



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Blair concludes visit

Both British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are downplaying expectations regarding a planned May 4 meeting in London. At that meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright plans to hold separate talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership.

Blair concluded his three-day visit to the Middle East after holding a second meeting with Netanyahu.

### Moledet sought as ally

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is looking to bring the far-right Moledet Party into his governing coalition.

The party, which holds two Knesset seats, opposes the Oslo accords and calls for the expulsion of Arabs to neighboring countries. [Page 3]

### Report: French planning sales

Washington is reportedly furious over French plans to supply long-range cruise missiles to a number of Arab countries in the Persian Gulf.

According to the London-based Arab-language daily al-Quds, Washington is engaged in quiet diplomacy to persuade Paris not to sell the missiles to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

But French President Jacques Chirac apparently is personally committed to the deals, which are likely to be linked to a multibillion-dollar sale of upgraded Mirage 2000 fighter jets.

### U.S. to beam reports to Iran

The United States will begin beaming into Iran news radio reports beginning in September, according to Tom Dine, the president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Iranian officials criticized the plans, saying they would harm efforts to improve relations with Washington.

### Ministers send tough message

Ministers from 11 European and African nations bordering on the Mediterranean called on Israel to withdraw its troops from the West Bank and to stop building settlements on Arab-owned land.

The tough message to Israel, issued in a communique at the end of a two-day meeting on the Spanish island of Majorca, also warned against the "prolonged stagnation" in the peace process.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Congress seeks to cut funds to Palestinian television network

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Every day in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinian children gather in front of television sets to watch the "Children's Club."

But unlike "Sesame Street," on which the show is loosely based, these children learn more than simple math and the value of sharing. They learn about the glory of killing Israelis.

In one episode, a Palestinian girl about 10 years old — standing against a backdrop of Mickey Mouse and other Disney cartoon friends — gets up in front of some 20 classmates to present her skit.

"When I wander into the entrance of Jerusalem, I will turn into a suicide warrior in battledress," she yells, tugging at her green dress.

The show's host, an adult, stands and applauds, "Bravo. Bravo. Bravo."

Armed with this video clip from the Feb. 6 show — and more than a dozen other similar ones — Republican lawmakers hope they now have the long-sought ammunition they need to end U.S. funding for the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, which airs the show.

Since 1994, the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, which also runs a radio station, has received about \$500,000 from various U.S. federal agencies, including the Agency for International Development.

That funding is separate from the \$400 million the United States has given to the Palestinians since the Israelis and Palestinians launched the Oslo peace process five years ago.

There have been consistent efforts to cut off all aid to the Palestinians by some U.S. lawmakers critical of the Palestinian effort to crack down on terrorism. But even many supporters of general aid to the Palestinians are so outraged by the anti-Israel television programming that they are supporting the campaign to cut off any U.S. link to the network.

"Why should people who preach hate, divisiveness, bigotry and prejudice get a dime?" said Rep. Jon Fox (R-Pa.).

The lack of U.S. funding would not affect the day-to-day operations of the network, say congressional aides involved in the effort, but it could prompt U.S. allies to re-evaluate their support for it.

Fox and about a half dozen of his colleagues, along with the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group, have led the effort to end support for the PBC.

In addition to the "Children's Club," the Palestinian network airs many sermons and news-style broadcasts that praise suicide bombers and encourage violence against Israelis.

Since the peace process began, activists of all political stripes have tried in vain to convince the Palestinians to change the way they talk about Israel.

Without peaceful rhetoric, they argue, the Palestinian people will never support peace.

Last year, members of Congress defeated a Fox-sponsored amendment to end U.S. support for the network.

The effort failed at the last minute on procedural grounds.

At that point, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu privately urged several members of Congress to revive the campaign to cut off funding.

Now Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and John Ashcroft (R-Mo.) have joined

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel extends detentions

An Israeli court extended for another six months detention orders against 21 Lebanese prisoners who are being held in the hope that they can be exchanged for missing Israeli servicemen.

Among the detainees are Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid, a Hezbollah leader abducted from Lebanon in 1988 by Israeli commandos, and Shi'ite guerrilla leader Mustafa Dirani, who was abducted from his home in eastern Lebanon in 1994.

### Israel's unemployment rises

Unemployment jumped 6.5 percent in Israel between February and March.

Official statistics showed that the number of job seekers last month increased to 163,400 and that there were 20 Israeli towns where the unemployment rate exceeded 10 percent. In February, there were 18 such towns.

### Lerner sentenced to six years

A Jerusalem court sentenced a Russian immigrant to six years in jail and a fine of nearly \$1.4 million on charges of fraud and attempted bribery totaling tens of millions of dollars.

The sentence against Gregory Lerner was agreed to in a plea bargain worked out last month between Israeli prosecutors and Lerner's attorneys.

### Marijuana found on road

Israeli police found dozens of marijuana plants hidden in a traffic island on a major road in Jerusalem.

The plants were interspersed with flowers planted by the city.

Two plainclothes detectives were shown on Israel Television digging up the illegal plants as cars whizzed by.

Police said they had no suspects, but said they would continue to hunt for more of the plants.



## Daily News Bulletin

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Michael Forbes (R-N.Y.) and Fox to lead the Capitol Hill effort. Beginning next week, the lawmakers, in conjunction with the NJC, plan to send a daily letter to all members of Congress until they convince the congressional spending committees to end all U.S. funding for the network.

The letters will include excerpts from the "Children's Club."

In one episode from the show, which have been recorded and distributed by an Israeli-based group, Peace for Generations, children stand and proclaim their devotion to becoming "martyrs."

"Like my father, I will live in the shadow of the heroes and echo his voice, with my blood," said one young boy on the Feb. 13 episode.

Initially founded as a separate entity, the television station now is considered by the U.S. government to be a direct arm of the Palestinian Authority.

In 1995 Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat changed the structure to force the directors to report directly to him.

That's when the United States Information Agency cut off direct funding for the station and decided to support and train individual journalists, including many who work for the PBC.

But in 1997 the USIA decided to try again, providing more than \$200,000 of satellite-receiving equipment after the PBC agreed to broadcast seven hours of shows from Worldnet and Voice of America — U.S.-sponsored programming — on American policy, society and culture.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright circulating among Republicans on Capitol Hill, the lawmakers are urging her to support their effort to cut off the USIA and other U.S. agency funding.

The Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation has been "benefitting from U.S. assistance while engaging in a campaign in support of violence and hatred against the United States and its interests.

"This campaign has further fostered an atmosphere sympathetic to violence and terrorism in the region," the letter says.

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, said that "however outrageous" such a show is, it would be "unfair to punish the entire Palestinian people" by cutting U.S. funds to the network.

Zogby found an ally at the Anti-Defamation League, where national director Abraham Foxman said cutting off aid would be "too drastic" because the network can still be "used as an instrument for good."

Foxman instead called on Congress to issue a stern warning to the Palestinian Authority to exercise restraint.

For its part, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, has decided to support the effort to end U.S. funding.

"This would send an important message that these are not the kind of broadcasts that the U.S. ought to be funding," said an AIPAC spokesperson.

Even Jewish groups traditionally supportive of U.S. aid to the Palestinians say the Palestinian television station has crossed a line.

"Obviously, these offensive broadcasts have to stop," said Tom Smerling, Washington director of the Israel Policy Forum.

But Smerling questioned whether the current effort is the "most effective means" to stop the broadcasts.

In the end, continued funding for the PBC may be too politically hot to support, according to many on Capitol Hill and in the Jewish community.

Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, expressed the view of many when he said, "Who are the people who are going to stand up on the floor of the U.S. Congress and advocate continued U.S. taxpayer support for this kind of hatred?"

The National Jewish Democratic Council took a similar position, suggesting that Democrats, too, would support cutting off funds.

"To have this television network under the control of the Palestinian Authority air this kind of program while the U.S. is trying to get the parties together sends a cold-blooded message to Israelis," said Stephen Silberfarb, deputy executive director of the NJDC.

## JEWISH WORLD

### E.U. official decries sanctions

The European Union's commissioner for humanitarian affairs called for a review of international sanctions against Iraq.

Emma Bonino told an international conference in London that the sanctions had left the Iraqi people facing "unbearable hardships" and that such a situation "can help to strengthen dictators."

### 'Reflection' bill sent to governor

The Alabama state legislature sent Gov. Fob James a bill that calls for a mandatory moment of "quiet reflection" in schools. The measure comes in response to a federal judge's ruling last year that struck down Alabama's school prayer law, which allowed for voluntary, student-initiated prayer.

The legislation, which the governor supports, says the reflection period is not intended to be "a religious service or exercise," but "an opportunity of silent reflection on the anticipated activities of the day."

### Court rules for Holocaust denier

A Canadian court ordered a cartoonist to pay a Holocaust denier \$7,500 for depicting him as a Nazi.

The court said that while Malcolm Ross was anti-Semitic and a racist, his views were founded on his fundamentalist Christian beliefs, not on Nazism.

### Swastika flown in Lithuania

Lithuanian police removed a flag with a swastika from a house in the Western port city of Klaipeda. Police said it was likely that neo-Nazis raised the flag to mark Monday's anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth.

### Jewish leaders criticize Latvia

Russian Jewish leaders added their voices to a growing chorus of political and public figures condemning Latvia's treatment of its large Russian-speaking population.

"Fascism will always raise its head where and when the persecution of national minorities begins," said a statement signed by Russian Chief Rabbi Adolf Shayeich and the leaders of Holocaust survivor and veterans groups.

### L.A. Jewish cemetery sold

Beth Olam Cemetery in Los Angeles was saved from foreclosure after two years of failed rescue attempts.

The Jewish section of the century-old Hollywood Memorial Park was sold for \$375,000 to a St. Louis cemetery operator. An estimated 20,000 Jews are buried or were cremated at Beth Olam, including actors Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson and Peter Lorre, composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold and mobster Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel.

## Netanyahu looks right to bolster his coalition

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is thinking of adding a far-right party to his governing coalition.

The premier confirmed during a press briefing Tuesday that he is engaged in talks with the Moledet Party with that goal in mind.

The party, which holds two Knesset seats, opposes the Oslo accords.

The Moledet platform states that the "proven antidote to the demographic situation is the transfer of Arabs to Arab countries as a goal of any negotiations aimed at solving the Israeli-Arab dispute over the land of Israel."

Netanyahu said Moledet, which means "homeland," had agreed to "accept the guidelines of the Israeli government, which also includes clear statements on the peace process," before the talks began.

But if it joined the coalition, Moledet could complicate efforts to push any further redeployment from the West Bank through the Cabinet. But at the same time, the party, which has abstained or voted against the government in the past, could strengthen the government's ability to fend off no-confidence votes from the opposition.

Moledet leader Rehavam Ze'evi told Israel Radio on Tuesday that the negotiations were serious.

"We haven't yet agreed on anything concrete. There are still some political differences to resolve, but there is a good chance for success."

Coalition chair Meir Shetreet said he opposed bringing Moledet into the coalition unless it made a public statement in support of the peace process.

Opposition members questioned how Netanyahu could try to break a deadlock in Israel-Arab peace negotiations while bringing in the most extreme far-right party on the Israeli political spectrum.

During the press briefing, Netanyahu also spoke about settler plans to establish a presence at Har Homa, the controversial new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem, on April 30, Israel's Independence Day.

Looking concerned, Netanyahu was unclear regarding how he would respond, adding that he hoped the settlers' plan was "hypothetical."

Netanyahu also used the briefing to discuss Israel's diverse and often sharply divided society prior to the Independence Day celebrations.

Some of the founders of modern Israel, said Netanyahu, "believed that we should have one blueprint of one Israeli, cut from one cloth."

"It turns out that the Israeli reality is far more sober, more balanced, and ultimately more truthful and more accurately reflecting the real life of the people of Israel," he said. "We have Sephardim and Ashkenazim, religious and secular, new immigrants and old immigrants, a whole tapestry of the Jewish people." □

## Acceptance of Israeli offer urged

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen has called on Syria and Lebanon to accept a recent Israeli proposal to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon.

Cohen, who was in Israel for one day as part of a regional tour, issued the call after meeting Monday with Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

Israel recently said it would implement U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 and withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon if the Lebanese government would guarantee to maintain security in the region. Both Lebanon and Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon, have rejected the offer out of hand, saying any Israeli pullback must be unconditional.

Cohen, who also discussed strategic cooperation between Israel and the United States with Mordechai, agreed to an Israeli request for an additional battery of Arrow anti-missile missiles. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Peace talks move to London but progress remains doubtful***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Middle East peace talks could use a little luck of the Irish.

Hoping to build on the success of the recent agreement to resolve the decades-long conflict in Northern Ireland, British Prime Minister Tony Blair succeeded this week in getting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to agree publicly to participate in a round of meetings May 4 in London.

But significant doubts remain as to whether the London talks — at which U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will meet separately with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders — will achieve any meaningful progress in the long-deadlocked peace process.

Blair's success in getting the two sides to announce publicly that they would attend the London meetings cut little ice with some of the more cynical pundits among Israelis and Palestinians.

These observers noted wryly that Netanyahu seized on the idea of going to London with an alacrity that seemed to take Blair himself aback. The Israeli premier announced his willingness Sunday night during his joint news conference with Blair — even before his guest had the chance to meet with Arafat.

For Netanyahu, these observers suggested, London was an opportunity to evince more movement without progress, more talks without conclusive resolutions.

The media-savvy Israeli leader will likely try to turn the international coverage of the event to his advantage, emphasizing again and again to reporters his readiness, as he said Sunday, "to go anywhere" in pursuit of peace.

For Arafat, in the words of one Palestinian pundit, there was little choice but to respond favorably to Blair's invitation when the two met Monday. Blair was careful during his talks in Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip to play a supportive role in the ongoing American mediation effort.

Indeed, while he will serve as host of the London meetings, Albright will mediate the political discussions.

As British premier and with his country currently holding the rotating presidency of the European Union, Blair has supported Washington's efforts — not trying to upstage them, as some of his E.U. colleagues would prefer.

In this vein, the British leader made it clear that his suggestion that the parties come to London had been fully coordinated with Washington in advance. His own participation, or that of his foreign secretary, remains uncertain at this point.

Only if Albright's talks produce a breakthrough would a four-way summit be held, the British premier said.

If that does happen, the British and E.U. focus would be on the economic aspects of the peace effort, leaving the Americans to work on the political and military aspects. The European Union, which has been the largest foreign donor to the peace process, has long sought an increased role in Middle East peacemaking.

The Palestinian Authority has repeatedly called for a greater European role in the peace process, with several officials repeatedly charging that the United States is not an honest broker.

Israel has maintained that the European Union would be

biased in favor of Palestinian demands. This stance has prompted some E.U. officials to remind Israel that Europe represents the Jewish state's largest export market — and that E.U. interests should be given their due.

A clear display of European sentiment toward Israel — and why Israel would like to keep E.U. officials out of the peace process — emerged this week from the Spanish island of Majorca. After two days of meetings, ministers from 11 European and African nations bordering on the Mediterranean called on Israel to withdraw its troops from the West Bank and to stop building settlements on Arab-owned land.

The choice of London as the stage for the next round of peace talks may indeed represent something of a concession to the European request for greater involvement in the peace process.

But wherever the talks are held, the question remains whether anything substantial will emerge from them.

Since his announcement that he would gladly attend the talks, Netanyahu has been doing his best to dampen expectations.

And the U.S. State Department, when it confirmed Monday that Albright would mediate the London sessions, reiterated its familiar catch phrase that it would be up to the Israelis and Palestinians themselves to make the difficult decisions for peace.

The State Department spokesman, James Rubin, said the meetings would be held to determine whether an American set of proposals "can provide a basis for a breakthrough."

U.S. officials have drawn up a proposal that reportedly calls for Israel to redeploy from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank in tandem with Palestinian moves to live up to their security commitments. Some observers claim to detect a softening in the Israeli Cabinet's long-standing resolve not to cede more than 9 percent of the West Bank.

According to the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, Netanyahu might be ready to give back 11 percent — thus crossing the double-digit threshold and approaching the American proposal.

But the Palestinian position, made clear during Arafat's talks with Blair, is that 13 percent is the barest acceptable minimum — and only if it is followed by another Israeli redeployment by year's end. Israel has until now said that any additional West Bank redeployments must be part of the final-status negotiations.

Arafat wants Washington to "go public" with its plan — that is, to submit it formally to the parties and to world opinion in advance of the London talks. But Arafat stopped short of making that his condition for attendance.

Given the wide gaps between the Israeli and Palestinian positions — gaps that have been in place for a year — it is hard to be optimistic about what will emerge from London. In an effort to tilt the odds in the peacemakers' favor, U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross was slated to visit the region later this week.

Reflecting the urgency of his mission, which failed in several recent tries to break the deadlock, Ross was expected to be accompanied this time by Martin Indyk, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

Palestinian officials found a receptive ear when they sought to stress to Blair on Monday that continued stalemate can only bring more violence. Blair responded, publicly and in the talks, that this was the Northern Irish experience. While he was wary of making too close an analogy with the situation there, which may now be on the road to resolution, he did warn all the parties that the absence of progress, in the Middle East as in Ulster, spells regression. □