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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Cease-fire plan frozen?

Israel's defense minister denied comments by Cabinet minister Dan Naveh that Israel had frozen its participation in a gradual cease-fire plan.

But Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said Israel would not withdraw from more areas unless Palestinian forces intensified their efforts to stop anti-Israeli violence.

In other reports, Israel said it will not withdraw its troops from the West Bank city of Hebron at least until after the High Holidays.

Ben-Eliezer said the decision was aimed at preventing terrorist groups in the city from exploiting the holiday period to launch attacks at a time when Palestinian security forces would not be capable of preventing attacks.

Would-be bomber nabbed

Israeli soldiers caught a suspected suicide bomber near Jenin on Sunday.

Two other suspected terrorists were arrested with the would-be bomber. Over the weekend, Israeli security forces arrested another Palestinian allegedly connected to the eastern Jerusalem-based Hamas cell captured a week ago that is believed responsible for at least eight terrorist attacks, including the July 31 Hebrew University bombing.

In other weekend operations, four armed Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Two of the Palestinians were killed in an attempted infiltration of an Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip on Friday night. The other two fired on Israeli soldiers patrolling Jenin on Saturday.

Also, six wanted Palestinians were arrested near Ramallah and a seventh was detained in the Hebron area.

Sharon cancels 9/11 trip to U.S.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is canceling a trip to the United States next month. Sharon was expected to visit Florida and California, in part to commemorate the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Sharon's aides said the cancellation was caused by the security situation in Israel and the need to pass Israel's budget, and not concerns that Sharon meeting with Republican Jeb Bush would benefit the Florida governor in his bid for re-election.

Bush wins kudos for effort toward Arab democratization

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — American Jewish leaders and democracy advocates are praising Bush administration plans to promote democracy in the Middle East.

The Washington Post reported Aug. 21 that the State Department will invest millions of dollars to promote democracy throughout the region, advocating reform and training political activists and journalists. Secretary of State Colin Powell is expected to detail the plans as early as next month.

A State Department official has reportedly laid out a four-pronged approach utilizing \$25 million in appropriated funds. The goals are economic reform and private sector development, education, promoting civil society and respect for the rule of law.

The overarching goal is to bring democratic values and leadership to many of the countries in the region. In recent months, the Bush administration has spoken at length about the need for democracy in the Palestinian territories and Iraq, and the new effort is viewed as an attempt to make this policy consistent for the entire region.

"Post-Sept. 11, there was a feeling that we always had promoted democracy in the region but it needed to be taken to a new level," the State Department official said. "There is criticism that we have given democracy lip service in the Middle East."

Officials note that the issue started gaining prominence at the White House in June, when President Bush spoke at the U.S. Military Academy.

"In poverty, they struggle. In tyranny, they suffer," he told the army cadets. "The peoples of the Islamic nations want and deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation, and their governments should listen to their hopes."

Despite State Department claims that Arab leaders will welcome the initiative, it seems probable that any effort to support democracy advocates in the Middle East will meet resistance in the largely authoritarian regimes.

But sources say the focus of the effort is not on the heads of state but the Arab public. The program is seen as an effort to thwart future threats from a surge of anti-Americanism in the Arab world and promote a more positive image of the United States.

The program is believed to be spurred in part by the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, and the view that anti-American sentiment is high on the Arab street, even as Arab governments support much of U.S. policy.

Without fundamental changes, State Department officials say, the region could remain a hotbed of terrorist activity against American interests. With large and growing populations, weak economies and few civic and political freedoms, the Arab world will be a source of instability in the decades to come unless steps are taken now, experts warn.

The first tangible sign of the new policy was unveiled last week, when the Bush administration announced it would oppose additional foreign aid to Egypt to protest the conviction of Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim, a human rights activist with American citizenship who writes about democratic values. While no new aid was being discussed, the shift in U.S. policy toward Egypt garnered international attention.

As part of the reforms, the State Department is expected to review the \$1 billion in foreign aid distributed to the Middle East each year.

The democratization effort is expected to include all countries in the Middle East, including Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria, which the State Department defines as sponsors of terrorism. A State Department official said the government will look at ways of

MIDEAST FOCUS

Soldiers suspected of looting

More than 30 Israeli army soldiers are suspected of looting Palestinian homes during Israel's anti-terror operation in the West Bank in March and April.

The soldiers are suspected of taking money, jewelry and other belongings, including handguns, from the homes, Israel Radio reported. The army is investigating the incidents.

Alleged female collaborator killed

A group of Palestinians reportedly killed a woman they suspected of cooperating with Israeli authorities.

Ikhlas Yasin, a 39-year-old mother of seven, was shot and killed in Tulkarm on Saturday, the Jerusalem Post reported. The paper said her son, who had been kidnapped by Fatah gunmen, confessed that his mother helped Israeli soldiers in killing a wanted member of the Al-Aksa Brigade.

Demolition orders delayed

Plans by the Israeli army to demolish the eastern Jerusalem homes of two terrorists who carried out a double suicide bombing in Jerusalem nine months ago were delayed Sunday.

The families of the terrorists appealed to military prosecutors after receiving orders to vacate the homes in Abu Dis by Sunday evening, Israel Radio reported. In the Dec. 7 attack, the two bombers blew themselves up among on Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall, killing 11 people.

French envoy to U.K. recalled

The French ambassador to the United Kingdom, who has used expletives to describe Israel, has been recalled. Daniel Bernard reportedly told luncheon guests in London last year that current troubles in the world were caused by Israel and used an expletive to describe the Jewish state.



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achieving its goals while circumventing those governments. More modest reforms also are being sought in Israel, the only democracy in the region. Among the plans for Israel are curriculum reform to promote Arab-Israeli reconciliation, at the same time as Arab neighbors consider accepting Israel's right to exist, State Department officials said.

Much of the new effort will be spearheaded by Elizabeth Cheney, a deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs and the daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney. Elizabeth Cheney joined the State Department this spring.

Many are praising the new U.S. stance, but questions remain as to whether the policy shift will have an effect.

"You're not going to get democratization through the current system; you need regime change," said Meyrav Wurmser, director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Hudson Institute. "The Saudi royals will not become the Queen of England."

Wurmser said it would take sustained pressure to achieve results, and she was unsure whether the Bush administration would make the effort.

"I think we can achieve a goal of democratizing the systems by putting enough pressure to change — or else," she said. "Our friendship is worth something."

Pressure on Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries would be a sharp change from the past year, when the Bush administration courted Arab support for its policies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the larger war against terrorism. Administration officials frequently have welcomed Arab leaders to the White House and have, until recently, kept criticism of those countries' domestic policies private.

State Department officials say they expect that Arab governments to support the initiative, even though some may see the reforms as a threat to their leadership.

"We feel it is an effort to transform their government and promote ideals in the best interest of their governments," the State Department official said.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said he believes the new policy comes from questioning of the Bush administration as to why its support for democracy has not been applied to the Middle East.

The proposed reforms are "a long time coming," Foxman said. "I think it needs to be gradual because if one dives into it impetuously, it can reverberate negatively." □

Two L.A. rabbis win high praise for help in arrest of alleged rapist

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Two young rabbis have become instant heroes by tracking down a suspected serial rapist.

Rabbis Chaim Kolodny, 31, and Shmuel Manne, 34, were besieged by television and newspaper reporters recently after they and other members of the Hatzolah emergency medical service were instrumental in the capture of a man believed to have committed four sexual assaults and attempted four others.

Hatzolah, the Hebrew word for Rescue, was established in Los Angeles a year ago as the city's only volunteer emergency medical service. It operates mainly in the heavily Jewish mid-Wilshire and Fairfax districts.

Police had earlier transmitted a composite drawing of the suspect to the group, and Kolodny, who serves as director of the Cheder of Los Angeles boys and girls schools, had transmitted the description to the community through e-mail and fliers, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Abraham Matyas, a Hatzolah volunteer, was driving in the neighborhood on the evening of Aug. 15 when he spotted a pedestrian fitting the suspect's description and started following him.

To avoid arousing the suspect's suspicions, Matyas called in other volunteers to join the chase and switched cars, with the two rabbis taking up the pursuit at a minimall. They followed the man as he stopped at a couple of residences and rang the doorbells, without getting a response.

Satisfied that the man fitted the suspect's description, Kolodny used his cell phone to call police, who arrested Gary David Johnson, 41, a man with an extensive criminal record in California, Pennsylvania and Florida, according to authorities. □

JEWISH WORLD

Palestinian speaker irks group

A Jewish group has sent a letter to Colorado College, expressing concern that a Palestinian leader will be addressing the school about Sept. 11.

Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian spokeswoman, has been invited as the keynote speaker for a program on the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. In the letter, B'nai B'rith President Richard Heideman said "nothing she has said since the start of the Oslo process has promoted good will and understanding from the Palestinian side."

Poll: Most Israelis regret Oslo

Two-thirds of Israelis say the Oslo peace accords have harmed the country. Before the Palestinian intifada began two years ago, a majority of Israelis supported the accords.

According to a Dahaf poll published in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot last Friday, 67 percent of Israelis surveyed said the peace process has harmed Israel, while only 21 percent said they still backed the accords. The poll of 500 Israelis has a margin of error of 4.5 percent.

Supremacists march in D.C.

Police in Washington prevented demonstrators and counterdemonstrators from clashing at a white supremacist rally against Israel at the U.S. Capitol. On Saturday, more than 1,000 counterdemonstrators marched against an equal number of neo-Nazis.

The white supremacists, who were organized by the National Alliance, chanted "What do we want? Jews out!" as they made Nazi salutes and shredded an Israeli flag.

Interfaith pair goes for an ace

A Jewish-Muslim tennis team will compete together in the U.S. Open tournament. Israel's Amir Haddad and Aisam Ul-Haq Qureshi of Pakistan were awarded a wild card slot to compete in the men's doubles competition at the Open, which begins in New York on Monday. The two drew headlines after they played at Wimbledon tournament during the summer.

Berlin subway rejects Israeli ads

The Berlin subway has rejected an ad campaign showing images of young Israelis killed in terror attacks.

The subway's parent firm, BVG, opposed a plan by the Israeli embassy and funded by the local Jewish community at a cost of \$25,000 to place ads in 50 stations with pictures of Israeli youths killed during the second Palestinian uprising, the Jerusalem Report said. Subway officials said they oppose bringing "an intense political confrontation" into the subway.

As U.N. summit opens in S. Africa, activists hoping to avoid Israel focus

By Michael Belling

CAPE TOWN (JTA) — Jewish participants have been bracing themselves for the opening of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, worried that the conference could turn into another forum for anti-Semitism like last year's U.N. anti-racism conference.

But on the eve of the conference in Johannesburg, which begins Monday and runs through Sept. 4, some Jewish leaders here are optimistic that it will remain focused on the issues of balancing respect for the environment with economic development.

Russell Gaddin, national chairman of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, which has led the local Jewish lobby in preparing for the summit, told JTA: "We do know that the anti-Israel lobby is going to be here and is going to endeavor to promote their anti-Israel propaganda. But I believe we have done enough network building to ensure they do not hijack the conference."

The South African government was determined to make sure that the conference dealt with the economic issues that are supposed to be the summit's focus, Gaddin said, "particularly after they came to understand what a disaster the Durban racism conference was."

The United States and Israel stormed out of last year's conference in Durban, South Africa, condemning it as a circus of anti-Semitism, after language was debated that would have rehabilitated the 1975 U.N. resolution denigrating Zionism as racism — and after thousands thronged in protest of Israel, with some distributing anti-Semitic cartoons and taunting that Hitler never finished the job.

This year's summit will be held in two main parts, starting with a gathering of nongovernmental organizations, followed by the governmental summit.

More than 100 heads of state and government are expected to attend. Several countries have expressed their disappointment that the United States delegation is being led by Secretary of State Colin Powell, and not by President Bush.

In contrast to the racism conference, there has been no major emphasis on anti-Israel resolutions during preparatory meetings, although four allegations were made against Israel in debates, relating to toxic waste dumps, the destruction of olive trees, "stealing water" and preventing sustainable development.

Jewish groups, who admit they were caught by surprise by the virulence of the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic campaign at Durban, worked to make sure that the Johannesburg conference would not be hijacked by Arab and pro-Palestinian groups. But the final preparatory document in June left the door open for the Palestinian issue.

Although the Palestinians and Israel were not mentioned by name, "foreign occupation" was listed among "worldwide conditions that pose severe threats to sustainable development."

Some prominent Africans, including Aziz Pahad, South Africa's deputy foreign minister, believe that any overemphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as happened at Durban, detracts from the Palestinian cause.

"We will always defend the right of the Palestinian people, but you can't have every conference dominated by the issue," he said earlier this month.

Gaddin regards the summit "not as a threat, but as an opportunity to showcase what Jews and Israel are doing for sustainable development worldwide."

This has led to a proactive strategy, focusing largely on Israel's contributions to sustainable development. Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, Israel's largest environmental organization, has sent a substantial delegation and is sharing research findings in the fields of forestation, desert rehabilitation, land development, water recycling and agricultural innovations.

Israel sent only a low-level delegation to Durban, but this time it will be represented by two Cabinet members, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Environment Minister Tzachi Hanegbi. The 130-person international Jewish caucus includes delegates from, among others, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, B'nai B'rith and Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America. □

Some Jews don't like it as German Christians rally for Israel

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — One of Germany's largest pro-Israel demonstrations in recent memory took place here Saturday — with no support from German Jewish groups.

The demonstrators, waving Israeli flags and marching under the slogan "Germany on Israel's Side," were mainly fundamentalist Christians who oppose a Palestinian state and believe Jewish control of the biblical Land of Israel is one of the preconditions for Jesus' return.

While the event, which police said drew 4,000 participants, received publicity and informational material from the Israeli Embassy here, the Union of Jewish Students in Germany "distanced itself completely" from the idea that Jews must accept Jesus as their savior. The group also distanced itself from the anti-Muslim beliefs of some the organizers, according to a statement distributed by a handful of Jewish students at the march.

Their protest attracted the attention of German media and underscored the question being asked elsewhere: Just how far should Israel supporters go in accepting support during troubled times? In the United States, Jewish groups and Israeli diplomats have grown less reluctant to accept evangelical Christian support for Israel during the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence — and there is a Christian rally for Israel slated for October.

But in Germany, evangelical Christians are fewer in number — and much less accepted — even by mainstream Protestants.

And for the Jewish students at the rally, there is no compromise. Many fundamentalist groups "do not recognize the right of Jews to exist if they do not believe in Jesus, that is, take on the Christian faith," read the students' flier in part. "We sharply condemn this goal."

"At the same time, we distance ourselves from the political orientation of the demonstration," whose main speaker, Ludwig Schneider, has in the past said Israel should "wage a 'Holy War' against those who hate you, oh God."

Gunter Keil, head of The Bridge Berlin-Jerusalem, the fundamentalist Christian umbrella organization that organized the planned demonstration, denied both points.

While he said Judaism is "completed" through acceptance of Jesus, he stressed that his group does not have a "division devoted to a mission to the Jews."

Keil also told the JTA that "We have nothing against the Palestinian people, but for us the Palestinians are Arabs. The word 'Palestinian' is made up . . . so there can't be a Palestinian state in Israel." Keil, who says his group has 500 prayer circles across Germany, said a Saturday was chosen for the demonstration to make it clear that it had been planned by non-Jewish groups and not by the Israeli Embassy.

But the Israeli Embassy publicized the demonstration in its electronic newsletter, and Ambassador Shimon Stein accepted a statement of support from the group, with more than 6,000 signatures gathered through the Web site "Jerusalem — Shalom," in a ceremony last Friday at the embassy in Berlin.

That tacit endorsement troubled some observers.

"I share the goal to show solidarity with Israel, but I see certain problems here," said Martin Kloke, a scholar on Is-

raeli-German relations and an editor at a textbook publishing company in Berlin. "Some of these groups only support Israel because they think Israel and the Jews have a certain role in the apocalyptic times, in which they think we now live."

"If someone is demonstrating for Israel, for a just cause, shall I tell him please don't demonstrate?" asked Mordechai Lewy, deputy chief of mission at the Israeli Embassy here. "It is a free country, and I cannot prevent them," he told the JTA.

The demonstrators marched from the Foreign Ministry to the Reichstag, the seat of the German Parliament, where they heard several speeches, punctuated by Israeli and Jewish music.

Many demonstrators waved Israeli flags and some wore yarmulkes and Stars of David, though they said they were not Jewish.

Signs bore messages such as "We stand by Israel," "God will bless you" and "Christians on the side of Israel." One woman carried a hand-painted poster with a cross against a yellow background. On the cross was a large heart with a Star of David in it.

Someone blew a shofar on stage, and a few demonstrators who had brought their own rams' horns blew them as well. The Shema was chanted in Hebrew, with many in the crowd joining in.

"People didn't know who these demonstrators are," said Uriel Kashi, member of the Union of Jewish Students in Germany, who handed out the protest leaflets. "When Ludwig Schneider talked, people were really shocked and getting a really strange attitude toward Israel solidarity," he added.

Schneider, a journalist who has lived in Israel for more than 25 years, told the crowd "Whoever hates Israel hates God."

There was especially loud applause when Schneider said the "bloodthirsty" enemies of Israel "should turn to our God."

"We work on a purely biblical basis," explained Keil of The Bridge Berlin-Jerusalem. "We don't talk of occupied zones or the West Bank. We talk of Samaria and Judea. And in our view, they belong to Israel."

Kloke said this view is so extreme among some groups that they have indirectly hinted that the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was a punishment from God, to prevent Israel from giving away land. Kloke has documented this in an essay in the German publication *Israel and Palestine*.

Cathy Palmer, a demonstrator from Florida, came to the demonstration to voice her objection to the idea that Israel should trade land for peace.

"Catastrophic dictates from God are the result — floods and fires," she said. When asked if Rabin was an example of someone who had received a judgment, she said, "Yes."

Even so, "the Israeli government has welcomed this kind of solidarity for years," said Kloke, who observed the demonstration. "They argue that Israel is lonely and doesn't have so many friends so we can't be too choosy."

The view was echoed at the event, where informational material from the Israeli Embassy and the Jewish National Fund was provided alongside fundamentalist Christian material on the Holy Land and the New Testament. "We have so few friends in Germany in this horrible time in Israel," said Sara Rozenbaum, who represents the JNF in Germany. "Our Christian friends are always with us together on the front for Israel."

Lewy said those who justify the assassination of Rabin are "lunatics." But "there should not be a witch hunt against people who are ready to do something for Israel," he said. □