



News from the Nations

IRAN PREPARES FOR US ATTACK

Iran's army chief said recently that his forces had been told to make preparations for a possible attack by the US on the Islamic republic, which Washington has accused of supporting terrorism. General Hassan Firouzabadi told local reporters that Iran's top security decision-making body had recently discussed "enemy threats". He said the Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader and chief commander of the armed forces, had told the army and the élite Revolutionary Guards to "get ready for two main tasks. The first is to make ready our arsenal for deterrence purposes. Second, if something comes up, we should be quickly able to punish the source of aggression". The report said his remarks were in reaction to "recent US threats".

Vandals desecrate Jewish sites

The northwest German city of Lingen is offering a £650 reward for information leading to the arrest of vandals who desecrated a Jewish cemetery. Last year, Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, blamed "virulent" right-wing extremism for an increase in vandalism against Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. He called on the government to act more forcefully. Meanwhile, in Greece, the Rhodes Holocaust Memorial, which was dedicated last June, has been vandalised. Attackers broke through the wire surrounding the memorial to Jews from the island who perished in concentration camps. The attacks have been condemned by local newspapers.

Concern over Iran's nuclear programme

According to a recent newspaper report, the US has risked further souring its relationship with Russia, after senior Administration officials expanded their accusations of support by Moscow for the development of Iran's military programme. Mr Abraham, US secretary of energy, said in Moscow that his government regarded Russia's cooperation with Iran's nuclear programme with the "utmost concern" and was raising its worries "at the highest level". Separately, the report continues, Mr Vershbow, the US ambassador to Moscow, said his country had concerns about "potential assistance" provided by Russia to Iran for the development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as well as the transfer of advanced conventional weapons. A Kremlin spokesman said recently that Russia intended to maintain its existing bilateral cooperation programme with Iran, but that the nuclear programme "has nothing to do with proliferation". He stressed that Russia also respected all its international obligations on nonproliferation. Despite US pressure, Russia has maintained its \$800 million contract for the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power station in Iran, and stated its desire to extend cooperation with the country further. Mr Abraham said that, given Iran's "vast natural resources", the US Administration had long been convinced that the only reason for development of a civil nuclear programme was to support the development of nuclear weapons.

Moscow and NATO enlargement

Russia will accept the enlargement of NATO by the bringing in of the Baltic States without building up its own military presence in its Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad, Sergei Ivanov, the Russian defence minister, said recently. Russia's view is that the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should not be allowed to join NATO until they have acceded to the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). Having the Baltic countries in NATO but not in the CFE treaty would create "a legal black hole" on Russia's borders, where NATO could deploy troops without control, Mr Ivanov claimed. By trying to make CFE membership a condition of the Baltic countries' NATO membership, Russia is seeking leverage over the practical terms of NATO's enlargement.

Hong Kong apology over Hitler quote

A popular Hong Kong coffee-shop chain has responded to a tide of criticism by apologising for displaying a quotation from Adolf Hitler in some of its shops. Quotes from Hitler were used as a 'thought for the day'.

British unions against Israel

According to a report, a wave of emergency anti-Israel motions anticipated at the Trades Union Conference in Blackpool prompted senior union figures recently to describe the attitude towards the Jewish State as "the most hostile in more than twenty years". Roger Lyons, general secretary of Amicus, representing workers in the manufacturing, science and finance industries, told the Jewish Chronicle, "The situation is very serious, unions which believe in the peace process will do their best to block an economic boycott". He said: "It would be easier if the Israeli Government understood the concern that exists across the world". The Board of Deputies is planning to lobby union chiefs, warning of what director-general Neville Nagler termed "the resurgence of the old hard left, which has always been anti-Israel". One of the most worrying developments for Jewish communal leaders was a statement by Britain's largest union, Unison, highly critical of Israel's attacks on Palestinians, and urging the government to impose trade sanctions on her. Further criticism has been voiced by the Fire Brigades' Union and Natfhe, representing university and college lecturers. The FBU's conference heard calls for a boycott of Israeli goods and the establishment of a pro-Palestinian lobby in the labour movement. The anticipated hostility to Israel is seen as likely to provide a challenging backdrop for the secretary general of the Israeli trades union organisation Histadrut, Amir Peretz, scheduled to address the TUC conference along with a top Palestinian trades-union leader.

US CONCERN OVER SAUDI ARABIA

Washington's growing distrust of Saudi Arabia spilled into the open with the leak of a Pentagon briefing describing the kingdom as "a kernel of evil", which should be ordered to stop backing terrorists or face the seizure of its overseas assets. The briefing to the defence policy board—which includes former generals, defence secretaries and statesmen such as Henry Kissinger—runs contrary to official US policy towards Saudi Arabia. According to the *Washington Post*, which was given leaked sections, the briefing stated: "The Saudis are active at every level of the terror chain, from planners to financiers, from cadre to foot-soldier, from ideologist to cheerleader". Saudi Arabia provides more than a fifth of America's crude oil imports, and in the 1991 Gulf War was the launch pad for the American-led operation to drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. However, Saudi rulers have caused anger by refusing to allow their territory to be used for any future attacks on Baghdad. Saudi Arabia has also caused American outrage over its recent activity to raise money for the families of Palestinian 'martyrs'.

Turkish-Israeli water deal

A new Turkish-Israeli agreement will enable Turkey to sell 50 million cubic metres of water a year to Israel for the next twenty years. Turkish Minister of Energy Zeki Cakan made the announcement at the end of a visit to Israel.

Continuing hostilities between Israel and China

Israel is enraged by China's ban on a 'Jewish' Einstein display. China has forced the cancellation of an Israeli exhibition about Albert Einstein because it referred to the physicist's Jewish identity. Beijing, a supporter of Arab nationalism and one of the few world powers to recognise a sovereign state of Palestine, told the Israeli Government to remove any references to Einstein's Jewishness from the travelling exhibition, which has been drawing large crowds across the Asia-Pacific region. It is currently in New Zealand. Israel has now cancelled the exhibition's planned visit to China and is sending it to Taiwan. The Israelis formally told Beijing that they regarded the demand to suppress Einstein's Jewish identity as an insult.

TURKISH PARLIAMENT TO HOLD EARLY POLLS

The Turkish parliament has voted overwhelmingly to hold early elections in November, nearly eighteen months ahead of schedule. This was decided after weeks of political turmoil. The foreign ministry recently denied local media reports that a US campaign against Iraq was expected soon and that Turkey's assistance was being sought for this by Washington.

Europe assists Palestinian election

A European Union mission is in the Palestinian areas to see how the EU can help to make general elections there go smoothly in January, the European Commission said recently. EU spokesman Gunnar Wiegand said the EU wants to make sure all eligible voters get an opportunity to cast their ballots unhindered and in secrecy. The EU was ready to provide technical aid and deploy election observers.