

Iran sends rocket with animals into space

AP, Tehran

Iran announced yesterday it has successfully launched a research rocket carrying a mouse, two turtles and worms into space...

Ahmadinejad also unveiled the model of a light booster rocket that is being built and three new, Iranian-built satellites...

The launch of the rocket Kavoshgar-3, which means Explorer-3 in Farsi, was announced by Defence Minister Gen. Ahmad Vahidi...

'Qaeda poised for terror attack on US by July'

ANI, Washington

Dennis C Blair, President Obama's director of national intelligence, has warned that al-Qaeda and its affiliates may attempt a large-scale attack on American soil within the next six months...

Blair's assessment came at Tuesday's hearing when Senator Dianne Feinstein, chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, asked him to weigh up the possibility of an attempted attack in the United States...

His response that "the priority is certain, I would say" was reaffirmed by top CIA and FBI officials.



Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (R) shakes hands with his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki during their meeting in Ankara yesterday. Mottaki is in Turkey on an official visit.

Iran sees 'no problem' in shipping out uranium

Western powers move towards tougher sanctions

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Iran is willing to send its uranium abroad, in comments cautiously welcomed yesterday by world powers...

Iran would have "no problem" sending out its stocks of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to be further purified into reactor fuel...

His comments came ahead of an expected meeting of world powers on possible new sanctions against Tehran and after the expiry of a January 31 ultimatum for the West to accept Iran's conditions for a nuclear fuel swap...

"There is really no problem. Some made a fuss for nothing. There is no problem. We sign a contract. We give them

(world powers) 3.5 percent (enriched uranium) and it will take four or five months for them to give us the 20 percent (enriched uranium)..."

Russia, Iran's main nuclear trader, welcomed Ahmadinejad's latest remarks.

"If Iran is ready to come back to the original agreement (UN-drafted deal) we can only welcome it," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in Moscow.

Britain, meanwhile, said it would be a "positive sign" by Iran if it were prepared to take up an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) offer to ship some uranium abroad, but stressed talks remain "the crucial issue."

"If Iran is willing to take up the IAEA's proposed offer, it would be a positive sign of their willingness to engage with the international community on nuclear issues," the Foreign Office said.

But it "does not change" the need for Iran to hold further talks with three European Union countries and China, United States and Russia, it added.

The United States reacted cautiously, saying Tehran should submit a formal offer of the deal to international authorities.

"If Mr. Ahmadinejad's comments reflect an updated Iranian position, we look forward to Iran informing the IAEA," White House official Mike Hammer said.

Iran's atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi stressed that talks were still "ongoing" and there was "no final agreement" regarding the deal.

'Iran, US talking possible prisoner exchange'

AFP, Tehran/Washington

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Tuesday that Iran and the United States were discussing a possible exchange of prisoners held by the two countries.

Ahmadinejad, when asked during an interview on state television about the fate of three American hikers detained in Iran, said: "They have arrested our citizens for nothing... this is very bad... now there are talks whether it is possible to do an exchange (of prisoners)."

"We said that we do not like to imprison anybody. Now they have given some messages and we replied that we bring these (the three Americans) and they bring them (Iranians held in US prisons) and let us see what happens."

But the White House on Tuesday denied it had held "any discussion" with Iran about a possible prisoner swap, refuting an earlier claim by Ahmadinejad.

Obama to meet Dalai Lama defying China

AFP, Washington

The White House is standing tough on President Barack Obama's plans to meet with the Dalai Lama, firmly rejecting Chinese pressure to snub him as rows escalate between Washington and Beijing.

The Chinese government reacted Wednesday to the plans by saying it "resolutely opposes" the Dalai Lama's visit to the United States and any of his meetings with US leaders.

"We urge the US side to clearly recognise the high sensitivity of the Tibet issue and handle related issues carefully and appropriately to avoid causing more harm to Sino-US ties," foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said in a statement.

Days after defying Beijing with a 6.4-billion-dollar weapons package for Taiwan, the White House insisted Tuesday that China address human rights concerns in Tibet.

"The president told China leaders during his trip last year that he would meet with the Dalai Lama, and he intends to do so," White House spokesman Bill Burton told reporters.

"The Dalai Lama is an internationally respected religious and cultural leader, and the president will meet with him in that capacity."

The Dalai Lama is due in the United States for a 10-day trip later this month, his secretary said, and will be in Washington February 17-19 before speaking and teaching engagements in Los Angeles and Florida. He will return to India from New York on February 25.

Obama has sought wide-ranging ties with the rising Asian power on issues from the global economy to North Korea. Burton said the president remained committed to "building a positive, comprehensive and cooperative relationship with China."

Frustration growing at Haiti aid bottlenecks

AP, Port-au-Prince

The aid flooding into Haiti by plane and boat is not reaching earthquake victims quickly enough to stem growing unrest because of transportation bottlenecks and isolated violence.

Many foreign aid workers and Haitians say ample donations are arriving, but express frustration at the slow pace of distribution of food and medicine from Port-au-Prince's port, airport and a warehouse in its sprawling Cite-Soleil slum.

"There's no top-down leadership. ... And since the Haitian government took control of our supplies, we have to wait for things even though they're stacked up in the warehouse," said Dr. Rob Maddox of Start, Louisiana, tending to dozens of patients in the capital's general hospital. "The situation is just madness."

US air traffic controllers have lined up an astonishing 2,550 incoming flights through March 1, but some 25 flights a day aren't taking their slots. Communication breakdowns between Haitians and their foreign counterparts are endemic.

"Aid is bottlenecking at the Port-au-Prince airport. It's not getting into the field," said Mike O'Keefe, who runs Banyan Air Service in Fort Lauderdale.

Boxes of supplies are stacked in the dimly lit warehouse of the capital's hospital. In another storage area, medicine, bandages and other key supplies pile up on tables watched over by a Haitian health worker who scrawls in a notebook, ticking off everything that comes in and out. Doctors say since locals took over the supply room, crucial time to save lives has been lost filling out unnecessary forms.



A Haitian woman holds her child as she and others line up to get potable water yesterday at a makeshift camp for displaced people in Port-au-Prince. An estimated 1 million people were left homeless by the 7.0-magnitude quake on January 12 that destroyed Port-au-Prince and killed around 170,000 people.

20 killed in Karbala blast

AP, Baghdad

Iraqi officials say a bomb planted on a motorcycle exploded, killing at least 20 Shia pilgrims near the outskirts of the holy city of Karbala.

The security officials said around 90 people were wounded in the blast that took place Wednesday morning.

The attack was the latest in a string of bombings this week that have targeted pilgrims making their way to an important Shia religious observance in Karbala.

The blasts have raised fears of a spike by suspected Sunni insurgents in attacks when the pilgrimage culminates Friday.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief the media.

The bomb exploded at about 11 a.m. in an area known as Ibrahimia, near the east entrance one of three into Karbala, the official said. The city is located 80km south of Baghdad.

At least 25 people were wounded in the attack, the official said, adding that the area was clogged with pilgrims and the number of casualties could increase.

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