



News from the Nations

WORRIES OVER LEBANON

Ahmadinejad's recent trip to Lebanon is part of a plan to tighten Iran's grip over the region. According to World News from the Jewish Chronicle, Iran's "geopolitical strategy is now clear. It aims to build an axis to the West, through Iraq, where it is engineering a new government to its liking; on to Syria, its main ally and arms conduit to Lebanon, through Hizbullah, which is now openly acting as a rival to the elected government in Beirut; and on to Islamify Turkey, which it is achieving rapidly. Another significant signal came recently when Chinese combat jets refuelled in Iran, en route to a joint exercise with the Turkish Air Force, the kind of exercise that only two years ago was routinely held with Israel and the United States." Israel's worry is that Ahmadinejad's visit could signal the start of an escalation on its northern border. In a speech given by the Commander of the Israel Defence Force Intelligence Branch, Major General Amod Yadlin said that "Iran is a never-ending source of radical ideology, terror funding, weapons and tactics that are distributed to all of Israel's enemies."

Iran fuels nuclear plant

Iran loaded its first nuclear-power reactor with fuel in October amid increased sanctions by the West and renewed calls for Teheran to reopen talks on its nuclear programme. The Bushehr plant, not directly subject to sanctions, is supervised by the UN's nuclear agency. While Western nations remain suspicious of Iran's nuclear intentions, Iran says that its reactor is expected solely to supply its energy grid.

Peace talks could divide Jerusalem

Palestinians are not prepared to compromise on Jerusalem. "As long as Jerusalem is not yet the Palestinian capital there will be no lasting peace in the region," said Palestinian Religious Affairs Minister Mahmoud Al Habash in a recent speech. "Jerusalem is a city that can spark a thousand and one wars . . . as long as Israel continues to defile Jerusalem, all the doors to conflict and war are wide open." At the same time, the US has backtracked on Jerusalem. When Hillary Clinton was running for president in 2007 she said Jerusalem should remain the undivided capital of Israel. But now, as Secretary of State, she believes the eastern half of the city should be the capital of a Palestinian state. According to Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak of the dovish Labour Party, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could make concessions on Jerusalem. "What is needed is the courage to make historic, painful decisions," Barak told reporters recently, saying that the framework of an agreement is clear: "West Jerusalem and twelve Jewish neighbourhoods that are home to 200,000 residents will be ours. The Arab neighbourhoods, in which close to a quarter of a million Palestinians live, will be theirs. There will be special arrangements for the Old City, the Mount of Olives and the City of David."

EU blocks UK request

The EU Council has refused to allow public access to documents concerning the highly controversial EU Equal Treatment Directive, which is currently being negotiated between European Member States. The refusal follows a public-access request by Christian Concern For Our Nation (CCFON). According to their *British Church* newspaper, "the Directive seeks to outlaw discrimination on several grounds, including sexual orientation and religion, in the provision of goods and services, and includes a controversial harassment provision which threatens free speech."

CHURCH LEADER LINKS ISRAEL TO APARTHEID

The head of the Anglican Church in Wales has received a lot of criticism after comparing the situation between Israel and the Palestinians to apartheid in South Africa. He said that conditions in Gaza resemble "the apartheid system in South Africa because Gaza is next to one of the most sophisticated and modern countries in the world—Israel. Whereas Israel has excellent technology and infrastructure, in Gaza people carry goods by horse and cart. Whereas Israel has an educational system second to none, next to it children live who are denied a basic education because their schools have been bombed." A leading British Rabbi called the remarks perverse: "Does he not know Israel withdrew from Gaza and they now live under their own enlightened Hamas leadership?"