

International Intelligence

Velikhov: ITER Tokamak Main Event of 2007

Academician Yevgeny Velikhov, scientific advisor to the Russian government, head of the Kurchatov Institute, and long-time innovator in scientific projects, told Itar-Tass Jan. 2 that he considers the beginning of official work on the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), the main event of the year 2007.

Thermonuclear fusion power would provide an almost unlimited source of electrical power and high-energy-density process heat, using the deuterium present in ordinary seawater as fuel.

Velikhov somewhat modestly noted that he “cannot be unbiased,” as he has devoted “at least the past 30 years” of his life to the project, starting in 1985 when he first proposed the idea of an international fusion experiment. During 2007, the ITER Council of Governors was set up, and construction began on the ITER tokamak in Cadarache, France. Velikhov was elected as Deputy Chairman of the ITER Council.

“Work has begun on the construction of the reactor itself, which means ideas are being translated into life,” Velikhov said. “This is a great thing, as it releases creative energy. Now everybody is sure that the reactor will be built, and creative potentials are being released for different kinds of offers, modernizations, and inventions not only on the reactor, but also on the whole thermonuclear problem.”

Ironically, just as the ITER project is finally getting off the ground, the U.S. 2008 budget passed by Congress eliminated all Department of Energy funding for the pledged U.S. contribution to the ITER program.

As for fission energy, Velikhov said that he believes that “very important decisions on the reorganization and the final organization of the atomic industry [in Russia] will be reached” this year. He said medium-sized reactors (300 to 400 megawatts) are seen as most attractive in the world, “and a lot has to be done” in that sector. “Major breakthroughs must take place there,” he stated.

Olmert Admits Israel Has Expanded Settlements

In a step forward in the Annapolis peace process, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert admitted, apparently for the first time, that Israel has not honored its commitments to stop expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. “There is a certain contradiction in this, between what we’re actually seeing and what we ourselves promised,” he said in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post* Jan. 4.

“Obligations are not only to be demanded of others, but they must also be honored by ourselves. So there is a certain problem here.”

Olmert’s remarks followed, perhaps only by hours, comments by President Bush on Jan. 3 that settlement expansion is “an impediment to the peace process.” Bush told Reuter, “The unauthorized outposts for example need to be dismantled, like the Israelis said they would do.” Israeli Vice Prime Minister Haim Ramon also said, on Jan. 4, that Israel would soon begin to dismantle about two dozen illegal settler outposts.

On Dec. 31, any new building, planning, or land expropriation for settlements in the West Bank would require his and the Defense Minister’s authorization.

Mukherjee: India Wants Strong, Stable Pakistan

India wants a “strong, stable and prosperous” Pakistan, also in its own interests, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said in New Delhi Jan. 4. Asked about Western media reports on the potential for Pakistani nuclear weapons falling into “jihadi hands”—a scenario posed by the British and the neoconservatives in the United States in order to promote a Western military intervention—Mukherjee asserted that Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is “in command” of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal. “Everybody will have concerns if they [nuclear weapons] fall into wrong hands, or if

non-state actors have access to them. But, perhaps now President Musharraf is in command of the situation, and I think he is also the civilian head of the command of the nuclear system.”

Pakistan has gone through many difficult situations in its history, said Mukherjee, but, at the same time, it has shown that there was “strength and resilience in the system to overcome them.” On the Jammu and Kashmir controversies, he said that India is “engaged in a composite dialogue with Pakistan. We are pinning hopes on the assurances in the Joint Statement of Jan. 6, 2004 that Pakistan’s territory will not be allowed to be used by terrorists. We are hoping that they will adhere to the commitments and that the [terrorist] infrastructure which are there will be destroyed.”

Speculators Profit in Food Hyperinflation Crisis

“A new crisis is emerging, a global food catastrophe that will reach further and be more crippling than anything the world has ever seen,” Donald Coxe, a financial analyst, told a Toronto meeting of the Empire Club Jan. 3. “The credit crunch and the reverberations of soaring oil prices around the world will pale in comparison to what is about to transpire,” Coxe is quoted as saying in the Jan. 4 *Financial Post* of Canada.

Food commodities prices are reaching an all-time high as a result of central banks’ hyperinflationary money pumping. On Jan. 3, wheat surged 30 cents, to \$9.45 a bushel (March contract). Corn for March delivery rose 5.25 cents, to \$4.67 in after-hours trading on the Chicago Board of Trade, an 11-year high. Soybeans for March delivery gained 11.25 cents, to \$12.60 a bushel, a 34-year record. Also rice touched an all-time record.

Meanwhile, as consumers were hit with spiralling price increases, the London *Financial Times*, reported that the Standard & Poor’s GSCI agricultural commodities index (which measures speculation in agricultural commodities) returned 31% to the speculators in 2007!