
IAEA head to visit Iran over uranium enrichment

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TEHRAN, January 7 (RIA Novosti) - The head of the UN nuclear watchdog will arrive Friday in Tehran on a two-day visit to discuss Iran's controversial nuclear program, Iranian media said on Monday.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), will meet with high-ranking Iranian officials in an attempt to push for further details on Iran's past and present nuclear activities, the media cited an IAEA spokesperson as saying.

ElBaradei said in a report in November 2007 that Iran had been truthful, in general, about key aspects of its "nuclear dossier," but noted that Tehran was continuing to work on uranium enrichment, despite persistent international demands to fold the program.

Western nations suspect Iran of seeking to build nuclear weapons. Tehran has insisted it needs nuclear technology to generate electricity, as is its right under the international non-proliferation treaty.

The Islamic Republic is currently subject to two sets of UN Security Council sanctions over its defiance to halt uranium enrichment, needed in both weapons and electricity production. A further round of tougher sanctions has been blocked by Russia and China.

The U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), published on December 3 last year, stated that Tehran had put a stop to weapons production in 2003, although it was continuing to enrich uranium.

The report contradicted a previous U.S. intelligence assessment in 2005 which said that the Islamic Republic was actively pursuing a nuclear bomb.

However, U.S. President George W. Bush remained hawkish, despite the report, saying that, "Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous and Iran will be dangerous if they have the know how to make a nuclear weapon."

Iran recognizes only IAEA as nuclear negotiator - president

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Saturday that Iran officially recognizes only the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as a party to talks on Iran's nuclear program.

The Iranian president made the statement during his meeting with Mohamed ElBaradei, the IAEA director general, who is in Tehran for talks with the country's leadership on Iran's controversial uranium enrichment program.

"Iran officially recognizes only the IAEA as a party to talks on the nuclear program. Of course, this does not obstruct our dialogue on different issues with other countries," the president said.

Several Western countries, particularly the United States, suspect Iran's nuclear program is geared toward the production of atomic weapons. Iran denies the allegations, saying it intends to use nuclear power purely for electricity generation.

Two sets of UN Security Council sanctions are currently in place against Iran over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment. A further round of more stringent sanctions has so far been blocked by China and Russia.

Ahmadinejad said he hoped the IAEA would not yield to "pressure from powerful states" and would abide by its commitments, meeting legal criteria.

ElBaradei said in turn that the process of resolving disputes over the nuclear program was on the right track and called for active cooperation on all issues.
