

Iran makes nuclear advance despite talks to salvage 2015 deal, says IAEA

Fri, 2021-12-03 03:14

VIENNA, JERUSALEM: Iran has started producing enriched uranium with more efficient advanced centrifuges at its Fordow plant dug into a mountain, the UN atomic watchdog has said, further eroding the 2015 Iran nuclear deal during talks with the West on saving it.

The announcement appeared to undercut indirect talks between Iran and the US on bringing both fully back into the battered deal that resumed this week after a five-month break prompted by the election of hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi.

Western negotiators fear Iran is creating facts on the ground to gain leverage in the talks.

On the third day of this round of talks, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had started the process of enriching uranium to up to 20 percent purity with one cascade, or cluster, of 166 advanced IR-6 machines at Fordow. Those machines are far more efficient than the first-generation IR-1.

Underlining how badly eroded the deal is, that pact does not allow Iran to enrich uranium at Fordow at all. Until now Iran had been producing enriched uranium there with IR-1 machines and had enriched with some IR-6s without keeping the product. It has 94 IR-6 machines installed in a cascade at Fordow that is not yet operating, the IAEA said in a statement.

A more comprehensive IAEA report circulated to member states said that as a result of Iran's move the nuclear watchdog planned to step up inspections at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant that houses the centrifuges, but the details still need to be ironed out.

The US sounded pessimistic on Thursday about the chances of reviving the deal, with Washington saying it had little cause for optimism and Tehran questioning the determination of US and European negotiators.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Iran starts enriching at Fordow with advanced machines.
- West fears Iran creating facts on ground for leverage.
- IAEA report says agency plans to step up inspections.

"I have to tell you, recent moves, recent rhetoric, don't give us a lot of cause for ... optimism," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in

Stockholm, saying he could judge in a day or so if Iran would engage in good faith.

Israel urged world powers to halt nuclear talks with Iran immediately. "Iran is carrying out nuclear blackmail as a negotiating tactic, and this should be answered by the immediate halt to negotiations and the implementation of tough steps by the world powers," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office quoted him as saying in a call with Blinken.

An Israeli official said Bennett told Blinken of his objections to any lifting of sanctions against Iran, particularly under an interim deal, which would effectively mean "the massive flow of funds to the Iranian regime."

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that negotiations in Vienna were "proceeding with seriousness" and that the removal of sanctions was a "fundamental priority."



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'No cause for optimism' on Iran nuclear deal: USIAEA plans to step up inspections at Iran's Fordow plant

Hashemite kingdom's Expo 2020 Dubai provides an authentic Jordanian experience

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DUBAI There are two main types of pavilions at Expo 2020 Dubai: "Self-build" pavilions that were funded by the participating nations themselves, and those that either received financial assistance from, or were fully built by, the expo.

Despite an unassuming exterior, Jordan's pavilion – which sits within an expo-built structure at the heart of the Mobility District – is a must-see.

This standard style of fitted pavilion has been transformed into a unique space filled with varying textures and experiences. The resultant atmosphere is inviting, stylish and sensory.

As soon as they enter the reception area, visitors are welcomed to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. A relief display outlines the country's territory and highlights the significance of its position between Turkey to the north and Saudi Arabia to the south.



Jordan's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai captures the sights and sounds of the country through interactive, multimedia exhibits. (Supplied)

From there, visitors walk down a winding wooden path called the Siq, with every step on their journey accompanied by multimedia effects and sounds. In Jordan, the Siq is the pathway through rock canyons that marks the entrance to the Nabataean city of Petra, which was built 2,500 years ago.

The Siq at Expo 2020 Dubai is a 30-meter, wooden sided path that leads to the pavilion's main exhibition stage. Here, visitors are invited to enjoy a one-of-a-kind, authentic Jordanian experience that will stimulate all of their senses.

At the end of the pathway, they are greeted by a series of tassel curtains that they must walk through to enter a room bustling with light and sound. It is alive with images of Jordanian landmarks and attractions, including Wadi Rum, The Dead Sea, archaeological sites and lush green landscapes.

In a matter of minutes, visitors can get a taste of the finest experiences Jordan offers, from the lowest land-based point on Earth, on the shores of the Dead Sea, to the highest viewpoints across the country.

For a more immersive experience, they can put on a headset and explore the country in virtual reality.

Visitors are encouraged to explore the exhibition space at their leisure and fully engage with the displays. Every element includes an interactive or sensory element. The highlight is an audio-visual journey that introduces the country's treasures, past and present.

A PAVILION FOR EVERY NATION

Expo 2020 Dubai is the first World Expo to adopt a "One Nation, One Pavilion" approach, which means each of the 192 participating countries has its own pavilion.

This gives them the chance to showcase their national identities, stories, innovations and future strategies in dedicated spaces assigned to one of three key, themed districts devoted to a particular concept: Sustainability, Mobility or Opportunity. This gives visitors a chance to fully experience the beauty and culture of every participating nation.

To make the "One Nation, One Pavilion" goal a reality, host country the UAE set up an assistance fund to support the participation of countries that otherwise might not have been able to justify the cost.

Countries that received assistance were carefully selected based on criteria such as level of development, income and geography, with smaller landlocked countries and island nations given special consideration.

As a result Expo 2020 Dubai features two main types of pavilions: "Self-

build” structures that were fully funded by the participating nations themselves, and those fully or partly funded by the expo.

Self-build pavilions vary in size, are spread across the expo site, and are accessible from the main concourses. They are large and diverse, featuring unique facades adorned with national symbols and branding. The largest of these pavilions belong to the UAE, China and India.

The structures built by, or with assistance from, the expo are more similar in external appearance, and surrounded by courtyards or exhibition spaces. The eligible developing countries were provided with a fully fitted pavilion of their own, complete with internal finishing, fittings and basic furnishings, situated at the heart of one of the themed zones to ensure high visibility.

Illuminated fields are projected onto the floor, and when stepped on they change shape and trigger the sounds of traditional Jordanian song and musical instruments, including the oud, nai and tabla.

The role of an expo pavilion, whatever its shape, size or design, is to tell the story of the country it represents from the cultural and economic standpoints.

While some of the interactive displays that help to do this in Jordan’s pavilion are fun and immersive, others provide more specialized, technical information on a range of business topics, including the country’s economy, its agenda for entrepreneurship and policies for female empowerment.



Despite an unassuming exterior, Jordan's pavilion – which sits within an expo-built structure at the heart of the Mobility District – is a must-see.

Jordan links the content of its pavilion to Expo 2020's wider, future-focused theme with a display dedicated to the launch of the first Jordanian satellite, CubeSat, which is one of the smallest of its kind.

The innovative design is the product of a cooperative program that partners engineering students at Jordanian universities with experts from NASA, under the supervision of Jordan's Crown Prince Foundation. It is the first Jordanian venture in the space industry and was of particular interest during Expo 2020's space-themed week.

Throughout the expo, Jordan will be hosting events designed to promote trade and cultural understanding and to stimulate inbound tourism. On Nov. 12, for instance, the country marked its National Day with a show at the expo featuring traditional music, a military band and other live performances.



Jordan's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai includes a gift shop offering authentic artisan products from the Hashemite kingdom. (Supplied)

After experiencing all that the pavilion has to offer, visitors can browse a gift shop showcasing a wide range of beautiful and unique Jordanian products, including handbags, olive oil and beauty products derived from the minerals of the Dead Sea.

Artisans are on hand to explain the cultural significance of the products, including face masks adorned with the national colors, bracelets made from local turquoise and other natural stones, and tea trays painted and decorated

in traditional styles.

A message at the entrance to the pavilion states: “Whatever appeals to you, no doubt you’ll find it in Jordan. This hospitable land was, and still is today, a destination to many who call it home. Its people are known for their generosity and hospitality, making Jordan a visitors’ haven.”

Jordanians who have visited the pavilion told Arab News it lived up to their expectations, capturing not just the sights and sounds but also the spirit of their home country. Visitors are, indeed, likely to find something that appeals to them, they added.



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[**In latest breach, Iran's Mahan Air hit**](#)

with cyberattack

Thu, 2021-12-02 23:34

TEHRAN: A cyberattack on Sunday disrupted access to Iran's privately owned Mahan Air, state TV reported, marking the latest in a series of cyberattacks on Iranian infrastructure that has put the country on edge.

Mahan Air's website displayed an error message saying the site couldn't be reached. The carrier said in a statement that it had "thwarted" the attack and that its flight schedule was not affected, adding it has faced similar breaches in the past.

Many customers of Mahan Air across Iran received strange text messages on Sunday. A group calling itself Hoosyarane-Vatan, or Observants of Fatherland, claimed in the mass texts to have carried out the attack, citing the airline's cooperation with Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. The self-described hacking group did not provide any evidence.

Mahan Air flies from Tehran to a few dozen destinations in Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

The US Treasury Department, which polices compliance with sanctions, blacklisted the airline in 2011 for allegedly "providing financial, material and technological support" to the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force.



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Iran gives drafts on sanctions, issues to European nuclear deal parties 'No cause for optimism' on Iran nuclear deal: US

[Tel Aviv most expensive city to live in, outranking Paris in new report](#)

Thu, 2021-12-02 23:16

TEL AVIV: Residents of Israel's seaside metropolis Tel Aviv have for years complained of how expensive it is, with living costs taking a chunk out of their paychecks.

Now a new report affirms their quibbles. Tel Aviv has emerged as the most expensive city to live in, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, a research group linked to the Economist magazine.

The city, which was previously ranked 5th most expensive, has now surpassed other pricy places like Paris and Singapore.

Economists attribute the jump to a strong appreciation of the shekel against the dollar.

In its report Wednesday, the Economist Intelligence Unit also pointed to a rise in grocery and transport costs.

The report did not include housing prices – another common complaint among young professionals and families trying to live in the bustling city.

"It's really hard to live here. You pay the rent and you pay for something small and you live, like, from paycheck to paycheck so it's really hard," said Ziv Toledano, a transplant from northern Israel. He said his expenses have nearly doubled in Tel Aviv.

Israeli news outlets constantly compare the prices of basic goods in Israel to other Western nations, hammering into audiences what has been clear to their wallets for years: That the country is far more expensive than others.

Tel Aviv is Israel's financial and cultural epicenter. It boasts a thriving high-tech scene, world-class restaurants and a stretch of Mediterranean beach lined by gleaming new hotels and condominiums.

The shekel is one of the world's strongest currencies, with its value buoyed in large part by heavy foreign investment in the local high-tech scene.

Dan Ben-David, head of the Shores Institution for Socioeconomic Research and an economist at Tel Aviv University, said goods and services in Israel in

general are more expensive than in other countries. Tel Aviv is more expensive because it is the country's economic hub, with high-paying tech jobs drawing talent from across the country who are driving up prices of food and rent.

"Israel is expensive, and in that regard, Tel Aviv is more expensive than other places in Israel's because that's where the good jobs are," he said.

The city draws even more Israelis wishing to live close to its vibrant cultural and social scene.

Compounding the issue, Ben-David said, is major congestion leading into the city and inadequate transit to its suburbs and surrounding cities, sending even more people wanting to reside in the city.

That, along with foreign buyers, has sent real estate prices skyrocketing, making purchasing an apartment in Tel Aviv almost unattainable for the average Israeli.

Even modest apartments in desirable areas can cost 4 million shekels, or over \$1.2 million.

A decade ago, hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to demand a solution to the rising cost of living.

Successive Israeli governments have struggled to create better job opportunities in other parts of the country and attempts to extend public transit are ongoing, but slow.



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Israeli PM slammed for family trip amid travel restrictions
Israel, Turkey should restore ambassadorial links: Foreign policy expert

[Lebanese info min Kordahi to resign on Friday: Reuters](#)

Thu, 2021-12-02 22:40

LONDON: Unconfirmed media reports suggested that Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi is set to resign on Friday, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Kordahi's resignation announcement was made following his meeting with Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Wednesday.

Kordahi's party, Al-Marada, is looking into who will replace him, and has appointed Minister of Education Abbas Al-Halabi as the acting information minister until then, Lebanese Al-Jadeed TV reported.

Several Gulf countries severed diplomatic ties with Lebanon in protest made by Kordahi that were critical to the war in Yemen.



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Lebanon relaunches support programs for the vulnerable