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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli slayed; agreement reached

A Palestinian gunman shot and killed an Israeli woman and wounded another as they drove on a West Bank road.

The slaying took place before U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell announced an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on a timeline for moving toward a resumption of peace negotiations. [Page 1]

Reform OKs convert guidelines

The U.S. Reform movement approved guidelines Wednesday that embrace traditional conversion rituals, welcome potential converts and call for prospective Jews to adopt certain Jewish practices, such as joining a synagogue, celebrating Jewish holidays and observing certain rituals.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis' guidelines are optional, but reflect the movement's increasing openness toward tradition and ritual, Reform leaders said.

At the group's annual conference, the CCAR also issued a resolution calling the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements "serious impediments to peace." The resolution also called on the Palestinian Authority to halt the use of force and cease violent attacks.

House panel backs Israel aid

A subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives approved \$2.04 billion in military aid to Israel and \$720 million in economic aid. Wednesday's move marked the first time in nearly 10 years that a House panel earmarked the full amount requested by the White House.

The bill also calls for the president to assess whether the PLO has complied with commitments to renounce terrorism, or should face sanctions advocated by many U.S. Jewish leaders. [Page 3]

Palestinians oppose Powell visit

Thousands of Palestinians marched in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to protest U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to the Middle East.

At least 3,000 people marched Thursday in Gaza City as Powell held talks with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The crowd chanted anti-U.S. slogans and set U.S. and Israeli flags on fire.

U.S. makes new diplomatic foray as Palestinian gunmen slay Israeli

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's Middle East visit this week was something of a balancing act — conveying understanding for the Israeli demand for an end to violence while addressing Palestinian demands to resume the diplomatic process.

After a series of separate meetings Thursday with Israeli and Palestinian officials, Powell announced an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on a timeline for advancing toward peace negotiations.

He also endorsed the idea of outside observers to supervise the cease-fire, though he later appeared to backtrack.

Just as Powell was making his diplomatic rounds, however, Palestinian gunmen shot and killed an Israeli woman and wounded another on a West Bank road.

Katya Weintrop, 27, was the seventh Israeli killed since a U.S.-brokered cease-fire took effect June 13.

The slaying took place hours before Powell and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon held talks about the fragile cease-fire.

A group affiliated with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement claimed responsibility for the attack.

The group said it was avenging the death of a Fatah activist in a telephone booth explosion in Nablus earlier this week.

The Palestinians accuse Israel of being behind the blast, but Israeli officials deny the charge.

Some observers thought the slaying of the woman would harden Sharon's negotiating stance to the point where no agreement was possible.

But at a news conference with Powell on Thursday, Sharon gave his backing for the timetable, saying a six-week cooling-off period would begin after a full week passes with no violence.

In his remarks, Sharon called for "an absolute stop to terrorist acts, violence and incitement."

"When there is total quiet, there will be a seven-day test period, to see how the Palestinian Authority upholds its commitments.

"After the seven-day test period, we can begin a period of six weeks of cooling off, when there must be absolute quiet," Sharon said. "If there is, we can move to the next phase, of confidence-building gestures, which I won't detail right now."

Powell, who met earlier in the day with Arafat in Ramallah, confirmed that the timeline outlined by Sharon is "consistent with what I discussed with" Arafat.

Powell said it ultimately would be up to Israel to judge whether the desired quiet had been attained during the seven-day test period.

"Obviously now that it has been announced and we have talked about the seven-day period, the whole world will be watching it," Powell said.

"But most important of all, the prime minister and his colleagues will be watching it, since they are the ones most directly involved.

"They will at the end of the day have to make a judgment as to whether or not it is quiet and by what definition.

"It is the two parties that will have to decide together that we can move forward into the cooling-off period."

Powell condemned the slaying earlier in the day, saying it underscored the need for the two sides to end the violence and begin the slow process of reconciliation. "We

MIDEAST FOCUS

Defense minister warns militants

Israel's defense minister lashed out at Palestinian militants, saying if they do not stop attacking Israelis, "the hard lives of the Palestinians will be even more intolerable."

Speaking after Palestinian gunmen killed an Israeli woman in a West Bank ambush, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer threatened, "Hell will arrive at their doors."

Palestinians attack troops

Palestinians threw firebombs at Israeli troops in Hebron, but there were no injuries, according to Army Radio.

Thursday's incident occurred after Israel eased a closure it had imposed earlier in the week.

The closure had come after Palestinian snipers had fired at an Israeli neighborhood in the often volatile West Bank city.

Report: Israeli hostages well

A Lebanese newspaper reported that the leader of Hezbollah told Japan's ambassador to Beirut that four Israelis held by the group since October are being treated well.

The father of one of the captives asked Israeli defense officials to verify the report.

Muslims want to end Israel ties

Islamic countries concluded a conference in the West African country of Mali with a call for members to cut ties with Israel as part of a show of support for the Palestinians.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis topped the agenda at the meeting of foreign ministers belonging to the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The ministers issued a similar call when they held an emergency meeting in Qatar last month.

Most members of the body representing the world's Muslims had no diplomatic relations with Israel even before last month's meeting.



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condemn it, we deplore it, it is outrageous, it is a crime. Those responsible for it should be condemned. They should be brought to justice," Powell said. "And we have communicated this point of view to Chairman Arafat."

The two women were traveling in separate cars near the West Bank settlement of Ganim when they were ambushed.

The gunmen apparently fled by car to nearby Palestinian-controlled areas around the city of Jenin.

A senior Palestinian security source in Jenin said Arafat had given orders to arrest those behind the shooting.

The number of violent incidents has subsided since the sides accepted a cease-fire agreement mediated by CIA Director George Tenet on June 13, but the quiet is relative: Israel has suffered more than 100 attacks during those two weeks.

In Washington this week, Sharon and President Bush disagreed over how to proceed.

Sharon insists on an absolute halt to violence before beginning the cooling-off period proposed by an international commission led by former Sen. George Mitchell. Bush called for a more "realistic" approach, reflecting the U.S. interest in advancing more quickly toward the diplomatic stage.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, accuse Israel of making excuses to delay the political process.

At a news conference Thursday with Powell in Ramallah, Arafat reiterated his call for the two sides to begin implementing confidence-building measures stipulated in the Mitchell plan.

The plan calls on Israel to freeze all settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

It also calls on the Palestinians to arrest terrorists, collect illegal weapons and cease anti-Israel incitement.

Sharon has repeatedly stated that such measures will begin only after a period of quiet, while the Palestinians want them to begin even before violence ceases.

The Palestinians also have called for the deployment of an international observer force to monitor the cease-fire.

During his stopover in Ramallah, Powell endorsed the need for some manner of monitoring when the sides reach the confidence-building phase, but refrained from elaborating on what form it might take.

"I think as we get into the confidence-building measure phase there will be a need for monitors and observers to see what's happening on the ground," Powell said.

"Now, what the nature of that monitoring or observer regime might look like, who might be members of it, we have not yet come to any conclusion on that. But I think there is clear understanding of the need for some kind of monitoring observer function performed by some group," he said.

Israel strongly opposes the stationing of international observers in the territories.

At the news conference with Sharon, Powell was asked by reporters to clarify his earlier remarks.

He stressed that he was not referring to imposition of an "outside" body and that any observers would be agreed upon by the two sides.

Powell added that the matter had not been raised in his discussion with Arafat, but had been posed as a question at the news conference afterwards.

In Washington, State Department officials backed away from Powell's original statement.

Echoing what Powell told Israeli reporters, the officials told American Jewish leaders that Powell was not calling for an international monitoring force, but only noting the utility of monitors later in the process.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told JTA that Bush administration officials told him the monitors would include representatives from the United States, Israel and the Palestinian Authority — not the United Nations or European Union, which Israel says have a pronounced pro-Palestinian bias.

"It doesn't break any new ground," Hoenlein said. "Powell may have been misunderstood, but nothing is imminent." □

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

JEWISH WORLD

German Jews fight messianics

German Jewish groups launched an Internet campaign against intensified missionary activity by a "messianic Jewish" group.

The campaign by a German group called Jews for Judaism is aimed at the "hot summer" planned by the American-based Chosen People Ministries, which is targeting some of the Russian Jewish immigrants who have settled in Germany over the past decade.

Berlin students plan Israel rally

The Jewish student organization of Berlin is asking all Berliners to demonstrate for Israel on Sunday, 30 days after a suicide bomber killed 21 Israelis outside a Tel Aviv disco.

The demonstration will be part of a day of solidarity events across Germany marking the end of the 30 days of mourning according to Jewish tradition.

Court won't override religious law

A U.S. appeals court upheld a lower court's ruling that secular courts cannot become involved in rabbinical judicial decisions. Saying the Constitution forbids secular courts from interfering with the doctrines and practices of a religion, the court ruled this week regarding a decision by a rabbinical court in Monsey, N.Y., to force a man to give his wife a Jewish divorce.

Zhirinovsky has change of heart?

A Russian ultranationalist who has often made anti-Semitic statements sent a sympathetic letter to Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar. "I mourn the 6 million Jews who died in the ovens, or were shot in concentration camps," Vladimir Zhirinovsky wrote.

When the nation marked Holocaust Remembrance Day in April, Zhirinovsky refused to stand for a moment of silence in the Russian Parliament.

Robber rabbi arrested again

A Chasidic rabbi in North Carolina was recently arrested on charges he exposed himself to a woman in his home, according to the Raleigh News & Observer. Rabbi Pinchas Lew conducts services for students attending the University of North Carolina.

In 1991, Lew drove the getaway car in an Iowa armed robbery described in the book "Postville."

Demjanjuk judge dies at 76

Dov Levine, the Israeli Supreme Court justice who presided over the trial of John Demjanjuk, died Wednesday at 76. The court determined in 1993 that there was reasonable doubt that Demjanjuk was Ivan the Terrible, who operated a gas chamber at Treblinka. However, the court found compelling evidence that Demjanjuk had served as an SS guard at several camps. Demjanjuk then returned to the United States.

House foreign aid bill could force Bush to cut off aid to Palestinians

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Under a new measure weaving its way through Congress, President Bush soon may be forced to determine whether the Palestine Liberation Organization is complying with its requirement to combat terrorism.

The foreign aid package, currently being debated in the House, includes language that would require the president to make a declaration about how well the Palestinian Authority is complying with its peace agreements with Israel, and possibly impose sanctions on the PLO.

Because the language is included in the foreign aid proposal, it has a much better chance of becoming law than similar efforts earlier this year.

"We put in very strong language that sends a very clear message" to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, said Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.). "We feel that this language was exactly what was needed."

Lowey, the ranking minority member of the House Appropriations Committee's foreign operations subcommittee, said the effort has bi-partisan support.

Under the plan, the State Department would analyze every six months whether Arafat and the Palestinian Authority are in compliance with the Oslo agreement signed in 1993, which calls on the PLO to renounce violence and terrorism.

If the president determines that the Palestinians are not upholding their obligations, he could either shut down the PLO's Washington office, cut funding to Palestinian-controlled areas or include PLO groups on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

The language also includes a national security waiver, allowing the president to avoid imposing sanctions even if he determines that the Palestinians are violating Oslo. Similar waivers have been used to avoid enforcing other acts to strengthen the U.S. relationship with Israel — such as moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The foreign operations bill is expected to have strong support as it goes through Congress.

To kill the PLO amendment, a representative would have to offer an amendment specifically against that provision, an unlikely scenario.

The bill could be challenged in the conference committee when the disparities between House and Senate versions of the foreign aid bill are reconciled.

Lowey said she was confident the measure against the Palestinians would stand, however.

Under current law, the State Department is required to document terrorist activities in Palestinian areas every six months, but that report does not analyze whether or not the Palestinian Authority is effectively combating terrorism, the key component of the new law.

Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) proposed essentially the same bill last month, but — unlike the amendment to the foreign aid bill — his plan would need to pass Congress independently.

On Thursday, Ackerman lauded the language in the foreign aid bill.

Lowey said she is not concerned about imposing sanctions on the Palestinian Authority while the United States is serving as a mediator for the Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire.

"We felt very strongly that he had to send a signal to Chairman Arafat," she said. "The continuation of violence and terrorism is unacceptable."

The foreign operations legislation also included language that would deny funding to the International Red Cross unless the organization recognizes the Magen David Adom, an Israeli humanitarian organization that has been denied admission to the international group since 1949.

The foreign aid package includes the full aid proposed by the Bush administration for Israel — \$2.04 billion for military aid and \$720 million for economic needs.

That allotment is consistent with Israel's request to add \$60 million in military aid and eliminate \$120 million for economic aid each year. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Argentine Jews tell of misery, ask Americans to come to aid

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — If it can happen to Argentina, it can happen anywhere.

So say American Jewish activists and Argentine Jewish expatriates of the economic and spiritual crisis afflicting Argentine Jewry.

"Ten years ago, if you had asked me which Jewish community in the world most mirrors the American Jewish community, I would have said the Argentinian Jews," said Will Recant, assistant executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. "If you had told me that today we'd be providing Argentinian Jews with relief aid and food packages, I never would have believed you."

Yet Argentina today suffers from an economic collapse and hardship that some compare to Depression-era America. Coupled with the failure of two Jewish-owned banks, it has spawned legions of "new-poor" Jews and devastated a community of approximately 220,000 that once was among the Diaspora's most vibrant.

Argentine Jewry's traditional pool of roughly 4,000 welfare cases has grown to some 25,000. In all, about 10 percent of the community is said to be living beneath the poverty line, drawn at \$12,000 a year for a family of four.

All this comes on top of twin terror attacks — against the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which killed 29 in 1992; and the main communal institution, AMIA, which in 1994 killed 86 people, including much of the community's leadership.

No one has been prosecuted for either bombing, though a trial is said to be expected within months.

The community is shaken and, several years later, still feels vulnerable. Physical barriers and armed guards now protect virtually every Jewish institution.

"The trauma this community has suffered is tremendous," Recant said Wednesday at Manhattan's Congregation B'nai Jeshurun.

Recant addressed the shul's Latin America Committee. He was joined on the panel by Rabbi Alfredo Borodowski — who moved from Argentina to the United States 11 years ago — and Stewart Cahn, a New York lay leader of Argentine Jewish descent.

Much of the Argentine community traces its roots to East European immigrants who, plagued by pogroms and economic misery, set sail for the New World a century ago.

"They went to Argentina for a sense of security," said Cahn, whose grandfather emigrated from Belarus, "and that sense of security is not there anymore."

Over the decades, they established themselves as one of the nation's most affluent communities. The older generation primarily was involved with mom-and-pop businesses — shops, pharmacies and furriers — while the younger generation embraced higher education and entered the professions.

Argentine Jews are a tight-knit group with a vast network of Jewish institutions, community centers, synagogues, day schools and Zionist camps.

But the network today is in disarray, and its congregations, sports clubs and other organizations are fast losing members.

The economic crisis is further exacerbated by a machismo that

Jews have adopted from the greater Argentine society, panelists said.

"If you're a man, you don't want to admit that 'I lost my job, I can't afford it, can I have a scholarship for my kids?'" Recant said. "It's just not the way it's done in a macho culture. So families are just dropping out."

As always, the elderly are hardest hit. The average pension is \$150 per month, while the JDC estimates an individual needs \$400 per month to survive.

With their welfare net torn apart, Jews are forced to continue working into their 70s to eke out an existence.

When Borodowski returned recently to the Buenos Aires seminary where he studied for the rabbinate, he said he found the elevator dormant and the building lit by a bare bulb, as the seminary couldn't afford its electricity bills. The activity rooms at his synagogue, where he used to play, have been transformed into areas where food, medicine and clothing are dispensed.

"The idea that in Argentina Jews would have to go to the synagogue for food," Borodowski said, is "beyond dreams — it's nightmares."

Borodowski said his brother lost his entire savings, which he had held in a Jewish-owned bank. He now lives in a sparsely furnished apartment, and "I don't know how he pays for it."

Once the panelists had stirred the sympathies of the 50 or so audience members with their personal tales and anecdotes, it was time to take questions. It wasn't long before the more unseemly aspects of the Argentine community were also revealed — and some of the troubles, it turns out, may have been self-inflicted.

According to Argentine Jewish expatriates in the audience, the Jewish leadership in the country is entrenched, incompetent and corrupt.

They also claimed that the two Jewish-run banks were linked closely to a corrupt government and played fast and loose with the community's money. When the banks failed, some \$26 million in communal assets was lost overnight.

"My brother can get over losing his money, but he cannot get over the fact that Jews betrayed other Jews," Borodowski said.

When a member of the audience asked in what way — in terms of activism, advocacy or logistics — American Jewry can contribute, Recant reassured the crowd that the necessary network is in place. The solidarity displayed by visiting U.S. Jews, "standing shoulder to shoulder" with the Argentinians in synagogue, would boost morale, he noted. But what is most needed, he said, is money.

That doesn't mean Argentine Jews are surging forward with their hands out, he said; they want to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. "They're not asking for welfare; they're asking for jobs," Recant said.

He also urged the audience to seek out U.S. corporations with branches in Buenos Aires and direct them to underemployed Jews.

In the end, the panelists were generally pessimistic about the prospects for an imminent recovery. Recant predicted that emigration may increase to a mass exodus that would halve Argentina's Jewish community within a decade.

How well Argentine Jewry survives the crisis, he said, will be as much a test for the Diaspora as for the community itself.

"What does 'never again' mean?" Recant asked, repeating a phrase Jews often use in reference to the Holocaust. "It's a nice phrase, but it rings hollow if in their time of need, we can't stand with the Jews of Argentina or anywhere else in the Diaspora." □