

Iran accelerates enrichment of uranium to near weapons-grade, IAEA says

Author:

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VIENNA: Iran has accelerated its enrichment of uranium to near weapons-grade, the UN atomic watchdog said in a report on Tuesday seen by Reuters, a move raising tensions with the West as both sides seek to resume talks on reviving Tehran's nuclear deal.

Iran increased the purity to which it is refining uranium to 60 percent fissile purity from 20 percent in April in response to an explosion and power cut at its Natanz site that damaged output at the main underground enrichment plant there.

Iran has blamed the attack on Israel. Weapons-grade is around 90 percent purity.

In May, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran was using one cascade, or cluster, of advanced centrifuges to enrich to up to 60 percent at its above-ground pilot enrichment plant at Natanz. The IAEA informed member states on Tuesday that Iran was now using a second cascade for that purpose, too.

The move is the latest of many by Iran breaching the restrictions imposed by the 2015 nuclear deal, which capped the purity to which Tehran can refine uranium at 3.67 percent. The United States and its European allies have warned such moves threaten talks on reviving the deal, which are currently suspended.

Following Reuters' report, Iran reiterated that its nuclear program is peaceful and said it had informed the IAEA about its enrichment activities. It added that its moves away from the 2015 deal would be reversed if the United States returned to the accord and lifted sanctions, Iranian state media reported.

"If the other parties return to their obligations under the nuclear accord and Washington fully and verifiably lifts its unilateral and illegal sanctions ... all of Iran's mitigation and countermeasures will be reversible," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh was quoted as saying by state media.

The IAEA said on Monday that Iran had made progress in its work on enriched uranium metal despite objections by Western powers that there is no credible civilian use for such work.

Uranium metal can be used to make the core of a nuclear bomb, but Iran says its aims are peaceful and it is developing reactor fuel.



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Iran warns it can enrich uranium to nuclear weapons grade Iran gives IAEA notice of escalating uranium metal work

[Egypt, Japan vow to cement cooperation](#)

Tue, 2021-08-17 23:09

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi and visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Monday discussed bilateral cooperation and regional issues of common interest.

They stressed the need for continued consultation regarding joint efforts to prepare for the next session of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Tunisia next year.

El-Sisi stressed Egypt's keenness to develop cooperation with Japan in many fields, while Motegi affirmed his country's willingness to enhance its relations with Egypt in terms of economic cooperation and political

consultation.

The meeting also touched on several regional issues of common interest, including developments in Afghanistan.

El-Sisi stressed Egypt's keenness to attract more Japanese investments, while Motegi said his country attaches special importance to its relations with Egypt due to the latter's central role in maintaining stability and peace in the Middle East.

BACKGROUND

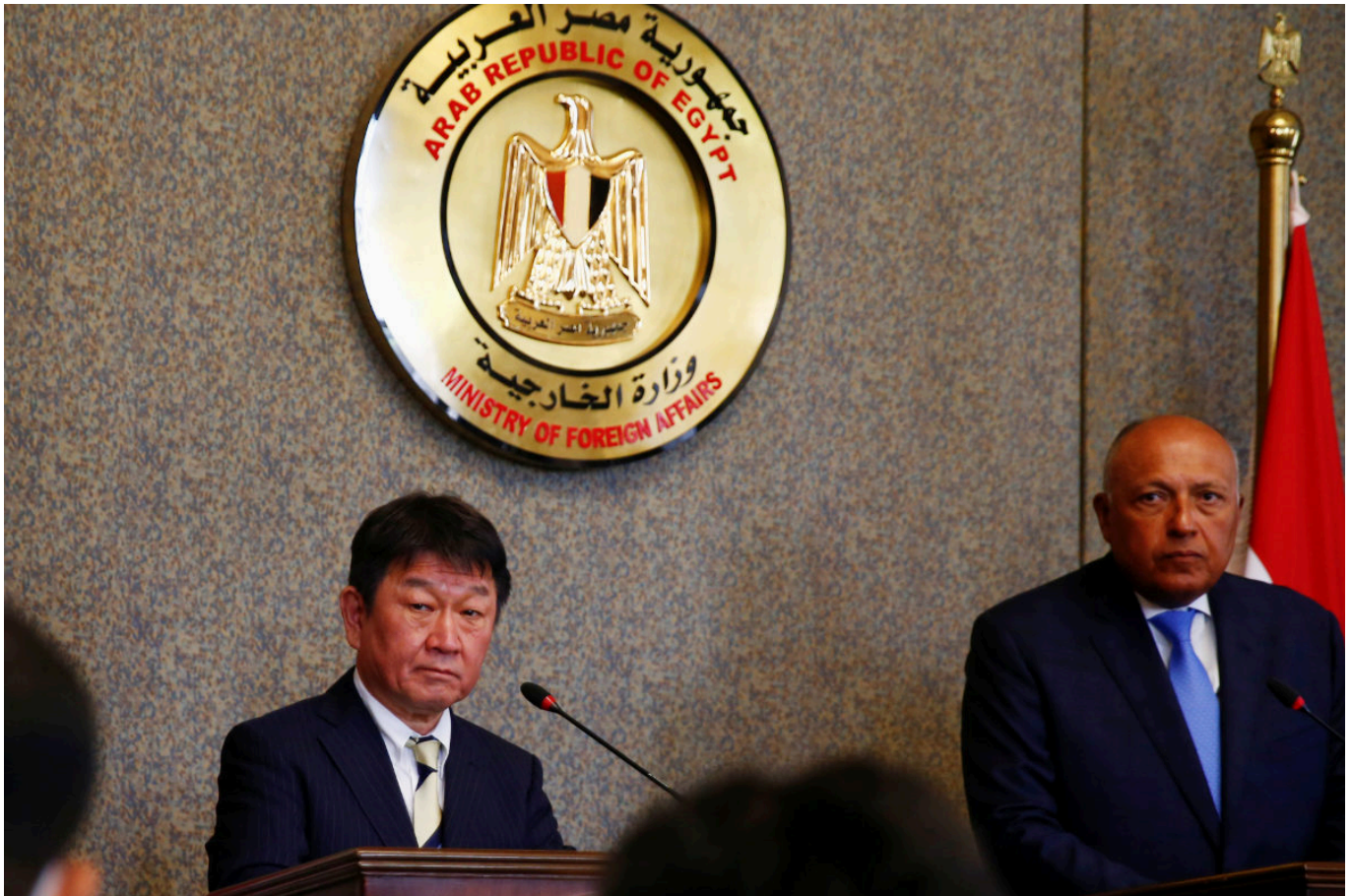
Talks between the Japanese and Egyptian foreign ministers covered Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as the need for continued Egyptian-Japanese coordination in order to achieve stability.

Motegi affirmed his country's aspiration to strengthen economic relations with Egypt and increase Japanese investments in light of the growth and development that Egypt is witnessing.

He said Japan intends to intensify its efforts to implement bilateral projects with Egypt, especially in the fields of technology, energy and transportation.

He cited the Grand Egyptian Museum, which is an icon of cooperation between the two countries, and Japanese schools in Egypt.

Talks between Motegi and his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry covered regional issues including Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as the need for continued Egyptian-Japanese coordination in order to achieve stability and defuse crises and conflicts.



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Egypt sends medical aid, personnel to Lebanon after fuel tanker explosion
Egypt stepping up Japan ties to promote tech studies

[PM-elect Mikati optimistic about new Lebanon government](#)

Tue, 2021-08-17 23:01

BEIRUT: The 11th meeting between President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati on Tuesday showed promise for eliminating the obstacles hindering the long-awaited formation of a government in Lebanon.

Following the meeting, Mikati said: “We still have a few meters left in the race, and I hope we can eliminate the remaining obstacles in a decent manner that suits everyone.

“Everyone is seeking to form a government, because if we do not, it would be

a sin against the nation.”

He added: “The dialogue has been positive, and we hope that a government will be born soon. We are working hard to eliminate all obstacles. The formation of a government in Lebanon is much like a complicated math problem that starts with calculating the representation of sects, regions and political parties and ends with people’s allegiances.”

Mikati claimed he received the support of former premiers, including Saad Hariri, who recently resigned, after nine months of fruitless efforts to form a new administration.

Mikati said on Monday that talks with Aoun would “mainly focus on naming the ministers.”

Talks between Aoun and Mikati are being fueled by US and French pressure and the suffocating conditions that the Lebanese have been living in.



Pharmacists hold signs reading in Arabic ‘no gasoline = no ambulance’ and ‘no electricity = no hospital’ as they protest in Beirut, denouncing the critical condition facing the country’s hospitals. (AFP)

Elsewhere, an argument on Tuesday at a gas station in Kafaat, Beirut’s southern suburbs, developed into a heavy firefight.

The Lebanese Army intervened, arresting some of the shooters and settling the dispute.

FASTFACT

Last week, the central bank announced it could no longer finance imports of gasoline and diesel at heavily discounted exchange rates, effectively ending a subsidy scheme.

The station was set ablaze after a B7 rocket-propelled grenade was fired at it by members of Zaiter family, who are protected by the dominant forces in the region and supported by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.

While rows over the limited supply of fuel blaze on, the army has been carrying out raids in search of subsidized gasoline and diesel that distributors have been hoarding to be smuggled to Syria or sold on the black market.

The army raided a depot in the industrial city in Zouk Mosbeh and seized 65,000 liters of diesel and 48,000 liters of gasoline. The fuel was later distributed for free to the hospitals and bakeries in the area.

A fuel tanker was also raided in Wadi Hunin in southern Lebanon, where the army seized over 47,000 liters of gasoline.

Security forces also seized more than 70,000 liters of gasoline, hidden inside tanks and cisterns in an abandoned zone on the road leading to the airport, in addition to other quantities that were hidden inside a sand plot in the same area. The seized fuel was distributed to hospitals and owners of private generators.

The power crisis has worsened amid the severe shortages of gasoline, forcing dozens of private generator owners to scale down or completely cut supplies, with Lebanon's state-owned electricity company providing less than one hour a day. Most regions have plunged into darkness and hospitals have intensified appeals for diesel supplies to be able to continue operating.

Head of the Syndicate of Private Hospital Owners Suleiman Haroun said "the seized fuel distributed to hospitals is not enough because hospitals require 350,000 liters of diesel per day to operate."

But positive signs regarding the diesel importation issue emerged on Tuesday, where it was reported that Lebanon's central bank had approved financing for two fuel shipments at the subsidized rate of 3,900 Lebanese pounds to the dollar. The two shipments contain 80 million liters of diesel that would suffice the market for five to six days.

The Lebanese parliament will convene on Friday to discuss a strategy for dealing with the fuel crisis.

Speaker Nabih Berri called the session to discuss "appropriate action" over crippling fuel shortages.

Last week, the central bank announced it could no longer finance imports of

gasoline and diesel at heavily discounted exchange rates, effectively ending a subsidy scheme, surrendering the Lebanese to a sharp increase in prices.

The bank's governor, Riad Salameh, has been at odds with the government over the move, claiming that it should only have been done after the provision of prepaid cash cards for the poor.

Salameh has said he can resume subsidizing imports only if a law is passed allowing him to dip into the mandatory reserves.



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Lebanon's wedding season in full swing despite financial turmoil
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[Turkey bracing for Afghan refugee](#)

crisis after fall of Kabul

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Tue, 2021-08-17 01:31

ANKARA: Turkey is bracing to deal with a mass of Afghan refugees entry following the Taliban's rapid takeover of the war-torn country, with the capital Kabul falling to the group on Sunday.

Speaking during a ceremony on the same day, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Afghan migrants to avoid traveling to Turkey, and pledged to continue efforts to ensure stability in Afghanistan.

"We need to continue our cooperation with Pakistan in order to achieve that. We are determined to activate all means we have for that purpose," he said.

Erdogan added that Turkey will prevent transit from the Iranian border through a high-security wall that Ankara is constructing.

However, the increasing number of refugees in Turkey, mostly Syrians and Afghans, has the potential to trigger further social tensions, with the country already facing significant unemployment and inflation, and citizens searching for scapegoats amid the pandemic economy.

In the meantime, Mullah Mohammed Yaqoob, son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, recently spoke to The Independent's Turkish service, and said: "Turkey is a country that houses many Afghans and that we want to build close relations with. We perceive Turkey as an ally and not an enemy."

Ankara is still in talks with Washington over its offer to deploy troops at Kabul airport amid the final withdrawal of NATO forces.

But Ankara has put forward some financial, logistical and diplomatic prerequisites.

"The main problem is that Turkey does not have a master plan for its refugee policy," Sinan Ulgen, executive chairman of Istanbul-based think tank Edam and a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe, told Arab News.

"Looking at the different voices that we hear from government and people close to the government, there is uncertainty about what Turkey is ready to do with regard to this potential wave of refugees from Afghanistan."

According to Ulgen, Turkish society appears to have reached a tipping point on the refugee issue.

"When the Syrian refugees were coming between 2011 and 2016, the Turkish economy was booming, whereas now Turkey is under economic duress, with unemployment mushrooming under pandemic conditions," he said.

"The reaction to having more refugees have become much more severe, with very tragic incidents like the one in Ankara a couple of days ago," he added.

Ulgen was referring to an incident on Aug. 12, when a crowd of Turks attacked shops, cars and houses belonging to Syrians following the killing of a young Turkish boy by a Syrian refugee in Ankara.

On the technical level, experts have underlined the need for effective border management by addressing existing deficiencies.

Ankara recently decided to expand the construction of the wall along its border with Iran to cover the entirety of the 295-kilometer frontier. So far, 149 kilometers have been completed, with plans to erect watchtowers, wireless sensors and trenches to boost security.

"The first major decision that awaits the government is to physically control Turkey's borders and to demonstrate to the Turkish population that this physical control is in place," Ulgen said.

"Unless that is done, my fear is that the recent provocations will create even more social difficulties and reactions within Turkey about the phenomenon of refugees," he added.

As a means to resolve the issue, Turkey should have a "social contract" on refugee policy, Ulgen said.

"Historically, Turkey has been a target destination for many of the refugees because of its geography, and with many countries nearby being a source of instability," he added.

"Turkey should have a social contract about what it wants to do about the question of refugees.

"Like in many other policy areas, today we cannot have an inclusive deliberation about this issue in an environment that is very polarized and driven by the government.

"The need is to have an open debate that would underpin Turkey's refugee policy."

Ankara-based Research Center on Asylum and Migration President Metin Corabatir recently visited the eastern province of Van, a Turkish region bordering Iran, where groups of Afghan migrants typically move through.

"There is a significant increase of border control in the city, with commando teams, special units and police guarding against migrants who try to infiltrate the border. State authorities who apprehend migrants and transfer them to removal centers are also present," he told Arab News.

"Although border reinforcement efforts have served as a disincentive, there are some spots along the border that are easier to cross, like valleys."

Corabatir said that the management of Afghan refugee inflow requires the

engagement of the international community, with effective negotiations with Iran and other countries that can also host large numbers of people.

“In terms of those who already live in Turkey, I think Turkey should immediately keep them under registry because most of them are not registered and cannot enjoy any rights to ensure decent life standards in the country,” he added.

“They cannot even be vaccinated or send their children to school.”

There are about 120,000 registered Afghans residing in Turkey. However, there are believed to be many more who are undocumented.

Turkey imposes a geographic limitation to its ratification of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees.

Therefore, only people fleeing from Europe can be given refugee status, while with some others, Turkey implements a temporary protection regime with a right of legal stay, as well as some basic access to rights and services.

“Turkey should lift this limitation to provide all migrants with some basic rights. Knowing the exact number of refugees who live in Turkey will also help the international community to channel the amount of financial aid. However, this has a significant political cost for the government and needs the backing of the opposition parties,” Corabatir said.

In the meantime, the number of migrants – mostly from Syria and Afghanistan – illegally entering the EU by crossing the Western Balkans has almost doubled this year, EU border agency Frontex said.



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Saudi Arabia calls for stability and protection of lives in Afghanistan

Most Algeria forest fires 'under control': Emergency services

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ALGIERS: Most of the deadly forest fires that have hit northern Algeria in the past week are "under control" and no longer endanger residents, the country's emergency services said.

Firefighters were still struggling on Sunday to put out 19 blazes, after over 90 people, including 33 soldiers, were killed in wildfires since Aug. 9.

"Most of these fires have been brought under control and don't represent a danger to residents," said Col. Farouk Achour, a spokesman for the Civil Protection Authority.

The authority's efforts focus currently on the "protection of inhabited areas, notably El Tarf, Bejaia, Jijel and Tizi Ouzou, Achour said.

More than 74 fires had been extinguished in the past 24 hours, he added.

The government has blamed arsonists and a blistering heatwave for the dozens of blazes, but experts have also criticized authorities for failing to prepare for the annual phenomenon.

Algerian police said on Sunday they had arrested 36 people including three women after the lynching of a man suspected of having started one of the deadly fires.

"A preliminary enquiry ... into the homicide, lynching, immolation and mutilation ... of Djamel Ben Ismail... led to the arrest of 36 suspects including three women," said police chief Mohammed Chakour.

Ben Ismail, 38, had "turned himself in of his own accord" at a police station in the hard-hit Tizi Ouzou region after hearing he was suspected of involvement, he said.

Algeria is Africa's biggest country by surface area, and although much of the interior is desert, the north has over four million hectares of forest, which is hit every summer by fires. Last year some 44,000 hectares went up in flames.

In neighboring Morocco, firefighters worked through the night on Sunday and into Monday to bring fires under control amid unfavorable winds.

The fires have destroyed 200 hectares of forest, according to a forestry official, but no victims have been reported.

Several Mediterranean countries have suffered intense heat and quickly

spreading wildfires in recent weeks, including Turkey, where at least 16 people have died, and Italy, which saw several deaths.



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Saudi king directs support for Algeria to help fight fires
Algeria mourns more dead as firefighters battle forest blazes