

IAEA says no evidence of Iranian Nuclear Weapons plan

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Report likely to influence agency's Vienna meet

DUBAI: As the countdown for a crucial meeting on Iran on March 6 gets under way, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has revealed that it has not found any evidence that Teheran had diverted material towards making atomic weapons.

In its report which has been circulated to its 35 board members, the IAEA said that its three years of investigations had not shown "any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices", the Associated Press reported.

Cooperation sought

However, it called upon Iran to substantially increase its cooperation with the IAEA inspectors as the agency has not been able "to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran."

Without heightened cooperation, the agency would be unable to establish whether some of Iran's past nuclear activities under wraps were not linked to the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki who has been visiting Japan said, "They (IAEA) could not find evidence which shows that Iran has diverted from its peaceful purposes of nuclear activities in Iran." The report is likely to strongly influence the March 6 meeting in Vienna where the IAEA board is expected to discuss the future course of action on Iran.

On February 4, the board had decided to report Iran's case to the U.N. Security Council, which can take action against Iran, including the imposition of economic sanctions.

Buoyed by the report, Iran is rushing the head of its Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Larijani to Russia for another round of talks.

A Russian delegation led by Sergei Kiriyenko held talks with Iran over the weekend.

These discussions had revolved around the establishment of a joint venture facility in Russia, which would produce enriched uranium for generating electricity.

That meeting produced an "agreement in principle" on this subject.

However, later, differences appear to have surfaced on another issue — on whether Iran would be allowed to operate a small-scale enrichment plant for research purposes.

The IAEA report said that Iran had begun enrichment using 10 centrifuges — a move which can result in the production of only minute quantities of enriched uranium.

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