

# Iran vows to strike Israeli nuclear sites if attacked

## Ahmadinejad suffers blow as VP sacked

AFP, Tehran

Iran has the capability to strike arch-foe Israel's nuclear sites firmly and will do so if it comes under attack, the head of the elite Revolutionary Guards Corps said yesterday.

Asked by Iran's Arabic language television channel Al-Alam whether Iran has the ability to strike Israeli nuclear sites, Mohammad Ali Jafari said: "Yes, definitely we have this capability because of the advances we have made in the past two years to carry out such a task."

"We have said that all of Israel's soil is under the coverage of our missiles. We have such capability and can certainly respond to any attack" by Israel.

Jafari said Iran will give a "firm and precise" answer if attacked by Israel.

"We are not responsible for this regime and other enemies' foolishness. If they strike Iran, our answer will be firm and precise. They will have no answer when Iran bombards them and sends several of its missiles."

His comments come a day before the annual day of the Guards.

Jafari issued a similar statement in March.

Relations between the two arch-foes have deteriorated in the past four years under the rule of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Israel, although widely believed to have nuclear weapons itself, is strongly against Iran's controversial nuclear programme.

Global powers feel Iran's nuclear drive is aimed at seeking atomic weapons. Tehran denies the charge.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced in May that Iran had successfully test-fired a new medium-range missile, Sejil-2, drawing a warning from Israel that Europe too should now worry about the Islamic republic's ballistic programme.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said the test appeared to have been successful and his information was that the missile will have a range of approximately

2,000 to 2,500 kilometres (1,200 to 1,500 miles).

Meanwhile, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday caved in to hardliners and sacked his controversial deputy, suffering his first major blow to forge a new government since his disputed re-election last month.

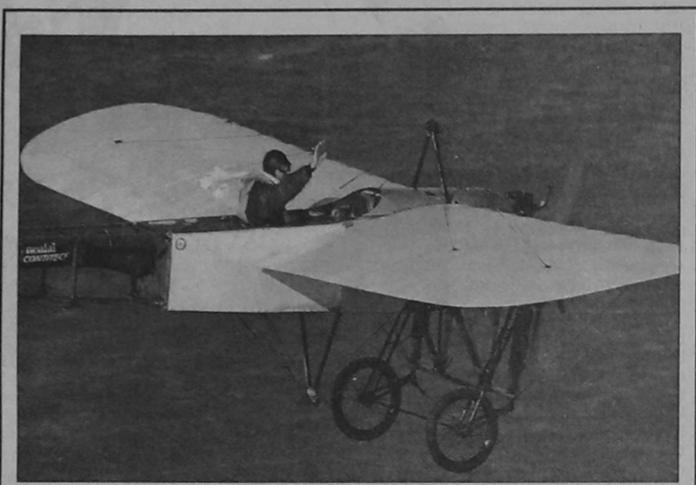
Ahmadinejad said in a letter to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that Eshfandiari Rahim Mashaie had stepped down as first vice president, a little over a week after he was appointed to the post, the official IRNA news agency said.

"I am sending you the letter of Rahim Mashaie announcing he is stepping down from the post of the vice president," Ahmadinejad wrote to Khamenei in the letter, IRNA said.

Rahim Mashaie's appointment triggered strong opposition from hardliners and plunged Iran into a fresh political turmoil even while it remains engulfed in the worst crisis since the 1979 Islamic revolution.



People stage a rally on Friday in Paris against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election and in support of the Iranian demonstrators who were protesting against the election for weeks.



Edmond Salis, a French pilot is on his way to Dover yesterday on a "Bleriot XI", a restored original of the plane in which Louis Bleriot crossed the Channel 100 years ago, near Ambleuse, during his attempt to cross the channel as part of the commemoration of the centenary of the event. Salis crossed the channel in 40 minutes later without problems in the English Channel port of Dover.

# Iran opposition urges clerics to help stop 'oppression'

AFP, AP, Tehran/London

Iranian opposition leaders called on the country's top clerics yesterday to intervene to prevent "oppression" by the authorities, as a detained protester was reportedly killed in custody.

"We want you, the top clerics, to remind the authorities of the harmful outcome of not abiding by the law and prevent them from spreading oppression in the Islamic republic," said a joint statement by Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karubi and former reformist president Mohammad Khatami.

Meanwhile, protesters across the world on Saturday called on Iran to end its clampdown on opposition activists, demanding the release of hundreds rounded up amid demonstrations against the country's disputed election.

Groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are backing a global day of action, with protests planned in more than 80 cities.

The protesters want Iranian authorities to release what they say are hundreds, or even thousands, of people detained during protests that followed the presidential election last month that returned Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power.

The three Iranian leaders repeated their call for the release of those detained in a crackdown on protests against the results of the June 12 presidential vote, which Mousavi says was rigged to ensure the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

# North Korea willing to hold talks with US

AP, Seoul

North Korea has indicated its interest in holding direct talks with the United States, a news report said, after the two sides traded barbs over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programmes at a security forum.

"We are not against a dialogue. We are not against any negotiation for the issues of common concern," Japan's Kyodo news agency quoted North Korean ambassador to the United Nations Sin Son Ho as saying Friday.

But the ambassador, speaking in New York, dismissed the possibility of a return to stalled nuclear negotiations involving the two Koreas, the US, Japan, China and Russia, saying "the six-party talks are gone forever."

The US has offered to hold talks with the North within the six-nation process if it returns to the negotiating table and takes irreversible steps for denuclearisation.

Last weekend, Assistant US Secretary of State Kurt Campbell indicated that the chances for direct talks between North Korea and the US

were slim. "Our bilateral negotiations are between the US and South Korea about our collective approach" to the North, Campbell told reporters in Seoul.

Sin said the five other parties to the nuclear talks "cheated" North Korea, accusing them of not implementing what they had agreed under a disarmament-for-aid deal. No more details were given in the Kyodo report.

Sin was not available for comment Saturday. The North Korean mission to the UN declined to comment.

North Korea quit the nuclear talks in April to protest a UN statement condemning a rocket launch. North Korea insisted it sent a satellite into orbit, while the US and its allies said it was actually a long-range missile test.

North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May and a barrage of missile tests in July, drawing international condemnation and new UN sanctions.

US and Chinese officials are expected to discuss North Korea's nuclear programmes and other regional security issues at a strategic dialogue next week in Washington.

# Brown, Obama in talks over Afghanistan

## Britain pledges more troops

AFP, London

Prime Minister Gordon Brown on Friday called US President Barack Obama for talks on Afghanistan as Britain announced it would send in reinforcements after a recent spike in troop deaths.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said it was deploying 125 more troops in Afghanistan on Monday following a surge in deaths this month that has seen the overall toll overtake that suffered during the war in Iraq.

Meanwhile Brown and Obama held telephone talks on the situation in Afghanistan and stressed the importance of "better military and civilian burden-sharing with Nato allies," a Downing Street spokesman said.

Brown has been forced to defend Britain's strategy in Afghanistan following the spike in troops deaths, in a row that has piled the pressure on a government already struggling with the recession and an expenses scandal.

Debate in Britain has focused on whether the troops have enough helicopters available. Several of those killed recently lost their lives due to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on the ground.

The MoD stressed the new deployment would "ensure specialist skills, notably counter-IED operations, are not lost to commanders."

Britain has around 9,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, largely battling Taliban insurgents in the troubled southern Helmand Province.

# Congress holds Mayawati guilty for attack on Joshi's Lucknow house

ANI, New Delhi

The Congress Party on Saturday said that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati is responsible for the attack on the Lucknow residence of Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Rita Bahuguna Joshi on the night of July 15.

Senior Congress leader and in-charge of Uttar Pradesh Digvijay Singh said: "The attack was made under the directions of Mayawati and CBI probe should be ordered into the matter."

On Wednesday, Joshi filed a petition before the Allahabad High Court seeking a CBI probe into the July 15 arson attack.

In her petition, Joshi squarely blamed Mayawati and her henchmen for the arson attack.

# Bush considered sending troops into New York to net terrors

ANI, Melbourne

To arrest a group of men suspected of plotting with al-Qaeda, the Bush Administration considered sending troops into New York.

Some of President George Bush's advisers, notably Vice President Dick Cheney, contended that a sitting president had the power to use the military on US soil to sweep up the men, known as the Lackawanna Six, and brand them as enemy combatants, the New York Times reported.

Bush eventually decided against the proposal, which was floated in 2002 without consulting senior military officials.

US laws and the Constitution, notably the 4th Amendment that bans unrea-

sonable search or seizure without probable cause, restrict military action for domestic raids.

The report said Bush administration officials debated the move using a broad interpretation of presidential authority roughly a month after the September 11 attacks on the United States, arguing that domestic use of military force against al-Qaeda would be legal because it served a national security, rather than a law enforcement purpose.

Proponents of the plan, advanced by Cheney and his legal adviser, David Addington, used a memo written by Justice Department lawyers John Yoo and Robert Delahunty that asserted it would be legal.



An Iranian policeman stands guard as rescue workers inspect the wreckage of the Aria Air Ilyushin 62 plane following an accident in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad yesterday. The Iranian airliner overshot the runway and slammed into a perimeter wall killing 16 people in Mashhad in the country's second air disaster in 10 days.

# 16 killed in Iran plane crash

AFP, Tehran

Nine Kazakhs were among 16 people killed when an Iranian airliner overshot the runway and hurtled into a perimeter wall, official IRNA news agency on Saturday cited an Iranian aviation official as saying.

"Sixteen people were killed, three were passengers and the rest were crew, nine of whom were from Kazakhstan," Reza Jafarzadeh, spokesman for the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization, told reporters in the northeastern city of Mashhad, where the disaster happened.

The other four crew members who died were Iranians, as were the three passengers who lost their lives in Friday's crash, he said.

Mashhad, Iran's second city, is a Shia Muslim pilgrimage destination as it was the burial place of the eighth Shia Imam, Reza.

"The plane was carrying 153 passengers, and 31 were wounded in the incident," Jafarzadeh said, adding that the plane belonged to Kazakhstan but was chartered to Iranian carrier Aria Airline.

# \$200m US aid for Palestinians

AP, Ramallah

The United States has transferred \$200 million to the Palestinian government to help ease a growing budget deficit, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Friday.

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has been struggling in recent months to keep his government afloat, borrowing hundreds of millions of dollars from commercial banks just to cover the public payroll.

The reasons for the shortfall include Israel's restrictions on the Palestinian economy, the border blockade of the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip and the failure of some donor countries to make good on their aid pledges, Fayyad said Friday, in a video conference with Clinton.

With Friday's aid transfer, donor countries have given the Palestinian government \$606 million in budget support this year, covering only about one-third of the estimated deficit of \$1.45 billion for 2009, Fayyad said.

"We have received aid, but not enough to deal with our needs, and we faced sharp economic difficulties throughout the last months," Fayyad told reporters.

Since 2007, donor countries have pledged more than \$10 billion to the Palestinians, to help shore up the Western-backed government of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who lost Gaza in a violent Hamas takeover two years ago. However, the aid has had little impact, largely because Israeli restrictions on Palestinian trade and movement have prevented a recovery of the Palestinian economy.

# Russia, US end latest round of nuclear talks

AFP, Moscow

The United States and Russia ended a fourth round of talks on replacing a key Cold War-era nuclear disarmament treaty and agreed to meet again in a month, the Russian foreign ministry said Saturday.

US and Russian negotiators met in Geneva from Wednesday to Friday to discuss a successor agreement to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Reduction Treaty (START), which expires in

December, the ministry said in a statement.

"The sides agreed to carry out the next round of negotiations at the end of August-beginning of September in Geneva," it said.

The statement did not give further details about the talks, except to say that negotiators worked from principles laid out by US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev at a summit earlier this month.



Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates (R) receives the Indira Gandhi National Award for Peace from Indian President Pratibha Devbisigh Patil (L) as Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (C) looks on at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday.

# Bill Gates wins Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bill Gates, the founder-Chairman of Microsoft Corporation and the world's richest man, yesterday received the prestigious Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2007.

Indian President Pratibha Devisingh Patil presented the prize to Bill Gates who received it on the behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation at a function here.

Speaking on the occasion, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pointed out that Bill Gates was the first businessman to receive the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development set up just over two decades ago "in memory of one of the most charismatic leaders of the last century to honour those who have made extraordinary contributions to these causes so dear to her."

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