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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bomber kills self, no others

A suicide bomber blew himself up near a group of Israeli border police Monday, but caused no injuries. The blast occurred in Israeli territory near the West Bank.

As border police approached the man to check him, he set off his explosives.

The bomber was a Palestinian wanted by Israeli security forces, Israel Radio reported.

The blast came amid reports that five Palestinian suicide bombers are ready to carry out attacks against Israeli targets.

U.S. has mixed response to fence

The United States gave a mixed response to Israel's decision to build a security fence along its frontier with the West Bank.

"Israel makes those decisions about what security measures it needs to take. As we have noted, Israel has a right to defend herself," Scott McClellan, a White House spokesman, said Monday. But, he added, "All parties must keep in mind the consequences of the actions they take."

Bush suspends embassy move

President Bush postponed moving the Israeli Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem for an additional six months. The Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 requires the United States to move its embassy to Jerusalem, but presidents since then have made use of a waiver enabling them to postpone the move for national security reasons.

Bush said in a memo Monday that his administration "remains committed to beginning the process of moving our embassy to Jerusalem."

E.U. blacklists Palestinian groups

E.U. foreign ministers added three Palestinian groups to its list of terror organizations. Following Monday's move, the 15 E.U. member states must freeze the assets of the Al-Aksa Brigade, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestine Liberation Front.

The United States has been pressing the European Union to take a tougher line against Palestinian terrorism. But diplomats said the move was largely symbolic, because none of the groups is thought to have significant assets in Europe.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Fence-building arouses opposition, but some say it will help diplomacy

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his defense minister, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, insist the fence they officially began building this week, more or less along the old border between Israel and the West Bank, is for security purposes only.

But chances are the fence will have major political implications.

Already, right-wing Israelis are accusing the prime minister of restoring the borders that existed before the 1967 Six-Day War.

Their public relations campaign dubs this boundary, which leaves Israel extremely narrow at points, the "Auschwitz borders."

Settler leader Yisrael Harel charged on national television that the fence was just a first step in an impending Israeli withdrawal from the entire West Bank.

It was evidence of a defensive, ghetto mentality, and soon Israel would regroup all its forces behind the new line, Harel said.

The settlers may be overstating their case, but they have reason for concern. One of the arguments for settlements in the West Bank was that they would contribute to Israel's security. But the very act of building the fence — and leaving the settlements on the other side — is a tacit admission that the settlements contribute little if anything to Israel's defense.

On the contrary, the existence of the settlements beyond the fence will force the army to allocate considerable resources to defend them. As time goes by, the fence will become a psychological fact of life, a symbolic divide between Israel and the Palestinians, and public pressure to shorten the lines and give up the settlements is likely to grow.

The settlements' *raison d'être* increasingly could be called into question. Movements like the Four Mothers, which pressed successfully for an Israeli army withdrawal from southern Lebanon, may well spring up demanding that the "boys be brought home" from the West Bank, too.

Ironically, the Palestinians also oppose the building of the fence: They denounce it as a unilateral move that shows Israel is preparing to perpetuate the "occupation" of land the Palestinians claim.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat went so far as to call the fence, designed to keep Palestinian terrorists from reaching Israel, a manifestation of "racism and apartheid."

Indeed, what concerns the Palestinians more than the fence is the "fence mentality": If taken to its logical conclusion, that mentality could lead to a separation not just between the two peoples but between their economies.

Over a period of years, that could prove disastrous for the Palestinians. Some Palestinians, in fact, contend that Sharon's goal is precisely to impoverish West Bank Palestinians and precipitate an exodus to neighboring Jordan — with the fence as part of the scheme.

Others, however, see reason for optimism. The building of the fence, which officially began on Sunday, comes as moves for political accommodation between Israel and the Palestinians appear to be gaining momentum.

Though it is intended as a defensive measure against ongoing terrorism, the fence could help concentrate minds on both sides and clarify issues, spurring a resumption of the diplomatic process, the argument goes. To pre-empt a fence they don't want,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Suspected terrorist killed

Israeli soldiers shot and killed a suspected Palestinian terrorist in a village near Bethlehem on Monday. Soldiers stationed on a hill some 200 yards from the village shot Walid Sbeh, 30, as he drove down its main street.

He was a prominent member of the Al-Aksa Brigade, the military arm of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

Rice, Arafat trade barbs

Yasser Arafat criticized U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice after she called the Palestinian Authority "corrupt." "She does not have the right to put or impose orders on us about what to do or not to do," Arafat said Monday.

Rice, in a weekend interview with the San Jose Mercury News, said a Palestinian state should not be based on Arafat's Palestinian Authority, which she said is "corrupt and cavorts with terror."

Report: Arafat stole millions

Yasser Arafat pocketed more than \$5 million in foreign aid intended for needy Palestinians, according to a Kuwaiti newspaper.

The Al-Watan newspaper also claimed that Arafat diverted aid money from Arab states that was earmarked for Palestinians who lost homes during Israel's anti-terror operation in the West Bank this spring.

Arab mother hails son's death

A Palestinian woman celebrated when she heard that her son had died in a shooting attack that killed two Israeli soldiers. In a video taped before Mahmud Abed embarked on a suicide attack, he sat holding hands with his mother. When news arrived that her son had died during an attack Saturday near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip, she reportedly celebrated by ululating and clapping her hands.



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the Palestinians may be prepared to be more conciliatory, as in the proposal they reportedly presented to President Bush that appeared to somewhat soften their demands.

On the Israeli side, because of the planned line the fence is meant to follow, Israelis may be more prepared psychologically to withdraw almost to the 1967 border, and recognize a Palestinian state in the evacuated territory.

But that is still a long way away.

The American idea floated recently for a provisional Palestinian state without final borders is meant to signal to the Palestinians that there is a light at the end of the tunnel — provided they build responsible institutions and stop terrorism against Israel. The Palestinians, however, want a firm timetable to move from provisional to full-fledged statehood. Otherwise, they say, they could be left with a truncated mini-state.

Sharon is adamantly opposed to any such timetable, however. In his early June meeting with President Bush, Sharon argued that establishing a binding time frame for Palestinian statehood would remove any incentive for reform — because, at the end of the allotted time, the Palestinians could count on getting their state, whether or not they had reformed their institutions.

Instead, Sharon recommends establishing performance benchmarks the Palestinians would have to meet before proceeding on each stage toward statehood.

The early signs are that the Bush administration intends to play hardball with both sides.

In a mid-June interview with the San Jose Mercury News, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had tough words for both leaderships.

"The Palestinian Authority," she said, "is corrupt and cavorts with terror," and therefore "is not the basis for a Palestinian state moving forward."

In other words, the Americans are serious when it comes to reform.

As for the Israeli side, Rice warned that if Sharon doesn't take the tough decisions necessary for peace, he could find himself out of a job.

"If the current Israeli government isn't willing to make those decisions and the Israeli people want to make those decisions, they have a mechanism for actually changing the government," she said.

Sharon finds himself under pressure not only from the Americans, but domestically as well.

As Israel's economic situation worsens, pressure is growing on Sharon to take radical action — whether military or political — to end the intifada.

An editorial in the Ma'ariv newspaper this week pointed out that if the economic situation worsens significantly, Sharon will not be in any position to maintain hard-line policies. Sharon is also under political pressure from the Labor Party, which includes Ben-Eliezer. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, for example, is strongly in favor of provisional Palestinian statehood, while Sharon has deep reservations.

Peres believes offering the Palestinians even a provisional state is the only way to rekindle their hopes for peace. Sharon believes a provisional state would not stop terror, but would make it far more complicated internationally for Israel to move into areas under Palestinian control, as it does today, to seek out terrorists.

These differences could spill over into an early showdown between Sharon and Labor, because Labor voices calling for a pullout from the national unity government are growing.

Many Labor legislators say that if Sharon does not present a "peace horizon" with the Palestinians within the next few weeks, Labor should leave the government. These calls are likely to come to a head at the party convention in early July. Ironically, starting work on the security fence — a fence neither of them initially wanted — could be one of the last acts of cooperation between Sharon and Ben-Eliezer. □

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

Scientists sign pro-Israel statement

JERUSALEM (JTA) — More than 600 scientists from around the world signed a statement calling for continued collaboration with Israeli scientists.

The statement, circulated by the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science, comes in response to petitions, primarily in Europe, urging a boycott on all scientific collaboration with Israel. □

JEWISH WORLD

Door-to-door proselytizing OK'd

Missionaries, politicians and others may knock on doors without getting permission from local authorities, the Supreme Court ruled.

In an 8-1 decision Monday, the justices agreed with the Jehovah's Witnesses group, which maintained that being required to apply for a permit before spreading their religious message was unconstitutional. According to Marc Stern, the co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, the case shows that religious liberty remains linked to the right of free speech.

Zionist Congress convenes

The 34th Zionist Congress opened Monday in Jerusalem. The congress is being held under the banner of Jewish solidarity with Israel. In opening remarks to the congress, Israeli President Moshe Katsav criticized Muslim leaders for not condemning Palestinian terror attacks.

"Not a single Muslim religious leader has arisen and declared in a clear and firm voice that the acts of suicide terrorists stand in contradiction to the Koran and Islam," he said. "Our strength to face our enemies is based on our recognition that we are fighting for values worthy of being defended."

Le Pen party fails to win seat

Jean-Marie Le Pen's political party failed to gain any seats in elections for the French Parliament.

The failure by the far-right National Front in Sunday's elections came two months after Le Pen qualified for the runoff in France's presidential elections, which he later lost. French President Jacques Chirac's conservative party swept to an overwhelming victory in Sunday's vote, which saw a record low turnout.

Rabbi calls off patrols

A militant rabbi decided not to launch armed patrols in Jewish sections of Brooklyn. "The response was so overwhelmingly negative, but God forbid anything should happen, and then I'll have to say, 'I told you so,'" Rabbi Yakove Lloyd said Sunday.

In an interview with JTA, however, Lloyd vowed to put the patrols on the streets next Sunday despite police threats that they would be arrested.

Bronfman Prize created

A prize was established in the name of philanthropist Charles Bronfman to celebrate vision and accomplishments in the Jewish world.

The prize of \$100,000 will be given annually to people under 50 who inspire the emerging generation of Jewish people through their achievements. Bronfman's children established the prize.

Jewish groups make their case ahead of Bush speech on Mideast

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The apparent confusion within the Bush administration over the White House's next step in Middle East peacemaking is breeding consternation among American Jewish groups.

With conflicting messages emerging from various parts of the administration, groups were waiting in anticipation of a presidential speech that could include a call for an interim Palestinian state.

Until the administration plan is revealed and President Bush lays out specific proposals, Jewish groups have little to go on. Still, as Israel and Arab states lend the president their advice, American Jewish groups also are working hard to stress certain points they consider crucial.

Yet those points span the ideological spectrum of American Jewry, with some warning the administration not to reward Palestinian terrorism and others saying the Palestinians must be offered diplomatic gains as an inducement to stop attacking Israel.

Bush was likely to deliver his speech this week, but a White House spokesman said only that he expected "something in the very near future."

Whatever vision Bush lays out, it must be based on performance benchmarks, not a strict timeline, according to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"It's all contingent on improvements on the security front," he said.

Palestinian officials are demanding a timeline to the establishment of a Palestinian state, while Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon says progress should depend on performance, not a deadline.

There also is concern that a provisional state could be seen as a reward for terrorism, Hoenlein added. That position won backing recently from several prominent opinion-shapers, including New York Times columnist William Safire.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee urged President Bush not to rush to call for the creation of a Palestinian state. The group urged the president to reject the advice of those "pressing him to endorse a 'timeline' or an 'interim state' that would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state before the Palestinian leadership rejects terrorism."

The pro-Israel lobby is "not opposed to a Palestinian state," AIPAC spokeswoman Rebecca Needler said, but believes one created now under Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat would become a "state sponsor of terror."

An administration official said U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's recent comments about a provisional Palestinian state was sparking anxiety among Jewish groups. Last week, Powell told the London-based, Arabic-language Al-Hayat newspaper that it "might be necessary to set up a temporary state as a transitional step."

When White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was asked whether Bush supported such a move, he sidestepped the question.

"The president has been receiving advice from any number of people, and many of these people give him multiple pieces of advice about the Middle East," Fleischer said.

The next day, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told the San Jose Mercury News that Bush is moving toward establishing a Palestinian state. However, she added, it would not be built around the Palestinian Authority, which she said is "corrupt" and "cavorts with terror."

Sharon said conditions are not ripe for the creation of even a provisional Palestinian state. Sharon's remarks at Sunday's Cabinet meeting followed media reports that he was open to the idea.

Sharon, who in the past has voiced support for an eventual Palestinian state, repeatedly has stated that the Palestinian Authority must institute internal reforms and halt attacks against Israel before there can be advances on the diplomatic front.

More liberal American Jewish groups say they are not anxious about Bush's announcement but support the interim state idea, and hope the president's announcement will include a major U.S. plan. □

NOTE TO READERS: Jews everywhere are looking to Israel's leaders to provide a vision for the future. In this special series commissioned by JTA, Israel's top political figures answer the vital question: Where do we go from here? Also included in the series are pieces by Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and former Prime Ministers Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak.

Cease-fire first, then peace talks

By Ariel Sharon

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For 20 months, Israel has been under a bitter and bloody attack, initiated by our Palestinian neighbors. We have paid a high price in casualties, solely because of our honest wish to live in peace with them and our belief that they want the same.

Visions for Peace Part 1 of a Series

The infrastructure of terror against Israel was established before this government took office. The main purpose of our national unity government was to achieve a cessation of violence and incitement as a vital and essential condition for the resumption of our efforts to achieve peace with security for our people.

I offered a practical proposal to end the violence, and reiterated our unwavering commitment to achieve peace. I proposed making a clear distinction between the general population seeking to live in peace with us, and the terrorists.

I suggested ways to ease their suffering and return to normal living conditions. I extended my hand in peace, and was met by a wave of acts of terror and violence. Still, we have not given up on direct dialogue to bring about an end to violence.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres has left no stone unturned in his efforts to find a partner for dialogue. I have personally hosted several Palestinian Authority officials, and reiterated our concrete proposals for a cease-fire and the resumption of political negotiations.

In talks with various world leaders, I presented our ideas for a step-by-step long-term interim agreement, and a permanent settlement possible only after the cessation of terror. We presented Israel's honest wish for a peace that will bring honor, prosperity and security for both peoples.

However, Yasser Arafat chose a different path. He chose a strategy of terror and established a coalition of terrorist organizations. He assumed, and still assumes, that he will be able to defeat Israel and break our spirit. By way of blood and horror, he wants to force Israel into a unilateral withdrawal to the 1967 borders, including Jerusalem, and then press for the return of the refugees to undermine the very existence of the State of Israel.

But peace can only be attained once a cessation of violence is achieved and terrorism is uprooted. A Palestinian leadership must emerge willing to accept the primary responsibility of every regime to prevent the use of its territory for indiscriminate acts of violence and murder. Peace negotiations can commence and move forward only after terrorism has ceased.

If such a Palestinian leadership should arise, it will find in Israel a hand extended toward peace and negotiations. I, who have fought in all of Israel's wars and have seen all the horrors of war, understand and appreciate the value of peace, as much, if not more, than those who speak of it, but have never experienced war.

Despite the extreme demands included in the resolutions of the conference of Arab leaders in Beirut, I welcome the fact that an important Arab leader such as Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has, for the first time, adopted the vision of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors — a vision that all of Israel's leaders have espoused for the last 54 years.

We welcome the Saudi initiative and vision, but the details must be negotiated between the parties themselves.

No party can enforce unilateral conditions. U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 affirm Israel's right to exist in peace, and within secure and recognized borders, free from any military threat, like any other nation in the region. These borders, and the way to ensure Israel's security in the face of any military or terrorist threat, must be directly negotiated between the parties.

Israel cannot accept the return of Arab refugees to its territory, as it would effectively terminate the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Neither can Israel accept any solution that would divide Jerusalem and deny Israel full sovereignty over its 3,000-year-old capital. What is the outline through which a comprehensive peace in the Middle East may be advanced?

Personally, I doubt it is possible to leap from the current violent conflict directly into a comprehensive permanent agreement that will bring a complete and final end to the conflict. Such an approach would rapidly lead us to a dead end.

After all, the Palestinians rejected the previous government's proposals, which included far-reaching concessions, refused to negotiate over them and chose to try to enforce their will upon Israel through terrorism.

Only when they come to the realization that violence is not an option will we be able to achieve a real cease-fire. And only when the Arabs reconcile with the birthright of the Jews to have an independent Jewish state in their ancestral homeland, can true lasting peace be achieved.

It is from that point that I propose to move forward toward a long-term interim agreement, which will affect the character and development of relations between Israel and the Palestinians.

It is in this situation that the Palestinians will be able to build an independent society and rebuild their ruined economy. We can and are willing to generously assist them in preparing their people for peace and good neighborly relations. Such an interim agreement would put an end to the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian population, those who wish to live in peace and prosperity.

The history of the political relations between Israel and the Arab states is proof of the viability of a gradual step-by-step approach. We were in a state of war with the Egyptians. We went through five terrible wars. The war ended with a cease-fire, in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 338 and 339.

Peace with Egypt has been sustained because it was predicated on the solid foundations of peace with ironclad security arrangements as well as painful concessions.

Although the situation with the Palestinians is more complicated, the outstanding issues are more difficult and the bitterness is greater, together, we can, I believe, move forward toward a better future for both our peoples.

All of Israel is committed to peace. It is a natural choice for us. I believe that we are destined to live here with Arabs and that if we remain united and determined, we will be able to bring our Palestinian and Arab neighbors to realize that peace is the only real viable choice for them as well. □

Ariel Sharon is the prime minister of Israel. This piece was compiled for JTA from recent speeches by the prime minister.