

Iran to look at EU offer on uranium enrichment

Europeans propose alternatives on fuel

By Tom Ichniowski

VIENNA: Iran said Thursday that it would consider an offer by the European Union to receive nuclear technology in exchange for abandoning its uranium enrichment program. The matter is just at the initial stage. The matter has to be considered on both sides, said Sirrus Naseri, a member of the Iranian delegation, speaking after a meeting with senior French, British and German officials.

"What has been agreed is that we will continue the dialogue," he said, adding that the EU officials had presented their offer in more or less clear terms.

The Europeans are offering to support the building of light-water reactor systems — less suited for developing fissile material for nuclear weapons — if Iran will scrap plans to build a heavy-water research reactor.

Other incentives in the European offer include resumption of talks on an EU-Iran trade pact and guarantees of Russian nuclear fuel.

The Europeans also promised help on a range of "political and security issues, saying they would continue to regard the main Iranian resistance group, the People's Mujahidin, "as a terrorist organization."

If Iran rejects the EU offer, diplomats say, most European nations will back U.S. demands that Tehran be reported to the UN Security Council for possible economic sanctions when the International Atomic Energy Agency meets in November.

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Asked if Iran was afraid of being reported to the Security Council, Naseri said only: "We are not threatening each other."

The talks involved the political directors of the foreign ministries of the three European countries who met with Iran's Atomic Energy Minister's international political affairs director.

Diplomats said the EU's "big three" had the reluctant blessing of the United States in making the offer, despite Washington's belief that Iran was using talks with the EU to buy time to acquire the capability to build a nuclear bomb.

At this point, Iranian compliance doesn't seem likely, the U.S. State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, said on Wednesday.

Boucher pointed to the Iranians' history and their "current expressions and the things that they're saying and doing right now."

"I think we made clear over the years that we don't see the economic or any other rationale for a country like Iran to try to generate power with nuclear energy," Boucher said, referring to Iran's wealth in oil and natural gas.

U.S. officials said that regardless of the outcome of the talks in Vienna, Iran must open its secret uranium enrichment facilities to international inspectors and safeguards before Nov. 25, when the atomic agency's 35-nation board of governors is scheduled to meet.

Iran maintains that its nuclear program is only for power generation and that it will never give up uranium enrichment — a process that can be used to make fuel for nuclear reactors or material for atomic bombs.

The IAEA, the UN's atomic watchdog body, has been investigating Iran's nuclear program for more than two years. It has uncovered many previously hidden activities that could be related to a weapons program but has found no "smoking gun."

President Mohammad Khatami said on Wednesday if Iran was guaranteed the right to develop peaceful nuclear technology, Tehran would "present everything necessary to prove that Iran will not produce an atomic bomb."

"But we will not give up our rights," he added.

Under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Iran has the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes, but it has hidden many parts of its nuclear program in violation of the pact.

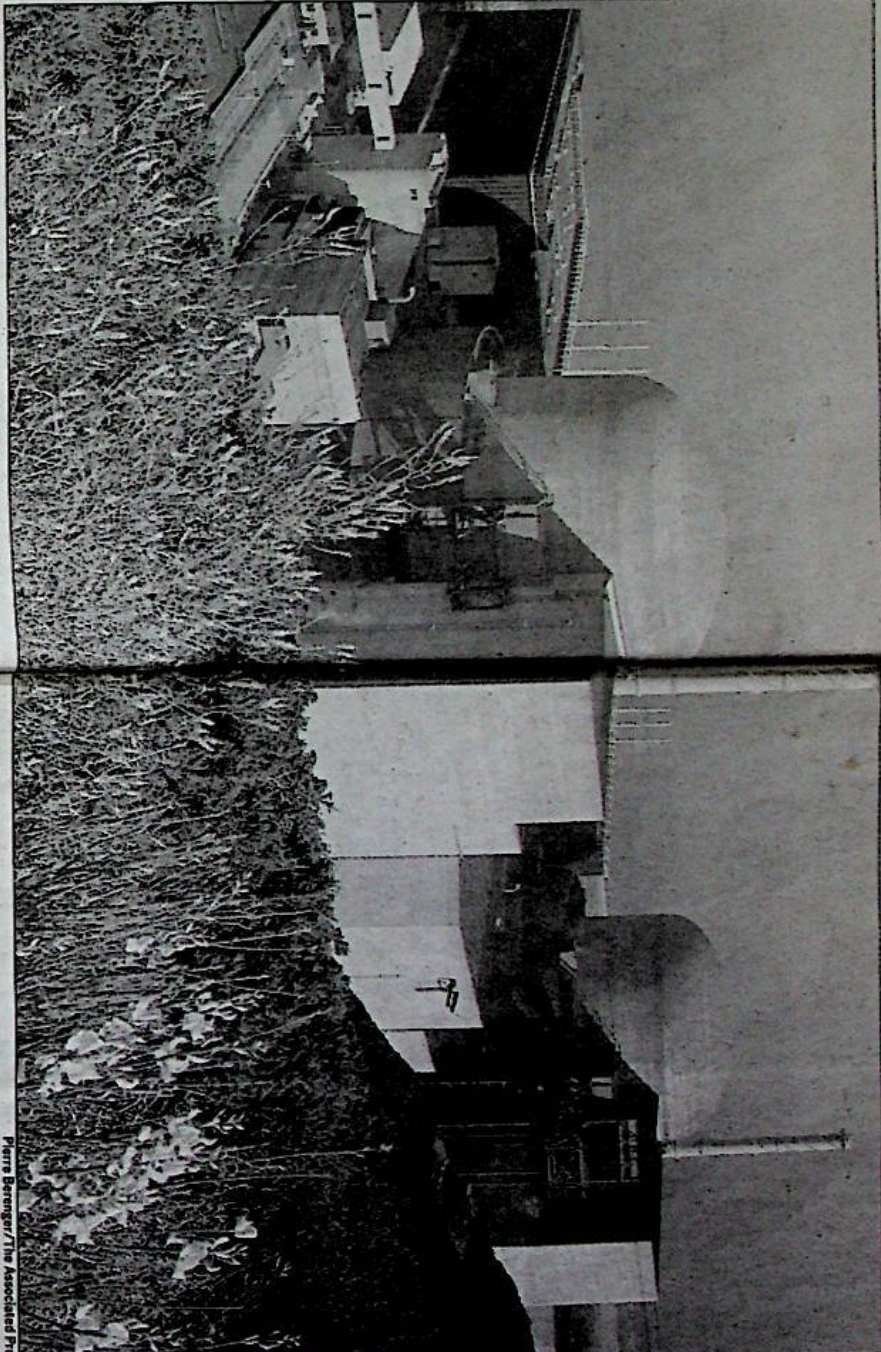
Some diplomats say Iranian officials have never clearly explained why their oil-rich state needs nuclear energy or why they are so intent on producing nuclear fuel — years before any Iranian atomic power facilities would be in need of such fuel.

Khatami said Wednesday: "We cannot rely on other countries to supply our nuclear fuel as they can stop it any time due to political pressures."

(Reuters, AP, Boston Globe)

Correction

An article in the Business section Wednesday misidentified the status of some of the banks involved in an \$8 billion class action lawsuit filed by the British fund management firm Hermes against Parmalat and a string of banks. Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley and UBS are non-defendant third parties in the suit.



The nuclear plant in Famanville, Normandy, will be the site of France's latest generation of power facilities. The project has drawn criticism from environmental groups.

French plan for new nuclear plant draws fire

From news reports

PARIS: France announced Thursday that it would build the first of a new generation of electricity-generating nuclear plants in Normandy.

The plant — billed as more efficient, safer and environmentally friendly than current models — is planned for the town of Famanville on the Atlantic coast, which already has a nuclear facility.

The project has drawn protests from opponents of government plans to replace aging nuclear plants with a new generation of reactors, known as the European Pressurized Water Reactor or EPR.

France's \$8 nuclear reactors produce 78.2 percent of the country's electricity. However, about 30 of the reactors will be between 40 and 50 years old by 2020 and in need of replacement.

Construction is due to start in 2007, with the first electricity being produced five years later, the state-owned generator company EDF said in a statement.

Built at a cost of \$3 billion, or \$3.8 billion, the reactor will be the first of a so-called "third generation" of nuclear power stations. The earliest "second

generation" plant, at Essenheim near the German border, went into service in 1977. Those plants have a life expectancy of about 40 years.

The "first generation" plants were prototypes built in the 1950s and 60s. While the pressurized water technology does not mark a major innovation, it is more efficient and more

safer than current models. Electricite de France, the power utility, said the reactor should reduce the risk of accidents by tenfold and be able to withstand the impact of an aircraft flown by terrorists.

The design also means that even there is a disaster, the reactor core will collapse in on itself to contain radioactive leaks.

The EPR reactor should also generate 1,600 megawatts of electricity, compared to 900 for most current reactors, need less regular re-charging and have a life span of 60 years.

However, opponents of nuclear power say official statements about the safety of EPR are not to be believed. "The EPR reactor offers no greater

guarantee against terrorism than any other reactor," said Stephane Lhomme of the Get out of Nuclear collective.

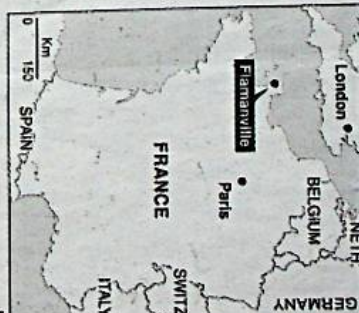
A statement by the environmental group Greenpeace said the money is being invested in a technology that is almost obsolete for political reasons that have no connection with a rational, properly thought-out energy policy.

France's center-right government took the decision in May to press ahead with the new generation of nuclear reactors, arguing that it is the best response to the likely long-term increase in petrol prices as well as demands for a cleaner environment.

Two other sites, one in northern Normandy and the other in southeast France, had been under consideration for the project.

"On the environmental front, the reactor reinforces France's pre-eminence in the fight against climate change, and economically it will allow us to ensure supply and limit the effects of a rapid increase in oil prices," said Patrick Ollier, chairman of the National Assembly's economic affairs committee.

Development of the EPR is also seen as a crucial way of maintaining France's technological edge in the



From Reuters/The Associated Press

Bosnia seeks return of 6 detainees held by U.S. in bomb plot

By Nicholas Wood

SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Three years after six men were accused of plotting to blow up the U.S. and British Embassies here, the Bosnian government is seeking their return.

The six were handed over to U.S. peacekeepers here and are being held at Guantanamo Bay, the American military base in Cuba.

A court here in January 2002 dropped charges against the men for lack of evidence and ordered them released. The men, all Algerians who claim Bosnian citizenship or residency, were immediately handed over to the peacekeepers by the Bosnian police and eventually taken to Guantanamo Bay.

Like the rest of the detainees at Guantanamo, they have been classified by the United States as enemy combatants whose status is being examined by a military tribunal and the Defense Department. But unlike most of the fellow prisoners, they were not taken captive in conflict zones, like Afghans, and had been living in Bosnia in several years.

The men's continued detention has presented the Bosnian government with a difficult balancing act, officials here said.

Under pressure from Parliament and human rights officials, the government has recently sought to find out more about the men's status and has taken several steps to meet its legal obligation

to defend four of them who hold Bosnian citizenship.

At the same time, the government is also eager to appear as a strong ally to the United States and avoid the impression that Bosnia is providing a safe haven for Islamic extremists.

In July, a member of Bosnia's justice ministry, Amir Filip, visited four of the men in Cuba. In a recent interview, he outlined the possibility that all six men could be returned to Bosnia and set free, or face trial on minor charges.

He said all criminal proceedings against the men concerning the suspected plot to attack the embassies had been dropped in Bosnia, although two of the men, Sabir Lahmer and Bekasim Ben Syer, could face charges of having

Italians plan to see Libya once again

The Associated Press

ROME: Weeks after the Libyan leader, Muammar el-Qaddafi, said Italians expelled from the North African country in 1970 were welcome back, a first group is preparing to return for brief visits.

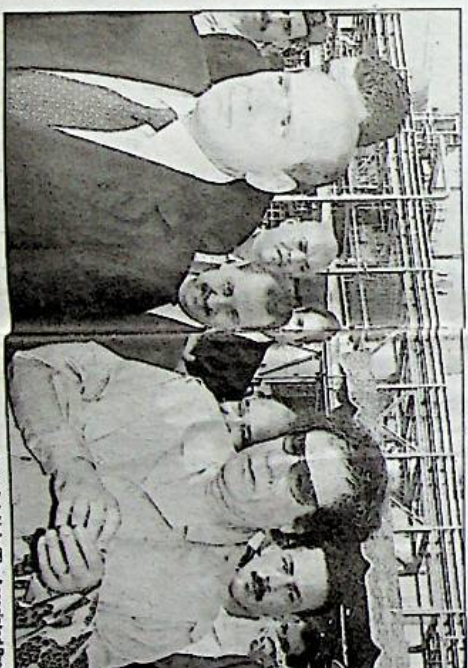
"I am very glad that the circle is finally closing, Giovanna Ortu, one of seven Italians going back next month, said Thursday.

"It makes me forget all the pain I've gone through in the past years," he said.

All of Libya's Italians — about 20,000 people — were expelled from the North African country in 1970, a year after Qaddafi seized power. The deportations were meant to punish Italy, which had ruled Libya from 1911 to 1941.

The Nov. 1-4 visit will help resolve a longstanding issue that has strained otherwise good Italian-Libyan relations. It was part of broader efforts by Qaddafi to end decades of international isolation. Earlier this month, after another mission by Tripoli, a delegation of Italian Jews visited Libya for talks on possible compensation. About 6,000 Libyan Jews were expelled in an anti-Jewish backlash after Israel's victory in the 1967 Middle East war.

Ortu, 65, a native of Tripoli who was 31 when she was forced to leave, heads an association of Italians expelled from Libya that includes about 2,500 families. Another of the seven expected visitors, 55-year-old Giancarlo Consolanti, told the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera that he would like to return to the places he knew from childhood, especially Libya's beaches.



Muammar el-Qaddafi, right, and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi during a recent meeting in which they discussed allowing the Italians expelled from Libya to visit.

"During summer we would be on vacation for four full months," he reminded. "Those were carefree moments with our moms, as our fathers were working."

Only a few of the Italians who were forced to leave have been allowed back in the past 30 years, some receiving special permission or invitations from Libyan authorities, said Ortu, who returned herself in 2002.

But the November trip will be the first one after Qaddafi opened his doors to all former Italian residents. The issue was brought up by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi during talks with Qaddafi in Libya on Oct. 7.

"I call on the Libyan people to allow the Italians who were born in Libya to visit it once again," Qaddafi said after the talks.

Italy has maintained good relations with its former colony, and Berlusconi has visited Qaddafi four times in the past two years. Italy is also Libya's largest trading partner.

Rome has successfully lobbied the European Union to ease off an arms embargo on Libya, enabling the country to buy high-tech equipment to combat the flow of illegal immigrants from Libyan shores into Europe.

While some Italians, like Ortu's father, moved to Libya in the early-to-mid 1900s, tens of thousands went there in the 1930s, during the rule of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. They took charge of road construction, power plants and other public works.

Ortu expressed regret that nothing has been done for the compensation of seized assets, which she said were worth some 200 billion lire, or about \$130 million, at the time, according to conservative estimates.

She also noted that the doors have reopened too late for many who were born and lived part of their lives in Libya.

"Many have died," she said, "but there are many youths who want to know the country that was the backdrop of many of their photos."

English a must in France? Opponents of proposal for schools cry 'Non!'

Agence France-Press

PARIS: A new report recommending that English become a compulsory subject in all schools in France has stirred heated debate in the country, with teachers' unions and proponents of linguistic diversity staunchly opposing the idea.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin is said to back the proposal, which was advanced a week ago by a commission looking into the future of France's education system, according to the Friday edition of Le Monde.

Such a move would help French pupils catch up with their counterparts in other EU countries who enjoy a big lead in using what the commission's report called the language of "international communication." Currently, 97 percent of French students opt to study English to some extent, often as their required first foreign language. Overall results, though, are "relatively mediocre," Le Monde noted.

But some politicians who want to see English usage diminished until it is only one of several widely accepted languages — among which French would figure, of course — have rallied against the idea of making English compulsory.

"English is the most-spoken language today, but that won't last," a deputy from the governing Union for a Popular Movement party, Jacques Myard, told Le Monde. He predicted that Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Spanish would all become increasingly important in the future.

Teachers' unions, too, are against the idea, fearing that existing classes in German, Italian or regional French languages such as Breton would dwindle, and even regular French courses could

used false documents to apply for residency. The official report on the visit, and what possible action might now be pursued, will be discussed by the government next week.

Concerns over the presence of Islamists in Bosnia have existed since Muslim fighters from the Middle East and North Africa joined the Bosnian conflict from 1992 to 1995 to help Bosnia's Muslims. While many returned home after the war, others stayed on and in many cases married Bosnian women.

Four of the six detainees have Bosnian wives.

Human rights observers and former Bosnian officials charge that the government has flouted its obligations to

defend four of them who hold Bosnian citizenship. At the same time, the government is also eager to appear as a strong ally to the United States and avoid the impression that Bosnia is providing a safe haven for Islamic extremists.

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U.K. agrees to redeploy 850 troops to Baghdad

By Patrick E. Tyler

LONDON: Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon of Britain announced Thursday that 850 British forces currently deployed in southern Iraq would advance toward Baghdad to replace American fighting units that are expected to mount an assault on Iraqi insurgents west of the capital near Falluja.

"The government has decided that we should accept the US request for assistance," Hoon said in Parliament. He said the deployment would take "a matter of weeks, not months" and that it would be "limited in scope, time and space."

Hoon's announcement ended weeks of speculation about the role of British forces in American-led efforts to suppress an insurgency that is threatening to delay and disrupt Iraq's first national elections set for January.

After careful evaluation, the chiefs of staff have advised me that UK forces are able to undertake the proposed operation, that there is a compelling military operational justification for doing so, and that it entails a militarily acceptable level of risk for UK forces," Hoon said in the House of Commons.

Opposition members of Parliament have questioned why the United States with 150,000 troops in Iraq, needed 850 British troops for the mission. Hoon said Thursday that the number of armed combat troops in Iraq is a fraction of the total deployment. He added that British troops would be drawn from Scotland's Black Watch regiment, whose soldiers are among the most experienced and best equipped in the British army.

British officials have also emphasized a determination among British military commanders to play a strong supporting role in any new American operation to pacify the country in advance of the elections.

Hoon's description of the timing of the operation — "weeks" rather than "months" — also indicates that the Bush administration may be preparing to announce a major military campaign in Iraq during the final weeks of the U.S. presidential election campaign.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, speaking to Parliament Wednesday, said the redeployment of British forces and any prospective military campaign would have nothing to do with the U.S. presidential election on Nov. 2, and everything to do with guaranteeing free elections in Iraq.

General Michael Walker, chief of the defense staff, said there would be a 30-day lull on the British redeployment.

The New York Times

English a must in France? Opponents of proposal for schools cry 'Non!'

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Teachers' unions, too, are against the idea, fearing that existing classes in German, Italian or regional French languages such as Breton would dwindle, and even regular French courses could

suffer. The final decision could come down to President Jacques Chirac, Le Monde said.

The French leader, who speaks fluent English from his time working as a youth in the United States, has stayed out of the debate so far, but during a trip to Vietnam early this month, Chirac was quoted as saying that he was against a world "where we speak only one language."

Law interpretation criticized

A powerful Islamic organization said Thursday that officials were abusing a new law banning religious symbols from schools by expelling Muslim girls wearing printed bandanas, not Islamic head scarves. The Associated Press reported from Paris.

The head of the Union of French Islamic Organizations urged girls expelled for wearing bandanas to take their cases to court.

The union's president, Lhail Thaniat Breze, denounced some schools' interpretation of the law and said his group would no longer be "blacklisted" into silence by concern over the fate of two French journalists held hostage in Iraq.

The hostages' captors have demanded that France abolish the law, forcing French Muslim leaders into a low profile so as not to endanger the hostages' lives, so that that wall of silence began cracking amid a series of expulsions from schools, including at least three for wearing bandanas.

"We refuse blackmail against France from overseas," said Breze, referring to the demand from the Islamic Army of Iraq, which claims to hold Christian Chestnut and Georges Malbrunot.