Ahmadinejad says he is ready to be first Iranian in space

Reuters

(Reuters) - President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Monday he was ready to be the first human sent into orbit by Iran's fledgling space program, Iranian media reported.

Iran [1] declared last week that it had successfully launched a monkey into space and retrieved it alive, which officials hailed as a major step towards their goal of sending humans into space.

The launch added to Western concerns about Iran's space program because the same rocket technology could potentially be used to deliver a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile.

"I am ready to be the first human to be sent to space by Iranian scientists," Ahmadinejad said on Monday, on the sidelines of an exhibition of space achievements in Tehran, according to the Mehr news agency.

"Sending living things into space is the result of Iranian efforts and the dedication of thousands of Iranian scientists."

Ahmadinejad is known for provocative public comments and it was unclear whether the suggestion was a serious one.

His second and final term as president ends in August, and his political star has been on the wane since he fell out with parliament early in his second term and appeared to lose the support of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

On Sunday he stood up in parliament to play a tape recording that he said provided evidence of corruption by the family of parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani, his political arch-rival and a likely frontrunner to succeed him as president. Larijani and his brother Fazel denied the accusations.

(This version of the story corrects the end of Ahmadinejad's term to August from June in paragraph seven.)

(Reporting by Yeganeh Torbati; Editing by Marcus George and Kevin Liffey)

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