

Iran selects 16 new sites for nuclear plants

Locations chosen in part for their resistance to military airstrikes; state TV reports new uranium reserves discovered

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T EHRAN — Iran has selected 16 locations for the construction of nuclear power plants as part of a plan to generate 20,000 megawatts of electricity at multiple sites over the next 15 years.

Iranian state TV said Saturday that experts at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran had finished studies to select the best locations across the country. It added that sites were chosen in part for their resistance to earthquakes and military airstrikes.

The Islamic Republic claims it needs 20 large-scale plants to meet its growing electricity needs over the next one-and-a-half decades.

State TV also said on Saturday that Iran had discovered new uranium resources in the country that will put its reserves at 4,400 tons compared to 1,527 tons three decades ago.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator struck a belligerent tone just three days ahead of talks with world powers in Kazakhstan, saying that the Islamic Republic had fulfilled all of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"We will not accept anything beyond our obligations and will not accept anything less than our rights," Saeed Jalili told nuclear industry officials in Tehran on Saturday. "Iran has fulfilled its NPT obligations as an active and committed member, therefore it should gain all of its rights," he added in remarks quoted by the Iranian Students' News Agency.

A new report by the UN's nuclear watchdog revealed this week that Iran had installed and activated nearly 200 advanced centrifuges. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reacted Thursday to the report, saying that it proved the Islamic Republic was steadily working its way toward the "red line," at which it couldn't be stopped from obtaining nuclear weapons.

"This is a very grave report which proves that Iran is continuing to make rapid progress toward the red line. Today, Iran is closer than ever to achieving enriched material for a nuclear bomb," a

statement by the Prime Minister's Office said, adding that the need to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons would be the first subject discussed with US President Barack Obama on his upcoming visit to Israel.

UN nuclear inspectors have counted nearly 200 advanced machines fully or partially installed at Iran's main uranium enrichment site, the leaked International Atomic Energy Agency report stated, confirming diplomats' accounts that Tehran has begun a major upgrade of a program that can be used in the making of atomic arms.

The US also reacted harshly to the report, with State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland calling the revelation disturbing and "yet another provocative step" from Iran.

"The installation of new advanced centrifuges would be a further escalation, and a continuing violation of Iran's obligations under the relevant UN Security Council resolution and IAEA board resolutions," she said.

White House spokesperson Jay Carney said there was still an opportunity for Iran and the West to solve things diplomatically, but stressed "that window will not remain open indefinitely."

Iran denies it wants such weapons and says it is enriching only to make reactor fuel and for scientific and medical purposes under international law specifically allowing such activities. But because it hid its enrichment program — and other nuclear activities — for decades, many countries fear that it ultimately wants to enrich to weapons-grade level, suitable for arming nuclear warheads.

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