

# IAEA: THE WORLD'S EYES AND EARS IN IRAN

**VIENNA:** Staff at the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN watchdog set to play a vital role in the new Iran nuclear deal, call this pleasantly cool basement the dungeon. Inside a display cabinet full of clunky, old equipment sits a little orange toy figure with a tongue-in-cheek sign next to it: "Little Brother". But this is no laughing matter. Down here lurks some of the high-tech kit, shown to AFP in an exclusive recent visit, that will ensure that Iran sticks to its side of the bargain in the historic accord clinched on Tuesday.

Mounted on a wall are cameras encased in microwave-sized blue metal boxes undergoing testing, able to record images of Iran's nuclear facilities that can then be watched by inspectors. The cameras are specially made for the IAEA, and the pictures, just like the electronic fibre-optic seals to be put on nuclear equipment, cannot be faked. Other gadgets, some of them new, fit to pipes in facilities to measure - online - the enrichment levels of uranium, while ultrasonic transducers monitor reactors and 3D laser range scanners check for any changes to nuclear sites. The Vienna-based IAEA will be the "eyes and ears of the international community" in Iran, according to its Japanese

Director General Yukiya Amano.

## People Power

The equipment is nothing without the human factor, though. The IAEA has between four and 10 inspectors in Iran every day as well as its equipment, trying to make sure that Iran is not secretly building a nuclear weapon. The IAEA will now have an even bigger job, inspecting not only sites where Iran declares nuclear material to be, as per the current arrangement, but elsewhere too. Controversially, this could include inspecting military bases, in order to investigate allegations of past efforts to develop nuclear weapons - and to probe any suspected efforts in the future.

With Iran set to reduce the number of uranium centrifuges, which can make nuclear fuel but also the core of a weapon, surplus equipment will be dismantled and placed in IAEA-monitored storage. It will also have to certify that Iran is reducing its stockpile of low-enriched uranium and monitor the redesigning of the Arak reactor and the removal of the original calandria or reactor core.

But according to Thomas Shea, a former IAEA inspector, the watchdog might also get

help from others - foreign intelligence services or dissidents - to detect any secret sites. "If Tehran were to create new clandestine facilities, it might try to hide them in cities, possibly under industrial facilities, hospitals or shopping malls or on military bases," Shea said in a report for the Arms Control Association. "National intelligence services employ methods, such as spying and intercepting communications, that are beyond IAEA capabilities," he said.

## Big Task

The IAEA is already unrecognisable from its 1950s beginnings, undergoing a radical overhaul after North Korea and Iraq's secret weapons programs emerged in the 1990s. Even to do its job in Iran before the recent deal, it had to bring former inspectors back from retirement, insiders say, and its new role will require many more, plus more money. Their job is not helped by the fact that some in Iran view the IAEA as being riddled with spies and biased, an impression not dispelled by diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks in 2010. According to diplomats, Iran only allows in inspectors from certain nations - no Americans, no Britons, no French, and definitely no Israelis. But Germans, Russians and



**BUSHEHR, Iran:** A file picture dated on April 3, 2007 shows an Iranian flag outside the building housing the reactor of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in this southern Iranian port town. — AFP

Chinese are okay. According to the US official involved in this week's nuclear talks, part of the new accord is that this will change. Any nation with diplomatic relations with Iran - so

not the US - will be able to send inspectors, he said. "It is impossible to say how well this is going to succeed," Shea told AFP. "Iran is a big country." — AFP

## IRAN SAYS NUKE DEAL ENDS 'MANUFACTURED CRISIS'

### BRITAIN HOPES TO REOPEN EMBASSY SOON

**TEHRAN:** A deal with world powers ended a "manufactured crisis" over Iran's nuclear program, its foreign minister said yesterday after negotiating the accord, which drew furious objections from US lawmakers. President Barack Obama faced a bruising battle to sell the deal in Washington as Congressional leaders queued up to denounce it. In return for curbs on its nuclear program for at least 10 years, Iran will be freed from Western and UN sanctions that have crippled its economy.

Obama was to hold a news conference yesterday to try to convince Americans of the benefits of an agreement that has drawn opposition from US allies in the region, including Israel. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who led Iran's negotiating team in the final 18 straight days of talks that culminated in Tuesday's deal, said on his return home that common ground had been found with the six powers led by the United States. "We will take measures, and they will do their part," he told reporters at Tehran's Mehrabad airport. "It will happen in around four months from now," he said of the deal's formal implementation.

Zarif's comments came after a night of celebrations in Tehran, where his own name was chanted in the streets by joyous Iranians. Many festooned their cars with balloons and danced in the street to celebrate the prospect of an end to long years of economic hardship caused by Western sanctions. "Maybe the economy is going to change, especially for the young people. I was thinking about leaving, but now I will stay to see what happens," said Giti, 42, a computer programmer. The sentiment was shared by most Iranian newspapers. Financial daily Donyaye Eqtasad said Iran had "entered the post-sanctions age." "Iran Siege Broken," headlined the moderate daily Ghanoon.

In Washington, however, the deal came under intense scrutiny. The speaker of the Republican-led US House of Representatives, John Boehner, said it was "likely to fuel a nuclear arms race around the world." But Zarif hit back at the deal's biggest critic, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the region's sole if undeclared nuclear state, who branded the agreement a "historic mistake." "Netanyahu kicked up a fuss, as he is upset that Iran managed to get sanctions lifted and prevent a manufactured crisis," Zarif said.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond headed to Israel yesterday to explain the deal in person. He also voiced hope London could reopen its embassy in Tehran, which was closed in 2011 after being stormed by a mob.



**TEHRAN:** Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who is also Iran's top nuclear negotiator (right), and the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Ali Akbar Salehi leave their press briefing at the Mehrabad Airport yesterday. — AP

## Obama Faces Hard Sell

Iran has always denied seeking an atomic bomb, a stance President Hassan Rouhani reiterated after Tuesday's agreement. Soon after the deal was announced the White House launched a campaign to stop sceptics at home and abroad from derailing the hard-won accord. US lawmakers have 60 days to review the agreement but Obama has vowed to use his veto over any attempt to block it.

Under the deal, Iran will cut by about two-thirds the number of centrifuges - which can make fuel for nuclear power stations but also the core of a nuclear bomb - from around 19,000 to just over 6,000. It has also agreed to allow the UN nuclear watchdog tightly controlled access to its military bases, an Iranian official said. Obama said the accord meant "every pathway to a nuclear weapon is cut off." "This deal offers an opportunity to move in a new direction. We should seize it," he said, pointing to a broader effort to end the hostility that has persisted ever since the overthrow of the US-backed shah in the Islamic revolution of 1979.

## Cooperation Against IS -

Washington hopes the accord may lead to more cooperation with Iran at an explosive time in the Middle East after the Islamic State jihadist group surged last year, seizing vast swathes of Syria and Iraq. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the deal paved the way for a "broad" coalition to fight the Sunni extremist group, which is as hostile to Shiite Iran as it is to the West. "It removes the barriers - largely artificial - on the way to a broad coalition to fight the Islamic State and other terrorist groups," Lavrov said.

But the agreement has alarmed some of America's most important Middle East allies, including Sunni regional power Saudi Arabia. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said he had accepted an invitation to visit Tehran soon. With Iran set to reopen for business with the progressive lifting of sanctions, he was likely to be the first in a long line of top diplomats beating a path to Tehran. France was one of the powers that reached the deal with Iran, along with Britain, China, Germany, Russia and the United States. — AFP

## INFURIATING PATIENCE PAYS OFF FOR KERRY AND ZARIF

**VIENNA:** In a stunning tweet on Monday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declared: "#IranDeal is the victory of diplomacy & mutual respect". Except that it wasn't. The latest round of ministerial negotiations between Iran and six world powers on curbing Iran's nuclear program were still in full swing, 17 days in, and Rouhani had jumped the gun. The tweet was deleted. But then it reappeared, with a judicious edit. "If #IranDeal, victory of diplomacy and mutual respect..."

It was a moment that revealed perhaps the most crucial aspect of the deal in Vienna on Tuesday: that the main protagonists, Iran and the United States, for decades the bitterest of enemies, had too much invested in the process to let it fail without a fight, and the longer the talks went on, the likelier a deal became. One US nuclear expert calculated that he had travelled 400,000 miles (643,700 km) - the distance to the moon and halfway back - since Feb 2014 in the search for an agreement.

Some of his colleagues were on their 18th visit to Vienna, scene of most of the talks. Unlike his big power counterparts, US Secretary of State John Kerry, on crutches after breaking his leg in a cycling accident, remained in Vienna for the entire duration of the ministerial round. It was the longest period that anyone could remember an American secretary of state staying in a single foreign location in peacetime.

It was the culmination of a huge commitment that began when the pragmatist Rouhani was elected president of Iran in mid-2013. By November of that year, an interim confidence-building deal had been agreed that gave Iran limited sanctions relief in exchange for freezing the nuclear programme that Western powers suspected to have been a cover for weapons development, something Tehran has consistently denied.

## Another 17 Months

It took a further painful 17 months of wrangling between Iran and the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China, including the conclusion of a "framework deal" in April that went 30 hours into overtime, to get to Vienna. It all meant that, even after the talks had been extended for the third time past their long-forgotten June 30 deadline, Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif remained confident of eventual success - infuriatingly so for Kerry's European partners, who challenged him to back up his assertion that he was prepared to "walk" if necessary. "These f\*\*\*ing negotiations are not held together," complained one European diplomat. "They are going in all directions and Kerry is just sitting there saying, 'I don't care how long we stay, we need a

deal and can't put Zarif in a corner."

When European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, coordinating the six powers, threatened to quit the talks in a meeting with Zarif on July 6, he lost his temper and yelled "Never threaten an Iranian!" according to a report by Iran's Mehr news agency. Zarif and Kerry, for their part, met face-to-face about 20 times in Vienna, although they, too, lost their cool at a meeting earlier the same day, their raised voices carrying into the corridors of the genteel 19th-century Palais Coburg hotel.

Both men knew that, for all their patience, they had to produce a deal that would be supported by their own leaders. Zarif flew home to Tehran on June 28, two days before the original deadline, for consultations after Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, set out unexpectedly tough "red lines" in a speech. A senior US official said Washington had seen this as "an indication that he would presumably return with the Supreme Leader's guidance and the necessary authority to close a deal... That's ultimately what seems to have transpired."

## Deal Rejected

Then, last Wednesday, US President Barack Obama, under pressure from critics who accused him of giving too much ground in the quest for a deal, held a video conference with his team in Vienna in which he "essentially rejected the deal that was on the table", a White House official said. The sticking points he named were those that diplomats in Vienna said had occupied the last hours of the talks, into the small hours of Tuesday: how long would a UN embargo on selling weapons and missile technology to Iran be maintained, and how quickly would sanctions be lifted - and potentially restored if Iran violated the terms of the deal? But at the same time, he told the US negotiators: "I don't care about any particular deadline, I care about the quality of the deal," the official said.

Kerry almost certainly thought much the same. After failing to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in months of dogged shuttle diplomacy early in his tenure, Iran was his chance to secure a lasting legacy. For his part, Zarif told Kerry early this year that failure to achieve a nuclear deal would herald the demise of Rouhani, who had promised that to revive Iran's crippled economy by ending its international isolation. After finally sealing "the most significant multilateral nuclear agreement in two decades", former IAEA official Tariq Rauf, director of the Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Programme at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, said he had no doubt that Kerry and Zarif had done enough to secure a Nobel Peace Prize. — Reuters

## NETANYAHU DEFIANT IN FACE OF ISOLATION AFTER IRAN DEAL

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suffered a major defeat in failing to stop a nuclear deal with Iran but he remains as defiant as ever even at the risk of further isolation. While the world's major powers welcomed the deal finalised with Iran yesterday as a historic moment capable of setting relations with the Islamic republic on a new path, Netanyahu harshly condemned it. For the 65-year-old savvy rightwing prime minister, the agreement was a "stunning, historic mistake".

He stressed Israel would not be bound by the deal and - again signalling that military force was not off the table - said the country would "always defend ourselves". Yesterday, he declared the agreement was "not the end of the story". "We are going to continue to denounce the danger in reaching an agreement with a dictatorial regime," he said.

Netanyahu argues the deal will fail to block Iran's path to nuclear weapons that could be used to target the Jewish state, and says the lifting of sanctions will allow it to further support proxy militants in the Middle East. While he has angered US President Barack

Obama by appearing before Congress in Washington to argue against the agreement, there is wide support for Netanyahu's stand among his political allies in Israel.

The opposition has also denounced the deal, while at the same time criticising Netanyahu for deteriorating relations with the United States, the country's most important ally. "Netanyahu wants to go down in history as practically the only person to warn to the very end against the dangers of a nuclear Iran," a senior Israeli official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "He knows in advance that it is a losing battle in the short-term, but he cannot stand idly by."

His focus now is likely to turn to the US Congress, which has 60 days to review the deal. Netanyahu has allies there, particularly among Republicans, but their chances of sinking the agreement appear unlikely for now. Even if the deal is voted down in Congress, Obama can veto the move. Congress can only override the veto with a two-thirds vote. Obama has sought to reassure Netanyahu, telling him in a telephone conversation on Tuesday night that the agreement was in Israel's

"national security interest". He also announced US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter would visit Israel next week. British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said he was heading to Israel yesterday night to explain the deal in person, with a meeting set with Netanyahu today.

## 'American Umbrella'?

Israel is believed to be the only country in the Middle East with atomic bombs, although it has never confirmed it. The United States currently grants Israel some \$3 billion in military aid yearly outside of spending on other projects, such as assistance in developing the country's Iron Dome missile defence system. There has been talk of further assistance to compensate for Israel's concerns related to the deal, such as additional F-35 stealth fighters capable of evading Iranian detection. Israel has already ordered 33 F-35s.

Yuval Steinitz, the Israeli minister who has overseen the Iran dossier, however sought to keep the focus on the danger his country says the deal poses. "We are very grateful for the assistance we get from the US," Steinitz said yesterday. "But I think it's wrong to

use the word compensation because there is no real compensation for nuclear threat."

Akiva Eldar, a political analyst and columnist for the Al-Monitor website which covers the Middle East, said one strategy Israel may be seeking to pursue involves protection under an "American umbrella". That would mean reaching an agreement specifying that any Iranian attack against Israel would be considered an attack against the United States, he said. The Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity said discussions would also likely include further cooperation between US and Israeli intelligence to detect any potential violation of the nuclear agreement by Iran.

It is unclear whether Netanyahu, long known as a shrewd political operator, will continue to strongly criticise the deal in public but work more diplomatically behind the scenes. Some in Israel have however begun to suggest it is time to move on. "The nuclear deal in the making is far from perfect, but the skies are not going to fall on our head tomorrow," Yossi Melman, who focuses on security issues, wrote in The Jerusalem Post. — AFP

## IN 'TEHRANGELES' HOPES, FEARS OVER NUCLEAR DEAL

**LOS ANGELES:** "Tehrangeles," as the vast expatriate Iranian community based in Los Angeles is known, welcomed Tuesday the nuclear deal struck in Vienna with hope, but also some doubts. A "very, very happy" Alex Helmi, owner of a luxury carpet boutique in Beverly Hills, cheered the agreement as a sign of change, "because the policy of not talking to each other for 35 years has not been working". "I'm very grateful to (US) President (Barack) Obama for continuing the negotiation. I think it's the right direction for the us," added the 59-year-old, who moved to the United States 40 years ago.

Ali Shorouh, a writer who calls himself "an old leftist", called the deal between the Islamic Republic and key world powers "very positive, very hopeful". "This is a show against proliferation, a blueprint for a viable civilian nuclear deal," added the 60-year-old, browsing through books in an Iranian bookshop. More than 700,000 Iranians or children and grandchildren of Iranians live in Los Angeles, many of them in Beverly Hills, where 20 percent of the population is of Iranian stock.

In his boutique on Westwood Boulevard - nicknamed Persian Plaza for its many Iranian businesses - Sam Tala said the deal between Tehran and the "P5+1" (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany) should help trade. "The value of the money is going up. That's important because if the value increases, everything will be OK," said the 29-year-old, not-

ing that his sanctions-gripped native country is currently forced to import lots of goods.

The 109-page deal struck in the Austrian capital limits the Islamic Republic's nuclear program in exchange for progressively lifting sanctions which have stifled its economy for decades. The aim is to make it almost impossible for Tehran to build a nuclear weapon, while allowing the country to develop nuclear power capacity. In a music shop called Musi, 35-year-old artist Anita voiced doubts. "I'm hopeful everything will get better, the economy and the situation for the young people. But my main concern is human rights," she said, declining to give her last name. "We were hoping there would be more improvements on human rights," she added as she voiced hope for the release of imprisoned spiritual leader Mohammad Ali Taheri.

Jimmy Delshad, a former mayor of Beverly Hills, is even more critical. "Iran won a big fight. They got everything they wanted," he told AFP. "I'm happy for the people of Iran if the money goes to the people of Iran, (but) I doubt that. Overall, it is a very big win for Iran and time will show whether they abide by this." "My hope that the Vienna deal and the easing of diplomatic strains between Tehran and the West will help improve the image of the Iranian people themselves. "The people of Iran are not a war-loving people. They are a magnificent people," said Helmi, the carpet dealer. — AFP