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Iran's president calls for TV debate with Bush

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IRAN, Iran (CNN) -- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called on U.S. President George W. Bush to participate in a "direct television debate with us," so Iran can voice its point of view on how to end problems in the world.

"But the condition is that there can be no censorship, especially for the American nation," he said Tuesday.

The White House called the offer to debate Bush a "diversion" from international concerns over Iran's nuclear program, Reuters reported.

During a news conference in Tehran, Ahmadinejad also blamed "special concessions" granted to the United States and Britain as "the root cause of all the problems in the world."

"At the Security Council, where they have to protect security, they enjoy the veto right. If anybody confronts them, there is no place to take complaints to."

His comments came two days before a deadline set by a U.N. Security Council resolution for the Islamic republic to suspend uranium enrichment or face possible sanctions.

Although he did not directly address the U.N. deadline, Ahmadinejad said "nobody can prevent" Iran from its right to a "peaceful, nuclear program."

"I think the time has passed to speak of the Security Council and the tools they can use to force a country to do certain things," he said.

Ahmadinejad said he would reject any suspension of enrichment, even if requested by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan during an upcoming visit to Iran. ([Full story](#))

Iran has until Thursday to agree to halt the enrichment program, which Tehran

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maintains is part of a civilian nuclear program to generate power.

Asked about Ahmadinejad's comments, U.S. ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton said Washington and its European allies are moving forward with sanctions against Iran.

"We have made it clear unless we get an unequivocal acceptance of that condition in the Security Council resolution, that sanctions would follow," Bolton said.

"That condition by the way is not something the United States has imposed. That condition is what the European-3 have been operating under since the outset of their negotiations."

Western nations accuse Iran of seeking to master technology to produce nuclear weapons.

The U.N. Security Council resolution, approved on July 31, would pave the way for the Tehran regime -- if it complies -- to receive financial incentives.

The United States has also held out the possibility of resuming direct contacts with Iran, more than 25 years after the two countries broke off diplomatic relations.

Last week, Tehran offered to resume negotiations about its nuclear program but did not agree to halt uranium enrichment before any talks take place. ([Full story](#))

If the Iranians do not accept the U.N.'s incentives offer by Thursday, the Security Council will discuss a resolution proposing economic sanctions on Iran.

While such a move is backed by three of the council's permanent members -- the United States, Britain and France -- the two others, Russia and China, have been cool to the idea and could use their veto to block a sanctions resolution.

Meanwhile, a senior Iranian official on Tuesday invited Western companies to bid for tenders to build nuclear plants, The Associated Press reported from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"We have had ... another 21 thousand megawatts of nuclear power plants approved by the parliament that will be built in the next 20 years," Seyed Ala'addin Barojerdi, chairman of Iran's Parliament National Security and Foreign Affairs Commission, was quoted as saying.

"(The) international tenders for building of two of these nuclear power plants have been so far presented and we would be willing to see the Western companies participate in these projects," he said.

Western nations have been closely watching developments in Iran's nuclear program for signs of compliance. In recent days, Tehran has made public displays of new technologies and facilities.

On Sunday, state television reported that Iran test fired a long-range, radar-evading missile from a submarine in the Gulf as part of war games that began earlier this month. [\(Full story\)](#)

Some analysts interpreted the test and war games as thinly veiled threats that Iran could disrupt vital oil shipping lanes if pushed by an escalation in the nuclear dispute, according to Reuters.

A day earlier, Ahmadinejad officially opened a heavy-water production plant that he said would serve medical, agricultural and scientific needs. [\(Full story\)](#)

Video broadcast on Iranian television showed the president touring the plant in the central Iran city of Arak along with Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization.

Heavy water is used in preparing uranium for nuclear weapons, but it is also useful for medical purposes, such as nuclear magnetic resonance imaging, according to Reuters.

"No one can deprive a nation of its rights based on its capabilities," the agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying in his speech to inaugurate the project.

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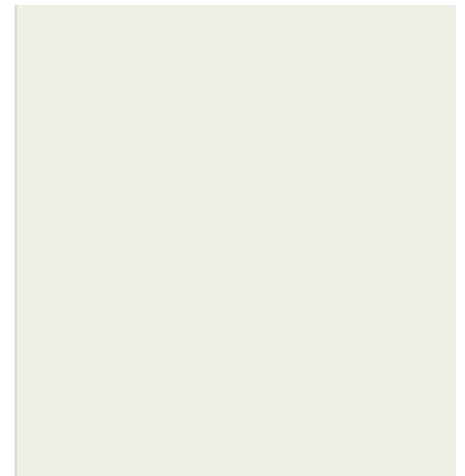
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