

US to defend Israel if Iran attacks: Bush

AFP, jerusalem

US President George W Bush said Washington would defend its close ally Israel in the event of an Iranian attack, in remarks broadcast on Israeli army radio yesterday.

"Whether there's an imminent attack coming, I don't think so," Bush said in excerpts of an interview with an Israeli television station to be aired in its entirety later in the day.

"If Iran did strike Israel... We will defend our ally, no ands, ifs or buts," he said.

Bush's statements came just days before he arrives in the region for his first visit since taking office in January 2001 and the first trip by a sitting US president since December 1998.

The visit is aimed at boosting Israeli-Palestinian peace talks relaunched at a US conference in late November and at rallying regional opposition to Iran's controversial nuclear programme.

Israel considers the Islamic republic its main regional threat in the wake of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's repeated statements to be wiped off the map.

Widely considered to be the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear power, Israel along with the US suspects that Tehran's nuclear programme is a cover for developing atomic weapons, a charge Iran has

denied.

"If I were an Israeli, I would take the words of the Iranian president seriously, and as president of the United States I take them seriously," Bush said.

International support for further sanctions against Iran has been waning since a US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in early December said that the Islamic

republic had halted a nuclear weapons programme in 2003.

On Sunday Iran slammed Bush's planned trip as an interference in relations between regional states.

"We see such a trip as interference in the relations of the countries in the region and propaganda," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini told reporters in Tehran.

"Sarkozy to marry girlfriend Bruni

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AFP, paris

French President Nicolas Sarkozy is to marry his new girlfriend, the former model turned singer Carla Bruni, a French newspaper reported yesterday, claiming a wedding was "imminent".

Citing several anonymous sources, the *Journal du Dimanche* said the couple, currently on a private visit to Jordan at the invitation of King Abdullah II, are believed to have set a wedding date for February 8 or 9.

Presidential spokesman David Martinon declined to comment on the page-story.

Sarkozy, 52, and Bruni, 39, were photographed on Saturday touring the rose-red city of Petra in southern Jordan, the president carrying Bruni's young son Aurelien on his shoulders.

During a Christmas trip to Egypt, the recently-divorced president reportedly gave Bruni an engagement ring -- a pink diamond heart -- while Bruni gave him a luxury Swiss watch in grey steel.

Sarkozy and Bruni -- heiress to a tyre fortune whose former boyfriends include rock stars Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton -- have been trailed by a swarm of paparazzi since their romance was first publicised in mid-December.

Bruni may accompany Sarkozy on an official trip to India late this month, according to local media, which said the government of the morally conservative country was struggling to find the right protocol to greet her.

Health centre opens at Keraniganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Keraniganj Health Care Centre under Health Care Development Project of Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) was formally inaugurated yesterday to bring the health care services to doorsteps of the people.

Charge de Affairs of the Netherlands Embassy to Bangladesh Fritz Meijndert inaugurated the centre while Director of the centre Dr SM Akmal Ali, Executive Director of BISH Dr Md Lutfor Rahman, Director of the Project AKM Shahjahan and President of Managing Council of the project Prof AK Azad Khan were present.

On the occasion, a medical camp was arranged to give treatment to the people.

The project taken by the DAB in association with Netherlands-Bangladesh has been working to provide health facilities to all diabetic and non-diabetic patients.

Construction works of hundred-bed hospital in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Bogra and Pabna each and a two hundred-bed hospital in Shirajganj under the project are on the verge of completion.

Four centres in Talora, Shetabganj, Ranishankail and Kashinathpur upazila in northern region of the country have been working in full swing that were inaugurated a year ago, says a handout of DAB.

Ten centres at Dhanmondi, Banani, Mirpur, Motijheel, Uttara, Rampura, Bashabo, Savar, Keraniganj and Jurine in the city under the project already are in operation, the handout added.



Admission seekers coming out of the examination halls at Chittagong University on the first day of the admission test yesterday under Gha unit. Eighteen

Seven killed in Delhi slum fire

AFP, new delhi

At least seven people were killed when a fire tore through a slum yesterday in the Indian capital New Delhi, the fire department said.

Ten others were injured as the inferno engulfed hundreds of make-shift huts in the over-crowded old city commercial district, city fire department chief RC Sharma told reporters.

"Seven people were charred to death and almost all the 300 huts completely gutted in the fire," Sharma said.

The cause of the blaze was not immediately known, but Sharma said sparks from an open stove lit to ward off the bitter winter cold may have been to blame.



Combank Sports and Recreation Club of Commercial Bank of Ceylon (CBC) donates 500 blankets and winter clothes to Prothom Alo Relief Fund for the Sidr-affected people recently.

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Three drug peddlers held

BSS, Rangamati

Police arrested a drug peddler and seized five grams of heroin from his possession at hatchery area in Rangamati town yesterday.

He was identified as Mohammed Alamgir, 22, son of Shafail Alam.

Besides, members of the Department of Narcotics Control with the help of Kawthali police arrested two ganja sellers named Bidubushan Chakma, 30, and Ujjal Chakma, 29, of Chhoto Daluchhari village under Kawthali upazila on Friday.

The authorities also seized five kilograms of ganja from their possessions.



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