



News from the Nations

Iran's new missiles

Iran has taken delivery of missiles that could be fitted with nuclear warheads and are capable of reaching Europe, it was claimed in a recent media report. The BM-25 surface-to-surface missiles were bought from North Korea, according to Israeli military intelligence. Iran already has missiles capable of reaching Israel. But the new weapons, which have a range of 1,559 miles, are a significant upgrade. The end of April was the deadline set by the UN for Iran to halt its uranium enrichment programme. Hard-line president Ahmadinejad has vowed that "no one" can force Iran into abandoning the programme.

Kadima vows withdrawal by 2008

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert intends to complete a unilateral withdrawal from most of the West Bank by the time US President Bush finishes his term in November 2008, the Jerusalem Post revealed recently. The new date cuts two years from the deadline Olmert set for himself in interviews ahead of the election. Mr Olmert himself said in an interview with Newsweek that he would seek US recognition for the borders if he sets them unilaterally. Addressing Palestinian President Abbas after leading his centrist Kadima Party to victory recently, Olmert said, "We are prepared to compromise, give up parts of our beloved land of Israel, remove, painfully, Jews who live there, to allow you the conditions to achieve your hopes".

Turkey's pursuit

A recent report in *Newsweek*, entitled, "Turkey embraces hot pursuit in northern Iraq", says, "Could another front be opening in the Iraq war? Over recent weeks some 200,000 Turkish troops, backed by tanks and helicopter gunships, have massed along the mountainous border with Iraq. Trucks passing from Turkey, ferrying the imported goods and foodstuffs that are the lifeblood of the Kurdish economy, have slowed from 2,000 a day to just a couple of hundred. The Turkish military says its troops are there only to prevent armed insurgents of the Kurdish PKK rebel group from crossing into Turkey from their bases on Iraq's Kandil Mountain. But last week, according to angry Foreign Ministry officials in Baghdad, Turkish commandos briefly crossed 15 kilometres into Iraqi territory in pursuit of PKK rebels—a move that could signal dangerous new frictions to come". The report further says, "tensions are rising. Shia militiamen from Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army have begun moving into oil-rich Kirkuk, claimed as part of Kurdistan . . . Ankara is losing patience with the United States, which has promised to deal with the PKK problem . . . Washington is caught between two allies—NATO member Turkey, its closest friend in the Muslim world, and the Iraqi Kurds, its closest ally within Iraq. By rights . . . dealing with the PKK 'should be the responsibility of the Iraqi government', as a senior Iraqi official puts it. In words widely interpreted in Ankara as a veiled threat to support a Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey if the cross-border raids continue, Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government, warned recently that if Turkey tries 'to stop our people from profiting or progressing', then Turkey's own 'stability and security' would suffer. That kind of talk is likely to reinforce Turkey's determination to stamp out the PKK once and for all—and take their war inside Iraq if necessary".

ISRAEL LAUNCHES SPY SATELLITE

According to the Jerusalem Post, Israel has fortified its presence in space this April by successfully launching the Eros B spy satellite from a mobile launch pad at the Svobodny cosmodrome in Siberia. The satellite, which has the ability to spot images as small as seventy centimetres on the ground, will enhance Israel's ability to spy on and follow developments at Iran's nuclear facilities, officials said. They said the satellite was at the forefront of image satellites in the world. Outgoing Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz called the launching of the Eros B satellite a "great achievement" for the defence establishment and the State of Israel, and said, "This satellite will enhance our ability to collect quality intelligence at great distances from Israel. Israel proved once again that it first relies on itself when it comes to protecting its citizens and is at work all the time to develop advanced and new technological means to deal with the threats around us".

Iran's spies watching Israel

According to a report in the Daily Telegraph by its Defence and Security Editor, writing from Israel's northern border, Israeli military commanders claim that Hizbullah allies in border control towers are lining up possible targets. Iran has set up a sophisticated intelligence-gathering operation in southern Lebanon to identify targets in northern Israel in the event of a military confrontation over its controversial nuclear programme. Senior Israeli military commanders say Iran has spent tens of millions of pounds helping its close ally, Hizbullah, the Shia Muslim militant group that controls southern Lebanon, to set up a network of control towers and monitoring stations along the entire length of Israel's border with south Lebanon. Some of the new control towers, which are made of reinforced concrete and fitted with bullet-proof reflective glass, are less than 100 yards from Israeli army positions and are clearly visible for long stretches along Israel's border. "This is now Iran's front line with Israel", a senior Israeli military commander said. "The Iranians are using Hizbullah to spy on us so that they can collect information for future attacks. And there is very little we can do about it". The Israeli military has reported a significant increase in Hizbullah activity in southern Lebanon since Syria came under intense international pressure to withdraw its forces from the area last year following the assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister, Rafik Hariri. Israeli military officers report that teams of Iran's Revolutionary Guards travel regularly to southern Lebanon to help train Hizbullah fighters in terrorist tactics. "Iran is playing a very dangerous game of cat and mouse on our northern border and it could easily spiral out of control at any moment". In recent weeks Hizbullah sent unmanned aircraft on reconnaissance missions over the border to photograph sensitive Israeli military installations. Iran has also equipped Hizbullah with improved weapons and ammunition to launch attacks against Israel.

Iran steps up threats against Israel

As Jerusalem urged the world to act swiftly against Iran's nuclear threat, a group in Teheran said it was trying to recruit Iranians and other Muslims in the UK to carry out suicide bombings against Israel. According to the *Guardian* newspaper, the Committee for the Commemoration of Martyrs of the Global Islamic Campaign said it was targeting potential recruits in Britain because of the relative ease with which UK passport holders can enter Israel. The *Guardian* reported that a spokesman for the group said, "The first target is Israel, for us that is the battlefield . . . Israel is a rotten, dried tree that will be eliminated by one storm". Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres cautioned recently, "We must not let Israel stand at the head of the campaign, since then it will be perceived as an Israeli-Iranian issue and could lead to an end of international pressure". Moscow, however, has warned against the use of force to deal with Teheran. Mr Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, said that military strikes on nuclear facilities would create "a dangerous explosive blaze in the Middle East, where there are already enough blazes".

The UN reports on Syria and Lebanon

A new UN report calls for the disbanding of Hizbullah and for setting clear borders between Lebanon and Syria. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in the report, compiled by envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, that it was now time for Syria to hold a dialogue with Lebanon over exchanging embassies and marking the border between the two countries. The report was prepared as a follow-up to Security Council Resolution 1559, which called for Syrian forces to leave Lebanon.

Iran worries the US

Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, said that Washington was concerned about Iranian threats to share the nuclear technology it is developing with other countries. She was commenting on a statement from Iran's supreme leader that Teheran was prepared to transfer its know-how to other countries. "We have to be concerned when there are statements from Iran", she said. Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, as he met the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, that "Iran's nuclear capability is one example of various scientific capabilities in the country . . . the Islamic Republic of Iran is prepared to transfer the experience, knowledge and technology of its scientists".

Afghan oil reserves

Afghanistan's untapped oil and natural gas reserves may be much bigger than previously thought, according to the results of a survey by the US Geological Survey and the Afghan Ministry of Mining and Industry. The survey shows that two northern regions could contain as much as 1.5 billion barrels of oil and 1,560 billion cubic feet of natural gas. The figures represent the mean of several estimates.