

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

'Road map' unfolded

Progress in the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace "will depend strictly on the performance of the parties," President Bush said Wednesday. The plan was presented Wednesday, a day after the new Palestinian Authority prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, was sworn into his position, and hours after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three in an attack on a Tel Aviv bar. [Page 1]

Suicide bombing kills 3

Tuesday's suicide attack at a Tel Aviv pub was intended to be a double bombing, and was carried out by two Palestinians with British citizenship.

One of the terrorists was killed in Tuesday night's blast, while the other managed to flee after his explosive belt failed to detonate, according to Israeli media reports.

At least three people were killed and 35 wounded, six seriously, in the bombing at Mike's Place, a beachfront pub. The bomber blew himself up at the entrance to the pub when a security guard barred him from entering.

Abbas sworn in

Mahmoud Abbas took office as the first Palestinian Authority prime minister.

Prior to his inauguration Wednesday, Abbas condemned Tuesday night's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv that killed three and wounded 35.

A swearing-in ceremony for Abbas and the other Cabinet members was held at the Ramallah headquarters of P.A. President Yasser Arafat, a day after the Palestinian Parliament held a vote approving the new government.

Philanthropists back 'road map'

Some leading Jewish philanthropists wrote a letter to congressional leaders, backing the "road map" for peace.

As reported in The Washington Post, the letter signed by Edgar Bronfman and 13 others appears to represent a disagreement between the philanthropists and major U.S. Jewish organizations that have expressed concerns about the plan.

Many of the signatories are current and former leaders of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella fund-raising arm of U.S. Jewry.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

What makes the 'road map' different? History and leadership, analysts say

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Why is this peace process different from all other peace processes?

There is reserved optimism in the air these days, as many observers see favorable circumstances for progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front.

But as the United States and its allies move forward with their "road map" toward peace, many are questioning whether this approach will garner better results than the Oslo process a decade ago.

Daniel Kurtzer, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, officially delivered the road map to Israel Wednesday, and international officials gave it to Mahmoud Abbas, who was elected Palestinian Authority prime minister a day earlier.

On the surface, the circumstances seem similar to those that led to an international peace conference in Madrid in 1991 and the Oslo peace accords between Israel and the PLO in 1993.

Like the previous attempt at peace, this effort comes amid a Palestinian uprising, after an overwhelming U.S.-led military victory in the Middle East and with a president named Bush at the helm in the United States. But the differences are in the details. Analysts say that there are several significant changes in the political landscape this time around, as well as different tactics being used by negotiators.

In addition, they say that lessons have been learned from the unsuccessful Oslo process, which ended in failed peace talks and a Palestinian intifada that began in September 2000.

The most obvious change is in the Palestinian point man. High hopes are being placed on the shoulders of Abbas, previously known as Abu Mazen, who was confirmed Tuesday as Palestinian Authority prime minister.

Analysts say that Abbas, unlike P.A. President Yasser Arafat, shows a real willingness to abandon terrorism and work toward peace.

"I think intellectual honesty requires us to say this is something different out there than what we've seen," said David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Abbas has said "some remarkable things in Arabic" about the Palestinians' needs to work harder to control their own destiny, Makovsky said.

Dennis Ross, the institute's director and the former Middle East envoy during the Clinton administration, said Abbas seems more ready to take responsibility for the actions of the Palestinian people.

When Arafat complied with U.S. and Israeli calls to arrest terrorists, he said he was making the arrests because of pressure, not because terrorism was wrong.

"Arafat said he had a zero tolerance policy for terror," Ross said. "But he never said it publicly. He never said what 'terror' was."

Ross said Abbas' intentions seem to be clear, but questions remain about his capability. Ross is very skeptical that Arafat will simply hand over the reins of leadership to Abbas, and said Arafat's continued involvement may again be a major impediment towards peace.

In addition to a new Palestinian leader, a change in attitude on the part of some Arab states could aid the peace process this time around. Saudi Arabia's introduction of a plan for Middle East peace last year — though unacceptable to many Israelis — sug-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Strike shuts down Israel

Israeli workers launched a general strike Wednesday as Israel's finance minister presented an austerity package to the Knesset.

The strike ordered by the Histadrut shut down Ben-Gurion Airport, ports, trains, schools, banks, the stock exchange and government ministries.

The labor federation launched the strike to protest proposed cuts of \$2.3 billion that Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said are essential to prevent the economy from collapsing.

2 terrorists killed

Israeli settlers killed two Palestinian terrorists who attacked a West Bank outpost. There were no Israeli casualties in Tuesday night's attack on the outpost, located near the settlement of Elon Moreh.

Comptroller accuses Sharon

Israel's state comptroller accused Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of a conflict of interest regarding land-leasing policies.

Presenting the state comptroller's report on the functioning of the government and its agencies, Justice Eliezer Goldberg said Sharon, who owns a Negev ranch, had acted to advance decisions regarding leasing of agricultural lands from which Sharon and his family benefited, Israel Radio reported.

Group: Abbas linked to massacre

The new Palestinian Authority prime minister should be investigated for his alleged role in financing the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre, an Israeli law group said. Shurat Hadin-Israel Law Center said Mahmoud Abbas helped finance the PLO's Black September group that committed the attack, which killed 11 Israeli athletes. It is unclear whether Abbas, who now holds a top position in the Palestinian Authority, could be prosecuted.

gested an Arab willingness to formally acknowledge the Jewish state and engage in the peace process. Some have argued, in fact, that Arab pressure on Arafat to accept the peace deal offered to him in 2000 by President Clinton and Israel's then-prime minister, Ehud Barak, would have changed the outcome.

"The Arabs need to embrace Abu Mazen and what he's doing," Ross said. "They need to put their money where their mouth is."

The violence of the last two years has been deadlier and more omnipresent than in the past, which could aid the negotiating process, said Stephen P. Cohen, national scholar for the Israel Policy Forum.

"This is not a beginning out of hope, this is a beginning out of mutual despair," Cohen said. "We've tried the worst ways of getting our way."

While the Oslo process began in secret, the diplomacy of the past year has been very public, which Cohen sees as positive.

"There's no quiet time for reflecting on the part of the top negotiators, where they are operating for long periods of time outside of harsh scrutiny from a multitude of public opinion," he said.

Another important change, participants say, is that they have been through this before and know what worked and what didn't. "These are not diplomatic virgins," Cohen said. "It's going to be a much saltier process."

Not everyone agrees. Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, was a harsh critic of the Oslo process. He says he is shocked that the current road map rewards the Palestinian Authority's refusal to end terrorism, after giving its commitment to do so a decade ago.

"This Oslo II is worse than Oslo I," Klein said. "It promises a state and discriminates against Israelis in the territories" by calling for the uprooting of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Klein says he does not see participants learning from their mistakes of the past 10 years. Abbas, he says, is a "Holocaust denier" — his doctoral thesis minimizes the Holocaust and accuses the Zionists of collaborating with the Nazis — and the road map "asks Israel to give tangible assets for more Palestinian promises, without specific and verifiable steps required by the Palestinians."

For his part, Abbas says he wrote the thesis at a time when Israel was the PLO's enemy.

Ross, however, says that the need for accountability is the main lesson learned from Oslo. Many have argued that the Oslo process failed because the timetable was not stopped or slowed when one side or the other failed to keep agreements.

Therefore, Israel is asking that the road map, conceived by the United States and its partners in the diplomatic "Quartet" — the United Nations, European Union and Russia — be based on performance, rather than timetables.

"Any progress will be driven by performance, and we will not move from one process to the next until the core elements have been fulfilled," Daniel Ayalon, Israel's ambassador to the United States, told the Anti-Defamation League on Monday.

The State Department seems to have gotten the message as well. William Burns, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, told the ADL on Monday that the road map "underlines the importance of performance as a criteria for moving ahead."

The Palestinians disagree, however, insisting that the document promises them a state within three years.

Ross says it's essential that greater efforts be spent to educate the public on both sides to accept the parameters of a settlement. No "psychology of peace" existed in 2000, he said.

In fact, on the Israeli side, years of intense public debate had created a slim majority in favor of the substantial concessions envisioned in the Clinton plan, according to polls.

Palestinian leaders, however, repeatedly had told their public that their demands would be met in full.

It therefore was nearly impossible for Arafat to bring a settlement back to the Palestinian people that contained any Palestinian compromises, Ross said.

The experience of Oslo also is likely to leave participants more skeptical of progress made on paper. "I think the Jewish community is more educated in this process," one Jewish official said. "I think it keeps expectations more realistic, and its approach is eyes wide open." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israel wins U.N. post

Israel has gained its second U.N. post in three months. Israel joined the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs after approval Tuesday by the U.N. Economic and Social Council.

It was the second time since the 1960s that Israel has been chosen to serve on a U.N. body. Three months ago, Israel was elected to serve as the deputy chairperson of a working group on disarmament. Israel's regional group, the Western Europe and Others Group, nominated it for both positions.

"This is another step in normalizing Israel's place at the U.N. We have a lot to contribute, in many fields, and today is another step in this important process," said Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.

PLO ordered to respond to lawsuit

The PLO should be held accountable for not responding to a lawsuit filed on behalf of an American man and his Israeli wife killed in a West Bank terror attack, a judge ruled.

The judge's April 18 order is subject to a hearing in May, but it ultimately could make the PLO responsible for the 2000 killings of Yaron Ungar and his wife, Efrat, by Hamas terrorists.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of the couple's two children, seeks \$250 million. The 1991 Anti-Terrorism Act allows U.S. citizens to file for damages from foreign entities involved in terrorist acts.

Jewish school cuts scholarships

An Atlanta Jewish high school said it no longer can offer scholarships to students in financial distress. Because of the economy, the Yeshiva Atlanta High School said it must change its 33-year-old policy and demand a minimum tuition from every student.

The school's principal, David Adler, said the move is particularly unfortunate because families of immigrants from the former Soviet Union are among those most likely to be harmed by the move.

Kosher Krispy Kreme rises

The newest kosher Krispy Kreme doughnuts are ready.

One of the chain's franchises in Pittsburgh, Pa., was certified kosher just after Passover by the Star-D Kosher Supervision dairy division of the Star-K kashrut agency in Baltimore, the Jewish Chronicle of Pittsburgh said.

The store joins 13 other kosher Krispy Kreme stores in the United States and four in Canada. The doughnut company's plants in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Effingham, Ill., are also certified as kosher, and the company's Web site says all of the ingredients that go into Krispy Kreme donuts are kosher.

New chief rabbi denies allegations as uproar over his election grows

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's new Ashkenazi chief rabbi is facing growing calls to step down amid allegations of misconduct.

The allegations center on sexual harassment charges against Yona Metzger, as well as charges that he engaged in fraud and is not qualified for the post.

Aides to Metzger have rejected the allegations as a smear campaign fueled by political rivals.

Metzger and his Sephardi counterpart, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, were elected as Israel's chief rabbis April 14 by a 150-member public committee.

Since then, however, opposition to Metzger has grown. In the latest development, a Tel Aviv accountant filed a petition Monday in the High Court of Justice challenging Metzger's appointment. It will be heard by a three-judge panel.

The petition claims that allegations of fraud and other improprieties involving Metzger were not fully investigated because of his 1998 pledge not to stand for chief rabbi of Tel Aviv.

Metzger's spokesman, Roni Rimon, told the Israeli daily Ma'ariv that the petition was full of "lies, lies and more lies" produced by "professional slanderers."

Metzger had been accused of forging witnesses' signatures on marriage contracts and unlawfully demanding payment for performing weddings, the daily Ha'aretz reported.

As a result of the allegations, Metzger's permit to serve as a chief rabbi of a major city was revoked.

However, it was reinstated several months later after a hearing before three senior Israeli rabbis — including Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, a former Sephardi chief rabbi — who accepted Metzger's explanations and his commitment to leave the Tel Aviv race, the paper said.

The petition also argues that Metzger, 50, who previously was rabbi of north Tel Aviv, was not qualified to fill the chief rabbi's duties as head of the country's rabbinic court system because he never had been a religious judge or rabbi of a major city.

The petition maintained that the elections committee for the chief rabbi was not adequately informed of the misconduct allegations against Metzger.

In a related development, Ma'ariv recently published what it said were sexual harassment allegations involving Metzger.

Three weeks before Metzger's election as chief rabbi, the paper reported, it learned of complaints from four adult men who claimed Metzger had touched their arms, legs and chests and expressed admiration for their muscular physiques.

Aides to Metzger categorically denied the allegations, pointing to polygraph tests Metzger took dispelling the allegations.

Metzger aides accused "well-known rabbinical sources" who they said were stooping low "after earlier accusations of chasing women failed."

The controversy comes against the backdrop of the contested election that preceded Metzger's appointment to the post.

A few hours before the vote, Israel's attorney general unsuccessfully asked the elections board to disqualify Metzger because of new information he had received.

Metzger then scored an upset victory over National Religious Party candidate Rabbi Ya'acov Ariel, who had been favored to win.

Metzger was supported by the non-Chasidic segment of the fervently Orthodox community, led by Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv.

In the wake of the renewed allegations against Metzger, the head of the Knesset's Legislative Affairs Committee, Likud legislator Michael Eitan, called on the attorney general to order an immediate investigation.

Meretz legislator Roman Bronfman called on Metzger to suspend himself from his duties until the matter is clarified.

But Shinui legislator Ilan Shalgi countered that as long as the allegations are not proven and no charges are filed, there is no reason for Metzger to refrain from acting as chief rabbi. □

ISRAEL TURNS 55

Pro-Israel interfaith pioneer brings his message to German Christians

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein rarely feels uneasy. But standing in Berlin's Sudstern Church recently, with an Israeli flag at his feet and a gigantic cross behind him, Eckstein felt a minor tremor.

It's not that his purpose was unclear.

Eckstein, 51, founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, was launching an appeal to German fundamentalists to support Israel with cold, hard cash.

His sermon in Germany earlier this year was part of a groundbreaking joint campaign with Keren Hayesod, the main fund-raising arm for Israel outside the United States.

It wasn't that this was Eckstein's first major speaking event in Germany, a country whose products he once swore he'd never buy because of the Holocaust.

Nor was Eckstein uncomfortable in the Christian milieu: For 25 years, this controversial rabbi has been going where few Orthodox Jews dared to go, working with Christian fundamentalists to build support for Israel.

The mission of Eckstein's group, which has bases both in the United States and Israel, is succeeding: Last year alone, American fundamentalists gave some \$21 million to Israel, Eckstein says.

But this night Eckstein felt uneasy for a few fleeting seconds.

"What was different, unusual, was the cross," he said a few days later over a beer at Berlin's Crowne Plaza Hotel. This was the first time he'd spoken with that symbol looming over his shoulder.

"It was uncomfortable, but I had to make a choice. I wasn't about to walk out," he said.

Instead, Eckstein "used the situation to make a point: How does the cross make Jews feel?"

He told some 600 congregants: For many Jews, the cross is a reminder of anti-Semitism. But Jews can work with Christians who respect their faith, he added.

Instead of trying to convert Jews, "You can demonstrate your love" by giving money to Israel, he told them.

"Every sixth child in Israel lives below the poverty level," he said. "We and the children of Israel thank you for your help."

In a style best described as holy rolling with a dash of political campaigning, Eckstein exhorted the congregation of several hundred to reach into their pockets.

Murmurs of "Amen" and "Hallelujah" mingled with applause and laughter.

Hebrew songs — including Israel's national anthem, Hatikvah — were sung. And this German Christian congregation knew the words.

In fact, Eckstein was preaching to the converted: Evangelical Christians are among Germany's most loyal supporters of the Jewish state.

Like their American brethren, they see Israel as a fulfillment of New Testament prophecies, and oppose the idea that Israel should trade land for peace.

Many also feel a close kinship to the Jewish people, and some even wear stars of David as pendants or on their lapels.

They have demonstrated publicly for Israel during a time when most Germans are profoundly questioning their historic commit-

ment to the Jewish state. On this particular night, congregants dropped several thousand euros into the red velvet collection bags that volunteers carried from pew to pew.

Afterward, several congregants came to the front of the sanctuary to greet the rabbi and shake his hand.

"I talk their language — I definitely do. I know how they talk and think, I know their theological convictions. I read their magazines," Eckstein reflected afterward. "I know there are some people who are critical of me for using aspects of their language and style. I don't cross their line."

The new campaign launched by Keren Hayesod and the fellowship comes during a crisis in German popular support for Israel since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000. German media tend to show Israel as the aggressor in the conflict.

"It's a lot harder to be pro-Israel in Germany than it was two years ago," Eckstein said.

That does not mean Germany is withdrawing as one of Israel's most important international supporters. But polls show average Germans are distancing themselves from the Jewish state.

In May 2002, a study commissioned by the American Jewish Committee's Berlin office showed that many Germans are questioning the "special relationship" between Israel and Germany, forged in large part because of the Holocaust.

A survey by the Emnid firm found that 73 percent of Germans criticized "Israel's tough treatment of the Palestinians."

But the numbers likely are different among Germany's evangelical Christians.

In August, German fundamentalists held one of the largest pro-Israel demonstrations here in recent memory. Some 4,000 came to Berlin, where they prayed, waved Israeli flags, blew shofars and decried "land for peace" initiatives.

Local Jewish groups did not participate, and the German Jewish Student Union actively protested the group's anti-Palestinian stance and the fundamentalist Christian view of Judaism as an "incomplete" faith.

The fundamentalists "support and strengthen the nationalist stream in Israel," Martin Kloke, a scholar on Israeli-German relations, told JTA. "It works as long as the State of Israel is not trying to find a historical territorial compromise with the Palestinians."

Eckstein agreed that the fundamentalists are "going to be much more to the right than the Jewish community" in Germany.

That does not seem to bother the Israeli Embassy in Germany or the Jewish National Fund, both of which have welcomed the show of support. Their view — shared by a growing number of Jewish leaders around the world — is that Israel has to take whatever help it can get in these trying times.

For Eckstein, this amounts to a belated endorsement of his campaign "to strengthen the hands of those who are standing up for Israel."

Eckstein — whose name means "cornerstone" in German — was born in Canada and grew up in the United States. He and his wife, Bonnie, have three daughters and one grandchild. Eckstein lives in Jerusalem but returns to Chicago regularly.

Eckstein founded the International Fellowship in 1983, five years after receiving his rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik of Yeshiva University in New York.

Building Christian support for Israel became "my niche, my talent, my forte," he said. "I am a specialist. Some doctors only do feet. I only do evangelicals." □