



## News from the Nations

### US and Russia in row over illegal arms exports

According to a daily news reporter from Washington, a dispute between Russia and America broke into the open as the White House accused Moscow of doing nothing to halt illegal arms exports to Iraq, despite repeated high-level pleas from Washington. The Russian foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, denied the charges, saying US complaints are baseless. Apparently, since Russia's fierce resistance to a second resolution authorising force in Iraq, the gloves have come off in Washington. Mr Fleischer, the White House spokesman, said: "We are very concerned that there are reports of ongoing cooperation and support to Iraqi military forces being provided by a Russian company that produces GPS jamming equipment. There are other causes of concern as well involving night vision goggles and antitank guided missiles". President Putin assured President Bush that he would look into it. American anger reached a peak recently when it emerged that Russian technicians from Avia-conversiya are in Iraq, helping the Iraqis to use the satellite guidance jammers.

### ALARM AS IRAN OPENS CRUCIAL ATOMIC PLANT

*Iran will start operating a uranium processing plant within the next few weeks, according to a foreign-affairs writer. Western intelligence agencies have given warning for more than a decade that Teheran was secretly developing nuclear weapons. Washington has contended that Iran does not need nuclear energy, because of its extensive oil and gas supplies. Teheran says that it has to ensure power supplies that are independent of outside influences. The opening of a uranium processing plant in Isfahan, central Iran, shortly is bound to set fresh alarm bells ringing. Iran has always firmly denied developing a secret nuclear-weapons programme, but the Isfahan plant would be an essential piece in a chain of installations that go towards producing the enriched uranium essential for atomic armaments.*

### Libya's new United Nations role

According to the latest ICM opinion poll, eighty-one per cent of the British public would support war against Iraq with—and only with—the support of the UN. Yet the United Nations has just elected Libya as the chairman of its Human Rights Commission, ignoring objections from America, Canada and Guatemala. There were seventeen abstentions, including Britain and other European states. Kevin Moley, the American ambassador, told reporters he was "deeply disappointed" at the outcome. "Libya's government continues to commit serious human rights violations", he said. "A country with this record does not merit a leadership role".

### Syrian nuclear reactor?

According to a reporter in Moscow, Russia is in negotiations to build a nuclear power plant in Syria, risking damage to its tighter relationship forged with the West in recent months, and triggering fresh concerns over the spread of nuclear weapons. Moscow's ministry of atomic energy (Minatom) confirmed the discussions recently. It said Syria wanted the project and that Russia "in principle" could supply it, while stressing that an agreement was "not ready". Washington has long been a critic of Russia's contract to build the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran, which Russia is seeking to expand, as well as Russian agreements to build reactors in other countries. The details emerged after a statement on the foreign ministry website that an agreement had been drafted under which Russia would build a nuclear power plant and an atomic desalination plant in Syria. Minatom said that the Bushehr contract with Iran was worth about £620 million, with an equivalent sum from a project in India and twice as much from one in China. Recently it expressed interest in cooperation with North Korea, while stressing that it abides by all nonproliferation agreements.

### Russia and North Korea

*Russia has positioned itself to be an important mediator in the crisis over North Korea's nuclear programme. Putin's first foreign visit after becoming president was to Pyongyang, breathing new life into decades-old ties with a former client state.*

### **NATO may take prominent role in Afghan force**

Germany and the Netherlands recently took over command of Isaf, the international peacekeeping force in Kabul, amid signs that NATO could take a commanding role in the force, and as debate continues over the extension of the peacekeeping effort. NATO has been at a loss for a role in Afghanistan since the military alliance was sidelined during the US-led campaign by the administration of George Bush. "For the first time NATO capabilities are being employed in Afghanistan—perhaps an initial step to an extended NATO responsibility for this country", said German defence minister Peter Struck, during the Isaf hand-over ceremony in Kabul. NATO is helping the German-led command with planning, communications and intelligence. George Robertson, NATO secretary-general, appeared to support Mr Struck's proposal, saying that NATO could play "a bigger part" in Afghan peacekeeping. He said, "The unseemly scramble to find a country to command the force in Kabul gives neither the Afghans, their neighbours nor the remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda the sense we are there for the long haul". However, France is blocking efforts to play a greater role, saying it does not want NATO to have any "out of area" role.

**Russian uranium for Iran plant**  
Iran's controversial Bushehr power plant will receive its first shipment of enriched uranium from Russia in May, Iranian officials said recently. A ten-year economic programme is proposed that would include the supply of five more nuclear reactors. Igor Ivanov, Russia's foreign minister, reiterated his support for the plant during a two-day visit to Teheran, saying, "Iran has no plans to produce nuclear military projects".

### **US deploys bombers as deterrent to north Korea**

Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, has ordered twenty-four long-range bombers to the Pacific island of Guam, a deployment that officials said was designed to show North Korea that the US intends to deter any aggressive actions even as it builds up forces in the Gulf. The bombers were put on alert in February. It is reported that hundreds of thousands of US and South Korean troops are expected to participate in "Foil Eagle", an annual training drill designed to test readiness for possible war with North Korea. Nearly 40,000 US troops are stationed in South Korea as a deterrent against aggression by the North. Washington has insisted that this "defence-orientated" exercise is part of routine training. The US has stressed it has no plans to invade Korea, but refused to rule out military action when asked by news reporters.

### **NORTH KOREA—WORLD VIEWS**

The observations of a *Newsweek* reporter on the North Korean situation are: "North Korea has announced that it will restart its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, which would mean the ongoing production of plutonium, the key ingredient in a nuclear bomb. Worse, it appears to be on the verge of moving its existing fuel rods away from the reactor, where it could extract enough weapons-grade plutonium to make six nuclear bombs. Once this happens the plutonium will be untouchable, out of sight of any future inspectors and out of reach of a military strike, hidden in mountains and caves. Plutonium will be forever". Bill Rammell, Foreign Office minister with responsibility for North Korea, said Kim Jong-Il's regime was "posturing and attention seeking in a crude attempt to gain economic leverage". Speaking to the *Financial Times*, he voiced fears that Pyongyang was preparing to carry out further missile tests. "Whether it's during the conflict with Iraq, or after that . . . this is probably going to get worse before it gets better".

### **The pope speaks to the Greek Orthodox Church**

In a recent message to His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, the pope said regarding the 'Christian future of Europe', "The Catholic Church knows she has a mission to fulfil on the continent of Europe at this time in history, and the responsibility she perceives coincides with that of the Orthodox Church of Greece. What is at stake is the promotion in Europe, here and now, of human and religious values, of the recognition of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities, of the protection of the sacredness of life and of the safeguard of creation. We are motivated by the deep conviction that the 'old continent' must not lose the Christian riches of its cultural heritage, and must not forego any of what made it great in the past, the spread of so many treasures in the East and West of Europe. The Church of Rome is available for reciprocal collaboration, conscious of the need to integrate the Greek, Latin and Slav traditions of contemporary Europe, so that they may be joined together in a harmonious whole".