



# Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Group speaks out against Lott

B'nai B'rith International called on the Senate Republican caucus to replace Trent Lott as majority leader.

Lott (R-Miss.) has come under fire for comments he made at a recent birthday party for retiring Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) in which he praised Thurmond's 1948 presidential run on a platform advocating racial segregation.

The Jewish group's letter to Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), chair of the Senate Republican Conference, calls Lott's comments "inappropriate" and says it would be "in the best interest of the Senate and a nation at war" to elect a new majority leader.

While some Jewish groups have condemned the remarks, B'nai B'rith is the first Jewish group to call for Lott's ouster.

### Kenya death toll rises

A Kenyan hotel employee died of her injuries, bringing the death toll from the Nov. 28 suicide bombing of an Israeli hotel there to 14.

Including the latest fatality, 11 Kenyans and three Israelis died in the attack at the Hotel Paradise.

### No U.S. tax on Shoah restitution

President Bush on Tuesday signed a law excluding Holocaust restitution payments from federal tax.

The Holocaust Restitution Tax Fairness Act of 2002 passed Congress earlier this year.

### Hamas associates arrested

Four brothers have been arrested in Dallas for alleged ties to Hamas. The four, who work for the InfoCom computer company, were arrested Wednesday, according to WFAA-TV in Dallas.

They were accused of having fund-raising ties to Hamas and the Holy Land Foundation, a charity closed last year after the Treasury Department claimed it funneled funds to Hamas.

### Britain backs off envoy's remark

London distanced itself from a remark made by the British ambassador to Israel that appeared to justify terrorism in some circumstances.

"Terrorism defined as attacks on innocent civilians is always absolutely wrong," a British Foreign Office spokesman told JTA on Wednesday.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### 'Quartet' comes to Washington, but prospects for peace unclear

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As representatives of the diplomatic "Quartet" prepare to converge in Washington this week, the fate of the group's plan for Mideast peace is unclear.

Envoys of the United Nations, European Union and Russia — which, with the United States, make up the Quartet — are due to meet with President Bush on Friday.

Some type of statement on Mideast diplomacy is expected to emerge from the meeting.

Hopes initially had focused on the presentation of a revised "road map."

But with the United States stuck between its promise to delay the plan until after Israel's Jan. 28 election and its desire to court both Arab and European support ahead of a possible military attack on Iraq, no one seems sure what will emerge from the meeting.

Sources say Bush could enunciate his support for the road map's principles, or even endorse a specific draft.

Israel and American Jewish leaders would like to see the former, while E.U. leaders have said they would like to see the road map formally adopted Friday, with clear timetables leading to a Palestinian state by 2005.

Sources say the Bush administration has promised European leaders that this week's meeting will be serious and substantive, and that progress will be made on the timetable for a Palestinian state and for Israeli concessions — such as a withdrawal of troops from most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and a freeze on developing Jewish settlements there.

But the White House also has told Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that nothing substantive will be decided until after the Israeli elections.

"The only thing that is clear is that the principals are coming here with a very high degree of skepticism," said Henry Siegman, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

"Each of them considered not showing up because of indications by Washington that it did not want to see movement on the road map at this time."

The meeting with Bush was scheduled to appease the other members of the Quartet, Siegman said.

The other participants want the president to speak clearly and firmly in support of the draft plan and to state that it conforms to Bush's Mideast vision, as laid out in a June 24 speech that called for new Palestinian leadership before diplomatic progress could be made.

Israel consistently has said it has concerns about the road map. Specifically, Israeli leaders say the plan does not repeat Bush's demand for a change in Palestinian leadership and does not set firm standards the Palestinians must meet before the sides progress from step to step.

Israel wants the steps to be performance-based, not dictated by a timeline that runs regardless of how well the Palestinians honor their commitments, as was the case under the Oslo peace accords.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz reiterated that point in meetings with U.S. leaders this week, according to a senior Israeli defense official.

The road map calls for a three-staged approach leading to an interim Palestinian

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Labor candidate talks tough

The leader of Israel's Labor Party attempted to shake off his dovish image.

In an appearance Tuesday before a group of students, Amram Mitzna threatened harsh retaliation against the Palestinians if they continue launching terrorist attacks. "If you continue with terror, we will beat you to a pulp," Mitzna said.

### Patriarch: Make peace or quit

The Catholic Church's highest official in Jerusalem called on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to either make peace or resign. "If the present leaders do not succeed in making peace, there is only one solution: Open the way to other leaders. Perhaps they will succeed better where the present ones have failed," Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah said Wednesday.

### Clinton ties save house

Israel canceled a plan to destroy a Palestinian's house in Bethlehem after discovering that the owner has ties to Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.). Neighbors said the building is owned by Hussein Othman Issa, whose family runs the Hope Flowers School, which promotes coexistence.

The army said two men involved in recent terror attacks against Israel had been living in the house. But family members said they are unaware that the tenants might have been engaged in violent activity.

### Rabin assassin testifies

Yitzhak Rabin's assassin testified in the trial of a former Shin Bet operative.

Yigal Amir appeared Wednesday at the trial of Avishai Raviv, an undercover agent accused of knowing in advance about the 1995 assassination but failing to prevent it. Amir testified that he never told Raviv he intended to murder Rabin, but did say that someone should kill the prime minister.

state in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip next year, and the creation of a permanent state by the end of 2005.

In the first stage, the plan calls for the appointment of a new Palestinian Authority Cabinet and the creation of a prime minister's post, to dilute P.A. President Yasser Arafat's power.

It also demands that Israel improve humanitarian conditions for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and dismantle any settlement outposts created since the Sharon government took office in March 2001.

Later, it would require the Palestinians to write a constitution.

A monitoring system led by the Quartet would be set up to ensure that the two sides meet their commitments.

Israel also would be called on to withdraw troops from all areas occupied since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000, and to freeze all settlement activity.

The second phase, which would run through the end of 2003, begins with Palestinian elections in January and an international conference to form a provisional Palestinian state.

The third phase, set for 2004 and 2005, calls for a second conference and negotiations toward a final peace agreement and a permanent Palestinian state.

Drafts of the plan have been written throughout the fall, and it is unclear whether additional changes have been made since the most recent draft was prepared in November.

Israel claims it has been mostly left out of the drafting process.

Siegmán, a former executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said the fate of the road map is in Bush's hands.

"If the president does not embrace fully, without qualification, the road map, the whole initiative is dead," he said.

But American Jewish leaders who met with Bush for a Chanukah celebration earlier this month say the president said he is committed to the principles of his June 24 address.

"His speech was a very meaningful, practical approach, and these principles ought to be adhered to," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Hoenlein said it is difficult to comment on the road map drafts because there have been so many.

It's not clear which draft currently is prevailing, or whether there are still discrepancies between the current draft and Bush's speech.

The Israel Policy Forum has called on Bush to put momentum behind the road map, including making American troops available to head an international observer force in the Palestinian areas.

The idea is opposed by Israel and most American Jewish leaders, who worry about the perceived pro-Palestinian bias of the other Quartet members.

The United States has a vested interest in the road map: A perception that it is thoroughly behind the initiative will be welcomed by European and Arab states, whose support the United States seeks before any military action against Iraq.

To that end, the State Department last week unveiled a Middle East democratization program, designed to foster economic, political and educational development in a region that has lagged behind the rest of the world.

"Any approach to the Middle East that ignores its political, economic and educational underdevelopment will be built upon sand," Powell said Dec. 12 at a Washington think tank.

"It is time to lay a firm foundation of hope."

The democratization project will have an initial budget of \$29 million, with more money sought from Congress next year.

The international community would like to see a concrete U.S. plan for tackling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after any war against Iraq.

Given its conflicting interests, the United States may do best to take no firm decisions at the meeting, thus keeping its promise to Israel while keeping its options open with European and Arab allies.

"The U.S. interest may not be served by moving too fast on the road map," one Jewish official said. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Swiss Holocaust fund closing

The Swiss government said it plans to close at the end of the year a fund it created for needy Holocaust victims.

Since 1997, the fund has distributed some \$200 million to more than 300,000 Holocaust survivors.

The fund was established after Swiss banks were accused of having close financial ties to the Nazis and of hoarding the contents of long-dormant bank accounts opened by Holocaust victims.

It is separate from a \$1.25 billion fund set up by Swiss banks in 1998 to settle a variety of Holocaust-related claims.

### Court won't OK firing

A U.S. court refused to approve a Florida university's plan to fire a Palestinian professor who is accused of having ties to terrorism.

On Monday, the court recommended that the dispute between the University of South Florida and Sami Al-Arian be submitted to binding arbitration.

A spokesperson for the university said the school is still deciding how to proceed.

Critics of Al-Arian, who is suspended from his tenured position, say he raised money for terrorist groups, brought terrorists into the United States and established groups that support terror.

Al-Arian denies the charges.

### Court rules for neo-Nazi

Norway's Supreme Court overturned a lower court's conviction of a former neo-Nazi leader.

A majority of the court's 11 judges ruled that Terje Sjoelie's denunciations of Jews and immigrants during an August 2000 rally were within the legal bounds of free speech.

He made the comments while leading a march celebrating Nazi official Rudolf Hess.

The verdict that Sjoelie had not violated the nation's laws against racism provoked outrage among Norway's human rights activists.

Sjoelie is serving a three-year prison sentence for the attempted murder of a rival neo-Nazi leader, as well as for armed robbery.

### Dancing the night away in Brazil

Some 20,000 people attended a Jewish dance festival in Brazil.

The Carmel Festival, held over the weekend in Sao Paulo, is billed as the largest such event to be held outside Israel.

Some 2,500 dancers from several Brazilian states and from the United States and Mexico performed in shows that expressed Jewish culture through numerous dance styles. The festival included dance workshops as well as a nightlong dance marathon.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Russia returns books to Lubavitch, but will group get the rest of library?

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Lubavitch movement is celebrating the transfer of 16 religious books to a Lubavitch-run synagogue in Moscow.

But it is unclear when — and indeed, if — the balance of the thousands of books that make up the "Schneerson Library" will come into the fervently Orthodox group's hands.

On Monday night, a group of Lubavitch Jews gathered in a downtown Moscow synagogue to welcome the 16 books that were returned to the movement from the Russian State Library, formerly known as the Lenin Library, where the collection has been held for the last 80 years.

A few years after the Russian Revolution, the books — estimates range from 4,000 to 12,000 volumes — were seized from the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, as part of a crackdown on religion.

Excitement, singing and clapping filled the room as Rabbi Shlomo Kunin, who described the transfer as "the fulfillment of 80 years of imprisonment," carried the pile of antique books into the Bronnaya synagogue's main hall. Long tables were put together and covered with talitot, or prayer shawls, before the books were laid out.

Kunin opened the front page of the thickest volume in the pile.

"It's Gemarrah," he announced, referring to a volume of talmudic texts.

The return of the books came after more than a decade of efforts.

Agudas Chasidei Chabad-Lubavitch, a group affiliated with the Lubavitch movement, was established in 1990 with the goal of achieving the release of the Schneerson collection.

It took three U.S. administrations, appeals by all 100 U.S. senators, heads of state from various nations and Jewish leaders from around the world "to get these 16 volumes," said the Los Angeles-based Kunin, who has been spearheading the Lubavitch effort to get the books returned.

More directly, a gesture from the Bush administration apparently made the return possible.

At a ceremony in Moscow last Friday, the United States returned to Russia an archive of the Smolensk Regional Committee of the Communist Party.

At the end of World War II, the U.S. armed forces came into possession of the archive, captured by the Nazis when they occupied Russia during World War II.

Jewish leaders Ronald Lauder and Edgar Bronfman acted as conduits between the two governments in these gestures.

To show its appreciation for the gesture, Russia agreed to return part of the Schneerson library.

A senior Russian State Library official in charge of the Schneerson collection told JTA that the library was asked "to expedite the return" of some books to Lubavitch when the U.S. indicated they were ready to give back the Smolensk archive.

"These books are now the property of Chabad," said Meri Trifonenko, head of the Russian State Library's Oriental Center, where the collection is stored.

Rabbi Berel Lazar, leader of the Lubavitch movement in the former Soviet Union and one of Russia's two chief rabbis, confirmed that the books will be transferred to the library at Moscow's Marina Roscha synagogue and community center, the movement's main facility in Russia.

As part of the arrangement, the books must stay in Russia for the time being.

With the 16 volumes returned this week, the count of books from the collection released by Russia this year is raised to 30.

The State Library's Trifonenko said no more books have been marked for transfer to Chabad in the near future.

"It's almost impossible" to return the entire collection "as it will create a precedent that would inevitably lead to numerous claims" from the Russian Orthodox Church, other faiths and private individuals whose assets were confiscated by the Soviet state and ended up in state-run cultural institutions, Trifonenko said. □

## Reform rabbis urge greater U.S. involvement in conflict

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Reform rabbis are calling on the Bush administration to intervene more aggressively in mediating an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis' Board of Trustees issued the call to action last week in a platform on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is more detailed than any previous statement to date.

Before the board met, the rabbis also tried, but failed, to reach agreement on a statement about the looming conflict with Iraq, said the CCAR's president, Rabbi Martin Weiner of Congregation Sherith Israel in San Francisco.

"There was too much diversity of opinion" to reach any agreement, he said.

Despite speculation that the rabbinical group would issue a position paper reflecting a shift to the center from its traditionally liberal stand, the platform largely reaffirmed the Reform movement's left-of-center positions on Israel and the Palestinians.

"I don't think there's been any kind of major shift," said the CCAR's executive vice president, Rabbi Paul Menitoff.

The CCAR board, which comprises some four dozen rabbis from across North America, voted overwhelmingly for the platform, which urges the creation, through negotiations, of a Palestinian state that is "committed to peaceful coexistence with the State of Israel."

Calling a return to pre-1967 borders "unrealistic," the rabbis said any Israeli-Palestinian peace pact "may require territorial adjustments akin to those offered at Camp David," before the current Palestinian uprising erupted two years ago.

The platform also restates other longtime Reform positions, such as the protection of Arab and Palestinian civil rights, as well as Israeli Jewish rights, and urges a halt to Jewish settlement building in the West Bank and Gaza.

Yet on some other key planks, the document reflects new thinking in the community generally about the 1993 Oslo peace accords — and responds specifically to new facts on the ground, said Rabbi Donald Rossoff, of Temple B'nai Or in Morristown, N.J., who wrote a draft for the final statement approved by the board. For example, while the platform calls for a Palestinian state, the rabbis explicitly "reject a demand for a right of physical return to the State of Israel," which would allow a Palestinian demographic majority in Israel.

And though the platform urges no new Jewish settlements, and says most would likely need to be dismantled in any peace pact with the Palestinians, it also says that Israel may have to hold onto some settlements as well.

The rabbis also agree with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in seeking to marginalize Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. The Palestinian leader is "clearly unable or unprepared" to reach a peace agreement with Israel, the document states, so Israel should seek out a "younger generation of Palestinian leaders" who would participate in "constructive" talks.

At the same time, the rabbis are urging the White House to more "vigorously" nudge those peace talks along with "imaginative, bold and sustained efforts."

The Jewish community has largely been split on the need for more U.S. involvement.

Those who envision a two-state solution as a way to resolve the conflict tend to welcome stepped-up involvement, while those wary that any solution is possible worry that more U.S. involvement will lead to greater pressure on Israel.

Rabbi Joshua Davidson of Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester, N.Y., who brought the portion on Bush to the board's table, said U.S. involvement "is going to be critical in order for the two sides to reach peace."

"The Bush administration has at times initiated steps, but really hasn't followed through on them," he said.

Yet the platform does not address just what Bush should do, nor does it mention the "road map" that the administration and international community is developing to bring about a Palestinian state. Menitoff predicted there would be debate among Reform rabbis about the extent and nature of U.S. action when the group's rank and file meets at the CCAR's annual convention to vote on the platform in March.

Rabbinical groups from the other major movements, meanwhile, found plenty of material in the document to debate already.

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, said his group opposes the document's use of the term "occupation" with regard to the territories, and its wording on terrorism. In one passage, the document states that while Palestinian economic hardship is largely a byproduct of Palestinian terror, it also results from "the long-lasting occupation."

The CCAR platform "doesn't sufficiently stress the responsibility the Palestinians have for the current terror," he said.

Yet at another point, the platform does issue harsh wording on terrorism. At one point the Reform rabbis criticized Arafat for the "unwarranted and immoral Palestinian resort to violence and terror," and at another, blasts Muslim clerics and educators for preaching hatred toward the Jewish state.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, also took issue with the Reform rabbis, accusing them of less than full support for Israel.

"Jewish leadership has to show complete and unequivocal support for Israel," he said, "no matter the government" in power.

In response, Rossoff said the CCAR platform is "unequivocally supportive of those individuals and groups in Israel who are not only looking for security but for justice for all." □

## Activist barred from territories

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Canadian activist who took part in an anti-Israel riot at a Montreal university this fall was detained while trying to enter Israel.

A member of the International Solidarity Movement and Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, Jaggi Singh was held at Ben-Gurion Airport on Saturday after airport officials judged him to be a security risk. An Israeli court rejected an attempt to deport him, but ruled that Singh must stay inside Israel and cannot enter the West Bank or Gaza Strip, where it is feared he may take part in illegal activities. Singh, 31, has a criminal record from his participation in anti-globalization protests.

Samer Elatrash, founder of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, said the threat posed by Singh is exaggerated.

"The real rationale behind not allowing Jaggi into the country was because he was going to write about the occupied territories," said Elatrash, who is barred from Concordia's campus for his own alleged role in the September riot. □