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Launch of reactor in Iran to be delayed: Romyantsev

By **VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV**
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — A Russian-built nuclear reactor in Iran will come on line later than planned and Russia won't provide any fuel until it signs an agreement with Iran for returning the spent fuel, the Russian Atomic Ministry said Tuesday.

Atomic Energy Minister Alexander Romyantsev said that the nuclear reactor in Bushehr in southern Iran is now set to be launched in 2005 and not next year as originally planned, the Interfax news agency reported.

Romyantsev explained the delay by the need to replace some of the equipment initially provided by Germany's Siemens company before it abandoned the project after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

"Russian experts have determined that much of the German equipment was unfit for use and had to be replaced with the Russian analogues," Romyantsev said, according to Interfax.

However, Iranian officials have said they expected the Bushehr reactor to come on line later this year, and Romyantsev's statement could indicate that Moscow was heeding U.S. appeals to slow down the contract until Iran proves it isn't covertly building nuclear weapons.

Romyantsev said that his ministry was working together with the Ministry for Environment



ALEXANDER RUMYANTSEV

Protection on details of how Iran will return the spent fuel from Bushehr, but didn't say when the documents would be finalized.

He said it would take at least 10 years from now for Iran to have any spent fuel to ship back to Russia.

Nuclear Power Ministry's spokesman Nikolai Shingaryov said Tuesday that Russia wouldn't supply any fuel for Bushehr until the agreement on its return is signed.

Shingaryov told The Associated Press that Iran was ready to sign the document and the delay in signing was purely technical and was explained by the need to coordinate with Russian government agencies.

Iran's nuclear program has been one of the major sources of tension in U.S.-Russian relations since 1995 when Moscow signed the US\$800 million Bushehr con-

tract with Tehran.

Russian officials have dismissed U.S. fears that the deal could help Tehran build atomic weapons, but have recently shown signs of sharing some of Washington's concerns and urged Iran to put all its nuclear facilities under closer international scrutiny.

The United States accuses Iran of building a plant in the central city of Natanz to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons production. Washington wants the International Atomic Energy Agency to declare Iran in violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty at its session this month.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said after Sunday's summit with U.S. President George W. Bush in St. Petersburg that their positions on Iran "are much closer than they seem."

Speaking Tuesday after the summit of the Group of Eight leading industrialized nations and Russia in Evian, France, Putin reaffirmed that Moscow will insist that all Iranian nuclear programs be put under the IAEA's control.

At the same time, Putin defended Russia's right to continue cooperation with Iran and warned against what he described as pressure resulting from an "unfair competition."

Iran has insisted that its nuclear program was strictly peaceful and said last week it could accept additional IAEA controls if given access to advanced nuclear technologies. ■

Summit eased post-war tensions: Putin

Prime-TASS

Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters Tuesday that he was confident the G8 summit in Evian "had been successful."

"After the summit I am deeply convinced that the situation in the world has improved," Putin said.

In commenting on the results of the summit, Putin made sure to mention the two key figures, French President Jacques Chirac, the host of the summit, and U.S. President George W. Bush, who met for the first time face to face in Evian after sharp divisions that developed over their positions on the military operation in Iraq.

The summit took place at a time when the situation in the world had been aggravated by the Iraqi crisis, Putin said.

"But thanks to French President Jacques Chirac, his gift for organizing discussions, his experience, it was possible to bring the positions (of the different sides) closer," Putin said.

While saying that the U.S.' military operation against Iraq was prompted by "hurt pride and a wish for self-assertion," as a result of "the threat to national security following the September

11 attacks," Putin said that the military option "was to a large extent not the best one."

Putin went on to say that Russia's position with respect to Iraq has remained consistent and transparent, adding at the same time that "it would be unforgivable" if Russia and other countries in this situation took offence and dissociated themselves from the U.S.

But "Russia has its own strategic interests and will continue to maintain a position of principle on the issues about which it has its own opinion," Putin said without elaborating.

Earlier Tuesday Putin said Russia is now cooperating with Iran and will continue this cooperation further.

Putin also commented on Russia's role in the contemporary world.

"Attitudes toward Russia have been changing for a long time," the process depends on a multitude of factors and "the main problem is ourselves," Putin said without elaborating.

"Russia is integrating into the international community more and more, becoming a full member of it, a fact confirmed by the recent international meetings," he said. ■

MINI REVIEWS

DANCE CLUBS

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This is one of the most popular nightclubs in town, especially among English-speaking expats. The interior is designed Eastern-style, and there are hookahs and Pan Asian cuisine for dancers with an appetite. A regular feature of the club is its special parties. To date, the club's promoters have held a number of popular events (for more details, see the club's official Web site at www.karma-bar.ru). Latin American dancing (salsa, merenge, rueda) takes place every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.

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