



IN THIS ISSUE – MA#23 – FEB 2005

*** LEBANON ON THE BRINK**

*** ECONOMIC WOES**

*** 400 CHRISTIANS SAVED FROM TSUNAMI !
GOD PROTECTS HIS OWN**

*** HUGE “STAR-QUAKE” ROCKS MILKY WAY**

=====

LEBANON ON THE BRINK!



THE ASSASSINATION OF RAFIQ HARIRI

LEBANON was rocked by the assassination of its popular leader, Rafiq Hariri, the former 4-time prime minister, and the re-builder of modern Lebanon after the devastation of 15 years of civil war.

Mr Hariri was killed when his motorcade was blown apart by a massive car bomb. Windows were shattered as far as two miles away from the blast. Two ministers in Hariri's party and 6 of his bodyguards were among the 16 dead. And at least 120 bystanders were wounded.

The attack, on Feb 14, ravaged the Lebanese capital's seafront and has been described as the most brutal since the civil war ended in 1991.

Rafiq Hariri, a Sunni Muslim, was born in the Lebanese town of Sidon in 1944. He moved to Saudi Arabia after graduating from university. After leaving a teacher's job there, he founded a booming oil-funded construction business and became a billionaire.

In Lebanon, a brutal civil war between 1975 and 1990 ravaged the country, taking the lives of as many as 150,000 people.

In 1992, two years after the war ended, Hariri was appointed as the Lebanese prime minister. He served, with Syria's backing, in that post for 10 of the next 13 years.

Mr Hariri was a fervent supporter of Lebanese independence, and was opposed to the continued Syrian occupation of his country. He worked tirelessly to rebuild a free, independent and prosperous nation.

(Syria has been involved in Lebanon for decades, and under the guise of support, has maintained its troops in the country - at present about 15,000.)

Last October, Hariri stepped down after a row over Syrian interference in Lebanon, and in protest against the extension of pro-Syrian president Emile Lahoud's 6-year presidency term for another three years. (Lebanon has both a President and Prime Minister.)

A towering figure in Lebanese politics, Rafiq Hariri was recently leading the opposition and preparing to contest the national election due in May.

In recent months, Lebanon's senior opposition politicians had begun pressing for the government in Beirut to divorce from Syria, and to recognize Israel. It wanted Beirut to sign a separate peace treaty with the Jewish state - without reference to Damascus.

This move was initiated by Rafiq Hariri, along with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and the Christian Maronite archbishop Nasrallah Sfeir, reportedly, with the encouragement of Washington. Behind this movement were two significant developments:

1. UN Security Council Resolution 1559 of 2 Sept 2004 called on Syria to cease intervening in Lebanese internal politics, to withdraw from Lebanon, and to disband all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. The resolution was co-sponsored by the US and France.

2. A 29 January 2005 UN Security Council resolution, adopted by all 15 Council members, ruled that the controversial Shabaa Farms along Israel's northern border were part of the Syrian Golan, prior to the 1967 War - not part of Lebanon.

That resolution, according to a *Debka* report, was supported by Washington to destroy Hizb'allah's main justification for attacking Israel, and also to free up Lebanese leaders so they could start talks with Israel.

With the Shabaa farms issue settled, the trio (Hariri, Jumblatt and Sfeir) could maintain that Lebanon has no further territorial or border quarrel with Israel, and has nothing to do with the Syrian-Israeli Golan dispute. There was no reason therefore why the two neighbours should not establish normal peace and economic relations – except for Syria's presence in Lebanon.

Without the Shabaa farms issue, Syria has lost its declared reason for supporting Hizb'allah in Lebanon. And Hizb'allah itself has lost one of its main grounds for attacking Israel.

Rafiq Hariri's assassination was a tremendous blow for "the free Lebanon movement," but the goal of the perpetrators may backfire, for most of the various factions in Lebanon have become united against the Syrian presence.
Official website. <http://www.rhariri.com>



SOME FACTS ABOUT LEBANON

Originally "Lebanon" was the name of a long mountain range in Phoenicia that ran up into Syria. Some of its mountains are up to 10,000ft. high. The word means "white or snowy." Phoenicia was renowned for its massive cedars and cypress trees. A tree is featured on the modern Lebanese flag.

Lebanon, Israel's north-west neighbour, is a small country - only 200 km long (10,452 sq km.) It is a well-watered, fertile country astride ancient trade routes from the Mediterranean to the East. It was home to the ancient Phoenicians from 14th to 9th century BC. Being a small country it has been fought over ever since.

In 721 BC it was invaded by Shalmanezzer; in 587 by Nebuchadnezzar; in 536 by Cyrus; in 466 Cimon defeated the Phoenicians; in 352 they revolted from Persia; in 331 they were subdued by Alexander; in 323 the country was annexed to Egypt; in 315 it was seized by Antigonus of Phrygia; in 83 it passed to Tigranes, king of Armenia; in 62 it became part of the Roman province of Syria; in 20 it was deprived by Augustus of all its liberties.

Much later, in 1516 AD it was annexed to Turkey. It gained independence from France in 1943. Thereafter it became the most developed state in the Middle East,

and was renowned for its financial services and tourism. Beirut, the jewel of the Middle East was shattered by the civil war of 1975-90.

Both King David and King Solomon had good relations with the king of Tyre, a main city of Phoenicia, and imported cedars, cypress and algum (red sandalwood) from there. (2 Chronicles 2:3, 8). Later, Ezra also bought cedars from Lebanon for the 2nd temple. (Ezra 3:7)



BLAME LAID ON SYRIA AND THE BEIRUT GOVERNMENT

LEBANESE opposition leaders hold both the Lebanese and Syrian governments responsible for Mr Hariri's death, and they are calling for Syrian troops in Lebanon to be pulled out. At Hariri's funeral, hundreds of thousands of people from all Lebanese communities chanted "Syria out" as Hariri's coffin was carried in a cortege through the streets of Beirut.

Once-warring Druze, Muslim and Christian factions, who used to slit each others' throats, stood shoulder to shoulder, in prayer for their deceased leader.

Beirut's *The Daily Star* wrote: "The reality the government should ponder is that Hariri's funeral turnout was a massive, popular vote of no-confidence in the government. Damascus should also take heed of this poignant message." Another paper, *An-Nahar*, described the rally as "the largest referendum for unity and sovereignty in Lebanon's history."

Lebanese Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, whose own father, Kamel, was reputedly assassinated by Syrians in 1997, said, "This (Lebanese) regime is backed by Syria. This is the regime of terrorists and terrorism that was able yesterday to wipe out Rafiq Hariri. I charge the Lebanese-Syrian police regime with the responsibility for Hariri's death."

OPPOSITION MPs CALL FOR 'UPRISING'

FEB 18. Lebanon's opposition, now led by Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, has called for a peaceful "independence uprising" to force the government to step down. The call which used the word "intifada" is seen as a "summons to civic rebellion." After a long meeting the opposition said sit-ins should be held until the "illegitimate regime" (of Lahoud) resigned.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets in Tripoli, Sidon and Beirut in massive protests, shouting slogans that blame Syria for Hariri's assassination, and calling for free elections, and for Syria to withdraw its troops.

Tourism Minister Farid al-Khazem resigned, saying the government was unable to "remedy the dangerous situation in the country." But the opposition is calling for the whole cabinet to resign over Hariri's death.

The opposition discussed whether its own 40 deputies should resign en masse from the 128-member parliament, and decided to stay on to ensure they have a hand in drawing up a new electoral law ahead of legislative elections due in May.

They want a representative government to be formed which would then oversee the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

THREAT OF CIVIL WAR

SIGNS of political upheaval are beginning to emerge as Christian, Druze, Sunni and even some Shia factions join together in an anti-Syria alliance.

Lebanese have attacked some of the 1,400,000 Syrian labourers inside Lebanon. And in response, the Syrian military has reportedly begun supplying weapons to groups supporting Damascus, and to workers in farms and factories "to protect themselves."

The belligerent Hizb'allah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that "popular agitation against Syria's grip on the country could plunge Lebanon into civil war again." Backed by Damascus and Tehran, he exhorted the 100,000 Shi'ites massed in Beirut to mark the Ashura festival, and not to forget the real enemy. "Death to Israel!" they roared after him.

U.S. & U.N. PRESSURE ON SYRIA

UN Secretary-General, Mr Annan, recently wrote to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, urging him to comply with UN resolution 1559 which calls for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon.

The US, which for some time has been accusing Syria of supporting anti-Israeli terrorists and Sunni Muslim backers of the Iraqi insurgency, says it will push for urgent US Security Council action to pressure Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon.

Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice has warned Syria against interfering in Lebanon, but said she was not blaming the attack on Syria, but Syria's presence in Lebanon was destabilizing.

SOME FACTS ABOUT SYRIA

Syria is the N-E neighbour of both Israel and Lebanon; it's N of Jordan, and NW of Iraq, and S of Turkey. Its territory of 185,189 sq km is nearly 18 times greater than Lebanon's, and its population at 15 million, is five times more.

Syria is separated from Iran in the east, by a stretch of about 250 km of "Kurdistan."

Syria is quite disparate to Iran and normally it would seem to be an unlikely ally. The regime in Tehran (Iran) is theocratic, absolutist and is strongly guided by the precepts of Shia Islam. The Damascus (Syrian) government is secular, somewhat socialist in ideology, and has a majority of Sunni Muslims.

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR PULLED OUT

THE US recalled its ambassador to Syria, and is considering imposing new sanctions on Damascus.

According to a news report, Ambassador Margaret Scobey delivered a stern note to the Syrian government prior to leaving. She made it clear to Syria that the US expects Syria to act in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, as well as the disbanding of militias there.

A Debka-file report says the US is demanding, not only that Bashar Assad withdraws his troops and disbands the Syrian-Lebanese militias, but more importantly, that he dismantles the Syrian **intelligence outfits** in Lebanon.

President Jacques Chirac of France, a personal friend of Hariri, attended the funeral in Beirut, and also reacted harshly to the assassination. Chirac is standing shoulder to shoulder with George Bush on the Lebanon crisis.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said there was "no doubt that Syria ... is uncomfortable with the prospect of elections in Lebanon and the last thing they want is to be forced to leave Lebanon."

SYRIA'S DENIAL

THE Syrian government swiftly denounced the assassination and vigorously denied any involvement. President Bashar Assad himself lamented the tragedy and labeled it a tragic terrorist attack.

Some commentators say that with the increasing international heat on Syria, it would have been unlikely that Bashar Assad's regime would have plotted such a blatant assassination. Assad had, in fact, been given a strong warning recently by the UN not to interfere with Lebanon's elections, and not to harm opposition politicians, specifically Hariri, otherwise there would be "a total, final and irrevocable divorce from the international community."

Syria is grappling with serious internal problems including divisions within the regime as the country decides, in the coming weeks, whether it is going to yield to the pressure to pull out its troops and cease backing terrorist movements.

If it **does** pull out, it would not only lose big trade benefits, but could face the very real danger of political upheaval in Damascus. If it does **not** pull out, the international pressure will increase, sanctions will be applied, and again, political upheaval could take place.

Earlier in February, Bashar Assad told a UN special envoy that he would take steps to fulfil Resolution 1559 by the April deadline. But he indicated that a withdrawal could be undertaken as part of a greater peace agreement that would see Israel withdrawing from the Golan Heights.

INTELLIGENCE OUTFITS MAY BE TO BLAME

LEBANON has long been a playground of intrigue for militias and terror gangs working for various political parties as well as for Syria and Iran.

Some observers suggest the perpetrators of the assassination may not be the Assad regime itself, but rather, Syrian and/or Iranian militia-intelligence groups operating in Lebanon – outfits that oppose independence and the disbanding of militias – particularly Hizb'allah.

Israel, in fact, believes Hizb'allah is the main culprit. Hizb'allah operates freely in Lebanon, under the Syrian eye.

Within a week of the assassination, the head of the Syrian intelligence was removed from his post, and replaced by Assad's brother-in-law, Brigadier-General Asef Shawkat. Some see this as an indication that Syrian intelligence was involved.

Whatever, Syria is now in the spotlight, and Lebanon has been leap-frogged into the centre of George Bush's plans for reform in the Middle East – and this time, he is supported by France.

With both Syria and Iran accused of being sponsors of terrorism and providers of extensive support for terrorists in Iraq, in Lebanon, and in the Palestinian territories, the war on terror widens, the forces of radicalism consolidates, and the world presses on relentlessly towards the climax of the age.

SYRIA AND IRAN UNITE

FEB 17. In response to the "threats facing them," Iran and Syria have made an extraordinary joint public statement of unity, declaring that they would form a "common front to face all threats." The announcement came after a meeting in Tehran between the Iranian Vice-President and the Syrian Prime Minister.

Iranian Vice-President Mohammed Reza Aref said: "Our Syrian brothers are facing specific threats and we hope they can benefit from our experience."

Within hours of the joint statement, the US declared it has “an increasing list of problems” with Syria!

“INDEPENDENCE UPRISING”

FEB 21. A week after the killing of Hariri, 100,000 Lebanese protesters gathered in Beirut, led by opposition figures, and shouting slogans against Syria. Many protesters wore red and white scarves, symbolizing the opposition’s “independence uprising.”

It was one of Lebanon’s biggest public protests in 25 years. Many companies and schools closed for the day.

Security forces closed off most of the capital’s central area and set up checkpoints on approaches to the city.

The European Union added to the call by the US for an international investigation into the assassination. “There has to be an independent probe, given the high-level of suspicion about the potential involvement of Syria in the killing of former PM Hariri,” said UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw.

Lebanon’s Syrian-backed government says it will co-operate with a UN investigation team due to arrive before the end of Feb, but it has rejected calls for a full international inquiry.

SYRIA’S MIXED RESPONSE

FEB 21. Syria has defied US demands to withdraw its forces from Lebanon and to disarm Hizb’allah militants. A leading Syrian analyst and spokesman told US officials:

“Syria has national interests which must be fulfilled before it can withdraw from Lebanon. If the US uses its leverage, and pressures Israel to return the Golan Heights, only then can Syria fully withdraw from Lebanon.”

FEB 24. Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed al-Mualem says Syria will co-operate with the UN over implementing a resolution calling for Syrian troops to leave Lebanon. Lebanon’s pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami also warned that a quick withdrawal of Syrian troops would cause instability.

BACKGROUND TO SYRIA’S OCCUPATION OF LEBANON

THE 1975-1990 CIVIL WAR

Full-scale civil war broke out with the Palestinians joining the domestic Muslim forces. Lebanon was informally divided, with southern Lebanon and the western half of Beirut becoming bases for the PLO and other Muslim militias, while the Maronite Christians controlled East Beirut and the Christian section of Mt. Lebanon.

Beirut was effectively divided in two. The main confrontation line, the Green Line, ran right through the middle of Beirut. The fighting eventually spread to most parts of the country, and in June, 1976, with the Maronites on the verge of defeat, the President called for Syrian intervention. Syrian troops subsequently entered Lebanon and imposed a ceasefire.

Syria occupied the parts of Lebanon not claimed by Muslims or Christians i.e., Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley. Despite the Syrian occupation, fighting in Southern Lebanon continued. In the fall of 1976, Arab summits in Riyadh and Cairo set out a plan to end the war. The resulting Arab Deterrent Force, which included the Syrian troops already present, moved to separate combatants. An uneasy quiet settled over Beirut, but security conditions in the south began to deteriorate.

In 1981, armed forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) occupied large areas of southern Lebanon. Attacks against Israeli territory increased, as the PLO's armed forces used Lebanon as a base to attack Israel with rockets and artillery. PLO soldiers fought with Lebanese forces. In 1996, the World Lebanese Organization, the World Maronite Union, and human rights groups concerned with the Middle East, issued a public declaration accusing the PLO of genocide in Lebanon and stating they were responsible for the deaths of 100,000 Lebanese civilians. Lebanon had no effective central government at the time.

An interim cease-fire brokered by the United States in 1981 between Syria, the PLO, and Israel was respected for almost a year. Several hostile incidents between the parties led to the June 6, 1982, Israeli ground invasion of Lebanon. The Israelis labelled the invasion Operation Peace for Galilee, with a view toward paving the way for an Israeli-Lebanese peace agreement. Israeli forces drove 25 miles into Lebanon, moving into East Beirut with the support of Maronite Christian leaders and militia.

About this time radicalism amongst the country's different factions began to rise. In 1982 Hizb'allah emerged from a loose coalition of Shia groups, supported by 1500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

The combat returned to Beirut in 1987, with Palestinians, leftists, and Druze fighters allied against the Amal militia, eventually drawing further Syrian intervention. Violent confrontation flared up again in Beirut in 1988 between Amal and Hizb'allah.

After the war, Lebanon made progress toward rebuilding its political institutions and regaining its national sovereignty. Under the Taif Agreement - the blueprint for national reconciliation - the Lebanese established a political system giving Muslims a greater say in the political process.

Most of the militias have been weakened or disbanded, and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have extended central government authority over two-thirds of the country. Only the radical Shia party Hizb'allah retains its weapons.

TAKING STOCK OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

IN VIEW of the increasing tension in the region, it will be helpful to consider:

* For several years, persistent rumours have been suggesting that Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction found their way into Syria prior to the onset of the Iraq war, and that they were hidden in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon - an area controlled by Hizb'allah and Syrian troops.

* Syria, is believed to possess a significant stockpile of chemical weapons, and is believed to have an ongoing bio-weapons program as well. It already has missiles capable of carrying these weapons, but it is now to be supplied with advanced Russian missiles.

* Ariel Sharon received a letter in mid-Feb from Russian President Vladimir Putin, informing him of Russia's decision to go ahead with the sale of advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Syria. (Israel has been waging a diplomatic battle against this deal. Sharon wrote to Putin that the missiles could undermine Israel's security as they could "leak" to Hizb'allah and other terror groups.)

Mr Putin told Sharon in the letter that the weapons were not shoulder-missiles favoured by the terror organizations, but rather they would be mounted on vehicles, and therefore they would not endanger Israel. He said Syria could oversee the placement of the missiles so as not to upset the balance of power in the area. - Ha'aretz / 17 Feb 05

* Moscow supports both Syria and Iran which are being tied into the Northern Confederation led by Rosh.

* Damascus is home to many of the world's most deadly terrorist organizations, all of whom are bent on destroying the nation of Israel.

* Damascus, which controls Hizb'allah as well as diverse Palestinian groups and radical Islamic organizations, has the means to plunge Lebanon into chaos. And there's a very real risk that civil war could break out again in Lebanon.

* Syria's newly-declared ally, Iran is currently close to obtaining nuclear weapons capabilities.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, whose country regards Iran as one of its most dangerous enemies, said on 16 Feb, that Tehran was "trying very hard to develop the nuclear bomb," and that it is "just six months away from being able to build an atomic bomb."

* The head of Russia's Security Council, Igor Ivanov, has asserted Iran's right to find access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

* Iran's former president, Hashemi Rafsanjani has said it was important for relations to be strengthened between **Iran, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and other Islamic states.**

* Israel and Syria are bitter enemies, and with the dispute over the Golan Heights not settled, and with Damascus refusing to stop aiding and harbouring terrorists and the

organizations that support them, an ultimate conflict between them is only a matter of time.

* With chemical and biological weapons in its arsenal, Syria is capable of launching an attack and inflicting massive casualties on the Israeli people.

* If attacked or threatened with weapons of mass destruction, Israel would find itself in a desperate situation, and would be forced to launch a nuclear attack on Damascus to save itself.

* Damascus, the capital of Syria, the oldest continually inhabited city in the world – 4500 years, is marked by God for destruction:

“The oracle concerning Damascus: Look! Damascus is about to be removed from being a city, and it will become a heap of ruins.” (Isaiah 17:1)

* Hariri’s assassination is bound to have a negative effect on the Israel-Palestinian peace process as well as the democratic process in Iraq, but it could also prove to be the catalyst that unleashes another major conflict in the Middle East, and that also accelerates the growth of a major coalition ...

THE NORTHERN, RUSSIA-LED CONFEDERATION

THE prophet Ezekiel foretold a great confederation of nations led by Rosh would come down against Israel in the endtimes. Many nations are included in the confederation, some of them being mentioned by name. The prophecy was in about the year 580 BC:

“Son of man, set your face against Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, The Sovereign Master, YHWH, says: Listen! I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Rosh (*Russia*), Meshech (*Moscow*), and Tubal (*Tobolsk, in Asiatic Russia*).

“I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws and bring you out with your whole army - your horses and horsemen all fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing swords. Persia (*Iran*), Cush (*Ethiopia-Sudan*), and Put (*Libya*) will be with them, all with shields and helmets; Gomer (*Germany*) also with all its troops; and the House of Togarmah from the far north (*Turkey and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia*) with all its troops - many nations with you.

“Get ready; be prepared, you and all the hordes gathered about you, and take command of them. After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will invade the land that has recovered from the sword, whose people have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had long been desolate. Its people had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them are living securely. You and all

your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land'." (Ezekiel 38:2-9)

Syria is not mentioned in this prophecy, but it is the traditional King of the North, and enemy of Israel. In Scripture Syria is mostly referred to as "Aram."

Daniel 11:21-35 speaks of the historical Syrian kings of the North – Antiochus 3, and Antiochus Epiphanes. From verse 36 the prophecy looks forward to the end-time, and to the Great Tribulation World War.

The prophecy deals with the King of the South, the King of the North, and also "the king who does as he pleases" –that is, the Antichrist coming from the Roman Confederation. The King of the North at the endtime is much more than Syria – it is the vast northern confederation that Ezekiel identified. Undoubtedly Syria is included. The prophecy reads:

"At the end time the king of the South (*Egypt*) will engage him (*Antichrist*) in battle, and the King of the North (*the Northern Confederation including Syria*) will storm against him with chariots, horsemen, and with a great fleet of ships. He (*Antichrist*) will invade *many* countries, overwhelming and sweeping through them. He will also invade the Beautiful Land (*Israel*). *Many countries* will fall, but Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon (*Jordan*) will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over *many* countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape." (Daniel 11:40-42). (The words in italics are not in the original scriptures; we have used them by way of interpretation.)

Current events indicate that the axis between Syria, Iran and Russia is developing fast. Sudan is also tied in through Iran, and most of the nations of Beth-Togarmah are already included. We are keenly watching for signs that Germany and Turkey are also to be included in the Russian-led northern confederation.

["When these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."](#) (Luke 21:28)

PROPHECIES REGARDING LEBANON

THERE'S one prophecy that indicates a disaster for Lebanon:

"Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, because the magnificent *trees* have been destroyed." (Zechariah 11:1-2)

The chapter does not stipulate the timing of this event, but as the chapters before and after deal with events of the endtimes, this could well be a Tribulation event.

And then there's another prophecy concerning millennial blessing for Lebanon:

“Is it not yet just a little while before Lebanon will be changed into a fertile *and* fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be regarded as a forest? On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek *and* afflicted will increase *their* joy in YHWH, and the needy of mankind shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” (Zechariah 10:17-19)

PROPHECIES REGARDING SYRIA

“The oracle concerning Damascus: Look! Damascus is about to be removed from being a city, and it will become a heap of ruins.” (Isaiah 17:1)

The destruction of Damascus is expanded in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Amos.

“Concerning Damascus: ‘Hamath and Arpad have been put to shame, for they have heard bad news. They have melted away with anxiety. There is distress on the sea which cannot be calmed. Damascus has become feeble; she has turned to flee, and panic has seized her. Anguish and pain have taken hold of her like a woman in labour.

“‘How it has been deserted - the city of praise, the city of My joy! Therefore, her young men will fall in her streets, and all the men of war will be silenced in that day,’ declares YHWH of Hosts. ‘I shall set fire to the wall of Damascus, and it will consume the fortified towers of Ben-Hadad.’” (Jeremiah 49:23-27)

“YHWH says: ‘For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its *punishment*, because they threshed Gilead with *implements* of sharp iron. So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael (*founder of the Aramean-Syrian dynasty*), and it will consume the citadels of Ben-Hadad (*Hazael’s son*). I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the sceptre, from Beth-Eden. The people of Aram (*Syria*) will be exiled to Kir,’ says YHWH.” (Amos 1:3-5)

A WORD FOR BELIEVERS

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but *let us exhort and encourage one another - and all the more, as you see the Day of YHWH approaching.*” (Hebrews 10:25)

ECONOMIC WOES



BILL GATES: "THE DOLLAR IS GOING DOWN!"

THE world's wealthiest man says the widening US budget and trade deficits are undermining the dollar. "It is a bit scary," Bill Gates said at the end of January. "We're in uncharted territory when the world's reserve currency has so much outstanding debt."

Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corp., is worth \$46.6 billion, and he is betting on a further weakening of the US dollar. He is following the example of Berkshire Hathaway Chairman Warren Buffett, who made a pre-tax gain of \$412 million in the fourth quarter of 2004 by buying foreign currencies.

Warren Buffett is the second wealthiest man (more than \$30 billion), and he shares the same view as Gates. Buffett has bet against the dollar since 2002, and he says that the US trade gap will probably further weaken the currency. "Unless we have a major change in trade policies," he said in January, "I don't see how the dollar can avoid going down."

The current decline in the value of the dollar is a matter of concern to investors, and to other major players, including Europe and China.

From the start of 2002 to the end of 2004, the dollar fell 21% against six major currencies. It hit a record low against the euro on December 30, when it took \$US 1.3666 to buy a euro.

A stronger euro reduces the competitiveness of European exports and shrinks growth among the nations sharing the currency.

The value of the dollar is linked to the debt-laden, deficit-run US economy. The US **trade** deficit increased to a record **\$609.3 billion**, and the total US government debt rose 8.7% to **\$7.62 trillion** in the past year.

An analyst says the silver lining that usually accompanies a drop in the dollar - an increase in exports because US products become cheaper for foreigners - has not materialized.

INTERNATIONAL CONCERN

SOME of the world's major central bankers have warned that the international community could be running out of patience with the massive US budget and trade

deficits that have pushed the dollar lower and increased the cost of their exports to America.

European Central Bank president Jean-Claude Trichet told a conference of business leaders and government officials that it was unacceptable for developed countries to run long-term current account deficits.

“The industrialized world as a whole is in deficit. There is a current account deficit, and there is no offsetting of the US current account deficit by the other industrialized countries,” Trichet said. “That of course means that we are structurally asking the rest of the world to finance us ... It doesn’t seem to me that this is an acceptable and sustainable long-term feature of the present functioning of the global economy.”

A lack of confidence was expressed recently by Chinese leaders. China is the world’s fastest growing economy, and has its currency pegged to the dollar. Fan Gang, director of the National Economic Research Institute in Beijing, told a recent World Economic Forum that “the US dollar is no longer - in our opinion - a stable currency and is devaluing all the time.”

CHINA’S CONCERN

CHINESE Central Bank adviser Yu Yongding also has criticized US policy makers, saying, “The US should take the lead in putting its own house in order. It’s the root cause of global imbalances. The US Government should do more to tackle its record current-account deficit and ease pressure on China to loosen its currency’s peg to the dollar, he said.

America’s own campaign to push China to untie its currency from the dollar as quickly as possible appears to be making little headway.

GERMANY’S CONCERN

GERMAN Deputy Finance Minister Caio Koch-Weser said in Davos on Jan. 27, “The US budget shortfall is the No. 1 risk, disregarding geopolitical risks, to the global economy.” He urged President Bush to present a “credible” plan for bringing the deficit under control.

Mr Bush is pledging to clamp down on spending to halve the **budget** deficit (currently \$427 billion), during his second term.

Economists are at odds in predicting the future. One says: “The people who know money are running - they are not walking - in my opinion, they are running from the dollar.”

Others say: “It is anybody’s guess which way the dollar will head. These *economic pundits* have been famously wrong in the past. I don’t think there are any gurus who know what is going to happen.”

“It keeps on falling. We can’t depend on the dollar, with the debt, the twin deficits and the trade gap.”

“I think the dollar has fallen about as much as it should, and the fact that the White House and Greenspan have made it clear that the dollar’s decline is not good for the consumer, makes it more likely it will be addressed.”

- Source: various news reports late Jan and early Feb. 05



AUSTRALIAN WARNING

FEB 24. The Australian Treasury Secretary, Ken Henry, fears the US is heading for a devastating financial crash that could ravage Australia’s economic growth. He likened the flood of money pouring into the US to support its budget and current accounts deficits to the stock market’s dotcom bubble of the late 1990s.

The financial crash feared by Dr Henry would involve a sharp fall in the US dollar and a bond market sell-off, which would push up US and world interest rates.

This would hit US economic growth and, as a result, cut Chinese exports of manufactured products to the American market. In turn, this would threaten the boom in Australian mineral exports to China.

Fears that the world economy is in grave danger are growing in the major financial capitals.

The International Monetary Fund, which is responsible for stability of the world economy, also warned yesterday of a sudden collapse. The main cause of concern is the US trade and budget deficits.

- Copyright *The Australian*, 25 Feb 2005. Used by permission

PROPHECY FOR THE ENDTIMES:

“Come now, you rich, weep and wail because of the miseries that are coming upon you. Your wealth has become rotten, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will testify against you and will consume your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the Last Days!

“See, the wages of the labourers who reaped your fields, and which have been withheld by you cries out *against you*; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of YHWH of Hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury *and* self-indulgence; you have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous who were not resisting you.

“Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Master. See how the farmer waits expectantly for the precious ‘fruit of the earth,’ waiting patiently until *the land* receives the early and late rains.” (James 5:1-7)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE MA#23 Feb 2005

*** 400 CHRISTIANS SAVED FROM TSUNAMI !
GOD PROTECTS HIS OWN**

[More ►►](#)

*** HUGE "STAR - QUAKE" ROCKS MILKY WAY**

[More ►►](#)