



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel delays 'road map'

Israel will not move forward on the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace until Prime Minister Ariel Sharon points out his objections in an upcoming meeting with President Bush, an Israeli official said Tuesday.

Israel has said Palestinians must give up the demand for a "right of return" for Palestinian refugees who fled their homes during Israel's 1948 War of Independence. Palestinians say Israel is stalling on implementing the plan.

Book on Nazi gold can stay

Switzerland's highest court dismissed accusations that a book on the Nazi gold scandal insulted the Swiss national flag.

The cover of "Imperfect Justice," by a former U.S. undersecretary of state, Stuart Eizenstat, depicts a Swiss flag that is obscured by a swastika made of gold bars.

Eizenstat was the Clinton administration's point man on Holocaust restitution issues.

Jewish scandal in France

Jewish religious institutions in France and a leading Israeli bank may have been involved in a money-laundering operation.

During a probe concluded Monday, more than 100 people and institutions, including heads of religious organizations and a number of rabbis, were placed under investigation by presiding judge Isabelle Prevost-Duprez.

The money-laundering involved passing fraudulent checks in France that were then cashed at exchange bureaus in Israel.

Israeli killed, 2 wounded

An Israeli was killed and his daughter and another passenger wounded in a shooting attack northeast of Ramallah Monday night.

Gideon Lichterman, 27, a resident of an outpost in the area, was to be buried in Haifa on Tuesday.

His 6-year-old daughter and an army reserve soldier they picked up were seriously wounded when the car the Israelis were traveling in came under fire.

The two were airlifted to Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem, where they were being treated in the intensive care unit.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Angered by Syria, U.S. wonders how to change Damascus' behavior

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Secretary of State Colin Powell may have heard what he wanted to on his recent visit to Syria, but few in Washington are putting much faith in Syrian President Bashar Assad's words.

Powell returned from Damascus this week with assurances from Assad that he would stop hosting terrorist organizations and would try to constrain the activities of groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

"The clear message to President Bashar Assad was that there is a new situation in the region with the end of" Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq "and with the commitment on the part of the United States and President Bush to go forward" with the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace, Powell said Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

Assad "can be a part of positive developments in the region if he chooses to do so," he added.

But as he made the rounds of TV talk shows Sunday, Powell made it clear that he does not anticipate real changes in Syria's behavior.

He repeatedly cited previous promises by Assad that had gone unfulfilled, such as agreeing to stop the flow of Iraqi oil through a Syrian pipeline in contravention of U.N. sanctions on Iraq. Indeed, even as Powell spoke, leaders of the terrorist organizations with headquarters in Damascus denied that they had been ordered to close up shop.

By Powell's own admission, his trip changed the rules of the game in how the United States deals with Syria.

When Assad was appointed president three years ago after the death of his father, Hafez Assad, he was welcomed with enthusiasm, trips by U.S. lawmakers and an eagerness on the part of U.S. officials to explore how Syria could become an important American ally in the Middle East.

A British-trained ophthalmologist, Assad was expected to be a modernizing force in a country held back for decades by his father's repressive, socialist-oriented dictatorship.

But while Syria pledged its support for the United States in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks — Assad reportedly may have saved American lives by sharing intelligence information on Al-Qaida activities in Syria — U.S. officials have been frustrated by the direction of Syrian policy since then.

The tension reached its height during the recent war in Iraq, when Syria allowed military equipment and irregular fighters to stream into Iraq and may have offered shelter to top officials of Saddam's regime. In addition, some reports claimed that Saddam had moved biological and chemical arms to Syria before the war so they wouldn't be detected by U.N. inspectors or seized by U.S. troops.

Astonished by Assad's recent behavior at a time when other Arab states clearly realized who was calling the shots in the Middle East, some have speculated that Assad seeks to assume Saddam's mantle as the self-proclaimed defender of Arab honor against Western, pro-Israel outsiders.

Many in Washington now believe that a policy of offering Assad inducements to change his behavior has not worked, and that it's time to take a tougher approach.

Powell's trip established strong requirements for Syrian performance. But Powell was vague on what would happen if Syria continued to flout the United States.

"We're in a situation right now where we want to see proof," one State Department

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel honors rescue teams

This year's torch-lighting ceremony in Jerusalem kicking off Israel's Independence Day celebrations honored security forces, rescue personnel as well as volunteers.

The lighters include a Magen David Adom volunteer, an Egged bus driver who pushed a suicide terrorist off his bus and the founder of an organization whose fervently Orthodox members scour disaster and terrorist attack scenes for human remains to be buried.

Army chief: Worst of intifada over

The worst of the Palestinian uprising is over, Israel's army chief said.

Speaking Tuesday on Israel Radio, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon said the new Palestinian leadership headed by Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas understands that terrorism does not pay.

Palestinian boat destroyed

The Israeli navy blew up a Palestinian fishing boat off the Gaza Strip.

The boat was spotted Tuesday near the settlement of Dugit in waters declared off-limits to Palestinian vessels, The Associated Press reported. The two fishermen on the boat were detained for questioning.

The army said the boat was blown up as a "precautionary measure," the report said.

Pilot's comment irks passengers

An Alitalia pilot on a flight this week to Israel reportedly angered passengers by welcoming them to "Palestine."

Upon landing at Ben-Gurion Airport Tuesday, the pilot wished a "Happy Independence Day to Palestine," Israel Radio reported.

The incident coincided with Israel's Remembrance Day for fallen soldiers, which is observed the day before Independence Day.



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official said. "If not, there are options available to us."

The list of demands on Syria include ending support for terrorism, turning over Iraqi officials who took refuge in Damascus, cutting ties with the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah and stopping the pursuit and development of weapons of mass destruction.

The Bush administration also is pushing issues on Israel's agenda, such as pressuring Syria to end its occupation of Lebanon and seeking information on Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah along the Israel-Lebanon border.

A State Department official said the Syrians were noncommittal about a timetable for withdrawing from Lebanon, but Powell "underscored the Syrian presence in Lebanon should not be open-ended."

The Syrians also said they would look into the case of the Israeli soldiers, but made no promises.

Mark Heller, principal research associate at Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, said the pressure on Syria now is too great for it simply to finesse the issue as it has in the past. "Whether or not the United States and Syria avoid a more serious confrontation therefore depends, to a greater degree than in the past, on the ability of the Syrian leadership to accommodate American concerns," Heller said. "And that depends on Assad's ability to break with his pattern of behavior."

One winner in the Syrian episode has been the Syrian Accountability Act, legislation that Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) has been pushing for years.

Once dismissed by the organized Jewish community and opposed by both the Clinton and Bush administrations, the bill now has become the underpinning of Bush administration pressure on Syria.

The bill would ban military and dual-use exports to Syria and ban financial assistance to U.S. businesses that invest in Syria.

It also would ask the president to impose two additional penalties from among several options, such as restricting the movement of Syrian diplomats in the United States, prohibiting U.S. exports to Syria or preventing U.S. businesses from investing and operating in Syria.

The Bush administration has stopped short of endorsing the bill, but has made it clear that it could support it if Syria doesn't change its ways.

The administration has "moved from opposing it to where it's part of the tool box," one Democratic congressional staffer said. "We're in that phase of pressure-filled diplomacy where the markers have been laid down and we are waiting for performance."

More than 70 lawmakers have signed on to the Syria bill. Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) are expected to introduce a Senate version in coming days. But sanctions aren't the only option at Powell's disposal if Syria does not comply. Israel also could be allowed to handle the Hezbollah problem itself.

"There is no doubt that Israel would like to deal effectively with Hezbollah and is currently being held back," said Avi Jorisch, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The U.S. administration is presently not giving Israel the green light, but that could certainly change."

If Syria complies with at least some of the U.S. demands, analysts say it might be taken off the State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, or it could be rewarded with U.S. pressure on Israel to restart peace talks over the Golan Heights.

State Department officials downplay that possibility, noting that Israel and the United States share many of the same frustrations with Syria, and that their diplomatic efforts in any case are focused on solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. □

U.S. spying on settlements?

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. satellites reportedly are checking whether Israel is freezing settlement activity, as called for under the "road map" peace plan.

The daily Ma'ariv reported Tuesday that U.S. satellites photograph areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip every few days to ascertain whether Israel is fulfilling the conditions of the road map, which call for a freeze in settlement activity.

The paper said Defense Ministry officials had asked settler leaders in the West Bank to stop setting up new outposts without government approval in order to avoid American pressure. □

JEWISH WORLD

Groups rally for hate-crime victim

Jewish groups are joining a New Jersey congressman in fighting to prevent the deportation of a Pakistani family who had a family member murdered in a post-Sept. 11 bias attack.

Rep. Rush Holt (D-N.J.) has enlisted the aid of 20 groups, including the Anti-Defamation League and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, in backing the family of Waqar Hasan, who was killed on Sept. 15, 2001, in Texas, in retaliation for the Sept. 11 attacks.

Hasan was in the process of applying for green-card status at the time of his death. His wife and daughter, who don't have U.S. citizenship, now face deportation.

Ban urged on terror-linked groups

British Jewish officials are calling on the government to ban British-based groups that support or encourage terrorists. The Board of Deputies' call follows the involvement of two British Muslims in last week's suicide bombing of a Tel Aviv beachfront pub.

The board singled out Al-Muhajiroun, a London-based Islamic group, for its anti-Semitic and anti-Western pronouncements.

A spokesman for Al-Muhajiroun last week publicly endorsed the Tel Aviv attack.

German Jewish cemetery defaced

German vandals left a dead piglet at a Jewish cemetery and Holocaust memorial in northern Germany.

The unknown perpetrators marked the site with "88," a neo-Nazi code for "HH," or "Heil Hitler."

Austrians mark Holocaust

A rally was held in Austria in a rare public commemoration of Holocaust victims there.

Thousands released white balloons at the Vienna rally Monday in honor of Austrian Jews killed during World War II.

The ceremony was the culmination of a project in which students "adopted" a Holocaust victim by researching that person's life.

Unlike Germany, Austria rarely has acknowledged its role in the Holocaust, preferring to call itself a victim.

Israeli independence marked

Jewish organizations across the United States are planning festivities in honor of Israel's 55th birthday. In Boston, various Jewish organizations are joining on June 15 at an indoor festival.

In Chicago, festivities for the local federation's annual celebration took place on Sunday. Federations in Atlanta and Los Angeles will hold their commemorations on Wednesday and Sunday, respectively.

Jews cry foul as British group to advise ban on kosher slaughter

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — An animal welfare body in Britain is planning to make recommendations that would outlaw kosher slaughter in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Farm Animal Welfare Council is scheduled to present a report next month to the British government that, among other proposals, will recommend that all animals be stunned before being slaughtered.

Jewish authorities have ruled unanimously that such a move is unacceptable, and a group of Jewish leaders walked out of a meeting with the council in March when discussions broke down.

"A meeting that was scheduled to last for a full hour lasted only 20 minutes," Michael Kester, executive director of Britain's National Council of Shechita Boards, told JTA. "Since we couldn't compromise halachically," or in terms of Jewish law, "we felt there was nothing more to talk about," he said.

Rabbi Jeremy Conway, head of the kashrut division of the London Beit Din, or rabbinic court, said Jewish authorities have ruled that stunning an animal before killing it renders its meat not kosher.

"The animal has to be entirely healthy and well before shechitah," or kosher slaughter, he said.

"From a halachic point of view it is absolutely clear that stunning is damage," he said, adding that a book of rabbinic opinion collected by Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg in the mid-20th century found "not even one opinion that stunning would be valid."

The Farm Animal Welfare Council refused to comment on its forthcoming report, but said that its recommendations would be "similar" to ones it made in an earlier report on religious slaughter.

That report, in 1985, recommended that the government "require that the Jewish and Muslim communities review their methods of slaughter so as to develop alternatives which permit effective stunning."

While admitting that prohibitions against causing unnecessary suffering are an integral part of the laws governing kosher slaughter, the report argued that the Torah itself did not mandate a particular method for killing animals.

The authors of the report did not seem to be aware that later rabbinic interpretation — the Oral Law of the Talmud — carries the same legal weight as the Torah.

They added that they did not believe their conclusions "carry inherently anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim views or restrict religious freedom."

Kester of the National Council of Shechita Boards said he does not believe the council is anti-Semitic.

"I believe that they are genuinely concerned about animal rights," he said.

"But the question is where the rights of humans and animals conflict," he said, pointing out that the council permitted many practices that cause some suffering to animals.

"Animals are tagged at birth. That's painful. Veterinary examinations are painful. Shearing sheep is a traumatic experience. But they say that microsecond of suffering at slaughter is unnecessary. I find that unbelievable."

He added that Jewish authorities had made every effort to make sure the members of the council understood both the practice and significance of kosher slaughter.

They demonstrated the killing of both a cow and a lamb and presented reports by a kosher slaughterer, a veterinarian and a cardiac surgeon specializing in pain "who had an interest in shechitah."

A spokesman for the council said its members understood the importance of ritual slaughter to religious communities. But, he added, "our remit is to look at these issues from the animal welfare point of view."

The council's recommendations do not have the force of law.

The government rejected its proposals in 1985, and a group of legislators is already pressing the government to do so again this year. At least 10 members of Parliament have signed a motion in support of kosher slaughter, saying the council's recommendations would place "unacceptable restrictions" on religious freedom. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Free speech or hate speech? Canadian groups fight Al-Jazeera

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — Officials of Canada's two leading Jewish advocacy groups are opposing plans to give Canadian cable TV subscribers the option of watching the Al-Jazeera news network.

"Our argument against Al-Jazeera has nothing to do with its political viewpoint. We don't like it but that's not the issue," said Jack Silverstone, national executive director of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

"They have on numerous occasions broadcast the most vicious anti-Semitic propaganda, any instance of which would have clearly been in breach of Canadian law," Silverstone said. "We believe that if they are allowed to enter into this market, they will violate Canadian law on an ongoing basis."

In April, the Canadian Cable Television Association, which represents cable providers across the country, applied to the federal telecommunications commission for permission to import Al-Jazeera along with four other ethnic or "third-language" channels.

The Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission is currently studying the application before requesting public comments. CRTC officials say the process of accepting or rejecting the application may take several months to a year, or even more.

The Qatar-based network, whose name translates as "the peninsula," first gained prominence in the West after broadcasting videotapes of Osama bin Laden in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

It further increased its name recognition after the Afghanistan war of October 2001, when the ruling Taliban expelled all foreign journalists, leaving Al-Jazeera to supply exclusive war footage to Western networks.

Often described as the CNN of the Arabic world, the provocative news-based network enraged many Americans and their allies during the recent Gulf War by broadcasting prolonged, gory shots of American casualties and POWs in Iraq.

Critics, however, say Al-Jazeera has the external veneer of CNN — attractive anchors, expensive studios and fancy graphics — but lacks the U.S. station's commitment to unbiased, objective journalism.

Al-Jazeera glorifies Palestinian suicide bombers and routinely broadcasts anti-Semitic diatribes and Holocaust denial, according to Keith Landy, the national president of the congress, who has documented examples to submit to the telecommunications commission.

In an Op-Ed piece that appeared in Toronto's National Post and the Montreal Gazette, Landy argued that Al-Jazeera should not be allowed into Canada because it contravenes the nation's core values. Canadian law, he noted, protects people from any abusive comment that promotes hatred or that is likely to expose them to hatred or contempt.

The Canadian Jewish Congress' reason for opposing Al-Jazeera "has nothing to do with conflicting points of view or 'undesirable' material," Landy wrote, but "has everything to do with opposing anti-Semitic hatred, affirming Canadian values, respecting Canadian law and upholding the Canadian public interest."

In an April 15 statement, the Canadian Islamic Congress expressed support for the bid to import Al-Jazeera.

"It is a matter of morals and principles," said Mohamed Elmasry, the group's national president. "There are two Canadian rights which must be upheld here — freedom of speech and freedom of religion."

More surprisingly, the usually pro-Israel National Post also urged the telecommunications commission to approve Al-Jazeera in an April 25 editorial that began, "We never thought we'd be saying this, but we wish Canadians had some of the freedoms Iraqis enjoy."

Acknowledging that Al-Jazeera "sometimes spews anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli vitriol," the Post went on to argue that "content-based censorship has no place in a democratic society that puts its faith in a free marketplace of ideas."

"If the Arab world is being stirred up en masse with satellite-broadcast demagoguery, it would be far better for observers in the West to be made aware of its malign influence," the Post suggested. "Sticking our heads in the sand will get us nowhere."

Some consumers already receive the signal by tapping into an American feed via satellite dish, which is illegal, said Janet Yale, president and CEO of the cable television association.

In the United States, the Colorado-based Dish Network of Echostar Corp. supplies a satellite feed to a pool of subscribers that reportedly exceeds 100,000.

"I don't think of this as a freedom-of-speech issue," Yale said. "I think of it in terms of consumer demand and a presumption of lawfulness, because they're already in markets all around the world."

"We're just trying to make sure that there are a diversity of viewpoints available on an issue of significant international importance."

Suanne Kelman, director of broadcasting at Ryerson University's School of Journalism in Toronto, acknowledges that many viewers would regard some of Al-Jazeera's content as abhorrent, but argues that consumers should still be allowed to see it.

"I don't think it's right for the community to try to get it censored in advance," Kelman said. "Let a distributor put in an application and once it starts running, if it violates our hate laws, then we can follow the proper legal channel."

Even if the CRTC is presented with a list of recent examples of hate speech that Al-Jazeera has aired, it still should give the network the benefit of the doubt and allow it into Canada, Kelman said.

"I dislike censorship. I would like to have it available even though I know perfectly well that it's anti-Semitic, because I don't think it's at a level of sophistication that is going to influence most Canadians," she said.

"I'd rather have the window open on the Arab world to show how they think and how they see things," she continued. "I think that some of the left wing here might get a healthy shock from seeing how the Arab world sees things."

Jewish officials contend that it would be highly difficult to monitor the content of the network, which broadcasts in Arabic around the clock, and that even if it spews illegal hatred, it would be difficult to retract its license once approved.

"We can't say, 'Come into Canada, broadcast hate speech, and afterwards we'll try to get you removed from the airwaves,'" said Frank Dimant, executive vice president of B'nai Brith Canada. "I think that's ludicrous. We know the entity. We know the track record. Al-Jazeera simply doesn't have a place in Canada." □