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AP Associated Press

Iran Ready to Share Nuclear Technology

By EDITH M. LEDERER, Associated Press Writer 2 hours, 14 minutes ago

Iran is willing to provide nuclear technology to other Muslim states, Iran's hard-line president said Thursday, notching up his rhetoric as his regime rejects international pressure to cut back its atomic program.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made the comment after talking with Turkey's prime minister during a gathering of world leaders at the United Nations, Iran's state-run Islamic Republic News Agency said.

Ahmadinejad repeated promises that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons, the report said. Then he added: "Iran is ready to transfer nuclear know-how to the Islamic countries due to their need."

Iran has said it is determined to continue processing uranium so its nuclear program can be self-sufficient in meeting its own reactor fuel needs. It insists the program is intended only to generate electricity and denies having any ambition to build atomic weapons.

The United States and others have accused Iran of trying to develop atomic arms in violation of its commitments under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Europeans have been uneasy since it was revealed Iran kept parts of its nuclear program secret for years from U.N. inspectors.

Ahmadinejad's statement came just four days before the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency, the International Atomic Energy Agency, is scheduled to discuss Iran's resumption of uranium conversion — which produces material that can be used either for reactor fuel or for nuclear bombs.

His comments were likely raised during a Thursday afternoon meeting of the foreign ministers from the three European countries that have been negotiating with Iran on the nuclear issue — Britain, France and Germany — and Iran's new foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, and its top nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani.

The European ministers met separately before they were joined about 15 minutes later by the Iranians in an office provided by Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette, European diplomats involved in the talks said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Afterward, officials wouldn't say what was discussed.

Germany's U.N. ambassador, Gunter Pleuger, said only that the session was a preparation for a meeting later in the day between Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Ahmadinejad. Pleuger said representatives of the three EU nations also would attend that meeting.

The United States and European countries warned last week that Iran was running out of time to freeze uranium processing or face referral to the U.N. Security Council for consideration of punitive sanctions.

However, diplomats and government officials in several European capitals said Thursday the U.S.-European push to take Iran before the council was meeting strong opposition and could be postponed. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hinted at that possibility Wednesday.

The officials in Europe, who agreed to discuss the delicate behind-the-scenes negotiations only if granted anonymity, said more than a dozen members of the IAEA's 35-nation board opposed making a decision about referral at their meeting Monday in Vienna, Austria.

Ahmadinejad has urged the United Nations not to bend to U.S. pressure to punish Iran.

"The raison d'etre of the United Nations is to promote global peace and tranquility," he told the General Assembly on Wednesday. "Therefore, any license for pre-emptive measures which are essentially based on gauging intentions rather than objective facts ... is a blatant contradiction to the very foundation of the United Nations and the letter and the spirit of its charter."

The European Union has taken the lead in trying to persuade Iran to halt uranium processing in exchange for economic help and a guaranteed supply of fuel for nuclear reactors.

Iran rejected that proposal, arguing the nonproliferation treaty gives it the right to run a peaceful nuclear program.

Ahmadinejad is expected to announced new Iranian proposals at the U.N. summit aimed at defusing the faceoff over its atomic operations.

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