

Iran president attacks Israel

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TEHRAN, Aug 23, (AFP): Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad renewed his verbal attacks on arch-foe Israel on Saturday, accusing it of dragging the world into turmoil and predicting its demise. "About 2,000 organised Zionists and 7,000 to 8,000 agents of Zionism have dragged the world into turmoil," Ahmadinejad told a rally in the central Iranian city of Arak carried live on state television. He said that if the West does not restrain Zionism, "the powerful hand of the nations will clean these sources of corruption from the face of the earth," without specifying which nations.

Iran does not recognise the Jewish state and Ahmadinejad has drawn international condemnation by repeatedly saying since his election in 2005 that Israel is doomed to disappear. Last month Vice President Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie triggered controversy and calls for his resignation when he said Iranians are "friends with Israelis." Israel, the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear power, accuses Iran of seeking atomic weapons and wants tougher sanctions against the Islamic republic to make it halt its controversial nuclear programme. Iran insists that its nuclear ambitions are purely peaceful and aimed at meeting the country's growing energy needs.

Sanctions

Russian Ambassador to Tehran Alexander Sadovnikov said Saturday that his country was against efforts to impose new international sanctions on Iran. Sadovnikov was quoted by IRNA as saying that Moscow was not looking forward to more international sanctions against Iran. He hoped that the new rounds of discussion between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would result in a solution that allowed Iran to only use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Iran should provide answers on its nuclear program to the IAEA, stated Sadovinkov, revealing that the head of Russia's Atomic Energy Organization, Sergei Kiriyenko, might pay a visit to Iran soon.

Setellite

Iran plans to launch a telecommunications satellite, the president said on Saturday, using missile technology the West fears is being developed to fire nuclear warheads.

Iran said last Sunday it had put a dummy satellite into orbit on a domestically made rocket for the first time, although US officials said the attempted launch was a failure. "Today, the Iranian nation has obtained the technology to produce different kinds of satellites and with God's help it will launch its first telecommunications ... satellite into space," President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told a rally.

He did not give a timetable in the remarks carried by state TV. Iran's top aerospace official said on Thursday the country aimed to send a manned rocket into space in the next 10 years. "Our nation has a modern missile that can launch the second stage missile 250 kms (150 miles) into space. The second stage is a smaller missile carrying the satellite which has very complex technical equipment," the president said. The long-range ballistic technology used to put satellites into space can also be used for launching weapons.

Pressure

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday praised the country's government for resisting international pressure on the Islamic republic to halt its controversial nuclear programme. "Some domineering countries and their worthless followers want to get their own way with the Iranian nation, but the nation, the president and the government have stood up to them," he was quoted by state television as saying.

"Adopting an aggressive spirit against world bullies is a sign of the government's loyalty to revolutionary slogans and discourse," it quoted him as saying in a meeting with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his cabinet. Iran risks a fourth round of UN sanctions for failing to give a clear response to an incentives offer by six world powers in return for halting uranium enrichment, a process to produce nuclear fuel that can also make the core of an atomic bomb.

Ahmadinejad on Saturday dismissed the impact of sanctions, citing last Sunday's launch of a home-produced missile that Tehran says can put a satellite into orbit. "You have imposed sanctions on us, but today young people in this land do not need your help to have a satellite-carrying missile," he told a rally in the central city of Arak carried live on state television. "Iran does not need you in any way," he said, vowing to launch the country's first communications satellite soon.

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