

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Iran indicates it is building another nuclear plant

By **Nazila Fathi**

Monday, December 17, 2007

TEHRAN: Iran confirmed on Monday that it had received the first fuel shipment for its nuclear power plant at Bushehr, but also indicated for the first time that it was building a second nuclear power plant.

The revelation came in comments by Iran's Atomic Organization, Gholamreza Aghazadeh, made to state-run television and reported by the semi-official Fars news agency. He was dismissing speculation that the arrival of the fuel would allow Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program, in Natanz.

"We are building a 360-megawatt indigenous power plant in Darkhovin," he said, referring to a southern city north of Bushehr.

"The fuel for this plant needs to be produced by Natanz enrichment plant," he added, Fars said.

Bushehr and Darkhovin were both projects planned before the 1979 Revolution. It was not clear how much construction had been done at Darkhovin. The location is also sometimes spelled Darkhovin, or referred to by other nearby place names, including Ahvaz, Esteghlal and Karun.

Aghazadeh said Monday that Iran needed to increase the centrifuges at the Natanz enrichment plant from 3,000 to 50,000, saying that with the current 3,000, it could only produce fuel for a 100-megawatt plant.

The White House had signaled on Monday that the arrival of the fuel could help convince Iran to curb its enrichment program. President George W. Bush that If Iran accepted the uranium for a civilian power plant, "there was no need for them to learn how to enrich," Reuters reported.

Aghazadeh said the shipment was made after an agreement was made between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit in October to Tehran.

Construction of Bushehr has been hindered by repeated delays. Earlier this year Russia delayed a fuel shipment expected in March, accusing Iran of tardiness in making its monthly payments of \$25 million. However, Western officials said that Russia made the decision in part to help the West to pressure Iran into more openness on its nuclear program.

Last week, Sergei Shmatko, the director of Atomstroyexport, announced that Russia and Iran had ended their financial disputes over the project, though he failed to indicate a date for when the long-awaited opening would occur.

Esipova said the plant will be technically ready to operate no sooner than six months after all the uranium fuel rods needed to power the station are delivered.

Aghazadeh said Monday that almost 95 percent of the work at Bushehr was finished and it could produce power as early as the next Iranian year, which begins on March 21.

"The first phase of delivery has been completed," said Irina Esipova, a spokeswoman for Atomstroyexport, the Russian contractor on the project. "A small amount of fuel is already on the premises of the Bushehr station in a special storage facility." The company plans to deliver about 80 tons of nuclear fuel to Iran over the next two months, she said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the fuel would be under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency and that Iran had given written guarantees that the fuel would only be used for the nuclear power plant.

"All fuel that will be delivered will be under the control and guarantees of the International Atomic Energy Agency for the whole time it stays on Iranian territory," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "Moreover, the Iranian side gave additional written guarantees that the fuel will be used only for the Bushehr nuclear power plant."

The statement added: "After the Russian fuel is processed at the Bushehr nuclear power plant, it will be returned to Russia for further processing and storage."

The power station is at the heart of an international dispute over Iran's nuclear program. Iran insists that Bushehr is part of a civilian nuclear program. However, critics, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, have accused Tehran of secretly developing or planning to develop a nuclear bomb.

The United States released a National Intelligence Estimate two weeks ago concluding that Tehran ended its nuclear weapons program in 2003, undermining earlier claims by the Bush administration that Iran was actively developing a nuclear weapon.

Officials in Washington have nevertheless continued to insist that Iran remains a threat, sentiments which have been echoed by some European leaders. Iran considers itself to have been vindicated by the intelligence report. On Sunday President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called the nuclear issue his "toughest battle and challenge" in recent years, but said the intelligence report had boosted Iran's international status, a statement on the website of Iran's Foreign Ministry said.

Notes: