

Iran rejects incentives to halt enrichment

AP, Tehran

Iran's president said yesterday that any European proposal that demanded an end to his country's uranium enrichment activities would be unacceptable.

"They (must) know that any proposal that requires a halt to our peaceful (nuclear) activities will be without any value and invalid," President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on state-run television. "They want to offer us things they call incentives in return for renouncing our rights."

European governments are seeking to build on a package of economic and political incentives offered to Iran in August last year in return for a permanent end to its uranium enrichment activities.

The Bush administration had been pressing for UN Security Council action against Tehran but recently agreed to put such efforts on hold and give time for new European-led attempts to find a negotiated solution.

Iran rejected last year's offer, but the Europeans have continued to try to sweeten the proposal, as well as pushing at the United Nations for measures that could lead to sanctions if Iran refuses.

Washington and its allies fear Iran is trying to develop atomic weapons. But Ahmadinejad insists his nuclear program is only for generating electricity and accuses the West of greedily trying to monopolise nuclear technology.

The Iranian leader spoke a day after returning from a trip to

Indonesia, where received a boost from the leaders of Pakistan, Nigeria, Turkey and Malaysia and government ministers from Egypt and Bangladesh. At a meeting on economic cooperation, the eight Islamic leaders released a statement supporting the rights of countries to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

In Indonesia, Ahmadinejad insisted the world has nothing to fear from his program to enrich uranium, which can be used for generating electricity or in making atomic weapons. The hard-line leader insisted he has cooperated fully with the UN nuclear monitor, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Fears that Iran is trying to build nuclear warheads were aggra-

vated Friday, when diplomats said UN inspectors may have found traces of highly enriched uranium on equipment from an Iranian research centre linked to the military.

The diplomats, who demanded anonymity in exchange for divulging the confidential information, initially said the density of enrichment appeared to be close to or above the level used to make nuclear warheads.

But later a well-placed diplomat accredited to the International Atomic Energy Agency said the level was below that, although higher than the low-enriched material used to generate power and heading toward weapons-grade level.

Witnesses to appear defending Saddam

REUTERS, Baghdad

The trial of Saddam Hussein and seven co-accused is due to resume on Monday with the testimony of defence witnesses in connection with the killings of 148 Shias in the 1980s, prosecutors and defence said.

Separately, prosecutors said they had completed preparing a second trial, for genocide against the Kurds, and had passed it to the court. Hearings could start within a couple of months.

Saddam, 69, who faces a death sentence if found guilty of crimes against humanity in the first trial, is not expected to take the stand when witnesses for a local Baath party official begin testifying in the heavily fortified Baghdad courtroom, defence counsel said.



VOLCANO ERUPTION

Thousands flee homes in Indonesia

AP, Mount Merapi

Thousands of people fled the fertile slopes of Indonesia's most dangerous volcano Saturday as glowing lava oozed down the side and ash and rock spewed from the mountaintop, leading authorities to warn that an eruption could come soon.

Villages on Mount Merapi were left virtually empty, although some residents returned to its slopes Sunday to tend their animals and crops. More than 4,500 people living in villages closest to the crater, or next to rivers where hot lava is more likely to flow down, had been evacuated.

"My feeling is it will not blow at this time," said Budi, a 30-year-old farmer, who came back to cut grass to give to his cows. Like many other Indonesians, he goes by only one name.

Police manned roadblocks Sunday preventing vehicles from getting within six miles of the volcano's crater, but allowed villagers to return to tend to land and animals, advising them to leave again by nightfall.

PHOTO: AFP

Women and children arrive at a shelter in Sleman yesterday. Thousands of villagers began fleeing their homes in the path of red-hot lava flows oozing from Indonesia's Mount Merapi as officials said an eruption looked imminent. But many residents were still reluctant to leave their homes, despite a mandatory evacuation order.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi children play near the destroyed shrine of notable cleric Abdullah bin Ali al-Hadi in the village of Wajhiya, outside the city of Baquba northeast of Baghdad, yesterday. Insurgents destroyed overnight several small shrines of holy figures.

Politics quashed facts about Iraqi WMD

Says ex-inspector

AP, Washington

A year after Bush administration claims about Iraqi "bioweapons trailers" were discredited by American experts, US officials were still suppressing the findings, says a senior member of the CIA-led Iraq inspection team.

At one point, former UN arms inspector Rod Barton says, a CIA officer told him it was "politically not possible" to report that the White House claims were untrue. In the end, Barton says, he felt "complicit in deceit."

Barton, an Australian biological weapons specialist, discusses the 2004 events in "The Weapons Detective," a memoir of his years as an arms inspector, being published Monday in Australia by Black Inc. Agenda.

Much sought after for his expertise, Barton served on the UN Iraq arms inspection teams of 1991-98 and 2002-03. After the US invasion, he was an aide to chief US inspector Charles Duelfer.

The Washington Post reported last month that a US fact-finding

mission confidentially advised Washington on May 27, 2003, that two truck trailers found in Iraq were not mobile units for manufacturing bioweapons, as had been suspected.

Two days later, President Bush still asserted the trailers were bioweapons labs, and other administration officials repeated that line for months afterward.

Barton's memoir says that well into 2004, pressure from Washington kept the US public uninformed about the true nature of these alleged WMD systems.

Former senior CIA officials denied such information was stifled.

The debunking of the "mobile biolabs" claim began in classified reports long before the US invasion, when German intelligence in 2001 and 2002 told US officials that the story's source, an Iraqi defector code-named "Curveball," was unreliable, official investigations later found. UN inspectors determined in early 2003, before the war, that parts of Curveball's story were false.

Cheney pushed for widening domestic spying: NYT

REUTERS, New York

Vice President Dick Cheney argued in the weeks after the September 11 attacks that the National Security Agency should intercept domestic telephone calls and e-mails without warrants as part of its war on terrorism. The New York Times reported in its Sunday editions.

Cheney and his top legal adviser, David Addington, believed the Constitution permitted spy agencies to take such sweeping measures to defend the country. The newspaper said, citing two senior intelligence officials who spoke anonymously.

NSA lawyers opposed the move and insisted that any eavesdropping without warrants should be limited to communications into and out of the country, a position that ultimately prevailed, the Times said.