

PROPHETIC TIMES

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS UPDATE

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

APRIL 26 2008

AHMADINEJAD TO SYRIA: DON'T SIDE WITH US

April 24, 2008 The Jerusalem Post reported: "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad issued a warning to Syria on Thursday not to side with the Americans.

"We must always be prepared to thwart the plans of the US in the region," Ahmadinejad told Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem in Teheran. According to the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA), Ahmadinejad said that "the Americans are on the verge of destruction" and that "anyone who sides with them will also go the same way."

The Iranian president's office stated that in his meeting with Moallem, Ahmadinejad called on Middle Eastern countries to "raise their alert in the face of the enemies' plots and make plans to foil them."

The Iranian president asserted that the US government was embarking on numerous operations in the region due to its internal issues, the "dead end" its policy toward Iran and Syria had reached and the upcoming US presidential elections.

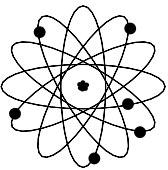
Moallem mentioned the "sensitive situation" the Palestinians were in, saying that "despite the blockade on Gaza and the continuing Israeli aggression, Gazans have succeeded in continuing the resistance under the leadership of Hamas and conducting their affairs." Therefore, he continued, "the peoples' movement of Hamas has gained strength."

The Syrian foreign minister also accused the US of making baseless accusations in order to create internal conflicts and divide the nations in the Middle East."

CIA REVEALS 'SYRIA REACTOR' FILES

April 24, 2008 The BBC reported: "US intelligence officials have been presenting evidence to Congress they say shows that North Korea has been providing nuclear assistance to Syria. The CIA says it has pictures proving that North Koreans were working inside a secret Syrian reactor, according to reports in the US media. The reactor was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike last year, the reports say.

Syria has repeated denials that it has any nuclear weapons programme, or any such agreement with North Korea. The claims follows an unexplained air strike by Israel last September on a target inside Syria.



The images - said to have been obtained by Israel - showed striking similarities between the Syrian facility and the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, reports said. However, the facility was not yet operational and there was no fuel for the reactor, officials said.

Republican Congressman Pete Hoekstra, who attended the CIA briefing, said there was a "a serious proliferation issue, both for the Middle East and the countries that may be involved in Asia".

The US needed "good, clear, verifiable information" from the countries involved before North Korea could be removed from a blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism, the AFP news agency quoted him as saying.

North Korea agreed to give up its nuclear weapons in return for removal from the blacklist and aid as part of a six-nation deal agreed between North Korea and US, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia in February 2007.

WORLD FOOD PROGRAM WARNS OF 'SILENT TSUNAMI' OF HUNGER

April 22, 2008 The Associated Press reported: "Ration cards. Genetically modified crops. The end of pile-it-high, sell-it-cheap supermarkets. These possible solutions to the first global food crisis since World War II - which the World Food Program says already threatens 20 million of the poorest children - are complex and controversial. And they may not even solve the problem as demand continues to soar.

A "silent tsunami" of hunger is sweeping the world's most desperate nations, said Josette Sheeran, the WFP's executive director, speaking Tuesday at a London summit on the crisis. The skyrocketing cost of food staples, stoked by rising fuel prices, unpredictable weather and demand from India and China, has already sparked sometimes violent protests across the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

The price of rice has more than doubled in the last five weeks, she said. The World Bank estimates food prices have risen by 83 percent in three years. "What we are seeing now is affecting more people on every continent," Sheeran told a news conference.

Hosting talks with Sheeran, lawmakers and experts, British Prime Gordon Brown said the spiraling prices threaten to plunge millions back into poverty and reverse progress on alleviating misery in the developing world. "Tackling hunger is a moral challenge to each of us and it is also a threat to the political and economic stability of nations," Brown said.

Malaysia's embattled prime minister is already under pressure over the price increases and has launched a major rice-growing project. Indonesia's government needed to revise its annual budget to respond.

Unrest over the food crisis has led to deaths in Cameroon and Haiti, cost Haitian Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis his job, and caused hungry textile workers to clash with police in Bangladesh.

Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said more protests in other developing nations appear likely. "We are going through a very serious crisis and we are going to see lots of food strikes and demonstrations," Annan told reporters in Geneva."..."

PROSPECT OF IRAN NUKES FRIGHTENS SAUDI ROYALS 'TO THEIR CORE'

April 18, 2008 The World Tribune reported: "A U.S. report projects a concerted effort by Saudi Arabia to match Iran's nuclear weapons program. The report, submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, took note of a U.S. assessment that Teheran's nuclear program frightens the Saudi royal family "to their core."

"The future Middle East landscape may include a number of nuclear armed or nuclear weapons-capable states vying for influence in a notoriously unstable region," the report, released in early April 2008, said. The report, ordered by ranking Republican Sen. Richard Lugar, was authored by staff member Bradley Bowman, Middle East Newswire reported. The assessment on Saudi nuclear plans was based on discussions with senior U.S. diplomats in Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia would be followed by other Middle East states bent on producing or acquiring nuclear weapons, the report said. The report, based on interviewing hundreds of analysts, diplomats in Washington and the Middle East in the last half of 2007, cited Turkey.

In contrast, Egypt would not develop a nuclear weapons program, the report said. Bowman said such a program would encounter strong opposition from Israel and the United States. The report warned Congress that U.S. credibility in the region was being eroded amid Iran's nuclear program. Bowman said the United States must take steps to restore its credibility with Turkey and Arab allies by 2010."

SURGEONS GIVE HOPE TO BLIND WITH SUCCESSFUL 'BIONIC EYE' OPERATIONS

April 22, 2008 The Times Online reported: "Surgeons have carried out the first operations in Britain using a pioneering "bionic eye" that could in future help to restore blind people's sight. Two successful operations to implant the device into the eyes of two blind patients have been conducted at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London.

The device — the first of its kind — incorporates a video camera and transmitter mounted on a pair of glasses. This is linked to an artificial retina, which transmits moving images along the optic nerve to the brain and enables the patient to discriminate rudimentary images of motion, light and dark.

The operations were conducted as part of an international clinical trial of the technology, known as the Argus II retinal implant, which has already proved successful in restoring rudimentary vision to patients who have become blind because of common conditions such as age-related macular degeneration or retinitis pigmentosa.

American researchers are hoping to develop a camera the size of a pea that could be implanted within the eyeball, replacing natural tissue with artificial technology.

Surgeons hope that the implant could be available to NHS patients within three to five years."..."

MACHINE GUN-TOTING OFFICERS TO PATROL NYC SUBWAY

April 24, 2008 CBS News reported: "The NYPD is pulling out all the stops to beef up safety of the subways. On Thursday it launched a new anti-terror effort called "Operation Torch," but the cost of the program is raising some eyebrows. The NYPD's new firepower consists of cops with Mp5 submachine guns, rifles, body armor and bomb-sniffing dogs.

Starting Thursday, five or six teams a day will patrol the major transit hubs in the city in the new program, all thanks to a 50 percent increase in a Homeland Security grant.

"Times Square, Grand Central, Penn Station ... the locations you would expect, but not only those locations. The assignments will vary and will be following no discernible pattern," NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly said.

Many straphangers were thrilled to see the city going all the way to protect its citizens.

"It's a very good idea," Patricia Knight Williams said. "It's like a deterrent. It's going to make me feel safer, much safer, yes it will. It's a good idea."

The city's massive subway system, With 5 million riders a day, has long been considered a potential terror target ever since Sept. 11, 2001.

Similarly equipped NYPD units known as "Hercules" teams have been patrolling the ground on Wall Street, the Empire State Building and other city landmarks.

Everyone seems to like the idea of an added police presence, particularly to fight terrorism on subway platforms, but then when you mention the price tag -- \$151 million -- then people aren't so sure. "..."



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