

Iran's first satellite equipped to spy on Mideast, Israel

SPECIAL TO WORLD TRIBUNE.COM

Friday, October 28, 2005

MOSCOW — Iran has sent its first satellite into space in a move expected to provide the Islamic republic with reconnaissance capabilities over Israel and the rest of the Middle East.

On Thursday, a Kosmos-3M booster rocket successfully launched Iran's Sina-1 satellite from the Plesetsk cosmodrome in northwestern Russia. The launch of Iran's Sina-1 satellite was deemed a success.

Later, Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency said Sina-1 weighs 170 kilograms and has been fitted with two space cameras, Middle East Newline reported. The satellite, with a 20-kilogram payload, was said to have a shelf life of three years.

Russian officials said Sina-1 was developed in cooperation with Moscow and manufactured in Iran. They said Sina-1, described as a miniature remote-sensing facility designed to evaluate satellite design concepts, can relay images of earth and communicate on VHF and UHF frequencies.

Western analysts called the Iranian launch a milestone. They said Iran has achieved limited space reconnaissance capability over the entire Middle East, including Israel.

"The satellite will be mainly used in telecommunications and taking photographs of the earth," IRNA said. "In addition, the satellite can be used to photograph natural disasters, resources and farmlands."

Officials said Russia had also planned to launch Iran's second satellite, Mesbah, aboard the Kosmos-3. But they said Mesbah was damaged by a short-circuit in the electrical system in September 2005.

Mesbah has been termed a reconnaissance satellite that contained a communications payload. The satellite has been produced by Italy's Carlo Gavazzi Space.

"The Mesbah would require repairs and a comprehensive inspection before launch," an official said. "This could take several months."

The next step for Iran, the analysts said, was the launch of a satellite on an indigenous rocket. Iran has developed an enhanced Shihab-3 missile with a range of 2,000 kilometers and was working on a Shihab-4, with a range of 2,500 kilometers. The Shihab-4 was meant to also serve as a space-launch vehicle.

"The satellite launcher is apparently not ready, but they preferred to send it already rather than wait," Tal Inbar, a researcher at Israel's Fisher Institute for Strategic Air and Space Studies, said. "It is clear that Iran plans to use space for military purposes. We are talking about the first capabilities for Iran."