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ISRAEL 'PLOTS TEHRAN RAID'

June 26, 2010

MANAMA: Israel is massing warplanes in the Caucasus for an attack on Iran, it was revealed yesterday.

Preparations are underway to launch the military attack from Azerbaijan and Georgia, reports our sister paper Akhbar Al Khaleej, quoting military sources.

Israel was, in fact, training pilots in Turkey to launch the strike and was smuggling planes into Georgia using Turkish airspace, they said.

However, Turkey was unaware of Israel's intention of transferring the planes to Georgia, the sources said.

The unexpected crisis between Israel and Turkey following an Israeli commando raid on an aid flotilla bound for Gaza Strip hit Israeli calculations.

Azerbaijan-based intelligence units, working under the cover of technicians, trainers and consultants, have helped with the preparations, the sources said.

Military equipment, mostly supplied by the US, was transported to a Georgian port via the Black Sea.

Georgian coastguard and Israeli controllers are co-operating to hide the operations from Russian vessels, said the sources.

They point out that according to Israel, it will not be in a position to launch a strike on Iran without using bases in Georgia and Azerbaijan due to the limited capabilities of its nuclear submarines stationed near the Iranian coast.

Meanwhile, Iran's Press TV reported that a very large contingent of US ground forces had massed in Azerbaijan, near the Iranian border. The independent Azerbaijani news website Trend confirmed the report.

Those reports came just days after the Pentagon confirmed that an unusually large fleet of US warships had indeed passed through Egypt's Suez Canal en route to the Gulf. At least one Israeli warship reportedly joined the American armada.

Press TV also quoted Iranian Revolutionary Guard Brigadier General Mehdi Moini as saying that the country's forces are mobilised and ready to face Israeli and American "misadventures" near its borders.

* Iran last night said it has cancelled plans to send an aid ship to the Gaza Strip as Israel "had sent a letter to the UN saying that the presence of Iranian and Lebanese ships in the Gaza area will be considered a declaration of war on that regime and it will confront it," Irna said.