

Iran won't stop enrichment, says Ahmadinejad

AP, Tehran

Hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad struck a defiant tone as he spoke to giant crowds marking the 29th anniversary of the Islamic revolution Monday, vowing never to slow down nuclear development and announcing plans for more rocket launches in Iran's space programme.

Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators marched through the capital Tehran, chanting "Death to America" and burning effigies of President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

The leader's speech before the crowd appeared aimed at showing an image of strength of his hard-line camp ahead of key parliament elections in mid-March.

Iran's ruling clerical establishment has worked to keep reformists out of the vote. Earlier this month, Ahmadinejad's Interior Ministry disqualified more than 2,000 pro-reform candidates from running in the election.

Pakistan mobilises troops for election

AFP, Islamabad

Tens of thousands of Pakistani troops deployed across the nuclear-armed nation yesterday to provide security for next week's elections after a series of attacks, the interior ministry said.

The move came as a bomb outside a candidate's office wounded nine people -- the second attack on a politician in two days in a country that is still reeling from the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in December.

In a show of force ahead of Monday's polls, army soldiers and paramilitary forces stood guard at government buildings and potentially sensitive areas of several major cities, witnesses said.

"Army has started mobilising and moving to their respective areas of deployment today and

would complete its deployment by February 15," interior ministry spokesman Javed Cheema told reporters.

Authorities had drawn up plans to provide security for more than 64,000 polling stations, Cheema said. More than 1,000 international observers and journalists were coming to monitor the polls, he added.

He rejected opposition concerns that the army could be used to interfere with the polls to benefit allies of President Pervez Musharraf -- a former general who only quit the army in November.

"All these arrangements have been made to ensure that people cast their vote without any fear in an environment of peace and order. Nobody would be allowed to disrupt the polling process or create any law and order situation," he said.

Officials in southern Sindh

province -- Benazir Bhutto's political powerbase -- said they had asked the army for four helicopters for surveillance duties and recruited 15,000 "volunteers" to assist police.

"We have also provided security to some political personalities including (Bhutto's husband) Asif Ali Zardari who have threats to their lives," provincial home minister Akhtar Zamin said.

Pakistan has been hit by a wave of bombings in the run-up to the elections, most notably the attack at a political rally on December 27 that killed former premier Benazir Bhutto.

The government has blamed an al-Qaeda-linked tribal warlord for her murder and a series of bombings that have left around 100 people dead this year. It has warned candidates that they are at risk of attack.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists of Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chant slogans near the Election Commission office during a protest in Islamabad yesterday demanding free and fair election. Human Rights Watch on Tuesday warned that Pakistan's Election Commission had failed to investigate reports of campaign violations, threatening the validity of next week's crucial national polls.

E Timor capital calm under emergency

AFP, Dili

East Timor's capital Dili was calm early yesterday with residents packing markets seemingly oblivious to a declared state of emergency after assassination attempts on the nation's top leaders.

Markets bustled and banks opened their doors as usual, though traffic was lighter amid a heavy presence by UN police and international troops patrolling the streets, an AFP correspondent here said.

A police checkpoint was set up 50 metres (yards) from the palace where President Jose Ramos Horta, who was shot and wounded in the dawn attack by renegade soldiers early Monday, would normally be working.

Interim president Vicente Guterres issued a decree at the palace saying that a state of emergency had come into force from 10:00pm (1300 GMT) Monday evening and would last for an initial 48 hours.

New Thai govt mulls self-rule for Muslim south

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's new government will consider granting some degree of self-rule to Muslim-majority provinces hit by bloody separatist unrest, Interior Minister Chalermlak Yubamrung said yesterday.

More than 2,900 people have died in the southern provinces along the Malaysian border since separatist violence erupted four years ago.

The violence has become increasingly deadly over the last year, despite repeated olive branches offered by the previous military government.

In the latest unrest, a 40-year-old Buddhist man was shot and set ablaze in Pattani province late Monday, while three others were shot dead in nearby provinces early Tuesday, police said.

Iraq launches hunt for kidnapped journalists

AFP, Basra

Security forces have launched a search for two journalists from the American television network CBS who were kidnapped at gunpoint from their hotel in the Iraqi city of Basra, an official said Tuesday.

"There is an intensive operation underway to find the journalists," interior ministry spokesman Major General Abdul Karim Khalaf told AFP.

"These are journalists doing their job and those common criminals must be brought to justice."

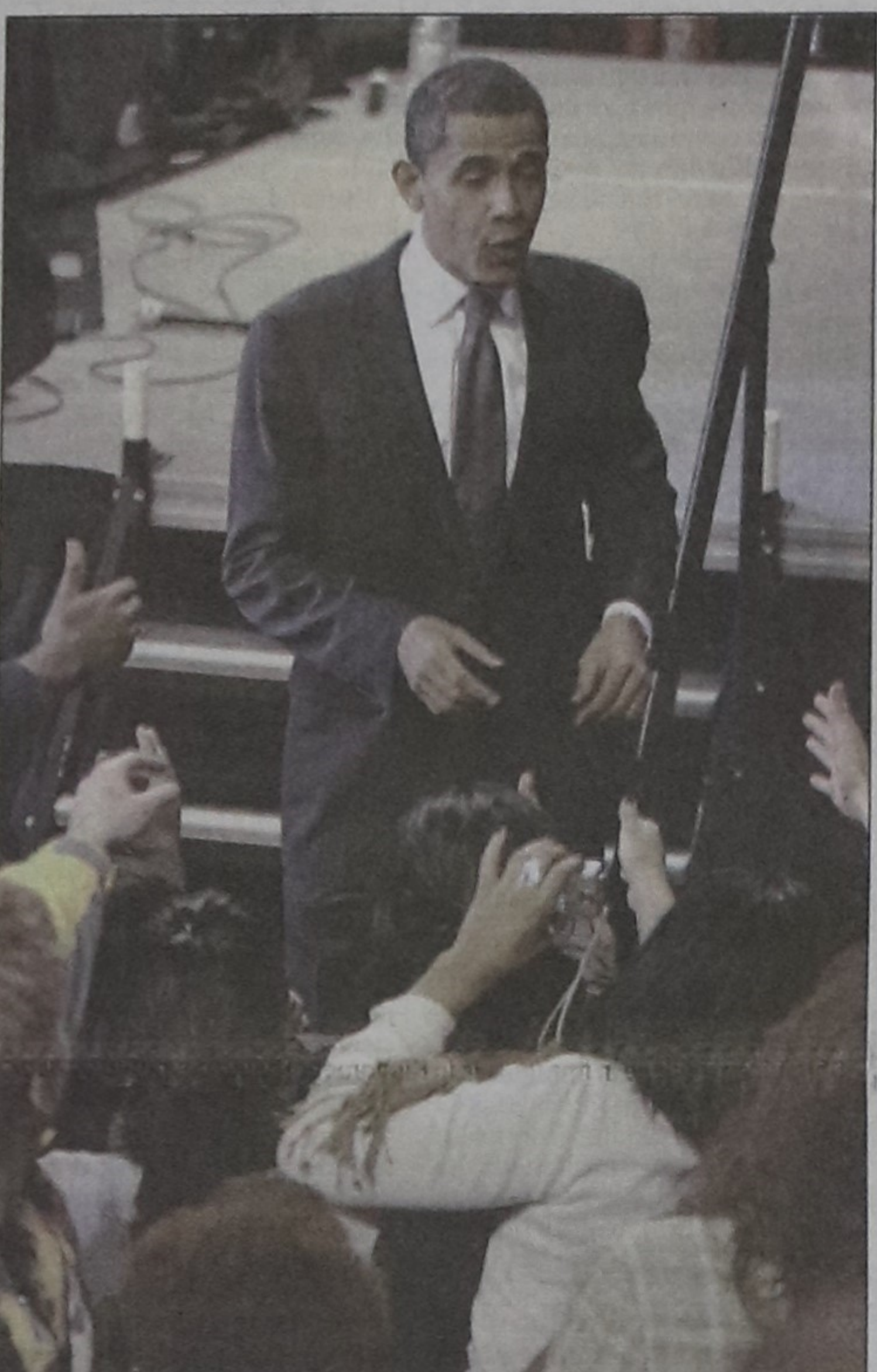


PHOTO: AFP

Democratic presidential hopeful Sen Barack Obama (D-IL) greets supporters during a campaign rally in the Comcast Centre at the University of Maryland on Monday in College Park, Maryland. Obama was campaigning ahead of yesterday's Democratic primaries in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, dubbed the "Potomac Primary."

Ragged Hillary campaign braces for more vote woe

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton's White House campaign faced the prospect of three new hammer blows Tuesday, with Democratic rival Barack Obama tipped to sweep a trio of Washington-area nominating contests.

Hillary Clinton insisted her historic quest was in good shape, despite a campaign staff shakeup and opinion polls that suggest she will tumble to defeat in the US capital, Maryland and Virginia after five Obama wins at the weekend.

"I think things have gone well. I think this is always going to be a

competitive race because there's so much at stake," the former first lady said in an interview with ABC's Washington affiliate on Monday.

"I've been around a long time, so, you know, sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down. I've been through all of that. But I feel really good about where we are."

Hillary Clinton campaign operatives signalled they were now pinning their hopes on Ohio and Texas, big states which vote on March 4, to close an anticipated gap with the surging Obama.

Despite Clinton emerging from last week's 22-state Super Tuesday

Democratic showdown neck-and-neck with the Illinois senator, he picked up weekend wins in Louisiana, Nebraska, Maine, Washington state, and the US Virgin Islands.

In so doing, Obama nudged ahead in the race for delegates portioned out by each state, who will formally pick the party nominee at the Democratic convention in August.

Obama now leads Clinton 1,144 to 1,138 in the running delegate count, according to website RealClearPolitics.com. A total of 2,025 delegates are needed for the nomination.

Israeli top brass calls for toppling Hamas in Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's top brass warned on Tuesday that its patience was wearing thin over rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, as more people were wounded in army incursions into the Hamas-run territory.

Amid growing calls for an all-out assault on the impoverished strip, Defence Minister Ehud Barak said the armed forces would do whatever is necessary to stop the attacks.

"Israel will not refrain from taking any course of action in order to bring a stop to the fire against

Sderot," Barak said, referring to the southern town that has borne the brunt of rocket fire.

"There are reasons why we are not using all our force right now, but it will happen at the right moment," he told journalists travelling with him to Turkey, without elaborating.

On Monday, army chief General Gaby Ashkenazi said the army was "prepared and ready to broaden its actions in conformity with the decisions taken."

The military has conducted a series of deadly operations in Gaza over the past week after a suicide

bombing in Israel that was claimed by Hamas, a group branded a terrorist outfit by Israeli and the West.

Israel has also tightened its blockade on the isolated territory, allowing in only limited supplies of fuel and medicines to a 1.5 million population largely dependent on aid.

On Monday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israeli "forces have been authorised to act to change the situation so that the inhabitants of Sderot and other Israeli towns targeted by Palestinian rockets can live in security."

Russia, China propose new treaty to ban arms in space

AFP, Geneva

Russia and China have proposed a new treaty to ban the use of weapons in space, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told a conference on disarmament in Geneva yesterday.

"Without preventing an arms race in space, international security will be wanting," Lavrov told the conference.

"The task of preventing an arms race in space is on the conference's agenda. It's time... to start serious practical work in this field," he said.

Concerns over a new arms race in space have been growing since China tested an anti-satellite missile last January, sparking a diplomatic outcry.

The United States also has its own anti-satellite programme ranging from laser cannon to satel-

lite destroying missiles.

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 bans the build up or stockpiling of military weapons -- including nuclear arms or weapons of mass destruction -- in orbit and their installation on the moon, but not the shooting down of satellites.

"Weapons deployment in space by one state will inevitably result in a chain reaction. And this, in turn, is fraught with a new spiral in the arms race both in space and on the earth," Lavrov said.

The Russian minister also reiterated his criticisms of the United States' plans for an anti-missile shield in Europe.

"We cannot but feel concerned over the situation where... there are increasing efforts by the United States to deploy its global ABM (anti-ballistic missile) system," Lavrov said.

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Phone No. 9883545, 8821067, 9895913, 9896134

Shaheda Educational Consultants
4pm to 7pm on Sunday 17 February, 2008.
Basholi Horizon
Flat No. 3B, 3rd Floor
Plot No. 21, Rd No. 17
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PHOTO: AFP

Members of pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party welcome visitors to a ceremony marking the 61st Union Day celebrations in front of Suu Kyi's portrait at the party's headquarters in Yangon yesterday. Suu Kyi's NLD urged the military government to create a "fair political climate," after the regime announced a constitutional referendum for May.

Suu Kyi's party calls for 'fair political climate'

AFP, Yangon

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy on Tuesday urged the military government to create a "fair political climate," after the regime announced a constitutional referendum for May.

The party did not directly mention the junta's plans for a referendum, which is meant to clear the way for elections in 2010, but repeated its long-standing call for a dialogue with the junta on national reconciliation.

"The (junta) has the main responsibility to realise national reconciliation, which is essential

for the country," the party said in a statement, read out by senior member Than Tun.

"Moreover, it also has the responsibility to create a fair political climate and environment," the statement added.

The party also repeated its call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest, as well as her deputy Tin Oo and 1,800 other political prisoners believed held in the country.

Tin Oo is also under house arrest, and the military is expected to announce an extension of his confinement this week.