



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli proposal offered

An Israeli official confirmed a New York Times report that Israel presented a compromise proposal for a West Bank redeployment. Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai met in Florida with U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross hours before Ross was scheduled to depart for Israel to discuss an Israeli redeployment plan. Mordechai is slated to meet in Washington on Friday with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to discuss the redeployment and an Israeli offer to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon. [Page 1]

### Lebanon rejects withdrawal plan

Lebanese leaders rejected an Israeli plan to withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon in exchange for Beirut's pledge to maintain security in the region.

"Israel wants us to be accountable toward Israel. We cannot do that," said Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri. [Page 1]

### Papon trial postponed

The war crimes trial of Maurice Papon was postponed after his wife died. The jury is now expected to deliver its verdict on April 1. Lawyers for the plaintiffs expressed concern that the jury may pity Papon and give him a more lenient verdict.

### Finance officials to meet

A committee of U.S. public finance officials is slated to meet Thursday to monitor the cooperation of Swiss banks in returning the assets of dormant accounts belonging to Holocaust victims. The officials are also monitoring the banks' accountability regarding assets looted by the Nazis. It remains unclear whether the officials will announce a boycott of the banks.

### O.U. joins court brief

The Orthodox Union joined with Christian groups in a friend-of-the-court brief asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review an appeals court ruling barring religious groups from using public school facilities for religious services during non-school hours.

The case involves an evangelical Christian church that was denied a request to use a gym in a Bronx, N.Y., school for its religious services because the New York City Board of Education policy prohibits such uses.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Showdown in Israel likely in wake of compromise plan

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears headed for a showdown with his coalition — yet again.

The likelihood of a confrontation became apparent this week when Israeli officials confirmed a New York Times report that Israel had presented to the U.S. administration a compromise proposal regarding further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank.

News of Netanyahu's proposed withdrawal plan came on the eve of U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross' visit to the region.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai met in Florida on Wednesday to discuss the Israeli proposal with Ross, who was slated to leave for Israel that night.

Observers believe the plan, which was first presented to Washington on March 12, was leaked to The New York Times in order to put pressure on Netanyahu to live up to his proposals.

The latest developments seem to inject new life into Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that have been virtually dead for months.

But Netanyahu remains in the dilemma he has faced every time he has sought to move the process forward: how to respond to international pressure to keep the peace process alive, while simultaneously reassuring his hard-line supporters and Cabinet members that he's not going to give away the shop.

It is also not yet clear how the Palestinians will respond to the compromise proposal.

Netanyahu's plan reportedly offers a 10 percent or 11 percent further redeployment instead of the 13.1 percent that the United States is reported to be seeking.

It also gives the Palestinian Authority smaller, contiguous tracts of West Bank lands instead of larger, disconnected ones.

The premier is believed to be willing to agree to a double-digit redeployment if he can convince Washington to agree that there be no more redeployments until a permanent agreement with the Palestinians is reached.

Amid the reports of Netanyahu's planned double-digit offer, some of these hard-liners are already drawing up battle plans to bring down the government with a no-confidence motion.

The Knesset's hard-line, 17-member Land of Israel bloc, has vowed to oppose anything larger than a 9 percent withdrawal.

The head of the faction, Geshet Knesset member Michael Kleiner, has said the group would get enough support to bring down a "government that portrays itself as a national one, but gives up hundreds of kilometers of homeland territory."

In an effort to avoid a no-confidence motion, Netanyahu plans to present his redeployment plan next week, during the Knesset's Passover recess, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Netanyahu's plan, discussed with President Clinton in two telephone calls and in the March 12 letter, is being seen, in part, as an effort to head off the reported American proposal, which links the phased 13.1 percent withdrawal it is seeking from Israel to specific steps by the Palestinian Authority to live up to its security commitments.

U.S. officials have been considering whether to go public with the plan and to publicly criticize either side that rejects the proposal.

On Sunday, the Israeli Cabinet, displaying rare unanimity, rejected the reported U.S.

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Annan criticized in Knesset

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan came under attack during a visit to the Israeli Knesset.

A remark by House Speaker Dan Tichon that the United Nations is biased against Israel and should not play a role in Middle East peace negotiations sparked a shouting match among legislators.

Annan, who also visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, made a speech in Jerusalem calling on Israel to commit itself to the principle of land for peace.

Annan was in an Israel as part of a regional peace tour.

As part of his trip, he visited several countries, including Syria and Lebanon.

### Knesset rejects amnesty

The Israeli Knesset rejected three bills calling for a widespread prisoner amnesty as part of Israel's 50th anniversary commemoration.

The votes were held as part of a flurry of parliamentary activity aimed at wrapping up outstanding Knesset business before the body's Passover recess.

In another vote, lawmakers overwhelmingly rejected a bill to oblige all citizens, including fervently Orthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs, to serve in the army or do national service.

### Israeli groups backs Iraqis

A group of Israeli intellectuals of Iraqi descent created an association to express support for the Iraqi people.

Founders of the group said they were making a distinction between the people and government of Iraq.

One member said in an interview that the group believes that joint activities with opponents of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein could lead to a change in the Baghdad regime and to Iraq's eventual inclusion in the Middle East peace process.

plan, saying it was "damaging to the security interests" of the Jewish state.

According to some observers, the Palestinians were willing to accept the American plan only because they knew of Israel's opposition.

It remains unclear how they would react to the reported Israeli initiative, which addresses at least one Palestinian concern — the ability to have under its control a whole piece of the West Bank, rather than isolated islands of self-rule.

Ross' visit, while announced earlier, was only scheduled in response to the Netanyahu initiative, according to Israeli officials, suggesting that the Clinton administration was taking the plan seriously.

By Monday, both Washington and Jerusalem were desperately moving to avert an open confrontation on the eve of Ross' scheduled visit to Israel.

Addressing the United Jewish Appeal's Young Leadership Conference in Washington, Vice President Al Gore said Israel has the right to determine its own peace and security. Ross, who also spoke at the UJA gathering, said he was going to Israel to "finalize" American ideas to revive the dormant peace talks. But Ross also stressed that there would not be any imposed solution.

Netanyahu has been hoping that Clinton would climb down in the face of a major confrontation with Israel.

This outcome has been contingent, above all, on Jerusalem's ability to rally all or most of the American Jewish community and the Republican-dominated Congress to its cause. One sign of unqualified support for the Netanyahu government came this week from the leader of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington.

"These latest developments are so troubling because they threaten to undo so much good and send us down a path from which it will be difficult to return," Howard Kohr, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said in an address to the UJA conference Tuesday.

"The State Department is now veering toward an approach that has never worked in the past and in fact has only been counterproductive," Kohr said. "Their idea of promulgating a so-called American plan and then using pressure tactics to try to coerce Israel into accepting it has been tried repeatedly and has never worked."

While the Clinton administration had not yet made a decision on whether to go ahead with its own plan, it was apparently startled by the intensity of Israel's reaction — and especially by Netanyahu's apparent intention to rally all of Israel's traditional friends in Washington and across the country in order to fight the White House over the reported plan.

Israeli diplomats, in recent weeks, have been busily briefing congressional leaders and Jewish organizational leaders on the government's position.

Several ministers have been dispatched to the United States to bolster the effort to win over political and public opinion.

Mordechai, who is widely seen as the key moderate in the Cabinet, went on record Monday — just days before his arrival in the United States — as staunchly opposing the 13.1 percent proposal.

"It is not acceptable to me," declared Mordechai, thereby scotching any speculation of discord between him and Netanyahu over the government's position on the peace process.

Mordechai would prefer that the international community focus on helping Israel extricate its forces from southern Lebanon.

Israeli officials have recently voiced their support of U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 — which was issued 20 years ago and called for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon — on the condition that the Lebanese government steps in and maintains peace in the region.

Mordechai won support in principle for this initiative from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who met with Israeli leaders Tuesday after visiting Lebanon and Syria.

And the defense minister hopes to garner support from Washington.

But there are some observers who believe that Israel's focus on Lebanon was merely an attempt to deflect attention from the West Bank redeployments.

But even if they prove serious, Lebanon does not appear eager to accept the plan.

"Israel wants us to be accountable toward Israel. We cannot do that," Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri said Wednesday.

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Insurer seeks settlement

A German insurance firm announced that it wants to reach an out-of-court settlement with Holocaust victims.

The chairman of Allianz AG's board of directors, Gerhard Rupprecht, said the settlement would cover claims from Jewish customers whose policies were confiscated or terminated during the Nazi era.

The company opened a hotline last year to handle claims and has launched an independent investigation of its remaining wartime records to help locate unpaid policies.

So far, the investigation has only located a handful of open cases.

Last year, a group of Holocaust victims filed a group action suit in a New York court against 16 European insurance companies, including Allianz.

After World War II, many companies claimed they were no longer responsible for paying uncollected premiums.

Complicating the issue of compensation, many Holocaust victims have been unable to document their policies.

### Holocaust position in doubt

A man who pledged \$3 million to Harvard University for a chairmanship in Holocaust studies transferred half of his money to the university's medical school because of a disagreement over how the subject should be taught, according to a news report.

Kenneth Lipper reportedly wanted the controversial scholar Daniel Goldhagen to fill the post. But some members of the search committee believed that hiring Goldhagen would lead to an overemphasis on studying the perpetrators of Nazism at the expense of their victims and Jewish culture.

Goldhagen's book "Hitler's Willing Executioners," which argued that ordinary Germans actively participated in the Holocaust, was popular in Germany, but criticized by scholars who said it opened little new ground.

Harvard officials and Lipper both say they still hope to fill the post.

Currently, Harvard offers no courses on the Holocaust.

### House Republican dies

U.S. Rep. Steven Schiff (R-N.M.) died Wednesday after a long battle with skin cancer.

Schiff, 51, one of three Jewish Republican members of the House of Representatives, was first elected to Congress in 1989.

The National Jewish Coalition, a Republican Jewish group, hailed him as "an important friend and leader in Congress."

## Jewish candidates vying for Ukrainian Parliament

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Jews are active participants in the Ukrainian elections scheduled for Sunday — as candidates, as voters and as targets of anti-Semitism.

For the first time in post-Communist history, voters in Ukraine have a wide variety of choices, as 30 political parties have registered for the elections.

Experts say that seven or eight parties and blocs have realistic chances to earn parliamentary representation in the 450-member Rada.

Municipal and mayoral elections are also slated for Sunday.

There are Jewish candidates on virtually every party's list — from the relatively weak pro-presidential and reform groups to the stronger Communist Party and the nationalist Rukh Party.

There is no specific Jewish party fielding a list of candidates.

"There are many Jews among the candidates, but they are not running on behalf of the Jewish community," said Arkady Monastyrsky, chairman of the executive committee of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, an umbrella organization.

The former Soviet republic, which has a population of 52 million, is home to 600,000 Jews.

The list of Jewish candidates running for the Rada includes Ukraine's former prime minister — and current member of Parliament — Yefim Zvyagilsky and businessman Grigory Surkis, who owns the nation's most popular soccer team.

"The Jewish community has much riding on the elections," said Mark Levin, executive director of the Washington-based National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

"This is an important test in the stability of democratic institutions in Ukraine," he added.

Several Jews are expected to earn a seat in the Rada.

Both Jewish and non-Jewish candidates are courting the Jewish vote.

In several regions, candidates addressed Jewish communities and attended Purim celebrations.

In a show of minority solidarity earlier this week, Jewish leaders, along with 12 other minority communities, issued a joint statement urging voters to go to the polls. Minorities account for a third of Ukraine's population.

Young voters, Jews and non-Jews alike, are expected to support reform-oriented parties, while older citizens — including some Jews — are expected to cast their ballots for the Communists and other left-wing candidates.

Monastyrsky said that for the organized Jewish community, the success of pro-presidential and liberal forces would be the most desirable outcome of Sunday's vote.

"We know these forces well," he said.

But Jewish leaders were not fearful of any outcome the election might bring.

"The elections will not change the situation for Jews," said Iosif Zissels, chairman of the Va'ad of Ukraine, the oldest Jewish umbrella organization in the former Soviet republic.

But anti-Semitism has played a role in the campaign.

In a letter last week to Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, Dmitri Dvorkis, the mayor of the central Ukrainian city of Vinnitsa, urged the president to intervene to stop the anti-Semitism he claimed was being used against him and other Jewish candidates in electoral campaigns.

"The ethnic terror should be stopped to give the citizens of Jewish origin who consider Ukraine their motherland the opportunity to work for its benefit and not to force them to emigrate," he wrote.

Jewish officials, however, are downplaying the importance of anti-Semitism in the campaign.

"Dozens of Jews are running in the parliamentary and municipal elections, and I don't see any reason for special concern," said Ilya Levitas, who heads the Jewish Council of Ukraine, another umbrella group. □

## Jerusalem suburbanites balk at city plan to expand

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jerusalem suburbanites are balking at the idea of officially becoming part of the Israeli capital.

Authorities are considering a proposal, backed by Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, to expand the city's boundaries to surrounding Jewish communities has drawn opposition from residents of the suburbs that would be affected.

A plan being considered by a government committee would merge the various local governments with Jerusalem, Israeli media reported this week.

The reports indicated that the move would be primarily westward and that such municipalities as Ma'aleh Adumim, Givat Ze'ev and Betar would not necessarily be annexed to Jerusalem or come within its municipal boundaries.

Olmert denied reports of plans to annex areas east of Jerusalem.

The eastward expansion of the city has been a point of contention between Israel and the Palestinians, who view it as settlement expansion and an obstacle to progress in the peace process.

The plan comes at a time of shifting demographics in Jerusalem, which has an increasingly large fervently Orthodox population. Some demographers also project that, as the Arab population of the city grows, the Jewish majority will decrease.

Olmert defended the idea of the westward expansion as a matter of efficiency and mutual benefit.

"There is no point in maintaining a string of local councils when they can be merged beneath one body in the Jerusalem municipality," he said.

"I am sure that the unification of the localities west of Jerusalem would not only benefit Jerusalem, but the local authorities as well. We have to remember that no small amount of resources are wasted on redundancy between different municipalities."

But opponents charged that the city is pursuing those residents who have left the city and opted for the suburbs.

"We should not chase after those people who have fled Jerusalem because of a feeling of suffocation, economic hardship and housing problems, and force Jerusalem on them," said Labor Knesset member Ophir Pines.

The leaders of neighboring municipalities said annexation to Jerusalem would mean losing the communities' own character and quality of life.

"People left Jerusalem in order to live here in a quiet and relaxed atmosphere," said Eli Moyal, head of the local council of one such suburb, Mevasseret Zion. "They will not agree to be returned to Jerusalem."

Officials in the Prime Minister's Office were quoted by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz as saying that despite the opposition of local municipalities, the expansion of Jerusalem was essential for its development.

They also denied speculation that the expansion of the city was intended to persuade Olmert to suspend municipal approval for construction at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem, another area of contention with the Palestinians. □

## Jewish groups challenge suit against anti-terror law

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Humanitarian activists are suing the U.S. government over a law that makes it illegal to aid the activities of foreign groups the State Department has deemed to be terrorist organizations.

The lawsuit contends that two provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1996 are unconstitutional because they criminalize fund raising for the "lawful and non-violent activities" of foreign terrorist organizations.

The case could have important implications for other groups designated as terrorist organizations, including the Islamic militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles this month on behalf of six organizations and two individuals who want to continue helping two designated terrorist groups — one that seeks independence for Kurds in Turkey and another that seeks self-determination for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Humanitarian Law Project of Los Angeles argues that it should be allowed to engage in political advocacy for the Kurdistan Workers Party, while Tamil American organizations say they should be able to continue donating food, clothing and other goods to orphanages and refugee centers run by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

But Jewish organizations, several of which were instrumental in pushing the anti-terrorism law through Congress with its provisions banning fund raising for lawful and non-violent activities of foreign terrorist groups, disagree with that position.

"We were strong backers of the concept in legislation and I think we will be strong backers as it gets challenged in court," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

"There is a seamless web between the terrorist activities of groups like Hamas and their social welfare initiatives," Lieberman said. □

## Museum receives autonomy

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Berlin authorities have decided to grant the city's Jewish museum cultural autonomy, potentially ending a long-running dispute between the Berlin Jewish community and city officials.

The agreement between the museum's director, Michael Blumenthal, and Berlin cultural senator Peter Radunski gives the museum control over exhibitions and displays as well as personnel decisions. Berlin cultural officials insisted for years on retaining control over the conception and display of exhibits in the Jewish museum. They envisioned a museum dedicated primarily to the display of Jewish life in Berlin.

The refusal of the previous director, Amnon Barzel, to realize this concept, led to his dismissal last year by the city's government.

The dispute delayed by two years the opening of the new Jewish museum.

The Jewish museum, slated to open in 1999, is part of a larger group of museums that are administered by the city of Berlin. The agreement must still be approved by the Berlin Parliament. □