

Iran says damage at nuclear site 'significant'

Tehran

An accident at a nuclear complex in Iran caused significant damage and could slow the production of centrifuges used to enrich uranium, the country's atomic energy spokesman said.

The incident happened on Thursday at a warehouse under construction at the Natanz complex in central Iran, but caused no casualties or radioactive pollution, according to the Islamic republic's nuclear body.

Security officials called it an accident and said they had determined the cause, without providing any further explanation.

"There were no victims... but the damage is significant on a financial level," Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said in an interview published Sunday by state news agency IRNA.

"In the medium term, this accident could slow down the development and production" of advanced centrifuges, he said. Natanz is one of Iran's



A photo released by the nuclear organisation showed a building with a damaged roof, walls apparently blackened by fire and doors hanging off their hinges



vanced centrifuges, he said. Natanz is one of Iran's

main uranium enrichment plants.

"God willing, and with constant effort... we will compensate for this slowdown so that the rebuilt site will have even more capacity than before," Kamalvandi added.

The organisation had earlier released a photo purportedly from the site, showing a one-storey building with a damaged roof, walls apparently blackened by fire and doors hanging off their hinges as if blown out from the inside.

State TV later showed the building from a different angle with minor damage to its walls.

Tehran announced in May last year it would progressively suspend certain commitments under a 2015 nuclear deal with major powers, which the United States unilaterally abandoned in 2018.

Iran restarted enriching uranium at Natanz last September, despite having agreed under the accord to put such activities there on hold. Tehran has always denied its nuclear programme has any military dimension.

Egypt approves law for military to run in polls



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (C), a former army chief, surrounded by top generals, could potentially stay in power until 2030 under amendments passed by parliament

● Sisi won his first term as president in 2014

● He was re-elected in March 2018

● The amended law prohibits officers from divulging information or joining political parties without premission

AFP | Cairo

Egypt's parliament yesterday approved amendments allowing active or former military personnel to run for the presidency and parliament pending the army's approval.

The legislative changes come a year after Egyptians overwhelmingly voted in favour of constitutional amendments that potentially allow President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, a former army chief, to stay on until 2030.

Since it became a modern republic, all but two of Egypt's presidents have hailed from a military background.

The army is highly visible in Egypt's public life, with former top brass currently serving as ministers and heading governorates as well.

The nationalist institution boasts a sizeable business

portfolio ranging from massive construction projects to most recently producing protective masks.

Sisi, the former general-turned-president, led the army's overthrow of elected president Mohamed Morsi in 2013 following mass protests against the Islamist leader's rule.

He won his first term as president in 2014 and was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97 per cent of the vote, after standing virtually unopposed.

The amended law also prohibits officers from divulging information during their service publicly or joining political parties without the Supreme Council of Armed Forces' permission.

SCAF is a military council comprised of the country's most senior generals. It ruled Egypt following the toppling of long-time autocrat Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

A former chief of staff of the armed forces, Sami Anan, was jailed in January 2018 after contesting the presidential elections against Sisi without the military's explicit approval.

He was released nearly two years later.

A military court jailed another former soldier in December 2017 for six years for announcing his decision to enter the presidential race as a potential candidate in a video he posted on YouTube.

Saudi opens Hajj registration for foreign residents

● Foreign residents are allowed to register on <https://localhaj.haj.gov.sa>

Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday opened Hajj registration for foreign residents in the kingdom, saying they will make up 70 per cent of the pilgrims after it scaled-back the annual ritual due to coronavirus.

Saudi Arabia has said it will allow only around 1,000 pilgrims already present in the kingdom to participate in this year's Hajj, scheduled for the end of July, a far cry from the 2.5 million who attended the five-day pilgrimage last year.

Foreign residents, aged between 20 and 65 who have no previous health ailments such as diabetes and heart conditions, are allowed to register on <https://localhaj.haj.gov.sa>, the



worshippers praying at the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Mecca

Hajj ministry said.

The registration process will be open until Friday, it added.

Saudi citizens will make up the remaining 30 per cent of the pilgrims, with the ritual restricted to medical professionals and security personnel who have recovered from the virus, the ministry said.

"They will be selected through the database of those

who have recovered from the virus," the ministry said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

The pilgrims will be tested for coronavirus before arriving in the holy city of Mecca and are required to quarantine at home after the ritual, according to health officials.

Last month, Saudi Arabia announced it would hold a "very

limited" Hajj, a decision fraught with political and economic peril as it battles a coronavirus surge.

The decision to exclude pilgrims arriving from outside Saudi Arabia is a first in the kingdom's modern history and has sparked disappointment among Muslims worldwide, although many accepted it was necessary due to the health risks involved.

YOU KNOW WHAT

Saudi Arabia has so far reported more than 213,000 coronavirus infections -- the highest in the Gulf -- and nearly 2,000 deaths.

Myanmar army sacks officers over landslide tragedy

Yangon

Two high-ranking officers were fired for having "failed their responsibilities" after a landslide in Myanmar killed at least 174 jade miners, the country's military said on Monday in a rare public sanctioning.

Heavy monsoon rains on Thursday sent mud cascading down a hillside over workers scouring the land for the green gemstone in Hpakant in northern Kachin state.

The victims were largely poor migrants who had travelled across the country to prospect in the treacherous open-cast mines, hoping to find valuable stones left behind by the big companies.

It was the worst tragedy in living memory to hit the shadowy, multi-billion dollar industry dominated by firms linked to the military.

A Facebook post Monday by the military announced Kachin Security and Border Affairs Minister Colonel Nay Lin Tun



The landslide victims were largely poor migrants who had travelled across the country to prospect in dangerous open-cast mines

and another unnamed commander had been removed from their posts.

"They were responsible for reporting any trespassing in this restricted area," spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun told AFP.

"They failed their responsibilities."

The military would hold an investigation and appropriate action against the two men would be taken, he added.

Unidentified miners have been buried in mass graves, while many more remain missing.

They join scores of informal prospectors killed each year in

174

jade miners were killed went heavy monsoon rain sent mud cascading down a hillside over workers