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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush envisions 'Palestine'

President Bush spoke of "Palestine" as a future state. In a speech to the U.N. General Assembly on Saturday, Bush said, "We are working toward the day when two states — Israel and Palestine — live peacefully together within secure and recognized borders."

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat called the speech "important, positive and constructive." Israel's ambassador to the United States, David Ivry, also found positives in the speech, telling the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that Bush's refusal to distinguish between terror and national resistance mirrors Israel's position.

Federation gathering opens

Approximately 3,600 people gathered in Washington for the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly.

At a press conference Sunday, the UJC's CEO and president, Stephen Hoffman, said the federation system's biggest challenges in the next decade are addressing the shortage of Jewish communal professionals, supporting Jewish education and strengthening ties with Israel.

The two incoming top lay leaders of UJC, James Tisch and Robert Goldberg, called for the organization to be fiscally responsible, cooperate with other national organizations, be strong advocates for Israel and keep focused on its mission of helping Jews in North America and around the world.

On Tuesday, the group's Board of Delegates will elect Tisch, of New York, chairman of the board, and Goldberg, of Cleveland, chairman of the executive committee. They will succeed Charles Bronfman and Joel Tauber.

Iran may one day accept Israel

Iran's president hinted that his country might one day accept Israel's right to exist.

In an interview that appeared in Saturday's New York Times, Mohammad Khatami said the Palestinians should have the final say on whether to accept the Jewish state. "It is the people of Palestine that have the last word, and naturally when the Palestinians themselves accept an issue, the rest of the world will accept it too," Khatami said. "We will respect the wishes of the Palestinian nation."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Bush's speech does the impossible: Both Israel, Palestinians are pleased

By Michael J. Jordan

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — Jewish observers are applauding President Bush for refusing to distinguish between terror attacks and acts of nationalist struggle that deliberately target innocent people.

In his first speech to the United Nations, Bush made a significant nod to Palestinian dreams of statehood — including an explicit reference to "Palestine" — but warned that not even "national aspiration" could "ever justify the deliberate murder of the innocent."

As the curtain rose on the 56th U.N. General Assembly, Bush also gave Jewish observers reason to believe that the U.S.-led war on terrorism will go beyond Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden's Al Qaida organization.

"Some governments, while pledging to uphold the principles of the U.N., have cast their lot with the terrorists," Bush said Saturday. "For every regime that sponsors terror, there is a price to be paid. And it will be paid. The allies of terror are equally guilty of murder and equally accountable to justice."

Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat made what Jewish observers saw as a standard stump speech Sunday, blaming Israel for the past year of bloodshed and resurrecting scurrilous charges that Israel is using weapons banned by international law.

Pro-Israel advocates had been concerned that Israel was being sidelined in the anti-terror campaign, and feared that it would not extend to those groups that attack the Jewish state.

Coming shortly after Washington froze the assets of Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad, Bush's speech was reassuring to Israel's backers.

"They're realizing the nature of what we're fighting, this interlocking network that you cannot fight piecemeal, but has to be fought with absolutes," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"The president drew a line: You're either on this side or that side, and don't think that symbolic gestures will be sufficient to put you on this side," Hoenlein said. "Only decisive action will qualify."

Meanwhile, Arafat praised Bush's speech, which spoke of "the day when two states, Israel and Palestine, live peacefully together within secure and recognized boundaries."

Israeli officials also sought to put a positive spin on Bush's speech.

Bush's support for a Palestinian state was "not an anti-Israel statement, that's a pro-Israel statement," Israel's deputy foreign minister, Rabbi Michael Melchior, said at a news conference Sunday at the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly in Washington.

"Israel has a government that supports the creation of a Palestinian state."

Though the explicit reference to "Palestine" shocked some Israeli officials, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that the language was deliberate.

In his speech, Arafat accused Israel of "state-sponsored terrorism" and "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians, and once again urged the world body to send international peacekeepers.

Arafat made no reference to Bush's refusal to condone terror related to nationalist grievances, or his statement that "peace will only come when all have sworn off,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Peres presents peace plan

Shimon Peres presented his peace plan to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon before heading to New York. The foreign minister's plan reportedly calls for the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and the quick establishment of a Palestinian state.

Jordan: Guarantee Israel security

The Arab world must be prepared to offer a collective guarantee of Israel's security, Jordan's King Abdullah said. Such a move will be necessary in return for the creation of a Palestinian state, he told *The Times* of London on Saturday.

The king said the collective Arab guarantee is part of a peace plan now being discussed by countries involved in trying to forge peace, including the United States, Russia, the European Union, Egypt and Jordan.

Bomb maker blows up

A bomb maker belonging to Islamic Jihad died in a "work accident." Omar Abu Zayed, 25, was making a bomb Sunday in his blacksmith shop in the West Bank city of Bethlehem when the device exploded, Palestinian security officials said.

In other violence, Palestinian gunmen killed an Israeli mother of four in a drive-by shooting. Hadas Abutbul, 39, was returning to her home in the West Bank settlement of Mevo Dotan last Friday when the terrorists opened fire. Shot in the back, she lost control of her car, and died of her wounds by the roadside.

Arab Knesset member grilled

Police questioned an Arab Knesset member over statements that appeared to justify a terror attack in Tel Aviv. Jerusalem police questioned Taleb El-Sana for more than two hours about remarks he made to Abu Dhabi TV in which he appeared to justify a Palestinian shooting attack on pedestrians outside the Defense Ministry compound last August.

forever, incitement, violence and terror." Israel long has complained about Arafat's tolerance — if not encouragement — of incitement in Palestinian media, schools and mosques.

"It was pretty predictable," an Israeli diplomat said of Arafat's performance in the cavernous, green-and-gold U.N. hall. "He didn't commit himself to fighting terrorism, which is unfortunate because the whole world knows that he is not doing even the bare minimum to root out terrorism and control violence."

Indeed, Bush refused to meet with Arafat this weekend in New York because of his permissive attitude toward Palestinian terror groups. Israeli officials predicted Arafat would come under intense pressure from American and European diplomats this week to finally crack down on Palestinian terror.

Observers said Bush may have had several reasons for touching only briefly on the Middle East. He discussed it in four sentences at the end of a 22-minute speech.

The General Assembly originally was scheduled to open Sept. 24, and Bush reportedly had planned a major speech on Middle East policy. The meeting was postponed after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, and Bush wanted the assembly to focus on the U.S.-led war on terrorism.

The American speech on Mideast policy now is expected to come soon after the U.N. gathering, which runs through Thursday.

Washington also has tried to keep the world body from mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict because of the U.N.'s perceived pro-Palestinian bias. That perception was reinforced in early September at a U.N. anti-racism conference in South Africa, where the Arab- and Muslim-dominated body piled on Israel and portrayed it as the world's most racist country.

Thus, for Bush to address the Mideast at the General Assembly might be seen as bolstering the U.N.'s credibility in dealing with the conflict, some observers suggested.

Finally, with bin Laden's group citing the Palestinian plight as one reason behind the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush may not have wanted to dignify the theory by devoting too many words to the conflict.

Overall, though, Bush offered up a remarkably tough-talking speech. After thanking U.N. members for their expressions of sympathy, he said now was the time for action.

U.N. states continue to debate the definition of terrorism, with one country's terrorist another country's freedom fighter.

The Arab and Muslim world, in particular, justifies Palestinian violence as legitimate against Israel's "occupation" of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Bush, however, rejected that definition, saying that "national aspiration" or a "remembered wrong" is not justification for terror.

"In this world there are good causes and bad causes, and we may disagree on where the line is drawn," he said. "Yet there is no such thing as a good terrorist."

Jewish observers already have their notions of which countries harbor or sponsor such terrorists, but Western diplomats say the rest of the world will soon have a clearer idea.

After Sept. 11, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution binding member-states to produce reports proving they have taken steps to tighten anti-terrorism laws. Those reports are due by the end of December, and countries that fail to produce satisfactory reports may face sanctions.

Lebanon, for example, last week refused a U.S. request to freeze the assets of Hezbollah.

Several other aspects of Bush's speech also pleased Jewish ears.

First, he condemned "conspiracy theories" that blame Jews for the Sept. 11 attack — theories that pervade the Muslim world — as "malicious lies that attempt to shift the blame away from the terrorists themselves, away from the guilty."

In addition, after describing the anti-terror campaign as a "defining moment" for the United Nations, Bush chastised the world body for allowing its Geneva-based Commission on Human Rights to "offer seats to the world's most persistent violators of human rights."

The commission is relentless in its criticism of Israeli treatment of the Palestinians. The United States was ousted from the commission in May, while countries like Sudan, Syria, Cuba and China have seats. □



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JEWISH WORLD

UJC votes on dues plan

The United Jewish Communities' Board of Trustees voted Sunday in favor of a "fair share" dues plan.

Under the plan — which still must be approved by the Delegates Assembly, meeting on Tuesday — the dues each Jewish federation owes to the umbrella organization will be determined as a percentage of the total amount each raises in its annual fund-raising campaign.

In the past, UJC got revenue by taking a percentage of the money the federations contributed for overseas needs. The Board of Trustees also voted to continue spending at current rates until a new budget is presented in June. The UJC's budget is approximately \$42 million per year.

BBYO chooses new leader

The largest nondenominational Jewish youth organization named its new international executive director.

Brian Greene was formerly executive director of Camp Ramah of California. B'nai B'rith Youth Organization has long been an arm of the Washington-based B'nai B'rith International and is in the process of becoming an independent non-profit. It has approximately 20,000 teen-age members around the world.

Nazi war crimes suspect dies

A Nazi war crimes suspect died before he could be extradited to stand trial.

Konrad Kalejs, 88, who was appealing his extradition to Latvia, died Nov. 8 in his nursing home in Australia. He reportedly suffered from dementia.

For years, Kalejs has faced charges of being involved in the wartime slaughter of civilians when he was an officer in Latvia's pro-Nazi Arajs Kommando unit. The militia is held directly responsible for the deaths of some 100,000 civilians, including 30,000 Jews, between 1941 and 1943.

Reacting to the death, Britain's Lord Janner, a vice president of the World Jewish Congress and chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust, said, "I regret that Kalejs died before he was put on trial for his hideous crimes."

Orthodox group backs vouchers

The Orthodox Union joined a brief in support of school vouchers. The Orthodox Union and other Orthodox groups want the U.S. Supreme Court to find that the use of vouchers and government support to religious schools is acceptable.

The high court agreed to decide next year whether school voucher programs are a constitutional use of taxpayer money. Jewish groups are split over vouchers, which allow parents to use a government subsidy to pay tuition at private or religious school.

Holocaust insurance body faulted for not getting money to survivors

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON — The word from survivors is clear: The Holocaust insurance claims process doesn't work.

Lawmakers joined survivors in their criticism, accusing the international commission charged with resolving Holocaust-era insurance claims of being too slow and not getting money to policyholders or their heirs.

At a hearing Nov. 8 of the U.S. House of Representatives' Government Reform Committee, the International Commission of Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, known as ICHEIC, was deemed a "failure." Lawmakers called for a quick end to the claims process and an extension of the February 2002 deadline for filing claims.

Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, ICHEIC's chairman, acknowledged weaknesses in the commission's work and said he would try to extend the filing deadline. But Eagleburger also said the group has made progress, and he indicated that whatever ICHEIC has been able to do since its inception in 1998 has been more than anyone else to help survivors get compensation.

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), however, took a tough stance, faulting ICHEIC for the low percentage of claims filed and for failing to force German insurance companies to follow procedures. Waxman also said the commission was poorly managed, having spent \$40 million on administrative expenses while offering only \$21.9 million to survivors. Even less has actually paid out.

Frustration rose as Waxman listed the commission's shortcomings, saying that fewer than 2 percent of claims have resulted in offers from insurance companies.

"I think you're a little disdainful of us and of the people who spoke here today," Waxman told Eagleburger, referring to Holocaust survivors who testified.

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard," Eagleburger retorted. "Don't you tell me that I'm disdainful of these people who have suffered so much."

Survivors blamed both ICHEIC and the insurance companies for the frustrating process. Israel Arbeiter of Newton, Mass., told the committee how his father, a tailor in Poland, faithfully paid premiums on a life insurance policy. But Arbeiter has heard nothing since he filed a claim with ICHEIC.

"Please, please, do not allow insurance companies to retain that which rightfully belongs to us," he told lawmakers.

Roman Kent, chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, came to the commission's defense.

"ICHEIC is not the criminal here," Kent said.

Congressional hearings may bring the issue into the spotlight, but Congress has no real jurisdiction over the ICHEIC process.

Survivors suggested that it might be effective to threaten non-compliant insurance companies that do business in the United States, but that is a matter for state insurance regulators. Two cases challenging state regulators' jurisdiction are working their way through the courts.

Waxman and Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) have filed a bill to force insurance companies operating in the United States to provide lists of policyholders, or face financial penalties.

Israel Singer, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress and vice president of the Claims Conference, said the ICHEIC system is flawed but "is the only mechanism we have."

There is a fund — worth about \$260 million at current rates — available for payment of insurance claims, according to Ambassador J.D. Bindenagel, who serves as special envoy for Holocaust issues for the State Department. However, the German insurance association and ICHEIC have to agree on procedures before the money can be disbursed.

ICHEIC reports that 77,800 claims have been received, but around 80 percent of claimants aren't sure of the name of the relevant insurance company. In addition, more than a third of the claims have been found ineligible for investigation by ICHEIC because the claims relate to other Holocaust issues, such as slave labor. Insurance companies dispute some of the numbers. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Knesset move against Beshara may inflame Jewish-Arab tension***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A new chapter has been opened in the decades-old tale of tension between Israeli Arabs and Jews.

In the past, such tensions played out in the streets or voting booths, but this time the scene of the drama is the Knesset.

Last week, Israeli legislators voted overwhelmingly to lift the parliamentary immunity of Arab legislator Azmi Beshara. The Nov. 7 vote came after the attorney general, Elyakim Rubinstein, filed two separate indictments against Beshara.

The first was over a call Beshara made in June, during a speech in Syria, for the Arab world to unite against the “war-mongering” government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The speech was made in front of enemies of the Jewish state such as Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah and terrorist Ahmed Jibril. The second indictment was for visits to Syria that Beshara arranged for Israeli Arabs, without the approval of Israeli authorities.

After the Knesset vote, Beshara said he had fallen victim to “extremist nationalist movements” in the Knesset. But he also said he would take no legal action to block the indictments.

“I will prove my innocence in court,” he said.

Indeed, Beshara appears to relish the idea of a trial, during which he is likely to try to paint himself as a martyr struggling against allegedly oppressive or racist authorities.

Rubinstein now is free to press charges against Beshara. If so, the ensuing trial will weigh the delicate balance between freedom of speech and the right of a democracy to defend itself against what it considers incitement from an elected official sworn to defend the interests of the state.

A longtime political rival of Beshara, Israeli Arab Knesset member Ahmed Tibi, saw last week’s Knesset vote as proof that Israel has a long way to go before it can call itself a democracy.

“The vote has proven once again that Israel is a democracy only for the Jews,” he said.

There is little doubt among critics and supporters alike that Beshara would reap substantial political benefits from a trial. In the eyes of Israeli Arabs, he would be seen as the victim of what the community long has considered an inequitable political system.

At the same time, a trial would strengthen Beshara’s aspirations to be the ultimate defender of the rights of the Israeli Arab population. Despite such considerations, there is a strong lobby pushing for a legal confrontation.

According to this lobby, it is high time to send a clear signal to leaders of the Israeli Arab community that if they continue to identify themselves with Israel’s enemies, they may find themselves banned from the Knesset.

Indeed, the Knesset last week approved in an initial vote a bill by Likud legislator Yisrael Katz that would ban any party that advocates armed resistance against Israel. The bill must pass several other rounds of approval before it becomes law.

Tibi later said that if the bill becomes law there will be no Arab Knesset members, because they all support the “struggle against occupation.” Despite such comments, Tibi was the only Arab politician who hinted recently that Israeli Arabs may need to question whether they have gone too far.

“It is the duty of the minority to aim for greater cooperation with the majority,” he suggested in a recent speech.

Many Israeli Arabs, however, believe Israel has given them little reason to be more cooperative.

The Arab population long has complained of unequal treatment in the provision of government services and in hiring practices that block them from securing civil service jobs.

Yet many Israelis claim that Arab demands go far beyond the realm of equal rights, and would strip the Jews of their right to a state of their own. Beshara repeatedly has called to transform Israel from a Jewish state into a “state of all its citizens” — a call adopted by virtually all Israeli Arab political parties.

Beshara demands that Israel drop Hatikvah as its national anthem and remove Jewish images, such as the Star of David, from the Israeli flag and other state symbols.

Tensions between Israel’s Jewish and Arab communities increased with the start of the Palestinian uprising in September 2000, when Israeli Arabs rioted in sympathy with the Palestinians. Thirteen Israeli Arabs were killed by police.

A Christian born in Nazareth, Beshara has not shied away from the political limelight in his attempts to secure more rights for the Israeli Arab community.

Until his 11th-hour withdrawal from the 1999 race for prime minister, Beshara was the first Israeli Arab to seek the post — and this for a man who tells his constituents that they are Israelis by accident of geography only, but are Palestinian in their hearts.

After earning a doctorate in philosophy, Beshara became the head of the philosophy department at Bir Zeit University, the hotbed of Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank.

In 1996 he was elected to the Knesset on a joint ticket with the Communist Hadash Party.

Now serving as the sole Knesset member of the Balad Party, he is trying to establish himself as the main alternative to the Islamic Movement’s growing influence in Israeli Arab politics.

A longtime champion of equal rights for Israeli Arabs, Beshara wants Israel to grant cultural autonomy to its nearly 1 million Arab citizens. Some Jews warn that this would be a prelude to a demand for secession and even, perhaps, to unification with a Palestinian state in the adjacent West Bank.

Many of Beshara’s political ideas have gained widespread acceptance within Israeli Arab society, and he hopes to parley that into more seats for his party in the next elections.

Regarding the indictments filed against him, Beshara defended the family visits to Syria, saying they were a humanitarian move aimed at allowing elderly Israeli Arabs to meet with family members in Syria before they die.

Israeli citizens are forbidden to travel to Syria, which is technically in a state of war with Israel. Beshara also denied the incitement charge, saying he had never called for the use of force.

Indeed, his comments in June — when he spoke at a memorial service in Syria for the late President Hafez Assad — were somewhat ambiguous. He did not explicitly call for violence, but left little room for other interpretations.

Beshara is not the only Israeli Arab legislator to run afoul of the authorities. Two days after the Knesset voted to lift Beshara’s immunity, police questioned Talab El-Sana, a legislator from the United Arab List, over statements justifying a Palestinian shooting attack last August on pedestrians in Tel Aviv.

“This was a unique incident because it was not aimed at civilians but at soldiers in the heart of the State of Israel. The Israelis have to understand that if there’s no security for Palestinians, then there won’t be security for Israelis,” El-Sana said. “There’s no guilt feeling — nor need to justify ourselves.” □