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BUSH SENDING LOAN PACKAGE TO HILL, BUT DECISION ON F-15s NOT YET FINAL

By Cynthia Mann
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- President Bush seized this week's B'nai B'rith convention here as an opportunity to defuse tensions with American Jews and recast his image as a champion of Jewish interests.

Almost exactly one year after he clashed with Jewish lobbyists over Israel's request for immigrant absorption aid, the president announced Tuesday that he would send proposed legislation to Congress this week authorizing guarantees for \$10 billion in loans.

Warm applause greeted the news that a highly charged and acrimonious chapter of events appeared closed to the satisfaction of all parties.

Bush had held up the loan guarantees request because of the previous Israeli government's refusal to comply with his insistence that it halt Jewish settlement activity in the territories.

He has been able to justify that hard-line policy since last month's announcement that he and Israel's new prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, had worked out a loan deal based on a virtual settlement freeze.

But touching on a possible new irritant in U.S.-Israeli relations, the president said a Saudi request to buy 72 advanced F-15 fighter aircraft from the United States is "under consideration."

He said, though, that he had not yet made a final decision on the matter, explaining that he had to balance several competing interests, including U.S. jobs at stake in the sale and the balance of power in the Persian Gulf.

Bush pledged that any such sale would not threaten the U.S. commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge in the region.

And he made a point of noting that his Democratic opponent, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, had recently declared his qualified support for the F-15 sale. That declaration has come under fire for giving the Bush administration the political cover it needs to go forward with the sale.

Says Clinton 'Waffled' On Gulf

In a recitation of his pro-Israel record of accomplishments, Bush recalled the U.S. defense of Israel against Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf War and his administration's success as a broker in the Middle East peace talks.

At the same time, the president took aim at Clinton as an equivocator on matters of foreign policy where Israel's security is at stake.

Reflecting his own decision to send Americans into combat in the gulf, Bush said, "Ask yourself where we would be if we had someone in the Oval Office who would have waffled, who would have wavered and wanted to have it both ways."

He read a quote attributed to Clinton that reflected indecision and ambivalence over what course he might have pursued.

"Israel's very survival would be at stake, and we'd be talking about whether there was any chance to avoid nuclear Armageddon in the Middle East," the president said.

The B'nai B'rith speech, coming less than

two months before the election, was of evident importance to Bush, who has been dogged in the Jewish community by remarks he made last Sept. 12 criticizing the organized Jewish lobbying efforts on behalf of the loan guarantees.

The incident, combined with his insistence on an Israeli settlement freeze, spurred charges in some quarters that the president is anti-Israel and even anti-Semitic. And it sharply eroded his Jewish support, which failed to top 30 percent in the last election.

The Bush campaign does not hope to win even that much of the Jewish vote in November. The conservative tone of the Republican convention in Houston last month was felt to alienate many Jews, the majority of whom are more moderate, at least on domestic issues.

But in a race that is expected to be close, Jewish support is being coveted and courted by both camps.

Clinton was scheduled to address the B'nai B'rith convention Wednesday via satellite.

Regrets Any Pained Caused

On Tuesday, Bush revisited the September remarks to set the record straight, saying he had been "misinterpreted," and that he had expressed his "regret for any pain this may have caused."

"Again, I want to make it clear," he said. "I support, I endorse and I deeply believe in the God-given right of every American to promote what they believe."

"It's more than a right," he said. "It's your duty as an American citizen."

In a curious twist of events, he then called on Jews to lobby on Capitol Hill for the passage of his loan guarantee legislation.

It was clear Bush felt vindicated by his posture on the settlements. As a result of Rabin's "new priorities," he said, "we will be able to promote peace and welcome new immigrants at one and the same time."

He added: "It was important not to choose between them, and I am glad we are now in a position to promote both objectives."

But Bush also had advice and a warning for his critics. "It is important that we learn how to disagree," he said.

"As my friend, Abe Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League has pointed out, to accuse those who may come to different conclusions on one or another public issue of harboring anti-Semitism is to cheapen the term.

"That is dangerous. That is deeply wrong," he said. "The way democracies engage in debate" is "a mark of civility and freedom."

The president spent several minutes condemning anti-Semitism and prejudice "wherever and whenever they appear," saying they "mock and threaten the basic principles upon which the United States is founded." He said he would do his utmost to banish it.

Foxman, who is ADL's national director, praised the speech, saying Bush had successfully defused the tensions around the Sept. 12 incident and made a strong case for his Middle East policy. But he said that would only serve to highlight the differences between Bush and Clinton on the domestic front.

"There will be classic issues, like pluralism,"

said Foxman. "The Republicans worked hard for the past 10 years to reach out and open their tent." But in Houston, he said, that "tent" was closed.

Lingering Concern Over Buchanan

Several prominent Jewish Republicans held a news conference after Bush's speech in which they deflected charges that the prominence of Patrick Buchanan and other conservatives at the convention signaled the party's sharp turn to the right and a shrinking tent.

"Pat Buchanan does not represent the party in its totality," said George Klein, chairman of the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group. The party, he said, "is an umbrella where all points of view can speak out."

"Pat Buchanan was a strong negative at the convention," conceded Jacob Stein, another Jewish Republican leader. But he argued that the convention "was meant to be inclusive."

Arthur Rothenburg, a B'nai B'rith delegate from Plano, Texas, said the speech marked the first time he had seen a president. But he said Bush's conciliatory remarks were not enough to make him change his plans to vote for Clinton.

"I felt it was just a pre-prepared political speech (in which) he said the right things," said Rothenburg. But he added that even if Bush said the "right things" about Israel, the president is too far to the right for him on domestic issues.

"I'm not the kind of person who says Israel is the only issue," he said. "I support Israel, but this is my country, and I have to live in it every day of the week -- and so does my family."

Rothenburg cited Buchanan's speech at the convention, saying it made him feel that "unless you're a white Christian American, you're almost a second-class citizen."

CABINET ADOPTS \$41 BILLION BUDGET, AFTER RESTORING SOME PROPOSED CUTS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- Israel's Cabinet approved a 1993 budget of 97.6 billion shekels (\$41 billion) Tuesday after restoring cuts to religious institutions under pressure from Interior Minister Arye Deri.

The budget was approved after 11 hours of debate, with only Absorption Minister Yair Tshaban of the Meretz bloc voting against it. Environmental Protection Minister Ora Namir and Economic Planning Minister Shimon Shetreet, both of the Labor Party, abstained.

Deri, who threatened to withdraw his fervently religious Shas party from the narrowly based coalition, was granted demands worth some \$58 million.

A decision to back off some planned cuts to the religious sector and to the World Zionist Organization Settlement Department followed consultations between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Finance Minister Avraham Shohat.

A proposed cut in allocations to the WZO Settlement Department was halved and now stands at \$8 million.

A cut of \$20.8 million in grants to yeshivot was restored; religious cultural projects were allocated an additional budget of \$23 million; and \$6.3 million was put back in allocations to religious councils.

The budget now goes to the Knesset, where it is likely to undergo a lengthy process of discussion before being adopted.

GOLAN SETTLERS WORRY OVER FUTURE AFTER MEETINGS WITH HERZOG, RABIN By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- Visits to the Golan Heights this week by Israel's two top leaders were of little comfort to Jewish settlers there, who are worried their homes will be sacrificed to attain peace with Syria.

During a visit to the region Tuesday, President Chaim Herzog said only that he "understood" the concern of the settlers "as we stand at an historic crossroads."

Stopping just short of making an all-out political statement, the president said he prayed that God would "guide us to the destinations of peace" and assured the settlers that Israeli policy-makers were considering not only the prospects of peace but the dangers involved.

Herzog's visit came after Golan settlers met Sunday with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to discuss the future of the territory. They left that meeting as worried as when they arrived.

Rabin too made no comforting promises at the meeting. The settlers' concern has been intensified by Rabin's public assessment that Israel does not necessarily need to hold on to "every kilometer" of the area.

During Tuesday's visit by the president, Noa Weinberger, an elementary school pupil at the settlement of Hispin, handed Herzog a scroll reading: "Your visit here is a sign that your heart is with us. Please help us persuade our government that the Golan is our home."

Under a 1974 interim accord, Israel withdrew from part of the Golan, gaining a quiet border with its most menacing enemy for the past 18 years. Prior to the Six-Day War, settlements in the Jordan Valley were the targets of repeated Syrian shelling.

'Every Rock In The Golan Is Important'

Golan settlers were rolling up their sleeves this week for an intensive and protracted campaign against additional Israeli concessions on the plateau.

Settlements within the pre-1967 borders of Israel that had been within easy range of gun-sights from the Golan also registered concern.

Taking part in Sunday's meeting with the prime minister was a representative of Kibbutz Ein Gev, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, situated at the foot of the Golan Heights.

He said the fate of the settlements in the upper Jordan Valley was linked with the future of the Golan Heights.

The only positive sign recorded by the settlers was the fact that "no one has drawn up any maps" for a possible border settlement between Syria and Israel.

In an official communique, Rabin said he had outlined to the settlers the Israeli position, as it was presented in the negotiations with Syria in Washington.

"Israel wants a full peace with Syria. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 are valid and applicable, in the framework of negotiations with Syria, while each party has its own interpretation regarding those resolutions," the statement said.

The settlers said they would continue their campaign against territorial concessions on the plateau.

"For us, every hill, every rock in the Golan is important," said Yehuda Wohlman, chairman of the Golan settlements committee.

ITALIAN PRESIDENT CALLS ON CHIEF RABBI TO SUPPORT JEWS IN FACE OF HATE CRIMES

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro paid a visit to Rome's chief rabbi Monday night to demonstrate his solidarity with the Jewish community in light of recent violence by Skinhead youths and other manifestations of anti-Semitism here and elsewhere in Europe.

"I am and will always be with you, as I always have been," Scalfaro told Rabbi Elio Toaff.

"I want to express a clear condemnation of every resurgence of racism and anti-Semitism, which has already caused such great tragedy in Europe in this century," he said.

The visit came hours after anti-Semitic slogans and swastikas were discovered scrawled on graves in the Jewish section of the municipal cemetery at San Remo, the resort city on the Italian Riviera.

"Six million were too few," "Jews to the pyre" and "All Jews to the ovens" read the slogans scrawled on about a dozen tombs Sunday night or early Monday.

In a twist of irony, the desecrated tombs were those of Catholic families buried in the Jewish section of the cemetery.

Scalfaro's visit to Toaff, at the rabbi's office near Rome's main synagogue, was a response to Toaff's recent criticism of the government's failure to condemn recent anti-Semitic incidents in France and Germany.

"There's enough going on (in Germany) to allow for very dark predictions. I fear that something ugly may also happen in Italy," Toaff told the daily *Il Messaggero* in a recent interview.

He said at the time that he hoped to meet soon with Scalfaro to explain Jewish concerns over recent racial attacks.

Attacks On Immigrants

According to newspaper accounts, Scalfaro unexpectedly telephoned Toaff on Monday morning to arrange the meeting, saying, "It is not you who should come to me, but the opposite."

Also present during the 25-minute meeting was Sergio Frassinetti, the president of Rome's Jewish community.

Toaff told Scalfaro, "I am grateful for your solidarity, but I am still worried."

Toaff later said Scalfaro told him he "was as worried as we are about the upsurge of racist violence in Germany. But he stressed, and I agree with him, that here in Italy the situation is not so intense."

But in a chilling echo of the neo-Nazi attacks against foreigners in Germany, gangs of young people have launched attacks on immigrants in the Rome area.

On the night of Sept. 3, 15 youths attacked a group of Polish immigrants in the seaside town of Ostia.

The assault followed an attack the night before in the nearby town of Lavinio, where a group of toughs smashed windows at a cheap hotel housing Pakistani immigrants.

Over the weekend, violent clashes broke out between gangs, mostly based in poor, outlying neighborhoods, whose members often shave their heads Skinhead-style and scrawl swastikas and slogans such as "White Power" on walls.

But authorities said it was unclear how much of the violence is politically motivated and how

much simply street brawling by thugs who model themselves on right-wing extremist Skinhead gangs.

"They are not (neo-Nazi) Skinheads," a police official, Marcello Fulvi, told reporters.

"These are aimless youths, neighborhood thugs, and if some of them shave their heads, they do it more for reasons of fashion than political conviction," he said.

Jewish leaders in Rome expressed concern that the violence directed against foreigners in Italy and Germany could lead to a new wave of anti-Semitic violence.

GERMAN LAWMAKER TELLS ISRAELI OF CONCERN OVER RECENT ATTACKS

By David Kantor

BONN, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- As renewed right-wing attacks on foreigners were reported in several German cities, a German parliamentary leader assured her Israeli counterpart that she shares his concern over the wave of neo-Nazi violence in Germany. Rita Sussmuth, the speaker of the Bundestag, sent a letter Monday to Knesset Speaker Shevah Weiss in which she said she fully understood feelings in Israel over attacks on foreigners in Germany.

Weiss had written her a letter saying the attacks "are very harmful to all of us."

"There is no need to point out to you that there is naturally a particular sensitivity about such events in Germany," he had written.

Sussmuth said there is agreement by all parties in the parliament that the right-wing radicals would not undermine the country's democratic institutions.

The large number of refugees seeking asylum in Germany constitutes a real problem, she said, but under no circumstances could that justify aggression against foreigners.

The Bundestag speaker pointed to the situation caused by the collapse of the Communist regime in East Germany, where the situation "shows all of us we have to immediately react in more sensitive ways to overcome the poison of hatred."

On Tuesday, the Bundestag condemned the violent attacks against foreigners and urged efficient measures to protect lives of those vulnerable to attack.

Last week, a Jewish leader urged measures to find housing for Jewish families from the former Soviet Union.

Alexander Kogan, chairman of the Jewish community in the federal state of Brandenburg, urged Prime Minister Manfred Stolpe to help locate housing for Jewish families who have been living for more than a year in barracks near Berlin and could easily become the target of violent attacks by neo-Nazis.

Meanwhile, a spate of attacks was reported this week against asylum-seekers. Assaults on refugee hostels were reported in Quedlinburg, in the eastern German state of Upper Saxony; and in the states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and North Rhine-Westphalia.

The Justice Ministry of Brandenburg state said Tuesday it was studying the possibility of banning several neo-Nazi groups that initiated the recent rioting.

The ministry said that especially in the cities of Cottbus and Eisenhüttenstadt, violence has been carefully coordinated by experienced neo-Nazi activists.

ETHNIC FIGHTING IN MOSLEM LANDS COULD MEAN A BIG BOOST IN ALIYAH

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- Increased ethnic tension in the Moslem republics of the former Soviet Union could lead to a new surge in aliyah, according to Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Dinitz.

About 1,500 immigrants from the region are expected to arrive in Israel this month. And Dinitz indicated Monday that the upward trend is likely to continue, given the shaky political and economic climate in the republics.

One indication of the tense situation is the fact that 95 percent of the 180,000 Jews in these areas hold approved family reunification requests -- the first step in the aliyah process. During the past two and a half years, 62,300 people have immigrated from the Moslem republics.

Dinitz noted that Tajikistan, home to 12,000 Jews, is on the verge of civil war, while in Kyrgystan, where 8,000 Jews live, a law was recently enacted that prohibits anyone not fluent in the Kyrgyz language from holding a public or civil service post.

On Monday, the president of Tajikistan, Rakhman Nabyev, an old Communist leader, was forced to resign following a week of violent protests. And the leader of the opposition Democratic Party, Dost Mohammed Dost, said the country could expect more bloodshed.

In Azerbaijan, Jews have suffered in the protracted war with the Armenians, Dinitz said.

Direct flights have eased the aliyah process, he said, and the Jewish Agency is pursuing ways to add more routes using local airlines.

The agency just signed an agreement with Uzbekistan Airways. The inaugural flight, from Tashkent to Tel Aviv, was to arrive early Wednesday with 35 new immigrants, Dinitz said.

While the situation seems to be deteriorating in the Moslem republics, there are indications that at least some of the republics seek improved relations with Israel.

In the first-ever state visit to Israel by the head of a Moslem republic, Kazakhstan's prime minister, Sergei Tereschenko, pressed for cooperation between the two countries.

During his brief visit this week, Tereschenko said Kazakhstan could benefit from Israeli know-how in the agricultural and technological sectors, but added that his country had many things to teach Israel about desalination techniques.

Tereschenko vowed that his country would not sell any of the nuclear hardware it inherited when the Soviet Union collapsed.

"Kazakhstan is peace-loving. Israel has nothing to worry about," the prime minister said.

ARGENTINE JEWISH CEMETERY HIT AGAIN

By Victoria Verlichak

BUENOS AIRES, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- For the fourth time in a month, vandals have desecrated the Jewish cemetery at Mar del Plata, a seaside resort about 250 miles south of Buenos Aires.

In a rampage last week, they smashed 20 tombstones, stole ornaments from 10 more and painted swastikas on walls.

Buenos Aires police have been ordered to maintain permanent watch at all Jewish cemeteries in the province.

Jewish leaders warned that the recent attacks had wide implications.

The attacks "not only affect Jews but also destroy the social and cultural framework of the whole community," the Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations said in a statement.

In April, a Buenos Aires area cemetery was the target of a shooting incident found to have been perpetrated by "Nazi sympathizer groups."

No one was hurt in that episode, which involved the firing of two shots at the main entrance of the cemetery in suburban Berazategui. The same cemetery was vandalized last year on the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth, April 15.

JEWS LED ANC MARCH ON CISKEI WHICH TURNED INTO MASSACRE

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG, Sept. 8 (JTA) -- The African National Congress march that turned into a massacre Monday in the black South African homeland Ciskei was led by two Jews.

Ronnie Kasrils and Raymond Suttner of the ANC, together with South African Communist Party Secretary-General Chris Hani, led the march of about 50,000 people, which was aimed at ousting Ciskei's military ruler, Brig. Oupa Gqozo.

Some 24 ANC protesters were killed and another 188 injured when Ciskei troops opened machine-gun fire at the demonstrators in the homeland's capital, Bisho.

News reports from Bisho said Ciskei security forces opened fire when about 100 demonstrators, led by Kasrils, breached a corner of the border cordon and ran toward the soldiers.

Neither Kasrils nor Suttner, both of whom are affiliated with the South African Communist Party, was hurt.

Kasrils, one of the most colorful characters in the ANC, lived in exile for 27 years, with his base in London. Suttner, a lawyer and academic, was a political detainee for most of his young adulthood.

Kasrils returned to South Africa in 1990 when the ban on the ANC was lifted, to find that his temporary indemnity had been withdrawn by the South African government.

Nicknamed the "Red Pimpernel," he was on the run inside South Africa for many months, branded as one of the four most wanted people of the ANC's military wing, Umkonto weSizwe, of which he is a former intelligence chief.

When in hiding he met with journalists, took refuge in affluent Jewish homes and sent Rosh Hashanah cards to rabbis and Jewish leaders.

Kasrils grew up in the suburb of Yeoville, an enclave of religious Jews, where he had his bar mitzvah.

"Growing up during the war with all the talk about Hitler and fascism prompted me to ask my mother at a very young age why the Nazis were treating the Jews that way. I also asked whether that was not the way they were treating the Africans (blacks) here," Kasrils told this reporter in a 1990 pre-Rosh Hashanah interview before his indemnity was withdrawn.

Kasrils, who has a penchant for chicken soup and kneidlach (matzah balls), says he is proud of his Jewish origins and "never in my life have I for a moment allowed anti-Semitic remarks to pass. I feel very strongly that Jews should relate to all forms of oppression and racism."

The tragedy in the Ciskei, which has caused international outrage, appears to represent yet another setback to a negotiated settlement in this country.