



News from the Nations

Europe may support sanctions on Iran

Senior Israeli officials and analysts are confident that the international community will impose sanctions on Iran if it fails to halt its nuclear weapons programme. They see a major shift in the European position which could see Europe joining a US-led Security Council move to impose sanctions until Iran proves that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only.

ISRAEL'S WAR OF WORDS WITH IRAN

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom stepped up the war of words with Iran during his address to the UN General Assembly in September, saying: "Iran has replaced Saddam Hussein as the world's number one exporter of terror, hate and instability". The international community, Shalom said, "now realises that Iran—with missiles that can reach London, Paris, Berlin and southern Russia—does not only pose a threat to the security of Israel, but to the security and stability of the whole world". Shalom's comments to the General Assembly followed the day after Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi remarked to reporters at the UN that "Israel is always a threat, not only against Iran, but all countries in the Middle East". Shalom, after meeting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, urged the international community to bring the Iranian nuclear issue to the UN Security Council "in order to put an end to this nightmare".

Sinai security depends on more than troops

According to the *Jerusalem Report*, "Egypt's 'permissive' attitude toward weapons smuggling from Sinai into the Gaza Strip provided the backdrop for the deadly October 7 terror attacks on the peninsula's Red Sea coast, according to Israeli defence analyst Shalom Harari. Egypt's move to alter the Camp David peace agreement in order to allow it more troops in Sinai, says Harari, a senior research fellow at the Herzliyah Interdisciplinary Centre, will have no impact without a fundamental change in that attitude . . . Israel has criticised Egypt for doing little to stop the flow of weapons into Gaza through smugglers' tunnels under the border at Rafah. The tunnels are thought to be the main source of arms for Palestinian militants in the Strip and have drawn numerous IDF [Israeli Defence Force] attempts to eradicate them, most notably the massive 'Operation Rainbow' incursion in May . . . 'The Egyptians' permissive attitude provided the context for the terror attacks' [said Harari] . . . Since the violence around the Rafah tunnels in the spring . . . Egypt and Israel have been discussing the possibility of a change that would allow 800 to 1,200 members of Egypt's Hajana border patrol—traditionally a camel-mounted force and now equipped with Soviet BDRM armoured personnel carriers as well—to move up to the border to clamp down on the flow of arms. 'There are arguments in the Defence Ministry' [a] source told the *Report*. 'Some say this would leave an opening that Egypt would eventually use to smuggle in commando forces'".

Howard warns about new EU constitution

The new European constitution will be "a giant ball and chain" round the ankle of British business, Michael Howard, the Conservative leader, said after the signing of the constitution by Tony Blair and twenty-four other EU leaders in Rome. Mr Howard said the constitution had "untold" implications for businesses. It would give EU judges "a blank sheet of paper on which to start rewriting UK employment and trade union legislation". The Conservative leader highlighted the incorporation of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights into the new treaty. He said: "No one knows how these rights will be interpreted. But the omens are not good". He said there had to be a new approach to the EU if Britain was to thrive and survive in today's global markets. It was not a "question of in or out" but of change or decline. "We say no to the constitution, no to the euro, and yes to bringing powers back from Brussels to Britain. Flexibility—not rigidity—is the way forward", Mr Howard said.

European judges end press freedom

The European Court has quietly brushed aside fifty years of international case law in a landmark judgment on press freedom, ruling that Brussels does not have to comply with European human rights codes. According to a report in the Daily Telegraph, "In a judgment with profound implications for civil liberties, Euro judges backed efforts by the European Commission to obtain the computers, address books, telephone records and 1,000 pages of notes seized by Belgian police—on EU instructions—from Hans Tillack, former Brussels correspondent of Germany's Stern magazine. It is a test case of whether the European Court will adhere to the democratic freedoms and liberal principles upheld for the last half-century by Europe's top rights watchdog, the non-EU Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, or whether it will pursue a more authoritarian line as it grows in power. Raymond Kendall, the former Interpol chief and now head of anti-fraud office oversight board, claims that the anti-fraud office head had more power to launch raids and seize documents than any other police chief in the world. He said the body was a danger to civil liberties, and there was absolutely no control. It is not the first time that the European Court has appeared to ignore established human rights law. In theory, the European Court is obliged to defer to the court of human rights as the higher authority in all areas of rights protection. The Tillack rulings offer the first evidence that Euro judges may create their own very different brand of civil rights laws".

Christian aid criticises Israel

According to a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the charity Christian Aid has urged the European Union to take tough action against Israel over its settlement policy and security wall. The London-based charity asserts that without "determined and unambiguous intervention" by the UK and its European partners, generations of Palestinians and Israelis would face a "future of poverty and relentless insecurity". Christian Aid claimed that EU aid had been "undermined—and in many cases destroyed—by Israeli actions. Taxpayers had the right to ask how much more of their money was being "squandered due to lack of concerted political effort to confront Israeli policies which have made that aid necessary". The sixty-eight-page document was titled, "Facts on the Ground—The End of the Two State Solution?". It calls on the EU to demand compliance with human-rights clauses in its Association Agreement with Israel, under which Israeli exports are granted preferential access to European markets. "Failure to do so will undermine such treaties and jeopardise perceptions of Europe's commitment to the rule of law". While also strongly condemning terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians, Christian Aid painted a sombre picture of the situation in Palestinian areas, reporting that in fifty years of work it had "never witnessed such a climate of fear, hopelessness and insecurity as exists now".

Microchip implants

A beach club in Barcelona, Spain, now requires its VIP members to have a chip the size of a large grain of rice implanted by syringe in the skin in order to gain admission. The owner of the club, Conrad Chase, said: "VIPs can identify themselves with our chip and pay for their food and drink without the need for any kind of document". Meanwhile British Home Secretary David Blunkett has announced plans to move as rapidly as possible to the compulsory use of identity cards based on biometric techniques such as fingerprints, iris recognition, facial parameters or DNA. Researchers say the technology is currently available to implant biometric devices in human beings that can be monitored by government satellites.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES SEEKS UNITY

Theologians gathered recently in Kuala Lumpur to seek ways of promoting church unity. The meeting was organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC). A major issue for discussion is baptism, currently regarded as the most promising way to promote church unity. Ecumenists have mostly despaired of finding unity at the communion table because of Rome's intransigence. Last year the WCC general secretary, Konrad Raiser, said there would be "a revolution in ecumenical dialogue if churches were genuinely to recognise each other's baptism". Roman Catholic and Protestant churches had reached common agreement but this needed official acknowledgement, he noted. There is a move in Australia to hold baptisms in public and for ministers of all denominations to participate and then to issue an ecumenical baptismal certificate.