

France says Israeli information on Iran could be basis for long-term deal

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Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during a news conference at the Ministry of Defence in Tel Aviv, Israel. (Photo: Reuters)

Paris: France's foreign ministry said on Tuesday that an Israeli intelligence haul on Iran's past nuclear weapons programme could form the basis of a push for long-term assurances on Tehran's nuclear activities. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unveiled on Monday what he said was evidence of a secret Iranian nuclear weapons programme that could encourage the United States to pull out this month of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

"This information should be studied and evaluated in detail," foreign ministry spokeswoman Agnes von der Muhll said in a statement.

"The new information presented by Israel could also confirm the need for longer-term assurances on the Iranian programme, as the president has proposed." Since travelling to the United States last week, French leader Emmanuel Macron has spoken to leaders in Israel, Russia, Britain, Germany and Iran to propose a new negotiation on a wider agreement.

That would tackle Iran's nuclear activities post-2025 when the existing deal begins to expire, as well as Iran's ballistic missile programme and its regional influence.

Intelligence experts and diplomats said Netanyahu's presentation, in a prime-time television presentation, did not seem to have a "smoking gun" showing a violation by Iran but it could strengthen the hand of advisers to US President Donald Trump who want to scrap the nuclear agreement.

Von der Muhll said the information presented by Netanyahu confirmed in part the non-civilian nature of the programme revealed by European powers in 2002, but that it merely proved the need to ensure the nuclear deal and UN inspections remained, given they were among the "most comprehensive and robust in the history of nuclear non-proliferation."

"It is essential that the IAEA can continue to verify Iran's respect for JCPOA (nuclear deal) and the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme," she said. She added that a commission of the countries that agreed the deal "China, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States and Iran" could review the Israeli information.

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