

NEWS WRAP

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Western officials are aware of dozens of Nuclear-related sites in Iran. Over the last three decades, US and Israeli military planners have pondered options, for an attack on Iran. Besides huge logistical and political challenges, even a sustained assault on known nuclear facilities in Iran, would never eradicate nuclear threats from Teheran. Surprise air strikes would only delay Iran's development of nuclear weapons. Israeli air strikes would require mid-air refuelling and long flights across hostile Arab air space.

Israel could attack reactors of Bhusheh and Arak, and a centrifuge production facility at Natanz. From the outer operating borders of Israeli air force bombers, these targets are 1000 miles or more from Israel. The Bhusheh light water reactor is being built and fuelled by Russia, though not yet operational. Partially sheltered from air attack, the heavy water reactor at Arak is not expected to be completed for several years. Sheltered underground, the Natanz facilities are defended by short range Russian TOR-M surface-to-air missiles. USA has supplied Israeli air force with GBU-28 earth penetrating bombs, designed to destroy underground targets. Israel may also be equipped with nuclear-Tipped bunker shattering bombs. No outside agency has any clear idea of the exact locations where Iran may have hidden its weapons-related technologies, like the long range missiles, that could deliver nuclear warheads. Any surprise airstrike on Iran from Washington or Tel Aviv would only delay Iran's development of nuclear weapons.

In the tunnels of a mountain complex outside the holy city of Qom, the Iranians are preparing 3000 centrifuges, cylindrical devices that spin at high speed, to enrich uranium type P1, imported from Pakistan, could produce enough fuel each year, for one small nuclear bomb. While Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced that its air force would start "missile defensive war games", Mr Ali Akbar Salehi, the nuclear chief of Iran, declared that IAEA inspectors would be allowed to inspect the Qom site.

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Israeli citizenship laws allow any person with Jewish grandparents to be eligible to move to Israel, and qualify for citizenship. But the Messianic Jews believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Now the Israel government is using an ultra-orthodox group to suppress the Messianic Jews. The ultra-orthodox Jews consider the Messianic Jews, as a threat to the Jewish identity. Accused of Christian missionary activity, the Messianic Jews complain of harassment and intimidation by the Israel state. While the Messianic Jews consider Israel to be their spiritual home, an anti-assimilation group called Yad L'Achim is working with the Israel Interior Ministry, to prevent Messianic Jews from being allowed to live in Israel. Yad L'Achim opposes any form of assimilation between Jews and other faiths; and defends the faithful population from missionary efforts of Christian organization. Students involved with Messianic Jews are being denied visas, making it impossible for them to leave the country. In spite of Jewish roots and a desire to connect to a national identity, Messianic Jews are under surveillance of the Israel authorities. Yad L'Achim considers the Messianic Jews as 100% Christians, who are presenting themselves as a stream in the Jewish nation.

Often the Yad L'Achim has been using violence, against those who go to Israel, and seek persuading Jews to abandon Judaism.

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Arbitration cases relating to road projects in India, have locked up Rs 90 billion (Rs 9000 crores). Over 40% of the Indian road projects, suffer cost over-runs of 25 to 50%. Time over-runs affect 70% of the completed projects. Cumbersome processes and approvals cause the project preparation period to extend to about 18 months. Contractors could hold projects to ransom. Speed of development of state highways is comparatively better in Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Karnataka. Temporary suspension of finance from the World Bank is being considered for the Lucknow-Muzzafarpur highway project, for the slackening pace of work, at the project. World Bank assistance is being guided by restructuring of road projects, to include re-bidding and holding back funds, if the contractor does not perform.

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Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were set up in India, to cut costs and multiply forex earnings. The performance of the functional SEZs reveal domestic earnings are far higher than exports, for most of them. The domestic sources account for 75% of the capital formation in SEZs, in India. The number of new urban dwellers in India, over the next fifteen years, is expected to be at least 200 million. India needs full fledged new towns, with the additional demand for urban space, to accommodate additional 200 million new urbanities, which would run to tens of thousands of square kilometres. Capped by 50 sq km, an SEZ townlet cannot fulfil the rising demand for urban spaces, propelled by India's fast growing industry and services. To accommodate large scale migration of new skilled workmen from rural to urban areas, India requires hundreds of new townships, equipped with modern infrastructure. While export growth has been higher from SEZs than from the domestic tariff area, the SEZs enjoy liberal tax incentives, and practically become a huge drain on the exchequer. The domestic tariff area sector has been harmed by the unequal competition from SEZs. Even then a large number of the notified SEZs, are keen to exit, downsize or postpone their SEZ specific obligations owing to economic slowdown. □□□