



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad delivers his speech during a public meeting in the northern city of Qazvin yesterday.

Won't discuss nuke issue with big six: Iran

REUTERS, Tehran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday the Islamic state would not discuss its disputed nuclear program in proposed talks with major powers, state television reported.

His comments will likely further deepen scepticism about the chances of a negotiated solution to the long-running stalemate over Iran's nuclear ambitions, which the United States and its European allies fear is a cover to build bombs.

"We have repeatedly said that our (nuclear) rights are not negotiable... We only hold talks to resolve international problems... to help the establishment of peace," Ahmadinejad said in a televised speech in central town of Qazvin.

Western diplomats have made clear they want Iran to address their concerns about its nuclear program in talks that the United States, France, Russia, Britain, Germany and China have offered Tehran later this month.

In a letter dated November 9 and seen by Reuters, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, told European Union foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton that he was ready to meet on November 23 or December 5 in Turkey, a Nato member and candidate for European Union membership.

A spokesman for Ashton said she would be discussing the letter with the six world powers, who have given her a mandate to hold talks with Jalili. Talks between Iran and the major powers failed over a year ago, leading to a tightening of international sanctions against Tehran.

Israel defends construction in east Jerusalem

AP, Jerusalem

Israel on Tuesday hotly defended its new construction plans for disputed east Jerusalem against criticism from President Barack Obama, Palestinians and the European Union insisting it never agreed to halt the building and sharpening a crisis that threatens to derail peace talks.

A harsh statement from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office insisted that "Jerusalem is not a settlement. It is the capital of the state of Israel."

It continued: "Israel sees no link between the peace process and its development plans in Jerusalem."

The statement followed denunciations of a plan to build 1,300 apartments in Jewish neighbourhoods in east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians regard as illegal settlements.

Palestinians claim east Jerusalem, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast War, as the capital of their future state. The international community has not recognized Israel's annexation of the city's eastern sector.

The latest flare-up in the settlement issue has underlined its potential to scuttle US efforts to broker a peace accord. Palestinians see the settlements as a threat to their hopes for a state that would encompass West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, and charge that the continued construction is solidifying Israel's presence there. Settlers say openly that their goal is to prevent creation of a Palestinian state.

Series of blasts kill 5 Iraqi Christians

AP, Baghdad

Baghdad's Christians came under attack again yesterday when a coordinated series of roadside bombs blew up in predominantly Christian neighbourhoods, killing five people. The blasts came less than two weeks after insurgents besieged a church and killed 56 Christians in an assault that drew international condemnation.

Police said at least 11 roadside bombs went off within an hour in three predominantly Christian areas of central Baghdad. Four of the blasts hit houses belonging to Christians, and two mortar rounds also struck Christian enclaves of the predominantly Sunni neighbourhood of Dora in south Baghdad. Two bombs planted in deserted Christian homes in western Baghdad destroyed two houses.

It was the third attack targeting Christians since the church siege on Oct 31. Late Tuesday, a series of bombs hit three empty houses belonging to Christians in western Baghdad but no one was hurt. Last week, an al-Qaeda-linked group claimed responsibility for the church attack and threatened more violence against Iraq's Christian community.

The threat left many Christians in the country wondering whether it was time to flee their homeland.

"We were terrified by the explosions," said Juleit Hana, a 33-year-old Christian who lives in one of the neighbourhoods targeted Wednesday. She was having breakfast with her daughter when she heard the bombs go off. She vowed to leave the country.

"It's not worth staying in a country where the government is not able to protect you even when you are sitting in your house."

The new attacks struck as Iraq's minority Christian community was still in shock over the massacre at Baghdad's main Catholic cathedral, Our Lady of Salvation.

Bush faults Pakistan on extremism

AFP, Washington

Former US president George W Bush has written in a new memoir that he became convinced Pakistan would not act against Islamic militants and all but admitted he ordered drone strikes on its soil.

In his book "Decision Points" published Tuesday, Bush said he had "complex" relations with Pakistan and its former military leader Pervez Musharraf, who pledged to support the United States after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Bush acknowledged that Pakistan "paid a high price for taking on extremists" and said its forces were successful for several years in targeting al-Qaeda militants crossing the porous border with Afghanistan.

But Bush said: "Over time, it became clear that Musharraf either would not or could not fulfil all of his promises."

"Some in the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, retained close ties to Taliban officials. Others wanted an insurance policy in case America abandoned Afghanistan and India tried to gain influence there," Bush wrote.

Bush said he grew frustrated by late in his presidency. He recalled a meeting with US special forces returning from Afghanistan in which one troop pleaded with him, "We need permission to go kick some ass

inside Pakistan."

Bush said he could not reveal details of his decision but noted that the Predator, an unmanned predator drone, "was capable of conducting video surveillance and firing laser-guided bombs."

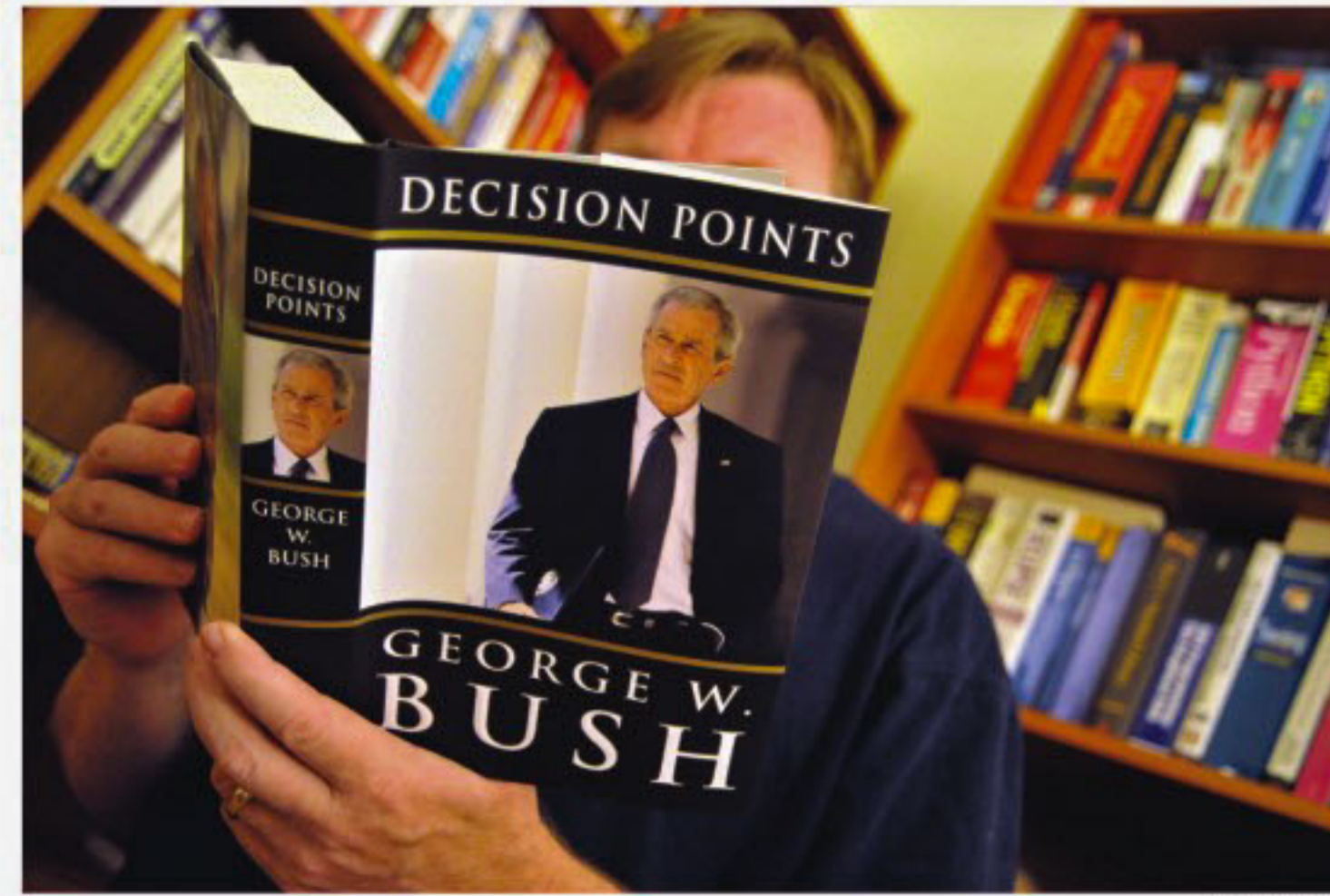
"I authorized the intelligence community to turn up the pressure on the extremists. Many of the details of our actions remain classified. But soon after I gave the order, the press started reporting more Predator strikes," he wrote.

President Barack Obama has intensified the drone attacks, which most US policymakers consider an effective way to kill senior al-Qaeda leaders without risking US troops.

But Pakistan has publicly protested the drone attacks, calling them violations of its sovereignty that kill civilians and risk worsening anti-US sentiment. Some US scholars have questioned the legality of the strikes, saying they amount to extrajudicial killings.

Musharraf raised controversy in 2006 when the United States threatened to bomb Pakistan "back to the Stone Age" if it did not lend support after the September 11 attacks.

In the memoir, Bush said Colin Powell, then secretary of state, called Musharraf on September 13, 2001 and told him he "had to decide whose side he was on" and gave him



A man reads the new memoir by former US President George W Bush on Tuesday at his home in Manassas, Virginia. The book entitled "Decision Points" recounts his critical decisions that shaped his presidency and personal life.

"non-negotiable demands" including breaking relations with the Taliban and denying al-Qaeda havens inside Pakistan.

Bush said that Pakistan's cooperation was impeded by its "obsession" with historic rival India. Both Bush and Obama have sought warmer relations with the world's largest democracy.

"In almost every conversation we had, Musharraf accused India of wrongdoing," Bush wrote.

Musharraf, who is touring the United States as he tries to stage a political comeback, insisted Tuesday that he had evidence that Indian intelligence agents met with Pakistani separatists who came via Afghanistan.

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