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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Mr. Sharon to go to Washington

Ariel Sharon will meet with President Bush in Washington next week.

The White House's announcement that Bush would meet Israel's prime minister next Monday was unexpected.

It comes as Bush continues to meet with Middle Eastern leaders to discuss plans for an international peace conference later this summer. Bush will meet over the weekend with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Palestinian court angers Israel

A Palestinian tribunal ordered the release of a radical Palestinian leader who Israel claims ordered the assassination of Cabinet Minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

The court in the Gaza Strip said Monday there was no evidence linking the secretary-general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmed Sa'adat, to last October's murder of Ze'evi in a Jerusalem hotel.

Along with four group members convicted by a Palestinian court for the Ze'evi murder, Sa'adat was imprisoned in a Jericho jail under U.S. and British supervision as part of a deal ending the Israeli siege of Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters. Despite the court ruling, there was no sign that Sa'adat would be freed.

Israel criticized the court's decision. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's spokesman, Ra'anana Gissin, said the ruling violates what was agreed upon by the two sides. "If he is not brought to justice," Gissin said, "we will bring justice to him."

New Jerusalem project begins

Construction began on a new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem.

Several hundred apartments are planned for the site in a predominantly Arab neighborhood, Israel Radio reported.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert dismissed claims by Arab residents of the area that the property is theirs.

He also rejected the suggestion that the construction, beginning as CIA Director George Tenet was visiting the region, was coming at a bad time.

"If it had been up to me, this neighborhood would have been built long ago," he said.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Seemingly best friends, Israel, U.S. may be on collision course

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ariel Sharon counts President Bush as a personal friend and a supporter of Israel, but signs indicate that Israel and the United States may be on a collision course over Middle East diplomacy.

Ironically, ideas initiated by the Israeli prime minister and picked up by the Bush administration have brought to the surface deep differences between Jerusalem and Washington on how to proceed in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

On the face of it, Sharon seems to have been extremely adept at getting his positions across:

- Sharon convinced Bush that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

- Sharon's prodding finally led Bush to declare his "deep disappointment" in the Palestinian leader.

- Sharon persuaded the Americans that the Palestinian Authority must undertake comprehensive reforms if it is to become a trustworthy neighbor to which Israel can make concessions.

- Sharon came up with a grand scheme for a regional peace conference this summer, which has become the cornerstone of America's peace policy in the Middle East.

Yet now, it seems, all these ideas may boomerang on the Israeli prime minister, forcing him into political moves he would rather delay. The trouble for Sharon is that while the Americans accept his package in principle, they differ over the purpose, timetables and other key details.

For example, American officials see Palestinian reform and an international peace conference as a recipe for kick-starting substantive peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Some of the officials now suspect that Sharon sees those elements as a means of buying time and putting off meaningful dialogue with the Palestinians.

By putting his ideas on the table, Sharon may have inadvertently set off a process leading inexorably to a showdown with Washington.

The perception gap between Jerusalem and Washington was apparent during late May and early June visits to the region by William Burns, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, and CIA Director George Tenet.

In a meeting with Burns, Sharon argued that Arafat is incorrigible, and that as long as he is in power there is no chance of a cease-fire or of political progress.

Arafat must be sidelined — including him in the reform process would be "a cardinal error," Sharon said.

Burns countered that only Arafat could give grass-roots legitimacy to the reform process, and that if Arafat carried out the necessary reforms he could still be a player.

Sharon's close advisers acknowledge that the prime minister's greatest fear is that Arafat will take charge of the reform process, pretend to go along with it, regain international support and whip up pressure on Israel to make concessions.

"The whole idea is to replace the Arafat system of terror, corruption and internal repression, and it's obvious to us that Arafat can't change the system he personifies," says Danny Ayalon, the prime minister's foreign policy adviser and ambassador-designate to Washington.

Sharon and his advisers also seem to have more stringent demands for Palestinian

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel warns of glider attacks

Terrorists in the Gaza Strip have acquired gliders to try to launch attacks into Israel, Israeli security officials warned. Israel's air force also has gone on alert to prevent such attacks coming from Lebanon.

In addition, Israeli officials are concerned about possible attempts to shoot down Israeli aircraft or crash a hijacked plane. Israel Radio reported that the army is planning to stage a drill simulating the deliberate crash of a plane into a building.

Nablus bomb factories destroyed

Israeli security forces discovered and destroyed two Palestinian bomb-making factories. One of the factories was discovered Sunday in the home of Mahmoud Titi, a Palestinian militia leader killed last month by Israeli forces.

Palestinian sources said Israeli security forces imposed a curfew on Kalkilya on Monday and were conducting searches there.

Hamas refuses to join P.A.

Hamas rejected an offer Monday from the Palestinian Authority to join a new Cabinet. Hamas and three other terrorist groups were offered the posts as part of plans to reform the Palestinian Authority.

Previous to Hamas' announcement, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine also said they would not join a new Cabinet.

Study: Jerusalem targeted most

Jerusalem has sustained more Palestinian terror attacks than any other Israeli city, according to Israeli researchers. The researchers found that between 1950 and 1989, 22 percent of terrorist attacks in Israel and the territories occurred in Jerusalem, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. Between 1990 and 1999, 25 percent of such attacks occurred in the capital.



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reform than the United States. On reform of the security services, Sharon says that unifying the services under a single command is meaningless unless the various militias — such as Tanzim, Hamas and Islamic Jihad — are disarmed.

On political reform, Sharon's advisers talk about separation of powers, not merely new elections.

But the biggest difference is over the relationship between reform and peacemaking. For Sharon, reform is a condition for bilateral peace talks with the Palestinians, while the United States says reform and peace talks should proceed simultaneously.

The legitimate demand for reform, the Americans say, must not be used to delay the peacemaking process.

Sharon and the Americans also have very different notions of what the international Middle East peace conference should be about. According to Ayalon, Sharon views the conference as a kind of open-ended "peace club" in which members with peace credentials like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel discuss ways of promoting regional stability.

"We see the conference as a means of establishing a peace coalition of Middle Eastern moderates as a counterweight to the war coalition which we see with Iran, Iraq and Syria," Ayalon says. "But it is not meant to be a substitute for bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians."

The Americans, however, see the conference as a major tool for Israel-Palestinian dialogue on a final peace deal, with a clear timetable for Palestinian statehood.

To balance Israeli, Arab, American and European positions on the conference, the Americans reportedly are considering crafting a letter of invitation stipulating that a key goal of the process initiated by the conference is the establishment of a Palestinian state.

That would make it clear to the Palestinians that the conference puts final status negotiations back on the negotiating agenda, and reassure Israel that the conference won't issue a diktat.

The Americans also are urging Sharon to come out with a substantive Israeli peace plan as a counterweight to the Saudi and Egyptian plans on which the conference would in part be based.

Sharon argues that for Israel to issue a peace plan while Arafat remains at the helm would be seen as a reward for terror, and would erode the pressure he has so painstakingly built up on the Palestinian leader.

The Americans warn that unless there is an Israeli plan, President Bush or Secretary of State Colin Powell will outline a detailed American blueprint.

To preempt a diplomatic rift with the United States and the rest of the international community, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is urging Sharon to coordinate peace moves with the United States, Europe, Russia and the United Nations.

In Peres' view, the conference and the preceding run-up should be used to shape the contours of a settlement with the quartet that would guarantee the Jewish state's vital interests.

So far there is no sign that Sharon intends to follow Peres' advice.

American officials suggest that Bush, wary of alienating the Jewish vote, will be careful not to confront Sharon before the mid-term congressional elections in November.

But after that, the president will feel free to act — and Sharon, if he fails to respond, could find that Bush is not such a close friend after all. □

(Leslie Sussner is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

Israeli delegation visits China

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli military officials recently visited China to renew defense ties between the two countries.

The delegation was the guest of the Chinese army and toured army bases, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. Bilateral relations had been damaged after Israel, under U.S. pressure, canceled the sale of the Phalcon airborne early warning system to China.

Israel agreed to compensate China for the failed deal, paving the way for the resumption of ties.

A Chinese delegation recently visited Israel, the first such contingent since the Phalcon deal failed. □

JEWISH WORLD

Group downplays FBI warning

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations downplayed an FBI warning to Jewish groups.

The FBI recently notified Jewish organizations that U.S. troops in Afghanistan uncovered Al-Qaida documents listing 12 Jewish groups, sparking concerns they could be possible targets.

But the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, Malcolm Hoenlein, told JTA he does not think there is a serious threat.

While Jewish organizations should remain on alert, he said the documents were outdated and contained no indication of any specific danger.

Clergy: U.S. should push peace

A group of religious leaders called on the United States to push for an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord.

A statement signed by more than 500 religious leaders and activists, including 73 rabbis, appeared as a half-page ad in Friday's New York Times.

The statement calls for an "international force to protect both Israelis and Palestinians from violence" and a "viable Palestine and a secure Israel, based on the 1967 boundaries, with adjustments that the two parties mutually agree on."

Court rules against German heirs

The U.S. Army may keep four watercolors painted by Hitler that were seized after World War II, the U.S. Supreme Court said.

The high court decided Monday not to accept an appeal brought by the German heirs of the late photographer Heinrich Hoffmann.

A lower court had rejected the family's contention that their father was the victim of wartime art pillaging that involved not only the watercolors but also rare photos of Hitler.

The Bush administration had urged the Supreme Court to turn aside the case, arguing that the works in question had been art confiscated "in order to de-Nazify Germany."

Had the court accepted the case, it would have had to consider the rights of non-Americans for recourse against the U.S. government.

Envoy angers Estonian officials

Estonian officials were outraged after the U.S. ambassador said the Baltic nation had not done enough to educate the public about the Holocaust.

The officials were also angered after Joseph DeThomas also said in recently published remarks that no Estonian has been prosecuted for Holocaust-era war crimes.

DeThomas' remarks represented an interference in the internal affairs of Estonia, they said.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Amendment on Jewish emigration is slowed on road to historic dustbin

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The recent summit between President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin was missing at least one thing: a ceremony to mark the end of the legislation tying trade privileges to Russian Jews' right to emigrate freely.

Bush had wanted to have Congress lift the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment in time for the meeting, but trade issues have delayed the plan to permanently repeal the restrictions and grant Russia favored-nation trading status.

U.S. Jewish groups are hopeful the legislation will pass by the end of the year.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been given a waiver each year from Jackson-Vanik's emigration requirements.

But the symbolism of having Jackson-Vanik still on the books led the administration to push for its repeal as a reflection of improved U.S.-Russian relations.

Congressional lawmakers, however, are focusing on trade problems, primarily in the poultry industry.

Russia banned imports of U.S. chicken and turkey in March because of health concerns.

Despite a lifting of the ban, exports have been slow to resume, causing difficulties in the U.S. business community.

Jewish groups in the United States and Russia generally are supportive of Russia's "graduation" from Jackson-Vanik.

But they want assurances that Russia will work to ensure human rights freedoms and fight against anti-Semitism.

Current legislation in Congress includes some human rights language, but Jewish groups want the Bush administration's policy objectives to be tougher regarding religious freedom in Russia.

Jackson-Vanik is "suspended for now," but is not stalled permanently, according to Harold Luks, the chairman of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia.

The legislation just needs a new vehicle to get it through Congress, and Jewish groups will continue to push for stronger human rights language, he said.

Jackson-Vanik was discussed at a U.S. House of Representatives hearing in April, but the U.S. Senate has not yet scheduled a hearing.

It is unclear whether several other countries in the former Soviet Union will also be graduated out of the Jackson-Vanik requirements.

Some lawmakers want a bill to address the continuation of free Jewish emigration, enforcement of hate crimes legislation and restitution of Jewish communal property seized by the Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s.

Other members of Congress do not agree that Putin should be rewarded for the steps he has made so far, and say it is too early to change Jackson-Vanik.

Micah Naftalin, national director of the UCSJ: Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, admits that Putin talks about anti-Semitism and human rights. But, he said, there needs to be "concrete action behind the excellent rhetoric."

Jackson-Vanik, however, does not have any real leverage, Naftalin maintains, and dealing with the Russians on human rights should be on a more constructive level.

"Incentives are as important" as punishments, he said.

Avraham Berkowitz, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Commonwealth of Independent States, said last week that lifting Jackson-Vanik is good for Russian Jews: It would prevent other Russians from saying that Jews are preventing positive trade relations with the United States.

Russian religious leaders have been supportive as well, wanting to thank the government of President Vladimir Putin for its help with Jewish renewal in a number of communities.

Yevgeny Satanovsky, president of the Russian Jewish Congress, wants to convene a conference of Russian Jewish leaders and groups next month to discuss Jackson-Vanik and form a unified stance on the issue. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Accusations of anti-Semitism roil Germany's literary, political worlds

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Issues of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism have exploded again in Germany.

Even before it reaches the bookstores, a new novel by author Martin Walser is sending shockwaves through the German media because of accusations that the novel contains anti-Semitic stereotypes. If the current crisis were merely literary, one could simply close the book on it.

In fact, the stir over the latest work by one of Germany's most famous modern writers — and a controversy involving anti-Semitism at the political level fueled by comments made by a leader of the Free Democratic Party — highlights the unresolved nature of anti-Semitism in Germany, as well as concern over growing anti-Semitism in the country in recent months.

Walser's book, "Death of a Critic," concerns a writer suspected of killing a prominent critic and a narrator who investigates the case.

The storm began last week when the publisher of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper decided not to serialize Walser's novel, and instead printed an open letter to the author. The newspaper has serialized several Walser novels in the past.

In his letter, which quickly turned into a front page scandal, the newspaper's publisher, Frank Schirrmacher, called the book an "execution," a "document of hate" and "revenge against Marcel Reich-Ranicki," a Holocaust survivor and literary critic who is believed to be the model for the book's character of Andre Ehrl-Konig.

It's not the first time Walser has gotten into trouble for controversial remarks

In 1998, when accepting Germany's highest literary award, Walser created a storm when he said it was time to stop using the Holocaust to criticize Germany.

Several critics and observers have expressed shock and bewilderment at excerpts of the book published in newspapers. Some say Walser cynically exploits anti-Semitism to sell books.

"I'm not concerned; I am appalled," said Henryk Broder, a Jewish journalist who frequently wrestles with themes of anti-Semitism in his columns for Der Spiegel.

Walser is "a gangster. He is a crook," Broder told JTA. "He is very coolly speculating on the current mood."

Alfred Schobert, a researcher at the Duisberg Institute for Linguistics and Social Research, told JTA he is disturbed by references in the book to the "Jewish critic" being fond of little German girls, calling it a stereotype that appears in Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

"I think it will be a best seller because of all the criticism," Schobert said. "And that breaks the taboo of making money through anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism sells. It sells like sex."

For his part, Reich-Ranicki at first remained silent. He then told Die Welt newspaper that he found the novel "deeply shocking, offensive and hurtful."

He also said it was a miserable work by "an author who has lost control of himself."

He then asked the book's publisher, Suhrkamp, not to print the book because of its anti-Semitism, according to the German Press

Agency. The publisher was weighing its decision early this week.

Walser has threatened to sue the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung for revealing the plot before publication.

"I never, never thought that now this book would be related to the Holocaust," he said in a TV interview.

He said the book was about a writer's experiences in the TV age. He said he modeled his main character after Reich-Ranicki because of his use of the TV medium, and "not because he is a Jew."

If the literary benefits of playing the anti-Semitism card are unclear, so are the political benefits. The vice president of the mainstream Free Democratic Party, Jurgen Mollemann, recently came under fire when he charged that Michel Friedman, a vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, is partly responsible for growing German anti-Semitism by labeling all criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic.

"What Mollemann does in politics, Walser does with literature," Broder said. "With the same chutzpah, the same attitude of being the victim."

Mollemann, who has expressed sympathy for Palestinian suicide bombers, later apologized for his remarks.

But Paul Spiegel, the president of the Central Council, said Mollemann's apology fell far short of what is necessary.

"Your clarification, as you call it, contains neither the tone of an apology nor the words, 'I am sorry,'" Spiegel wrote in an open letter.

A poll released last Friday showed that 40 percent of Free Democratic Party members — and 28 percent of the general public — agree with Mollemann that Friedman's personality increases anti-Semitism. Last Friday, the Free Democrats unanimously condemned Mollemann's statements in a declaration that Mollemann himself signed.

On Monday, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder warned Monday that Mollemann's anti-Israel commentary "must be stopped because it damages Germany in an international context."

Schroeder's Social Democratic Party approved a motion at its party congress, declaring that the Free Democrats could not be considered a potential coalition partner following September's national elections as long as the party follows an anti-Israel line.

Friedman was a guest at the party congress.

Meanwhile, one German Jewish leader quit the Social Democratic Party over what he calls political indifference to anti-Semitism and insensitivity to the experience of Jews in Germany.

In an open letter to his fellow Social Democrats, Reinhard Schramm, vice president of the Jewish community of the state of Thuringia, said that while his party is not anti-Semitic, it has become acceptable in all the main German political parties to tolerate anti-Semitism.

In his own party, that tolerance included Schroeder's recent public discussion about national identity with Walser, who in 1998 called Auschwitz a "moral cudgel" being used against Germany.

None of the democratic parties, Schramm said, had sufficiently distanced themselves from clear signs of anti-Semitism in the press and in politics. Schramm's letter appeared June 3 in a Jewish community newsletter.

While he made it clear that not all politicians were irresponsible, Schramm told JTA that "the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has led to an atmosphere that brings out hidden anti-Semitism. All the parties have done too little" to counter this trend. □