



News from the Nations

Major arms cache on cargo ship

According to the *International Jerusalem Post*, Israeli special Navy forces discovered weapons and ammunition in November after boarding a cargo ship flying an Antiguan flag some 100 nautical miles west of Israel. Officials said the ship, captured near Cyprus, was carrying arms sent by Iran and destined for Syria and Hizbullah. Soldiers from the elite Navy Commando unit, Shayetet 13, who did not encounter resistance on board, found the weapons and ammunition cache hidden behind what appeared to be a civilian cargo. There were thirty-six containers belonging to the Iranian national shipping company with more than 300 tons of armaments; these were loaded onto the ship in an Egyptian port en route to the Syrian port of Latakia. The ship had departed a week earlier from the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and travelled through the Straits of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. The ship was diverted to the port of Ashdod where the weapons were unloaded. The Israel Defence Force believes that this sea route is the main channel used by Iran and Syria to smuggle arms to Hizbullah. According to the officials, the vessel carried advanced weaponry, including missiles, and the incident was apparently similar in scope to the seizing of the *Karine A* intercepted in January 2002 off the coast of Gaza. That ship was carrying fifty tons of military equipment, including Katyusha rockets, anti-tank missiles and high explosives. A month ago *Der Spiegel* reported that the US Navy had boarded a German cargo ship near the Suez Canal that was carrying ammunition from Iran to Syria or Hizbullah. The shipment included thousands of mid-range rockets made in Iran and Russia, anti-tank artillery shells, mortar bombs, hand grenades and Kalashnikov rifle ammunition.

EUROPEAN UNION'S PRESIDENT

The new European Union president, Herman Van Rompuy, was Belgian prime minister for less than a year after coming to power following a banking crisis. "He was born in Brussels, he was educated at the Jesuit Sint-Jan Berchmans College in central Brussels, then studied philosophy and economics at the Catholic University of Leuven. Before entering politics, Van Rompuy worked at the Belgian central bank. He was vice president of the Flemish Christian Democrat Youth section from 1973 to 1975, and from 1978 he was a member of the National Bureau of the CVP. Van Rompuy is a Catholic and has often gone on religious retreats in the Abbey of Affligem (Flemish Brabant, Belgium) to renew his faith and meditate" (Reuters).

Missile defence

During October Israeli and US troops took part in Juniper Cobra, a two-week joint military exercise aimed at testing the two countries' missile defences.

Israel's reaction to a declaration of a Palestinian state

Israeli politicians were up in arms over the stated intention of the Palestinian Authority unilaterally to declare an independent state in the near future. Unilateral steps on the Palestinian side will be met by similar moves from Israel, they ominously warned, hinting at possible annexations of parts of the West Bank, as they did in east Jerusalem after the Six-Day War in 1967. Such a declaration, they promised, would mean an end to any diplomatic process with the Palestinians.

Brown in move to let Catholics take throne

Gordon Brown has paved the way for sweeping changes to the 300-year-old law that prevents Roman Catholics ascending to the throne. Mr Brown has made it clear that he also wants to change the rule which prevents women taking their place ahead of men in the line to the throne. The prime minister planned to raise the controversial issue at a Commonwealth summit in Trinidad. At present, members of the Royal family are forbidden by the Act of Settlement of 1701 from converting to Roman Catholicism unless they agree to being removed from the succession.

Clinton diplomacy

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met Netanyahu in Jerusalem on 31 October, calling Israeli concessions aimed at restarting the talks "unprecedented", and rejecting Palestinian calls for a complete halt to Israeli settlement activity prior to the renewal of peace talks.

Jerusalem to be divided into zones

The Jerusalem Municipality has announced plans to split the city into seven operational zones in an effort to improve delivery of services such as sanitation and maintenance. City Hall announced the new programme with the goal of boosting the city's residents' quality of life, along with the capital's overall appearance. Under the plan, a 'zone manager' will be appointed for each area. "The demarcation of the city into operational zones will bring an improvement to the municipal system, and will improve the connection between the various municipal branches", Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat said of the plan. "We are talking about one of the most complex reform programmes the city has ever undertaken", said the municipality's policy and strategic planning head Roy Folkman. Representatives have already begun touring the neighbourhoods that make up each zone, to gain a better idea of the challenges various district managers will be facing.

Israel returns to growth

Israel is officially out of recession after the Central Bureau of Statistics reported that the country's economy grew 2.2 per cent on an annualised basis in the third quarter of 2009. This followed 1 per cent growth in the second quarter. Israel was one of the last Western countries into recession, enjoying growth of 4 per cent last year despite a contraction of 1.6 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2008. The recession hit hardest in the first quarter of this year, when the Israeli economy contracted by 3.2 per cent. Growth in the second quarter was led by exports of goods and services, which rose by 21.8 per cent on an annualised basis, after a 14.6 per cent rise in the second quarter.

New calls to internationalise Jerusalem

The recent unrest at the Temple Mount has prompted calls by the UN and the Arabs to end Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem's Old City and bring it under international control. Israel Today reported that "for Muslims, Jews and Christians, for Israelis and Palestinians, and for peoples around the world, Jerusalem represents a place of faith and longing, a symbol of aspirations for nationhood and a sacred space that must be open to all". UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the Jerusalem International Forum in Morocco, "Jerusalem is a core issue that must be resolved through negotiations . . . The international community does not recognise Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, subject to the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention. If peace is to be achieved, the goal must be for Jerusalem to be the capital of two states living side by side in peace and security, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all". The Palestinian Minister for Jerusalem Affairs, Hatam Abdel Kader, told Israel Today that control of the Temple Mount should be handed over to the fifty-seven member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. "They would be objective overseers of the holy places in Jerusalem", he said. "But the most important thing is to end the Israeli occupation once and for all".

"We must give voice to Hamas", says the BBC

The BBC Trust has said that the terror organisation Hamas "should be treated fairly and a right of reply conferred where appropriate". The response was revealed after the Trust rejected a complaint from solicitor Andrew White, who runs a pro-Israeli website, beyondimages.info. He had complained originally that a website article about a BBC Panorama programme on Gaza gave a "very skewed" view of Hamas, air-brushing out much of its violent actions against Israel and Palestinians in Gaza. Mr White had pursued his complaint through all three levels of the BBC's complaints procedure, of which the Trust is the last. He argued that all criticism of Hamas had been left out of the web summary, but that criticism of Israel remained.

Evacuation of Jews from Yemen

According to the Jewish Chronicle, "Dozens of Jews have been evacuated from Yemen in a clandestine operation by the US Government. Yemen's Jewish population is thought to date back about 2,500 years. The majority of its Jews, about 49,000 people, were airlifted to Israel in Operation Magic Carpet during 1949 and 1950. By the beginning of this year, about 300 remained. Yemen has become increasingly unstable and growing Islamic militancy has brought a rise in anti-Semitism. Around 120 Yemeni Jews had been expected to move to London in April, after the Home Office agreed to them rejoining family members who had settled in Stamford Hill, but this was delayed. According to a report in the Wall Street Journal, the US embassy issued visas because it feared further attacks on the Jews could weaken US public support for Yemen. Meanwhile, Jewish charities raised \$715,000 to support the refugees. The first Yemeni Jews arrived in New York in July. Since then about 60 people have immigrated".