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## Iran hits back at nuclear weapons allegations

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Iran will not retreat "an iota" from its nuclear programme and the world is being misled by claims that it is seeking nuclear weapons, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, the country's president, has said.

Ahmedinejad was speaking on Wednesday in response to a report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog, which alleged that Iran was close to developing a nuclear warhead.

He strongly criticised the IAEA for siding with "absurd" US allegations.

"This nation won't retreat one iota from the path it is going," he told thousands of people who had gathered in Shahr-e-Kord, central Iran, reiterating that the country was pursuing nuclear research only for peaceful purposes.

"Why are you ruining the prestige of the [UN nuclear] agency for absurd US claims?"

A 13-page annex to the IAEA's report, released on Tuesday, included claims that while some of Iran's nuclear development activity was aimed at civilian as well as military applications, others were "specific to nuclear weapons".

The IAEA said that there were indications that Iran had conducted high explosives testing and detonator development to set off a nuclear charge, as well as computer modelling of a nuclear

warhead.

The report also said that preparatory work for a nuclear weapons test was under way, as well as development of a nuclear payload for Iran's Shahab-III intermediate range missile.

The IAEA says that Iran has begun to move low-enriched uranium (LEU) to an underground facility for the pursuit of nuclear research.

The report also said that Iran has installed two sets of 174 machines to refine uranium to a fissile purity of 20 per cent (as opposed to the 3.5 per cent required for normal power plant operations) at Fordow, near the holy city of Qom, but that these machines are not yet operational.

Iran says that it will use the higher-grade enriched uranium to convert into fuel for a research reactor that would make isotopes to treat cancer patients.

### **Allegations dismissed**

In his speech, Ahmedinejad reiterated previous statements in which he has said that Iran sees no point in developing nuclear weapons.

The Iranian nation is wise. It won't build two bombs against 20,000 [nuclear] bombs you have," he said in comments apparently directed at the West and others.

"But it builds something you can't respond to: ethics, decency, monotheism and justice," he said in his speech, which was broadcast live on state television.

The bulk of the information in the IAEA report was compiled from alleged findings that had earlier been partially revealed by the agency.

Some of the information, however, was new, including evidence of a large metal chamber at a military site for nuclear-related explosives testing.

Iran has dismissed those allegations, saying the structure was a set of metal toilet stalls.

Al Jazeera's Dorsa Jabbari, reporting from Tehran, said that Iranian officials did not consider any of the information in the IAEA report to be credible.

"They are saying that the evidence put forward in this report is not credible, that it is not accurate, and that they have already responded to it in the past," she said.

"According to sources that looked at this report, the IAEA's evidence is based on a laptop that was stolen from an Iranian nuclear scientist in 2004.

"This laptop contains a lot of information ... Iranians say this information was already put forth in previous reports and they have already responded to it four years ago in a detailed 117 page report.

"They believe this evidence is not clear, and they're asking where this evidence came from, when it was presented to the IAEA and how they obtained it."

Jabbari said that Iranian officials were now reconsidering the country's relationship with the IAEA, as their position was that they had complied with all of the agency's requirements and yet were facing recycled charges.

The US and its allies claim that a nuclear-armed Iran would cause a nuclear arms race among rival states in the region, including Saudi Arabia, and would directly threaten Israel.

### **'Unprecedented' sanctions**

The European Union reacted to the report on Wednesday by saying that it "seriously aggravates" concerns that Iran possesses a "full-fledged" nuclear weapons programme.

The 27-member bloc will consult internally and with partners in order "to work for an adequate reaction" to the report, said Maja Kocijancic, a spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

The IAEA report "seriously aggravates existing concerns on the nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, since this report puts particular emphasis on information corroborated by the IAEA regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme", Kocijancic said.

"Overall these findings strongly indicate the existence of a full-fledged nuclear weapons development programme in Iran."

The report "is based on information received from a variety of sources, including from several member states, over a longer period of time," she said.

"[The] IAEA's analysis is that information is internally consistent, credible and has, as far as possible, been cross-checked with information collected by IAEA during investigations in Iran," the spokeswoman said.

### **'Common ground'**

Ashton represents six world powers - the United Kingdom, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US - in stalled negotiations with Iran aimed at getting the country to cease any uranium enrichment activities.

She had earlier sent a letter to Iran offering to resume those negotiations as long as the country did not set any pre-conditions. Tehran had said it was ready to resume talks focusing on issues of "common ground".

The talks had stalled at the beginning of the year after Iran insisted that they should include the issue of broader nuclear disarmament in the Middle East region.

The US and France have threatened to extend Western sanctions against Iran following the IAEA report, to add to four existing rounds of UN, US and EU measures.

"If Iran refuses to abide by the demands of the international community and rejects all serious cooperation, we are prepared to adopt, with those countries that follow, unprecedented sanctions," the French foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

The ministry said that activities noted in the IAEA's report "are in violation of UN Security Council resolutions and the IAEA's governing council. They have no credible civil purpose".



**Iran insists that its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes and that the IAEA report is false**

China said on Wednesday that it was still studying the IAEA report, and the foreign ministry called on Iran to be "serious and flexible" on the issue of talks.

"At present we believe that all parties should do more to facilitate dialogue and cooperation," Hong Lei, a foreign ministry spokesman, said at a regular news briefing.

The Russian foreign ministry released a similar statement on Tuesday evening, when the IAEA report was first leaked.

### **Warning to Israel**

Also on Wednesday, Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri, Iran's deputy military chief, warned Israel that any attack on Iran's nuclear sites by that country would result in the "destruction" of Israel.

Jazayeri said the Israeli nuclear site of Dimona was "the most accessible" target, and that "our response would not be limited to the Middle East", according to a television interview.

"The smallest action by Israel [against Iran] and we will see its destruction," he said.

Jazayeri's comments came after a warning from Shimon Peres, the Israeli president, that an attack on Iran was becoming "more and more likely".