

By: ~~February 2008~~ Science News Editor

What's Iran Really up to?

The Arab state claims to have launched a rocket into space

Iran had a field day on Monday after reporting that it had successfully launched into space its first rocket, thus becoming one of the 11 countries in the world to have capabilities of launching satellites into space. The launch hasn't been confirmed yet by the international community, but could be one of those 'true' claims, similar to the technological achievements reported in the last year which haven't been confirmed even to this day. The claim is even more doubtful as the Iranian state television failed to provide with images or videos of the launch. Furthermore, the western space monitoring stations say that they haven't been able to pick up the signature of the launch claim. It is believed that a similar rocket has been launched from Iranian territory somewhere in February last year, but it wasn't capable to break the gravitational pull of the Earth to escape into space, and fell back onto the surface. Although it did not transmit images from the launch itself, the Iranian state television relayed a recording from the so-called space center that the Iranian state has just opened, showing the president Mohmoud Ahmadinejad giving the launch order. Moreover, the press failed to specify the altitude the rocket would have reached during its flight, but said that it was carrying a payload consisting of several scientific experiments. Usually, satellites launched into space are placed into orbits more than 160 kilometers over the surface of the planet. For example, radio satellites fly into low orbits between 160 to 480 kilometers, while weather and global positioning satellites have orbits reaching heights of up to 19,200 kilometers. On the other hand, the international community has expressed its concerns into what are the real intentions of the Iranian government, knowing its lust for nuclear power capabilities. Experts fear that Iran is in fact trying to cover a program of developing ballistic nuclear missiles. Minutes before the claimed launch, the president of Iran inaugurated the space center which is said to contain an underground launch facility and presumably a space launch pad. If indeed Iran has launched a rocket, the most likely outcome is that it would have reached a height of 150 kilometers, not enough to remain into a permanent orbit, before opening a parachute to assist the launch vehicle down to the surface of the Earth. In 2005 a Russian made satellite owned by the Iranian state has been launched into space with the help of a Russian built rocket. Shortly after that, Iran stated that it will begin the assembly for a satellite to be sent into space with its own forces.