear programme.

Higher-than-expected traces of enriched uranium "are a normal technical issue that is being investigated by (IAEA) experts," Iran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency Ali Asghar Soltanieh was quoted as telling the official IRNA news agency.

The agency report said that the traces found at the Fordo site, inside a mountain bunker near Qom, were of uranium enriched to purities of 27 percent. Previously, the highest level recorded by the agency in Iran was 20 percent.

The West fears that Iran could be covertly aiming to enrich uranium towards the 90 percent needed to

develop atomic bombs, a claim Tehran vehemently denies.

"Addressing technical and trivial issues, which also occur in the nuclear facilities of other nations, show media reports are seeking political goals," Soltanieh said.

Analysts cautioned that the 27-percent find could just be a processing glitch and not necessarily a sign of a deliberate effort to enrich above 20 percent.

In the IAEA report, which was seen by AFP, Iran also explained that enrichment above 20 percent "may happen for technical reasons beyond the operator's control."

The report was published a day after Iran ended two days of crunch talks with the world powers over its disputed nuclear drive in Baghdad.

Little was achieved except arranging another meeting in Moscow on June 18-19 and establishing that they are poles apart on crucial issues.

Iranian media yesterday expressed pessimism about the scheduled talks in Moscow after this week's negotiations, which one newspaper described as "fruitless."

"Solution: stop the negotiations," ran the headline of an editorial in the hard-line Kayhan daily.

"It is better not to attend the talks because one can expect right now that the talks in Moscow will not gain any achievement either," said the newspaper's managing director Hossein Shariatmadari, who was appointed by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

It was the world powers who needed to keep the talks going so "they can control the oil prices," he added.

Israel, the sole if undeclared nuclear-armed state in the Middle East, accuses Iran of masking efforts to acquire an atomic weapon. It wants the Islamic republic to dismantle its Fordo nuclear site.

Iran has uranium for 5 bombs: Expert

REUTERS, Vienna

Iran has significantly stepped up its output of low-enriched uranium and total production in the last five years would be enough for at least five nuclear weapons if refined much further, a US security institute said.

The Institute for Science and International Security made the analysis on the basis of data in the latest quarterly UN watchdog report.

It said Iran had produced almost 6.2 tonnes of uranium enriched to a level of 3.5 percent since it began the work in 2007 - some of which has subsequently been further processed into higher-grade material.

"This total amount of 3.5 percent low enriched uranium hexafluoride, if further enriched to weapon grade, is enough to make over five nuclear weapons," ISIS said in its analysis.

Manmohan in historic Myanmar visit

Scheduled to meet Suu Kyi, president

AGENCIES

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is to kick off a landmark three-day visit to Myanmar today, first by an Indian PM after 25 years.

Manmohan, who is visiting Myanmar from May 27 to 29, would be meeting President U Thein Sein to discuss ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in the spheres of security, investment, culture and infrastructure, among others.

Manmohan Singh would also be meeting Aung San Suu Kyi, the Chairperson of the National League for Democracy, during his visit to Myanmar on Tuesday.

The visit underscores India's quest for energy supplies to fuel its economic boom and concerns about China's strong influence in Myanmar, where the elected but military-backed government is opening up its economy for investment and trade.

India wants to "secure a stronger and mutually beneficial relationship with a neighboring



country that is integral to India's Look East policy," Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai told journalists on Friday.

Bilateral trade between India and Myanmar was around \$1.2 billion in 2011. Both sides hope to push trade to \$3 billion by 2015.

India has adopted a "Look East" policy of engaging with southeast and east Asia, reaching out and deepening bilateral ties with Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia among others in the region.

Singh's visit will be the first in 25 years by an Indian prime minister, although the two countries share a 1,600-kilometer (1,000-mile) land border, as well as a maritime border in the Bay of Bengal.

Myanmar, which was once known as Burma, had been an international pariah for decades under a military junta that quashed any hopes of democratic reform. A 2010 election, though, has led to at least some reforms and a gradual opening up to the rest of the world.

Afghan assembly approves US strategic pact

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's parliament yesterday voted by an overwhelming majority to ratify a strategic partnership agreement with the United States signed earlier this month, lawmakers said.

"We voted with a majority in favour of the strategic pact," MP Shukria Essakhil told AFP. "Only five MPs voted against it," she said, adding that around 190 lawmakers out of 249 were present for the open vote.

The pact is now going to be sent to the Afghan senate where it is expected to be signed as early as next week, Seyawash said.

Earlier this month, President Barack Obama paid a surprise visit to Kabul to sign a deal with his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai that will cement post-war ties with Kabul after 2014, when Nato-led combat forces leave Afghanistan.

The pact foresees the possibility of American forces staying behind to train Afghan soldiers and pursue the remnants of al-Qaeda but does not commit Washington to specific troop or funding levels.

The pact alarmed Afghanistan's neigh-

bours including Iran, and lawmaker Bakhtash Seyawash said that the Islamic republic had attempted to "sabotage" the vote.

Relations between Afghanistan and Iran have been strained by the strategic pact, officials said, charging that Tehran had harassed Afghan diplomats in recent weeks.

Lawmakers had warned Iran to end its "interference" in Afghanistan's internal affairs over the pact.

The deal, reached after months of painstaking negotiations, also states that the United States does not seek permanent military bases in Afghanistan.

There are currently around 130,000 international troops in Afghanistan and all Nato-led combat forces are due to leave by the end of 2014.

But amid a rising death toll, troubled domestic economies and the increasing unpopularity of the Afghan war in many Western countries, troop withdrawals are now getting under way.

New President Francois Hollande, on a surprise visit to Kabul on Friday, defended France's imminent exit from Afghanistan.



Canadian students stage a protest against tuition fee increases on Friday in Montreal. Students, trade unions and community groups in Canada's Quebec province challenged a new law regulating demonstrations after months of protests and recent mass arrests. The government called for negotiations to break the impasse.

Clashes kill 33 in Yemen

AFP, Aden

Thirty-three people, including six soldiers, were killed in clashes between al-Qaeda and the army in southern Yemen yesterday as troops advanced towards the Abyan provincial capital Zinjibar, military and local sources said.

Soldiers from the 25th Mechanised Brigade "managed early on Saturday to deal heavy blows to terrorists in Maraqid and Mashqasa ... killing 20 terrorist elements," Brigadier General Mohammed al-Sawmali told defence ministry news website 26sep.net.

"Two soldiers were killed and four others were wounded," 26sep.net quoted him as saying.

Meanwhile, at Jaar, a major al-Qaeda stronghold in Abyan, four soldiers were killed in battles on the town's outskirts, a military official told AFP.

Everest season ends

150 reach summit on last day defying death

AFP, Kathmandu

A near-record number of climbers reached the summit of Everest as the season ended yesterday without a repeat of last week's deadly accidents, which had raised fears of overcrowding on the world's highest peak.

But the tragic deaths apparently make no dent in the increasing number of people attempting its ascent each year.

Around 150 people reached the top of the 8,848-metre (29,029-foot) mountain at the end of the spring weather window -- a week after four deaths led to calls for better safety measures to end "traffic jams" near the summit.

"A handful of climbers returned from camp four after being unable to move up. But the weather was good over the past two days and many took advantage. About 150 made it to the top today," said tourism ministry official Tilak Pandey.

"There are still a few Sherpas and other climbers who will try to reach the top for a couple of days. But the official season has ended and



the climbers are now returning to the base camp."

A 48-hour stretch of good weather saw more than 250 climbers reach the top of the world, despite warnings of potentially deadly bottlenecks in the "death zone" above 8,000 metres.

Four climbers from Germany, South Korea, China and Canada died while descending from the crowded summit area last weekend, which saw 150 people reach the summit before a severe windstorm set in.

Experts say the sheer numbers of climbers exacerbates the already substantial dangers of tackling Everest, which has now claimed more than 220 lives -- half of those in the past 20 years.

The record number of ascents in one day is 169 on May 23, 2010, according to German statistician Eberhard Jurgalski, who compiles data for the 8000ers.com website and has been chronicling Everest activity since 1981.

Britain plans curb on immigration

GUARDIAN ONLINE

The Home Office is working on plans to restrict migration to the United Kingdom if the eurozone crisis deteriorates leading to large numbers of jobs seekers travelling from Europe, the home secretary has said.

Theresa May said that "work was ongoing" to restrict immigration if there is a financial collapse, in an interview with the Daily Telegraph.

She said there was no sign of increased migration, but the government was examining the trends. When asked if she was considering immigration restrictions, May replied: "It is right that we do some contingency planning on this [and] that is work that is ongoing."

All members of the European Union have the right to work in the UK with the exception of the new members Romania and Bulgaria. While more than a million Europeans live and work in the UK, similar numbers of Britons live and work across Europe.

May's comments appear to be focused on Greece, which some commentators believe is likely to leave the eurozone which will in the short term at least cause even greater economic instability than the Greeks are experiencing now.

If Greece does leave the eurozone, the whole of Europe will be affected, especially those that are wrestling with debt problems such as Portugal, Spain and Ireland.

Jesus was crucified on Friday April 3, 33 AD

AFP, Washington

A study on earthquake activity at the Dead Sea has revealed the exact date of Jesus' crucifixion, which has been debated for years.

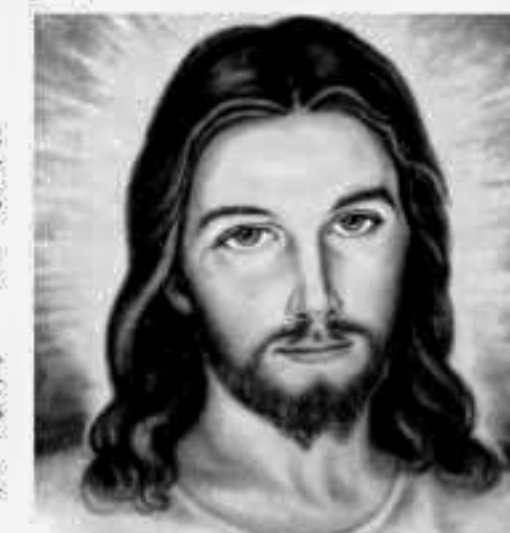
Researchers believe that Jesus, as described in the New Testament, was crucified on Friday April 3, 33 A.D.

Textual and geological clues, along with astronomical data, support the date, the Discovery News reported.

Geologists investigated the 4,000-year chronology of earthquake disturbances within the uppermost 19 feet of laminated sediment of the Dead Sea to determine the exact date of Jesus' crucifixion.

The latest investigation, reported in the journal International Geology Review, focused on earthquake activity at the Dead Sea, located 13 miles from Jerusalem.

Varves, which are annual layers of deposition in the sediments, reveal that at least two major earthquakes affected the core: a wide-



spread earthquake in 31 BC and an early first century seismic event that happened sometime between 26 AD and 36 AD.

The latter period occurred during "the years when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea and when the earthquake of the Gospel of Matthew is historically constrained," Williams said.

"The day and date of the crucifixion (Good Friday) are known with a fair degree of precision," he said. But the year has been in question.

When data about the Jewish calendar and astronomical calculations are factored in, a handful of possible dates result, with Friday April 3, 33 AD being the best match, according to the researchers.

Williams is studying yet another possible natural happening associated with the crucifixion - darkness.

Three of the four canonical gospels report darkness from noon to 3:00pm after the crucifixion. Such darkness could have been caused by a dust storm, he believes.

JS goes into budget

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House before the opposition's June 10 deadline for the government to accept its demand for restoration of the caretaker government system.

It is certain that the main opposition will not return to parliament today, said Mahubur.

"How can BNP join parliament when five opposition lawmakers are behind bars?" he asked.

"We have been demanding the restoration of caretaker government system. But the government is yet to respond," said the BNP leader.

"This session will continue for quite long. If the government frees the detained opposition lawmakers and senior leaders

and agrees to have dialogue on the caretaker government issue, we will return to the House."

Moudud Ahmed, another member of the BNP standing committee, said, "We were eager to join the budget session but the government made the situation different with the arrests of a number of opposition lawmakers."

The final decision on the issue would be made at a meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party, he said at a human chain in the capital.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Faroque said, "We have set June 10 deadline for the government to meet our demand for restoration of caretaker

government. We will be busy with our programmes till then."

The 12th session of the ninth parliament, which had 33 working days, was prorogued on March 29.

Having stayed away from parliamentary proceedings for 83 consecutive sittings since March last year, opposition lawmakers had returned to the House on March 18.

The Business Advisory Committee headed by Speaker Abdul Hamid sits at 4:30pm today, an hour before the parliament sitting, to decide on the duration of the session, said parliament secretariat officials.

PM opens online tax regime

FROM PAGE 1
eligible to pay income tax, to come under the tax net," she said while inaugurating the online tax payment system at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

She said her government wanted to be independent to meet development goals, and for that revenue earnings should be more than what they were at present.

Hasina also directed the authorities to quickly introduce a VAT e-payment system besides the tax e-payment system to ensure more transparency.

Income Tax Commissioner Kanan Kumar Roy made a presentation on the online tax payment system. A documentary drama was also screened at the event.

The PM said she hoped that revenue earnings would increase after the launch of the online tax payment system and that people would be encouraged to pay tax. "Expatriate Bangladeshis can also avail themselves of the service by visiting the specific portal."

She asked the authorities concerned to gradually improve the online tax payment system to meet the demands of taxpayers, and emphasised regular maintenance of the tax website to handle well the pressure of service seekers, especially in August and September.

The prime minister said her government led had brought about reforms in the overall tax administration-- modernised it and increased the scope of auto-

mation along with infrastructural development.

"We've also made the tax payment system easy, launched tax information and service centres, and improved the tax policy and tax management system."

As a result, there has been tremendous success in direct tax collection in the last three years as revenue earnings doubled, she said, adding that there had been around 18 percent growth in the current year.

Hasina said the government had taken the measures to make income tax and VAT act time-befitting. It had also constructed a modern building for the revenue department in the capital apart from expanding the income tax and VAT departments.

Despite the global eco-

nom recession, Bangladesh's economy was moving ahead, tackling domestic and international risks, she said, adding all the macro-economic indicators of the country, including GDP growth, import-export, remittance, investment, production, employment and foreign currency reserve, were positive.

"The rural economy has become more active ... income of people has increased and so has demand. A good domestic market has been created and we've also made infrastructural development in order to attract local and foreign investments."

She also urged all to gain knowledge on information technology and get used to it. She stressed the need for

maintaining progress in different e-services, including e-government, e-commerce, e-health, e-education, e-banking and the latest e-tax payment systems.

She claimed that Bangladesh was moving ahead in pace with the digitalised world.

The prime minister inaugurated the online tax payment system by paying in advance her income tax online for the year 2012-13.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith and PM's Economic Affairs Adviser Mashiur Rahman spoke at the programme as special guests. National Board of Revenue Chairman Nasiruddin Ahmed presided over the function, where FBCCI President AK Azad also spoke.