

## Diplomacy hots up to halt Iran's nuke drive

Israel will 'vanish' one day, says Ahmadinejad

AFP, Jakarta

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad warned yesterday that Israel will "one day vanish," ramping up the stakes in the midst of frantic international diplomacy over Tehran's nuclear ambitions. In speeches to students in Jakarta, he shrugged off the threat of sanctions or even war and accused the West of peddling lies and oppression.

"This regime one day will vanish," Ahmadinejad said of the Jewish state in comments that echoed previous statements when he said Israel should be "wiped off the map" and questioned the Holocaust.

"Is it logical to give compensation in the Middle East for an incident that occurred in Europe, if this incident is indeed true... by murdering thousands of local Palestinians and making millions of Palestinian refugees?" he asked.

Nevertheless, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, said he felt "a good sense of optimism" about diplomacy to resolve the crisis over Iran's nuclear program.

"I think it is a very good idea for the Security Council to hold their horses, so to speak," he told a press conference during a visit to Amsterdam.

"The more we go back to the negotiating table, the more we have a chance at a durable solution."

Iran says its nuclear programme is a peaceful drive to generate electricity but the United States and Europe fear it is a cover for the secret development of atomic weapons.

On Wednesday the United States, which has so far failed to win support for UN sanctions against Iran, said it would give its European partners "a couple of weeks" to draft a fresh approach.

Negotiators from the Security Council's five permanent members -

Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- plus Germany plan to confer in London on May 19 to weigh a new package of incentives, diplomats said.

They will also consider what penalties to seek if Iran does not comply with UN demands.

"I am very optimistic and I hope both sides will move away from their war of words ... we need compromises from both sides," ElBaradei said.

He said Tehran "owes it to the international community to make sure their nuclear programme is for peaceful means."

The United States and European Union troika of Britain, France and Germany are pushing for a binding UN resolution that could clear the way for economic sanctions, possibly escalating toward military action.

They are meeting resistance from China and Russia, however, which both have close economic

ties with Iran.

Igor Ivanov, the head of Russia's Security Council, described the talks as "fairly complicated," and warned that military action could ignite the whole region.

"Any military action in Iran will lead to consequences that could seriously explode the situation in the region and beyond," he was quoted as saying by state-run news agencies.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Wednesday the Europeans would present Tehran with two options: defiance leading to international isolation or "a path to a civil nuclear programme that is acceptable to the international community."

Ahmadinejad, who is on a five-day visit to Indonesia, told Metro TV in an interview that any military action against Iran would hurt its attackers more than Tehran.

## Bush pushes brother to run for presidency

AP, Orlando

Could there be a third President Bush? The current chief said Wednesday that younger brother Jeb would make a great one, too, and has asked him about making a run. The first President Bush likes the idea as well.

Jeb Bush, the Republican governor of Florida, has one asset that his presidential brother doesn't right now: approval from most of his constituents. While George W. Bush's approval ratings are in the low 30s, some 55 percent of Florida voters surveyed last month by Quinnipiac University said Jeb was doing a good job.

The governor has repeatedly said he won't be a candidate for president in 2008, but that doesn't stop his family from encouraging him to go for it some day.

"I would like to see Jeb run at some point in time, but I have no idea if that's his intention or not," the president said in an interview with Florida reporters, according to an account on the St. Petersburg Times Web site.

He said his brother would make "a great president" and that he had "pushed him fairly hard about what he intends to do."



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (C) shakes hands with his supporters at the Islam University of Syarif Hidayatullah in Tangerang, Indonesia yesterday. Ahmadinejad ramped up his rhetoric against the West, warning that Israel will "one day vanish" as he shrugged off the threat of war and sanctions over Tehran's disputed nuclear programme.

## 120 killed in Somalia street fighting

REUTERS, Nairobi

At least 20 people, including a pregnant woman and her three children, were killed overnight in the Somali capital, a militia leader said yesterday, bringing the death toll in five days of fighting to almost 120.

The third round of street battles this year between gunmen allied to Islamic courts and militia from a self-styled anti-terrorist alliance of powerful warlords erupted on Sunday.

It is the worst fighting in the capital of the failed Horn of Africa state for several years.

"At least 20 people have died since last night," said Sayid Mohamed, a militia leader linked to the Islamic side.

"Siisii has been turned into a battleground. So many houses have been shelled and hundreds of residents are fleeing. It's a catastrophe," he said.

Siisii is a shanty town in northern Mogadishu.

Mohamed said 50 people had been injured during the overnight clashes and a pregnant woman and her three children were killed when a mortar hit their house.



A young Palestinian boy cries as he and others with the Arabic words "I'm under siege" and "I'm hungry" written on their chests attend a protest against the aid cut to the Hamas-led Palestinian government in front of the United Nations headquarters in Gaza City yesterday.

## Taiwan's independence could mean war

Says US official

AFP, Washington

A top US administration official warned Wednesday that if Taiwan declares independence, the United States would be drawn into a war that it does not want between the island and China.

Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick gave the warning as he defended the government against complaints that it had snubbed Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian by not allowing him to make a stopover in a US city.

Republican lawmaker Dana Rohrabacher condemned the refusal, telling a Congress hearing: "I found this treatment unsatisfactory to a democratic leader in an attempt to curry favour with dictators and gangsters in Beijing."

Zoellick stridently denied that China had any influence over the

decision not to let Chen's plane make a stopover in New York or San Francisco while returning to Taiwan from a visit to Latin America this week.

"We make our own decisions. We don't clear them with China. We don't negotiate them with China," declared Zoellick.

During a hearing in which he highlighted China's "near-term military buildup" vis-a-vis Taiwan, the State Department number two said that Washington had to be "very careful" in its balancing act between Taiwan and China.

"The balance is that we want to be supportive of Taiwan while we're not encouraging those that try to move toward independence."

"Because let me be very clear: Independence means war. And that means American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines."

## Men lose too much to impress women

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL, Washington

Researchers at the University of Michigan claim that persistent male quest to impress their female counterparts cause them to die earlier than females.

Males compete aggressively for female attention and that costs them a part of their lifespan.

"Women live longer in almost every country, and the sex difference in lifespan has been recognised since at least the mid-18th century," said Daniel J Kruger, a research scientist in the U-M School of Public Health and the Institute for Social Research. "It isn't a recent trend; it originates from our deep evolutionary history."

"This whole pattern is a result of sexual selection and the roles that males and females play in reproduction," Kruger said.

"Females generally invest more in offspring than males and are more limited in offspring quantity, thus males typically compete with each other to attract and retain female partners," he added.

## Sun savages Taj Mahal

AFP, Agra

An Indian archaeologist is praying for a respite from a heatwave engulfing the Taj Mahal town of Agra, warning that heavy dust in the dry air could permanently scar the marble monument to love.

Temperatures hovered this week at 45 Celsius (115 degrees Fahrenheit) in the city, 200km south of New Delhi, as a heat wave that has killed 60 people nationwide in the past week dragged on.

The Yamuna River, which runs behind the 17th-century white Mughal tomb, was dry and Agra's chief archaeologist Doraiswamy Dayalan said he was worried that dust from the nearby desert and factories would turn the marble yellow.

"The dry river allows dust and suspended particulate matter to rise and flow in the air and slam into the monument's surface," said Dayalan, of the Archaeological Survey of India which cares for the Taj.

"If water returns to the Yamuna then there will be less suspended matter in the air," Dayalan said, adding that he was praying the annual monsoon rains arrived by the end of June.