

MID-EAST e-NEWS

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

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<http://www.morethantourists.com>

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Welcome

Ok, so you have a difficult choice. You have just received e-NEWS 13 and have still not read #1-12! This is what you do. Print out #13 (now!) and save it for later. Then go to www.morethantourists.com and find issue #1 (or whatever) and start catching up on your reading. When you've read it, drop it off at a friend's, the barbershop, dentist's, or wherever, and then print out #2 (rinse, and repeat...).

We read in the newspaper that the Passion of Christ will be released here on Wednesday. We're interested in what the response will be. The cinema that's advertising it is the one in the new mall, on the edge of the city – Mecca Mall, if you're interested! We hope that the message reaches out clearly. And, in the same week that this foreign language film comes to Jordan, you are privileged to have, in your very own e-NEWS, a carved inscription in Aramaic (see page 3).

This Month continues to develop, below. I'd be interested in your comments in how well it summarizes the **contexts** as well as the **events** of the past 4 weeks.

Sudan	UN aid mission	Bashir denies UN refugee estimates							Sudan blocking UN aid to African refugees																	
South calm, but rebellion in Darfur		Darfur rebels ambush Sudanese troops		Refugees attacked as they flee into Chad					US reports atrocities in Darfur																	
Cyprus		Talks between N & S on unification begin		Greeks want to return to homes in N					Greek Cypriots dislike plan																	
		Denktash breaks media blackout on talks		Denktash critical of progress					New Greek govt. pushes Annan plan																	
Reunification hopes before EU entry May 1				Turkey offers land to Greeks																						
Iran		Elections-conservatives reclaim parliament		Pipeline to be built from Iraq across Shatt al-Arab				IAEA criticizes nuclear research	US/IAEA accused of bullying																	
Feb 20 election with 2,400 banned, low turnout; Nuclear processing concerns									Inspection canceled by Iran																	
Pakistan		Peace road map agreed upon with India		Suicide bomb at Shia mosque					Bombs aimed at Shias kill 50+ in Quetta																	
Alignment with the US is resented by populace									Tribal chiefs arrested for hindering hunt for Bin Laden																	
Afghan.				Pashtun restrain Taliban in SE					Hazara peoples celebrate Ashura																	
Taliban resist US forces Warlords surrender militia/weapons				Karzai: 'Taliban defeated'					Ashura parade clashes with army recruits -1 dead																	
Gulf		Saudi halts construction of fence on Yemen border							Qatar arrests Russians for Chechen murder																	
Saudi gov't acts against al Qaeda									Moscow arrests 2 Qataris																	
Turkey		Erdogan pushes for success in Cyprus talks, restrains Denktash																								
Acts as intermediary for Syria, Israel; plans to sell water to Israel; in line to join EU									Masonic meeting bombed																	
Iraq		2 suicide bombs kill 11		Police stn bomb kills 10					Kurds ransack Turkmen offices																	
				UN "elections not ready until Jan. '05"					Constitution ceremony delayed																	
		3 US soldiers die-roadside bombs		Sistani OKs poll delay					Attacks on Karbala/Baghdad kill 197 Shiites																	
Elections; potential ethnic conflict; economy improves.									2 CPA killed by fake police																	
									11 mortars aimed at green zone																	
									New oil terminal opens																	
									Rocket attack kills 3																	
									Constitution signed																	
Syria				Accused of allowing militants to cross into Iraq																						
Assad seeks to improve US relations									Burns warns of US sanctions																	
									Lebanese protest Syrian presence																	
Israel		Red Cross criticizes barrier							3 banks raided for militant funds																	
									Supreme court orders 1-week halt to barrier																	
Road Map lapses; pullout from Gaza; Fence/wall Settlements grow.		Settlement funding increase approved		Bus bomb-8 die					Stone throwing from Al Aqsa to Wailing Wall																	
									Sharon prisoner swap criticized																	
									Jewish bomber arrested																	
Palestine		Barrier issue taken to ICJ		Teens plan terror attack					Arafat aide killed																	
									6 die in failed attack																	
Society moves towards anarchy; militias dominate life, recruit suicide bombers; conflict between Arafat and Dahlan supporters				Barrier protest-2 die					5 militants killed																	
									Internal reforms planned by Fateh																	
									Raid kills teen																	
									Gaza strip raid - hundreds resist, 14 die																	
									3 Hamas die in Israeli air strike																	
									Mother killed by random bullet																	
									3 teens attempt shooting																	
									Rape trial demo																	
Feb.	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	Mar	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S

The Iraqi Governing Council (2)

The governing council's first major task, preparing a draft constitution, was completed at the beginning of this month. Despite the extra day provided by the leap year, the council concluded their sometimes-acrimonious debate two days late, at about 4am on March 1st. The council, an interim institution itself, has prepared this interim constitution as part of the process towards full sovereignty being returned to Iraqis.

The document covers the makeup of the government, the presidency, parliament, voting rights and the role of women in the new Iraq. One of the most difficult issues has been the role of Islamic, *Sharia* Law in the new Iraq. Throughout the process, however, the council has striven for consensus, and even through the final delays successfully achieved its intention to have a unanimous acceptance of the document as it stands.



The two-day delay in presenting the Transitional Administrative Law, as it is properly called, was only the first in a series of delays. Once it was presented to the Coalition Provisional Authority, led by L. Paul Bremer, the CPA began its preparations for a Wednesday, March 3rd, signing ceremony. The double attacks in Karbala and Baghdad caused that ceremony to be rescheduled to Friday, but when Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani indicated his concern over one issue in particular, five of the Shi'ite members

(see e-NEWS 12) withdrew their support from the document, and Friday's ceremony was cancelled. After negotiations between the Governing Council and the Shiite leaders, the controversial points remained in place, to be dealt with later.

The points at issue are

1. allowing a 2/3 vote of any three constituencies to veto the future permanent constitution. (This is intended to protect the Kurdish region – 3 provinces – from the power of the majority Shia).

2. either increasing the power of the presidency or increasing the number of presidents and deputies to five (allowing the Shia a dominant proportion).



Elections for a permanent National Assembly will be held before Jan.31st, 2005. This body will be charged with drafting a permanent constitution for Iraq, which will then be presented before the

people in a referendum, scheduled to be held no later than Oct. 15th, 2005. Elections for a new government should therefore be held, according to the T.A.L., no later than Dec. 31st, 2005.

This is how the new Iraq will begin to look, at least from June 30th until a new government is installed following nationwide elections:

For those interested in what is happening in Iraq, the CPA has a web site that contains interesting links to development projects, documents, and photographs. Much of the funding that the U.S. provides is disbursed by USAID, and there are many pictures of what has already been achieved there. www.cpa-iraq.org

The full text of the interim constitution (sorry, Transitional Administrative Law) has been made available on the CPA site, as well as an official summary (for the rest of us!).

Government

President
Two Deputies
Prime Minister (chosen by President and deputies, by unanimous vote)
National Assembly includes 25% women
Elections to be held in late by Jan.31, 2005

Bill of Rights

Protects - freedom of speech
religious freedom
the press
assembly

Legal System

Independent judiciary
Islam is "a source" of laws (no laws can be passed "against Islam")
Equality regardless of race/gender
Federal Supreme Court to be created

Military

Under civilian control
A National Guard will incorporate the current militias, under local supervision, but answerable to the national government.

Ethnic issues

Kurds will remain autonomous
Arabic and Kurdish will be the official languages

Arabs in the Bible (3)

Having introduced the Arabs by tracing the lineage of Abram's descendants (and those of Lot) we also looked at the origin of those who consider themselves *true* Arabs, being descended from Joktan. As we have seen, the early Arabs were to be found to the east, even though some of them – Ishmael, Edom, Keturah's descendants – originated from Palestine itself. At the same time, however, there were other groups scattered down the Mediterranean coast. These various tribes were known as Canaanites, and were distinct from the Arabs to the east. They included Phoenicians, to the north, now Lebanon, and Philistines in the south, as well as the Amorites (Jos.10) and Jebusites. Abraham and Isaac had communications with these peoples (see Gen.20, 21, 26), and the Philistines in particular were to be a source of trouble for the Israelites, but, as can be seen, they were not Arabs.

During the period before the establishment of the Israelite kingdom the Arabs were generally referred to by their individual ancestries:

Judges 3 (EHUD) - Eglon the Moabite, the Ammonites and Amalekites (a descendant of Esau)

Judges 6 (GIDEON) – Midianites

Judges 10 (JEPHTHAH) – Ammonites (& Philistines)

King David had Arab ancestry.

Warfare was not constant between Israel and these people groups. During times of famine Jews would move to more fertile regions, as did Naomi. Her sons all married Moabites (Moab was the region on the eastern hills of the Dead Sea) and Ruth returned with her, accepting her God (Ruth 1:16-17) and marrying Boaz to become the great-grandmother of King David. While David was fleeing from Saul he sent his parents into Moab for safety. Later in his reign, while fleeing from Absalom, David was met at Mahanaim by Shobi, from Rabbah Ammon (2 Sam.17:27) who brought bedding, eating vessels, food and sheep for David and his people.

An Arab Queen praised God.

King Solomon was held in awe by peoples of all nations that heard of him. An Arab queen, Sheba, traveled a great distance to see if what she had heard was true (2 Chr.9:1f), and Solomon received tribute from kings of Arabia (2 Chr.9:13-14). This is the first mention of Arabs or Arabia in the Bible. Other kings who went to war against Arabs were Jehosaphat (2 Chr.20) and Uzziah (26), against Moabites, Meunites and Ammonites; Jotham (27) and Jehoram (21:16), who lost his sons to "Arabs who lived near the Cushites".

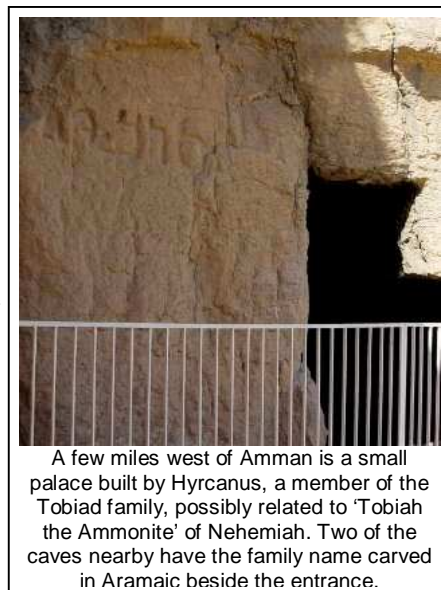
The earliest Arab recorded in extra-Biblical writing, Gundubu (see e-NEWS 11), was one of the emperor Shalmaneser's opponents. It was this same Assyrian monarch who took Israel into captivity in approximately 729 BC, scattering them around Mesopotamia and beyond, and resettling the northern part of Palestine with captured peoples brought from across his empire. At this time Hezekiah was king of Judah. (See 2 Ki.17:3, 18:9).

Soon after this Isaiah prophesied against Arabia, (Is.21:13) specifically mentioning Dedan (desc. of Keturah) and Tema (Ishmael).

Though Ophir is mentioned in the Bible more frequently than most other Arab patriarchs, it is almost invariably in relation to the fame as a source of gold. 'Gold of Ophir' becomes a cliché from its first use in Job (22:24), and in the Psalms (45:9) and Isaiah (13:12). Similarly, Sheba is associated with incense and Kedar with sheep.

During the Babylonian captivity Obadiah prophesies against Edom for taking advantage of Israel's exile. This in spite of the fact that Edom/Esau and Jacob were brothers, and that the Israelites had honored that during the Exodus. Obadiah prophesies how returning Israelites will occupy Edom, Gilead and the Negev, including exiles returning from Spain, *Sepharad* (Ob.20). Today, the *Sephardic* Jews are those whose ancestors returned from Spain during the Middle Ages.

When Ezra and then Nehemiah were given permission to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple they were opposed by various Arabs. Ezra does not name the lineage of Rehum and Shimshai (Ez.4:8) but when he arrives he is shocked at the intermarriage that has occurred between the Jews and local peoples, including Ammonites and Moabites. Nehemiah, perhaps ten years later, identifies three opponents in particular: Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite (2:10) and Geshem the Arab (2:19). These three harassed him and the people throughout their efforts to rebuild the city. When he returned from a period of time spent in Babylon Nehemiah found that one of these, Tobiah, had even been given use of a Temple store-room by Eliashib the priest. Intermarriage between these opponents of Nehemiah seems likely (see Neh. 13:28, though this may be a different Eliashib).



A few miles west of Amman is a small palace built by Hyrcanus, a member of the Tobiad family, possibly related to 'Tobiah the Ammonite' of Nehemiah. Two of the caves nearby have the family name carved in Aramaic beside the entrance.

Next Issue: Arabs in the Kingdom Age

Kashmir

During recent weeks the tension between Pakistan and India regarding Kashmir seems to have dissipated. Only 2 years ago the two countries were testing their nuclear arsenal and threatening each other over the disputed *Line of Control* that divides Kashmir. On the roof of the world Indian and Pakistani soldiers faced each other in a dispute that threatened to become the third war they would fight over Kashmir. Today, it seems a though both states have accepted that a solution is possible, and acquired the will to find it.



In 1947, when India and Pakistan obtained their independence from Britain, the state of Kashmir had a Hindu ruler, and opted to remain as part of India, even though 85% of its population was Muslim. This was the cause of the first war over Kashmir, in 1947. As a result of the war India held on to most of Kashmir. The cease-fire line is known as the Line of Control, and was also the flash point for the 1965 war between India and Pakistan.

In the past India has insisted that the whole state (shown in white on the map) is part of its national soil, but it has expressed a willingness to accept the status quo of the Line of Control. Pakistan has refused to accept the Line of Control, as it exists, because the Kashmir Valley, which has a 95% Muslim population, would fall within Indian territory.

Possible options:

- 1-Kashmir becomes independent,
- 2-Kashmir Valley is allowed to become an independent state,
- 3-Autonomy for Kashmir Valley, within India,
- 4-India and Pakistan have a joint protectorate over Kashmir Valley.*

One issue complicating the efforts to resolve the problem is the local campaign for the independence of Kashmir, a movement that has grown more vocal during the 1990s.

As we follow the talks between the two nations over the coming weeks, perhaps this information will familiarize us with the background behind the discussions.

(* I am indebted to the BBC web site for their discussion of these alternatives, which I have presented in a simplified form.)

Besides the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh are the two other portions of Kashmir that India controls. According to census figures Jammu is 30% Muslim, and Ladakh 46%. What does create a distinction between these two states is that the remaining portion is predominantly Hindu in Jammu but Buddhist in Ladakh. The Pakistani province of Azad Jammu is 99% Muslim.

Palestine in Crisis

During the three years and more of the Intifada, conditions in the Palestinian areas have deteriorated significantly. Part of the problem seems to be deep splits within Fateh, the organization led by Yasser Arafat. Fateh is the strongest of the various groups that make up the PLO. In Palestine daily signs are evident of the break down of law and order, and increasing power of the militias:

- Assassination of Khalil al-Zebin (Arafat aide, human rights magazine editor) (Mar.2)
- Armed men assault broadcasting offices demanding jobs (Late Feb.)
- Land Authority office raided, gunmen want land transferred to their names (Late Feb.)
- Health Minister flees restaurant attacked by gunmen in Jenin (Feb)
- The Parliament's vice-president's office was vandalized (Feb)
- Feud results in assault of police station in Gaza, 1 officer dies, 10 are wounded, including chief (Feb)
- On March 4th, Ghassan al-Shaka announced his resignation as Mayor of Nablus, due to the breakdown of law & order. "13 murders but no killer in prison." Nablus is the stronghold of Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an offshoot of Fateh that increasingly acts in defiance of Fateh directives.

Palestinians have long been critical of the Palestinian Authority's corruption and incompetence, many of the complaints dating back well before the current Intifada. The inability of the Palestinian security to properly police their territory is only partly due to the restrictive presence of the Israeli defense forces. The presence of IDF itself is a response to the lack of control exercised by those in authority in the PA.

The Oslo talks, and others since, have identified areas – cities, towns, neighborhoods – that should be directly under Palestinian police control. Frequently in the past three years the consequence of various suicide bombings has been that the IDF has moved in to these areas, searching for the perpetrators and attempting to prevent future assaults. This has, over the period, reduced the ability of local police to police their population, which has in turn increased the likelihood of future violence and incursions. Many of the problems in the region are indicative of the inability of either side to step out of these vicious circles.