



News from the Nations

EU pledge on aid to Baghdad

The European Union recently pledged to help build a stable democracy in Iraq. EU governments have made it clear that they would like to put past disagreements behind them and play a role in helping to restore stability, though without legitimising the US-led invasion. Iraq thanked the EU for being the largest donor of humanitarian aid to his country, but called for more "direct assistance" and "political visibility". According to The Guardian, the EU is already committed to spending £203 million in humanitarian and reconstruction aid for Iraq this year. Last month the European Commission approved a medium-term strategy for relations with Baghdad, designed to lead to an EU-Iraq agreement covering trade, aid and political and cultural dialogue after 2006.

Earth movement in Israel

Within the last few weeks, for the second time in five months, a moderate earthquake centred north of the Dead Sea caused a tremor felt in the south as well as in Jerusalem, parts of the Dan region, and as far north as Haifa. Israel's Geophysical Institute said the quake, originating some twenty-five kilometres north of the Dead Sea, measured 4.7 on the Richter scale. This was slightly less than the one in February, which measured 5, and was felt throughout Israel and neighbouring countries. Scores of people reported feeling the latest quake, but there were no casualties or any serious damage. The tremor lasted for about ten seconds, but some people evacuated buildings for fear of a more serious quake.

Quality oil find near Tel Aviv

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, "A Russian immigrant geologist, who sought and received the Lubavitcher Rebbe's blessing before starting exploration 12 years ago, claimed very recently to have discovered an oilfield in central Israel that could produce up to 30,000 barrels a day, one-tenth of the country's needs. The Israeli Government has granted Tovia Luskin's company Givot Olam a production lease on the field 'Eternal Hills', which is situated to the east of Tel Aviv, near Rosh Ha'ayin and Kfar Saba. Mr Luskin, a strictly Orthodox Jew, told the *Jewish Chronicle*, 'It is not a major field by Middle East standards, but it is a good sized field, bigger than average. The oil is of high quality'. He planned to drill 30-40 wells, each of which could pump 1,000 barrels a day in the early years. He dismissed a suggestion that it would change the balance of power between Israel and the Arabs. Israel consumes about 300,000 barrels of oil a day. After half a century, its only productive field is rapidly running dry, delivering barely 25 barrels a day. Givot Olam invested \$30 million in exploration over 12 years. The Israeli oil field is its only project. Mr Luskin is now seeking a further \$30 million from the stock exchange or a strategic partner to put it into production. He was born in Russia 53 years ago and left after graduating in geology in 1975. For the next 15 years he worked for Shell and other international oil companies in Canada, Australia and Indonesia. The company takes its name from Moses' farewell to the children of Israel in chapter 33 of Deuteronomy, in which he blesses them with 'the precious things of the eternal hills'".

Catholics lead 'Together in Europe' weekend

A gathering of 10,000-plus young Christians in Stuttgart, Germany, in May last, was planned and led by the Roman Catholic Focolare Movement. Yet it was endorsed by many evangelical groups, including co-organisers Youth with a Mission (YWAM) Europe, and by leading German evangelicals Ulrich Parzany and Walter Heidenreich. Tens of thousands more young Christians were connected to the event by satellite relay broadcasts. Jeff Fountain, director of YWAM Europe, said that the event was initiated by the Christian movements and communities for renewal and social commitment, a network of fraternal relationships including Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Reformed and Anglican believers. Its purpose was to "affirm and celebrate Europe's Christian heritage" and to help strengthen the demand to incorporate a reference to God in the European Constitution. The groups arranging the meeting support the European Constitution.

France and Turkey

According to a Newsweek report, headed "France gives the nod to Turkish membership in the European Union. What is Paris up to?", when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited President Chirac in Paris recently, hoping the ever-reluctant French would back Turkey's bid to join the European Union, the cash-and-carry policymaking was right out in front. As one senior Turkish official told Newsweek, "The intention was to spread a package of economic benefits before Chirac that France could not reject. Turkish Airlines announced it would purchase 36 Airbus planes worth more than \$1.5 billion. [Turkish Prime Minister] Erdogan also hinted he might be in the market for France's big ticket nuclear technology. And just after years of implicit opposition and fence-straddling, Chirac suddenly decided that support for Turkey's candidacy suits 'the national interests' of France. As Europe has expanded its frontiers, the eternal French game for power and influence inside the Union has moved to the countries just outside. Relations with Turkey, Israel, Iraq, the whole of the Middle East and North Africa are in line. Against the odds, Chirac seeks to create a tightknit new Europe, one that will be an alternate, if not opposite, pole of power to the United States. Chirac himself has always been a champion of a tightly integrated Europe, with France in the driver's seat—and although France and Germany make a show of their cosy cooperation these days, their inherent rivalry remains. The Turks' vast economic, emigrant and historical ties to Germany probably would tip Europe's core balance of power even further toward Berlin".

ISRAEL REROUTES BARRIER

According to the Jerusalem Post, Israel is rerouting its controversial West Bank security barrier to minimise the hardship for Palestinian civilians. Defence Ministry spokeswoman Rachel Ashkenazi told the Jerusalem Post recently that the "combination of wall and fence would be built closer to the pre-1967 war Green Line border and would try to avoid separating farmers from their fields, and children from their schools". The military planning team is due to present a revised map to Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon and Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz by the end of the month. It will then go to the government for review and approval. Officials insist the changes are being made in response to last month's Israeli Supreme Court ruling, stipulating that the route must balance security concerns with Palestinian human rights, and not to the recent highly critical International Court of Justice opinion, which Israel rejected. The changes will concentrate on the 491 kilometres that have not yet been built. These run from the settlement of Elkana south to Jerusalem, enveloping the capital itself, and from there southward.

Hizbullah threatens Israel

According to the Jerusalem Post, Iran may arm Hizbullah with chemical weapons, the Israeli army's military intelligence research chief Brigadier General Yossi Kuperwasser told legislators in July.

Sharon's appeal to French Jews

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon recently called on France's 600,000 Jews to immigrate to Israel "immediately", prompting the French Foreign Ministry to issue a response calling his comments "unacceptable" and to inform the Israeli premier that he would not be welcome and should halt preparations for a visit to Paris. "If I have to advocate to our brothers in France, I would tell them one thing: Move to Israel, as early as possible", Sharon told a meeting of the United Jewish Communities in Jerusalem. In reply, Sharon's office released a very unapologetic clarification, reported in the Jewish Chronicle as follows: "The Prime Minister reiterates there is anti-Semitism in France, and, despite the serious measures the French Government is taking, he urges French Jews to immigrate to Israel—just as he urges Jews worldwide to immigrate to Israel". Mr Sharon extended a hand of hope to French Jews who may feel under siege in a country where Muslims outnumber them ten to one, and where the likelihood of being attacked for being Jewish is at its highest level since the Second World War.

EU force to replace NATO troops in Bosnia

The European Union recently took the formal decision to begin its biggest military mission yet, a 7,000-strong force intended to replace the NATO-led force in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the end of the year. Many of the soldiers in the new operation will come from the previous NATO force, and NATO will be given a key role under asset-sharing arrangements known as 'Berlin plus'. The EU hopes that the mission will be able to bring military as well as civil resources to a country that remains poor and unstable but that the EU believes should eventually join the union.