



News from the Nations

Israel's natural gas windfall

Recent exploration 90 kilometres from Haifa has uncovered what tests indicate is Israel's largest offshore well. Moreover, this could be just the beginning. A report in the *Jerusalem Post* states: "The seabed off Israel's coast may contain much more gas than has already been found, and maybe even oil, a possibility that already has several energy companies preparing plans for expanding exploration all along the coast. A consortium, which carried out the prospecting under 1,676 mtrs of water and has drilled to a total depth of about 4,900 mtrs, includes the Houston-based oil operator Noble Energy Inc (36 per cent) and the Israeli Delek Group (31.25 per cent) controlled by Israeli real estate tycoon Yitzhak Tshuva, Isramco (28.75 per cent) and Dor Gas Exploration (4 per cent). Much of the credit for the discovery belongs to geologist Yossi Langotsky, who single-handedly tried to convince his people that Israel is a land of hydrocarbon resources, who also says that the gas well is titanic by international standards. It should be kept in mind that in Russia or Iran there are some reservoirs measuring thousands of BCMs (billion cubic metres). Despite the challenges and uncertainties, the potential upside of the project is so huge that some of Israel's neighbours have been casting a jealous eye. Muhammad Kabbani, chairman of the Energy, Infrastructure and Public Works Committee in the Lebanese Parliament, has stated that Lebanon will ask Noble Energy for confirmation that drilling does not reach Lebanese territory. Zvi Greenfeld, president and CEO of Delek, dismisses any foreign claims to the site: 'The site's location is within Israel's maritime economic zone and that has been confirmed by the most authoritative sources'. Yossi Langotsky regards the Lebanese claims as ludicrous, pointing out that Tamar 2 is 90 kms (60 miles) west of Haifa. He says that 'international treaties grant each sovereign nation ownership over sea-based resources (up to 200 nautical miles) off its coast, and beyond that general principle, exact maps detailing which areas of the oceans belong territorially to each nation have existed for a long time, and the boundaries between the territories of Israel, Cyprus, Lebanon and Egypt are long established. The Lebanese claims are patent nonsense. Even so, with the Tamar I well, there are still several technical and commercial hurdles that will need to be overcome before the first gas is successfully extracted'".

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS URGE BAN ON ARMS TO ISRAEL

The Liberal Democrats have called for a suspension of British arms sales to Israel following the Gaza conflict. In a wide-ranging motion proposed by MP Edward Davey, the party's foreign affairs spokesman, at its spring conference in Harrogate, delegates also voted for the suspension of the update to Israel's association agreement with the EU.

The pope's visit to Israel

Pope Benedict XVI confirmed recently that he was going to Israel in May, and will definitely visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, the Jerusalem Post was told. The pope will arrive in Israel from Jordan, said a church official, and will also visit Bethlehem. At each stop, in his position as both head of the Catholic Church and a head of state, he will meet with local church and political leaders, notably King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Shimon Peres of Israel and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. There will be major masses in Amman, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth, the official said. Unlike Pope John Paul II, who visited the Temple Mount during his visit in 2000 but did not go into al-Aksa, Benedict will enter that mosque, the official said.

Iranian bomb just months away

Israel warned the Obama Administration recently that the window of opportunity for dealing diplomatically with the Iranian nuclear threat has closed. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, "At the Israeli cabinet meeting recently Major Yadlin, commander of the IDF's [Israel Defence Force's] intelligence branch, said Iran had crossed the technological threshold. It is one strategic decision away from becoming a nuclear-enabled military power. He indicated that Iran can now build a bomb in a matter of months. General Yadlin's statement is being seen as a wake-up call to the United States".

IDF chief warns Pentagon over Iran

IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi has met his US counterparts in Washington for talks aimed at convincing the Obama Administration of the urgency of acting against Iran's nuclear programme. Senior Israeli military sources have made it clear that a decision on an Israeli strike against Iran will top the agenda of a new government headed by Binyamin Netanyahu.

IRAN THREATENS ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR SITES

Iran has given a warning that Israel's nuclear facilities are within range of its missiles. The country's military chief, General Ali Jafari, said, "Iran now has a mighty military force capable of deterring any US or Israeli attack—all nuclear facilities in various parts of the lands under occupation of the Zionist régime are within the range of Iran's missiles".

Iran buys anti-aircraft missiles from Russia

It is reported in the *Jewish Chronicle* that a sale of advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Teheran has made the need to deal with Iran's nuclear programme more urgent than ever. A senior source in Russia's Federal Bureau of Military-Technological Co-operation confirmed to the Interfax news agency recently that in 2007 his country had signed a contract to sell the S-300 PMU missile system to Iran. The official said that the system had not yet been supplied. Israel has over the last two years been lobbying Russia not to supply the equipment—believed to be one of the most advanced anti-aircraft missile systems in the world—to the Iranians. If a supply date is imminent, it could drastically narrow the opportunity that Israel and the US have to act militarily against the Iranian nuclear programme.

Israel-hate in EU parliament

According to United Kingdom Independence party leader Nigel Farage, as reported in the Jewish Chronicle, "there is a strong bias against Israel within the European Union and an emergence of a trendy new form of anti-Semitism in politics. Nigel Farage, head of the party's delegation of nine Euro-MPs, said there is a fundamental dislike of Israel, and it's more than that. UKIP opposes calls to suspend the EU's trade agreements with Israel and is critical of European aid to the Palestinian Authority". Media tycoon Rupert Murdoch has also warned that Israel's legitimacy and security are under attack from opponents of "freedom, tolerance and democracy" around the world. Warning of further threats from Iran's nuclear programme, and from international terrorism, such as last autumn's attacks in Mumbai, he told an audience in New York of a growing assault on the legitimacy and security of Israel: "This assault comes from people who make clear they have no intention of ever living side by side in peace with a Jewish State, no matter how many concessions Israel might make", he said. "They hate Israel for the same reasons they hate us. The Western world has to stand with Israel. We think Israel cannot survive without the help of Europe and the United States; maybe we should start wondering whether we in Europe and the United States can survive if we allow the terrorists to succeed in Israel".

Durban II pullout

America has pulled out of the United Nations Durban review conference on combating racism, to be held in Geneva this month, with Britain still in the wings. The US State Department announced its decision recently after several days locked in talks about the draft final document, but ultimately admitted defeat, saying it had gone "from bad to worse, and the current text of the draft outcome document is not salvageable". The decision has been welcomed by both the World and European Jewish Congress and the Jewish Human Rights Coalition in Britain. Britain will wait until the last minute before making a decision about whether or not it will participate. US Board of Deputies' president Henry Grunwald says he thinks the UK will withdraw but will wait awhile before doing so.

The Jews of Iran

Up-to-date statistics in the Jewish Chronicle give details of the number of Jews living in Iran thirty years ago as compared with today. Thirty years ago the number was around 80,000. In 1979 the Shah Reza Pahlavi took flight from Iran after demonstrations against his rule. Then Ayatollah Khomeini, the country's spiritual leader, who had been living in exile since 1964, returned to Teheran to establish an Islamic republic. The Jewish Chronicle says: "Although he decreed that Jews were to be protected, links with Israel were cut and Jews were arrested for having contacts with Israel and Zionism. Some 20,000 left the country in the months following the revolution, but many remained. There are now thought to be between 30,000 and 40,000 Jews living in Iran today".