



News from the Nations

Iran's warning to Europe on Israel

According to a media report, Iran's hard-line president has accused Europe of whipping up hatred in the Middle East by supporting Israel. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad warned that Europe "may get hurt" if anger in the region reaches boiling point. He has frequently targeted the US and Israel with his rhetoric, but seldom lashed out at Europe. European countries, frustrated by failed nuclear negotiations with Teheran, have recently toughened their stance. Britain, France and Germany have come close to agreeing a draft UN sanctions resolution against Iran for refusing to halt its uranium enrichment programme. "What benefit have you got in supporting this régime [Israel], except the hatred of the nations?", Ahmadinejad asked Europe. "We have advised the Europeans that the Americans are far away, but you are the neighbours of the nations in this region—if a storm begins, the dimensions will not stay limited to Palestine, and you may get hurt". He also taunted the US over Iran's nuclear programme: "We promise we will produce nuclear fuel in the next five years and will sell it at a fifty-per-cent discount".

ENHANCED SECURITY FOR ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

According to the International Jerusalem Post, the Israeli Government is considering creating an unprecedented security system for the Jewish community of Hebron, including never-before-used hi-tech laser radars, as part of a new NIS 400 million (nearly \$1 million) allocation for security systems at settlements. The Hebron defence system would be part of a second-phase hi-tech settlement security project carried out by the Israel Defence Force. The governmental body that creates security systems for settlements in the West Bank is a branch of the IDF Home Front Command called the Shabam Administration. Shabam is a Hebrew acronym for 'Special Security Zone'. The Shabam Administration was given the mandate and funding to create hi-tech security systems for West Bank settlements. The administration has to date created highly advanced security systems for forty-seven settlements, mostly isolated and far away from the Green Line. The radar has a range of between 400 and 700 metres. In some cases the radar system has provided settlements with a ten-minute warning before terrorists reached them. When the project began early last year, 100 per cent of the security systems around settlements in the West Bank were made up of fences and barbed wire. Today ninety per cent of the system is electronic.

Israelis returning home

In 2005 a total of 4,200 Israelis living abroad returned home, Israeli government figures released recently showed. The majority of those returning were living in the US. More than 600,000 Israelis are thought to be living abroad.

Oil in the Dead Sea area

Oil has been discovered in the Dead Sea area, Dr Eli Tenenbaum, an official from Genco, the national company responsible for drilling in the region, has announced. According to the Jerusalem Post, Tenenbaum said the find could reach commercial levels. "We noticed that the pressure in the area was very high, and when we opened the tap, oil started flowing freely for several minutes—we hope it was the first of many such discoveries".

The pope visits Turkey

Concerns for the pope's visit to Turkey were expressed in a report from the *Daily Telegraph*: "Roman Catholic leaders in Turkey held an emergency summit to discuss threats against Pope Benedict should his planned visit go ahead this month. There has been a sharp increase in anti-Catholic attacks in recent months. Catholic leaders have blamed the attacks on hard-line nationalists who want to preserve the country's Islamic identity. The foreign ministry reiterated that the Pope remains welcome after his expression of regret for hurt among Muslims for the contents of a recent speech. The Vatican remains committed to the trip. The EU issued a robust defence of Pope Benedict's position, warning that fundamental European freedoms were at stake. As a candidate for EU membership, Turkey would be expected to follow Brussels' line . . . Mgr Antonio Lucibello, the papal nuncio, called on the Turkish authorities to guarantee Pope Benedict's safety".

Call for peace from Syria

Syrian President Assad reiterated calls for peace talks with Israel in a recent interview with the BBC, and called into question the strength of the current Israeli Government and its ability to turn towards peace. According to Assad, the proper conditions for negotiations had not yet been achieved, but the Syrian president said he hoped Israel was prepared to agree to neighbourliness with Syria, which was looking for peace. Assad also said his country granted Hizbullah only political and not military support in its fight with Israel, and that Syria was committed to UN Resolution 1701.

Disquiet over charity

Christian Aid continues to upset Jewish leaders. Christian Aid has had a long and troubled relationship with the Jewish community. Although initial meetings between Jewish organisations and the charity were said to have been positive, by this summer the Board of Deputies of British Jews had dismissed Christian Aid's efforts to foster better relations as "window dressing", saying that there had been no serious attempt at addressing Jewish concerns over the charity's campaigns and public statements. Board Chief Executive Jon Benjamin was scathing about a Christian Aid briefing paper for MPs on EU aid to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. In his view it was not only "a missed opportunity to genuinely promote peace while addressing real hardship. It actually provides comfort and encouragement to those who want to achieve the very opposite". Christian Aid was also among the charities which called for an immediate cease-fire during the Lebanon war, and was highly critical of the actions of the Israeli forces.

Britannia rules the waves?

According to a newspaper report, "The European Union was recently accused of a 'sinister' plan to abolish the sovereignty of Britain's territorial waters. It is proposing a 'common maritime space'—a move critics said would lead to Brussels, rather than Britannia, ruling the waves. The change would mean sailing by ferry between Britain and the Continent would be considered a domestic voyage, because at no time will the vessel leave EU waters. Eurocrats claim the plan, being drawn up by the European Commission's transport officials, is designed only to help simplify trade. MPs and shipping bosses said it smacked of creeping federalism. The industry also fears the commission will attempt to protect its maritime space by restricting journeys made by vessels not flying the EU flag. Earlier this year the term 'common European maritime space' was included in a discussion document issued by the Commission. Plans have also been drawn up for an EU coastguard. Officials are gathering industry reaction ahead of making a formal proposal next year but declined to comment. However, Lloyd's List, the newspaper which covers the maritime industries, warned that the description of a 'common European maritime space' contains not a few sinister assumptions in its phraseology, and added, 'All sorts of deep and difficult implications could emerge should the Euro-bureaucrats come to believe that this is a legal term which changes these waters into a political entity'. UK Independence Party transport spokesman Mike Natrass said, 'This is a transparent power grab by an imperialist Brussels autocracy'. The plan is the latest challenge to Britain's maritime sovereignty. The EU has already opened up our fishing zones to Continental rivals and sought to replace the Red Ensign from merchant ships with the Euro flag".

ISRAELI JETS OPENED FIRE ON GERMAN SHIPS

Germany's Defence Ministry recently claimed that two Israel Air Force F-16s have fired shots at a German navy vessel close to the Lebanese coast. A German newspaper reported that a junior German defence minister had told a Bundestag committee that the two fighters flew low over the German ship and fired two shots. The jets also activated infrared counter-measures to ward off any rocket attack, the paper quoted him as saying. Germany assumed command of a United Nations naval force off Lebanon recently, and has sent eight ships and 1,000 service personnel to join the international peace operation in the region. Israel Defence Minister Amir Peretz said that the Israel Air Force would continue to patrol Lebanese skies in an effort to gather information and prevent terror groups from smuggling weapons from Syria into Lebanon. Mr Peretz told the Knesset, "We see ourselves not just as free, but as having the right to continue carrying out these necessary flights, which are part of our challenge to stem the flow of arms from the area of the Syrian Lebanese border". Mr Peretz said that the flights presented no threat to the peace or security of the international forces deployed in Lebanon. In response to threats by French President Chirac that his forces in Lebanon might open fire on Israel Air Force overflights, Mr Peretz said, "We will in no way accept these threats, and we have made that clear [to] all parties".