



News from the Nations

BUSH WARNS OF NEW DANGER

According to a report in *The Times*, President Bush has voiced growing US concern about a new kind of security danger in Iraq. He referred to "foreign terrorists" as a threat to order and stability, saying that increasingly confused Iraqis faced a barrage of claims about the identity of those sabotaging the country's infrastructure and attacking occupation troops. Paul Bremer, the US administrator, in an interview identified the spectre of Ansar al-Islam, a militant Sunni Islamist group that the US links to al-Qaeda. Mr Bremer warned that "hundreds" of Ansar fighters had returned to Iraq from Iran. "Intelligence suggests that Ansar al-Islam is planning large-scale terrorist attacks", he said.

Europe's Christian heritage

According to a weekly church newspaper, "Pope John Paul II is to be commended for his forthright insistence that the text of the new European Constitution should include explicit reference to Europe's Christian heritage. The Christian Peoples' Alliance Party will be organising a nationwide petition shortly before next June's European elections, so that churchgoers in every Catholic and Anglican parish across the country, as well among the Free Churches, can clearly demand that our unique Christian roots be recognised within the preamble of the constitution". There has been a "substantial increase in the number of Catholic faithful across the world, which grew from 757 million in 1978 to 1.1 billion in 2001, an overall increase of 40.2 per cent".

Iran tests missiles

According to a world-affairs correspondent, "While all eyes were set on Iraq, Iran has prepared and tested a missile with a range of 1,500 kilometres. Should Iran obtain nuclear weapons, then the picture could look like this. The mullahs will be in a position to bring down the apocalypse on every one of their neighbours: Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, southern Russia, the various Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and of course Israel. Many of the countries are too far away and too weak to threaten Teheran, let alone to do so in a way that would justify the expense of a nuclear weapons programme and the international complications it would cause. On the other hand, Iran is now surrounded by American forces on three sides: to the west, in Iraq; to the south, the Persian Gulf; and to the east, Afghanistan. To make it worse, Washington also maintains military missions in several of the Central Asian republics on Iran's northeastern border. Russia, India, and Pakistan have nuclear weapons already and will therefore be able to look after themselves. Recent press reports claim that Teheran has been working on a missile capable of reaching Europe. If so, then Europe too has what it takes to look after itself. Which leaves us with Israel. According to chief of Military Intelligence Maj.-Gen. Aharon Farkash, Israel has developed and deployed the world's only operational anti-missile system—the Arrow. Foreign sources credit Israel with a massive nuclear arsenal, as well as enough missiles and strike aircraft to turn Iran into a radioactive desert".

Israel and Austria

Israel resumed full diplomatic relations with Austria in July last, announced Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom in a joint press conference with his Austrian counterpart, Benita Waldner. Israel withdrew its ambassador from Vienna in February 2000 after the Austrian Government formed a coalition with the Freedom Party, whose leader Joerg Haider praised Hitler. Mr Shalom said: "We decided to open a new chapter in our relations, Israel will now appoint an ambassador to Vienna, and will today remove all the restrictions that were imposed on its relations with Austria".

More West Bank settlers

The number of Israelis living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip grew by 5.7 per cent last year—triple the overall national growth rate of 1.9 per cent, the Central Bureau of Statistics reported in July. Half the growth occurred in two ultra-Orthodox West Bank towns, Betar Illit and Modi'in Illit.

EU trains police in the Balkans

The European Union will beef up its role in police training in the Balkans as most of the region increasingly sheds its dependency on large international military forces. According to a report, there are more than 12,000 NATO-led troops still in Bosnia, up to 25,000 in the province of Kosovo, and a few hundred in Macedonia. There is a growing agreement among senior diplomats of the need to have professionally trained police forces providing security. The latest police initiative by the Europeans will focus on Macedonia, where earlier this year the EU launched its first military mission as part of its security and defence policy. The aim of the EU's small 350-strong 'Concordia' operation, which replaced a NATO-led force, is to provide security for the special monitors overseeing the implementation of last year's peace accords. The peace deal, negotiated after NATO and the EU prevented the republic from sliding into another Balkan civil war, is supposed to ensure equality between the Macedonian Slav majority and the Albanian minority.

Rise in UK emigration to Israel

Jewish emigration to Israel from the UK is showing signs of picking up after three years of intifada-related doldrums. The average number of UK Jews moving to Israel slipped from 500 a year in pre-intifada days to around 360, but between January and June of this year 165 people left for Israel compared with 100 during the same period in 2002. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, it is expected that 480 people will have made aliyah by the end of the year.

ISRAEL'S SECURITY FENCE

According to World News, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon insists that he will continue building a security fence to separate Israel from Palestinian areas, despite President Bush's opposition. The Israeli premier referred to the structure, which Mr Bush said was a "problem" in the search for peace, as something "which we are forced to construct to defend our citizens against terror activities". Although he promised to close down "unauthorised outposts", a reference to some Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, Mr Sharon was far less enthusiastic than Mr Bush about the extent of progress in implementing the 'road map' peace plan. Mr Sharon is adamant that the fence is vital for keeping away Palestinian suicide bombers, and ultimately will strengthen the prospects for the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005, as envisaged by the American-drafted road map.

Israel's economic crisis

A commentator in the *Jerusalem Report* observed recently: "For all the criticism of Finance Minister Netanyahu's reform programme, there is no single alternative, no magic formula hitherto overlooked, which Israel's leading experts would prefer. But they do propose a variety of urgent treatments, and unless at least some of these are adopted—and fast—they say, Israel runs the risk of sliding into the Third World".

Israel tightens ties with Turkey

Israeli, Turkish and US ships and planes held exercises off Turkey's Mediterranean coast recently, the countries' sixth naval manoeuvre since 1998. At the same time, Israel Aircraft Industries looked closer to clinching a \$2 billion-deal with the Turkish military. Also, Turkey and Israel are preparing to take a step toward producing Arrow-2 missiles. Following a green light by the US to include Turkey in the joint American-Israeli Arrow production, a group of Israeli officials will be travelling to Turkey next month to hold a digitally mastered military manoeuvre in order to promote the capabilities of the missiles. The *Jerusalem Post* was told recently that a military manoeuvre will be held in Ankara to demonstrate how the missiles can help Turkey defend itself against ballistic threats, mostly from Iran.

Al-Qaeda's men in Iran

According to a Newsweek report, as US troops try to fend off guerrilla attacks in Iraq, American spies and diplomats are increasingly preoccupied with a scary group of al-Qaeda operatives in neighbouring Iran. Recently Ali Younesi, Teheran's intelligence minister, confirmed that a large number of al-Qaeda personnel are presently in his country. Younesi claimed the terror suspects were "in custody". US officials believe that the suspects include some of America's most wanted terrorists. Also believed to be in Iran are the deputy leaders of two key Egyptian al-Qaeda affiliates. Some US officials believe that some of these suspects, including the Egyptians, really are in Iranian custody, but US Administration hard-liners believe Iranian authorities leave some of them free enough to hatch new terror plots.