



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush calls Abbas, Sharon

In his first phone call with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, President Bush re-emphasized the need for a crackdown on violence.

In the 15-minute call, Bush stressed the need for parties to work together on steps toward peace, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said. "People in the Palestinian Authority who care for peace must work with us to fight off terror," Bush said. "People in Israel who care for peace will work with us to fight terror."

Bush also spoke with Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Fries with your money?

Several Jewish groups are among 24 recipients of money from a \$10 million settlement with McDonald's over its use of animal fat in french fries and hash browns labeled vegetarian.

Hillel and the Star-K organization each will get \$300,000, the Jewish Community Centers Association will get \$200,000, the Orthodox Union will get \$150,000 and CLAL — National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership will get \$50,000.

Another \$6 million will go to vegetarian organizations, \$2 million to Hindu or Sikh groups and the remainder to groups that work for child nutrition.

In all, 10 percent of the money is slated to be used to promote awareness of kashrut, a U.S. judge ruled Monday.

The case, which was decided last year, stemmed from several lawsuits filed against McDonald's for mislabeling its french fries and hash browns.

Palestinians rally against Hamas

Hundreds of Palestinians in a Gaza Strip town demonstrated against Hamas on Tuesday for firing rockets on Israel.

Hamas terrorists have used Beit Hanoun as a launching pad for rocket attacks on Israeli towns in the Negev, prompting harsh Israeli retaliation.

"We've had enough because people have paid a heavy price," a farmer told the Jerusalem Post newspaper on Tuesday.

Israel has raided the town seven times in the past 32 months in an effort to stop the rockets.

Similar protests are believed to have occurred elsewhere in the Gaza Strip.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

With Sharon trip off, officials seek clarity on fate of 'road map'

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Ariel Sharon's trip to Washington was supposed to have brought some clarity about where the Bush administration and Israel stand on the "road map" to Israeli-Palestinian peace.

But after a string of suicide bombings since Saturday led the Israeli prime minister to postpone his White House visit, lawmakers and other supporters of Israel seem more confused than ever about the status of the plan.

There has been much movement in the halls of Congress and from other interested parties since the weekend, with some calling for President Bush to recall the road map and allow Israel to fight terrorism, and others urging him to push it forward.

The plethora of viewpoints — often similar except for differences of nuance — has had a "numbing effect" on the White House and other policymakers, one Jewish leader said. The Bush administration is likely to find support, and ridicule, no matter which direction it turns.

Some feel the road map has become more of an obstacle to moving forward than a vehicle.

The plan was supposed to lay the groundwork for resuming peace talks, but Israelis' and Palestinians' insistence on haggling over the conditions for even starting the plan has placed the Bush administration and Congress in the middle.

White House officials say the president is focused on the plan the United States crafted with its partners in the diplomatic "Quartet" — the European Union, United Nations and Russia — but that he believes the first step should be a Palestinian crackdown on terrorism.

"We're still on the road to peace; it's just going to be a bumpy road," Bush said Monday. He also called on Palestinian leaders to "work with us to fight off terror."

A day later, the president called the new Palestinian Authority prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, and urged him to work to prevent future attacks.

Bush also spoke to Sharon on Tuesday, the day the two were to have met in Washington.

Despite clear signals from the White House that the president is sticking to the road map, letters have been circulating in Washington calling for him to delay the plan until terror subsides.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) argue that it was a mistake to present the road map to the parties before Abbas proved he could fight terrorism and win an internal power struggle with P.A. President Yasser Arafat.

While Bush has an enormous amount of goodwill in Congress on Middle East issues, even from Democrats, his insistence on following the road map could hurt that standing, Weiner said.

"The administration is trying to have it both ways," he told JTA. "The president's advisers are trying to distance him from the road map because they sense it is politically and substantively a problem for him."

At the same time, however, the State Department is still pushing for an "even-handed" approach to peacemaking, he said.

The road map has its supporters as well.

A group of 40 lawmakers, including three Jewish members, sent a letter to the president on Tuesday praising him for presenting the road map to Israel and the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Envoy: No 'road map,' no peace

The "road map" may be the last chance at Israeli-Palestinian peace for a long time, the U.N. envoy for the Middle East said.

Speaking Monday to the U.N. Security Council, Terje Roed-Larsen also criticized both sides in the conflict.

Palestinian suicide bombings are "senseless acts that are unjustified on any moral or political grounds. Israeli roadblocks and checkpoints are the "single largest impediment to the Palestinian economy," he said.

Israeli travel restrictions are preventing dozens of international workers and U.N. officials from traveling to and from the Gaza Strip, Roed-Larsen said. These restrictions "run counter to Israel's international humanitarian law obligations as an occupying power," he added.

Christians back settlers

A Christian evangelical group is "adopting" Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem Prayer Team is planning to send \$55 to each of 14,000 settlers.

The group, which includes the Rev. Pat Robertson, opposes the U.S.-backed "road map" for peace. "We do not support the road map, as the Bible is our road map," it said in a statement.

Bombing victims buried

Funerals were held for two of the three people killed in a suicide attack at a shopping mall in northern Israel. Avi Zarihan, 36, of Beit She'an, and Hassan Ismail Tawat'ha, 41, of Jisser a Zarka, were laid to rest Tuesday in their hometowns.

A security guard whose name was not yet released also was killed when a suicide bomber blew herself up Monday at the entrance to a shopping center in Afula.

Palestinians on April 30. "This is a clear statement from members across the political spectrum that if you back away from the road map now you don't stop terrorism, you empower terrorism," one Democratic congressional official said. "The implied message is also that Sharon should accept the road map and keep the discussions going."

What the letter does not include is the parameters that should "guide" the road map. Those parameters were spelled out in a letter signed last month by more than 300 lawmakers and backed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The provisions include real authority for Abbas, an end to terrorism, accountability in Palestinian government and an overhaul of the Palestinians' myriad security services.

Those provisions were seen as essential parts of President Bush's landmark policy speech last June 24.

The road map was supposed to be a formula for implementing Bush's vision, but the "teeth" of the speech were left out of the plan, according to signers of the AIPAC-backed letter.

Privately, White House officials and their supporters say the president sees the road map as a guideline and its vagueness as a political necessity.

When it comes to implementing that vision, Bush's gut feelings are closer to the June 24 speech, which is why Bush and White House officials often refer to it alongside the road map, they say.

Bush's goal is to get Abbas to curb terrorist attacks enough to get the parties started on the plan, then push Israel to make reciprocal steps. The road map was presented to the parties as a reward to the Palestinians for appointing Abbas, White House officials say.

But that may not be enough. Noting that he represents a "key constituency" for the president, Christian leader Gary Bauer and 23 of his colleagues sent a letter to Bush on Monday calling it "morally reprehensible" for the United States to be "even-handed" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"He seems to have drifted away from the clear guidelines of Bush's speech last June, and all the slippage is in the most important areas," said Bauer, president of American Values. "Every time the president comes out and exerts more political capital on the road map, it becomes harder for him to back off."

He believes Bush will urge Israel to restrain itself in the days and weeks ahead more forcefully than he did after a string of bombings in the spring of 2002 led to Israel's first major invasion of the West Bank, said Bauer, adding that such a call would be "inappropriate."

The letter from Christian leaders is significant in part because of the political implications of Bush's Middle East steps as he gears up for re-election. To that end, Democratic supporters of the road map have begun to try to influence the nine candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, urging them to endorse the president's road map efforts.

Jonathan Jacoby, founding director of the Israel Policy Forum, which organized a letter to the Democratic candidates, said he hoped the letter would set a tone for the presidential primaries and make clear that, as he believes, a majority of American Jews support the road map.

"To the extent that the Bush administration might have thought that promoting the road map was a risk with regard to the Jewish community, this letter helps prove it's not the case," Jacoby said. □

Pilgrims flock to Tunisia

PARIS (JTA) — More than 400 French Jews took part in an annual pilgrimage to a Tunisian synagogue where 21 people were killed in a terror attack last year.

The annual Lag B'Omer pilgrimage occurred Tuesday at the Ghriba synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba, the site of a suicide attack last year in which 21 people were killed, Tunisian Jewish organizations in Paris said.

Organizers of flights from France said that about a dozen Israelis also made the trip. There were no cancellations, despite last week's attacks on Jewish targets in neighboring Morocco, organizers said.

There were more than twice as many visitors this year than last. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Note to Democrats: Back off

A group of Jewish Democrats called on the Democratic presidential candidates to refrain from criticizing President Bush as long as he works to implement the "road map" for peace.

The letter, organized by the Israel Policy Forum, is signed by Democratic backers such as actor Richard Dreyfuss, fund-raiser Lynne Wasserman and the president of the American Jewish World Service, Ruth Messinger. Only if the Bush administration makes the Middle East a low priority should the candidates speak out, the letter says.

Montreal schools defaced

Two Jewish schools in Montreal were defaced with graffiti. Staff at the United Talmud Torah and its adjoining high school, Herzliah, removed the slogans, which included the words "Free Palestine" and obscene references to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Several weeks ago, racist graffiti was spray-painted on the campus of the Muslim Schools of Montreal, located in the mostly Jewish suburb of Cote Saint-Luc. Phrases like "Death to Arabs" and swastikas were painted. No link has yet been made between the two incidents.

Booby-trapped sign case closed

Russian officials closed their investigation into a booby-trapped sign last year that left a woman injured. Responding to reports in the Russian media that somebody had been arrested in connection with the May 2002 explosion of an anti-Semitic sign on a highway near Moscow, investigators said no arrests had been made.

Transsexual celebrates Israel

An Israeli transsexual singer highlighted an Israeli Independence Day celebration this week in Budapest. Dana International sang to some 3,000 people at Sunday's event, which was sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel.

After Dana International won the Eurovision song competition in 1999, she was feted by some Israelis and condemned by others, mainly observant Jews.

In a related development, Dana International is one of several Israeli singers appearing at events in the former Soviet Union this week to celebrate Israel's 55 years of independence.

JCC leaders to meet

Leaders of Jewish community centers across the world are meeting next week. Delegations from the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, Israel and the United States are expected to attend the May 28-30 event in Paris.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Uruguayan Jews strong Zionists, but economy pushes them to Israel

By Michelle Dardashti

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay (JTA) — Unemployment in Uruguay is at 19 percent — but work has picked up for at least one person since the South American nation's economic decline became pronounced a year and a half ago.

In fact, business has been booming for Israel's immigration representative here, Sergio Goldstein.

"We had 550 olim in 2002 alone," he says, using the Hebrew word for immigrants.

For a country with a Jewish population even less than the official number of 20,000, according to Goldstein, the number of olim is high.

"Proportionally, it is as if more than 5,000 American Jews picked up their lives and made aliyah in a given year," said Goldstein, who came from Israel to take up his post in November 2001.

Before 1999, when the current recession began, approximately 80 Uruguayan Jews had been moving to Israel per year for at least a decade.

But as the economy dipped, strains on the country's primarily middle-class Jewish population increased. One hundred and twelve relocated to Israel in 1999, 89 in 2000 and 170 in 2001.

Last year's surge, however, came as a result of the December 2001 economic and political crash in Argentina, Uruguay's primary business partner.

Overall, an estimated 40,000 of Uruguay's 3.3 million people emigrated last year for economic reasons.

In response to Argentina's crisis, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli government decided to give special rights to Argentine Jews who made aliyah.

The Uruguayan Jewish community's request for the same enhanced absorption basket was rejected that month, but their case was re-examined in July of 2002, when Uruguay's economy plunged like Argentina's had.

A decision was made to give Uruguayan olim the enhanced rights given to Argentines for a trial period, the last four months of the year.

From Sept. 1 to Dec. 31, 2002, Jews began coming out of the woodwork.

According to Goldstein, word of Israel's limited-time-only immigration deal spread very quickly. "People from all over the country began inquiring, Jews we never knew existed here," he says.

This mutual rediscovery was one of the most rewarding aspects of those four frenzied months, Goldstein told JTA.

"I'm happy because, whether or not these people end up making aliyah, it brought many people in contact with their Jewish roots."

As the Dec. 31 deadline for the special package approached, people dropped everything to make it. Some 27 people left for Israel in September, 29 in October and 80 in November. Then, in December, 300 people rushed out.

With the arrival of the New Year, however, the special benefits for Uruguayan olim were extended through 2003.

But economics are clearly not the only factor behind the increased Jewish emigration. According to Goldstein, Uruguay's high rate of aliyah also stems from the Zionist education taught here, most notably through eight strong youth movements.

It's no coincidence that 60 percent of olim are younger than 35, and that Uruguay is the only country in South America where students can take Israel's university entrance exam, he says.

Goldstein, 35, is himself a product of the phenomenon.

An active member of the Betar youth movement in Argentina, where he was born and raised, he made aliyah at age 21.

Among those currently planning to go, Ginette Laufer, 21, a former member of the Macabi youth movement, is a textbook case.

"Macabi was my life," she says.

Laufer, one of 26 students enrolled in the prep class for the Israeli entrance exam this year, plans to move to Israel in July. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Victims in terror attack wave span spectrum of race and age

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Last Friday, on the way to work from Pisgat Ze'ev, my home neighborhood in Jerusalem, I noticed an armed guard standing by bus stop No. 6.

At last, I said to myself, people can board a bus in Jerusalem with a sense of security. Two days later, a suicide bomber managed to board bus No. 6, killing seven and wounding 20.

Within a 48-hour span beginning Saturday night, 12 Israelis were murdered in three suicide attacks and dozens were wounded. Terrorism was back on the scene, a sad reminder that its apparent absence in recent months was only an illusion born of the army's success in preventing attacks.

The thing about terror attacks is that you don't really grasp the horror unless you have witnessed one, or until you hear the stories of the victims' families. This makes the tragedies more real.

Pisgat Ze'ev borders a number of Arab neighborhoods. Most of its residents are new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, young couples who can't afford to buy apartments closer to downtown Jerusalem.

The terrorist who murdered the passengers on bus No. 6 aimed to hit the poorest of them all, those who can't afford a private car, those who get up early in the morning to make a decent living.

Yitzhak Moyal, 63, was on his way to the distribution center at the central post office. His wife, Rina, recalled that before going to sleep Saturday night, they discussed the latest news — the murder of Gadi Levy, 31, and his pregnant wife, Dina, 37, of Kiryat Arba, by a suicide bomber in Hebron.

"He was not afraid of anything," Rina Moyal said of her husband, who had immigrated to Israel from Morocco in 1960 with his nine brothers and sisters. "He was a strong believer that whatever will be, will be."

Moyal left six children and 12 grandchildren.

Shimon Ustinsky, 67, used to come to work in a parking lot near the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem's Old City, arriving 15 minutes before the lot opened. He never missed a shift, thankful for the opportunity to be employed at his age — even though, back home, in Kiev he had been a lecturer in economics.

"Despite this, he was happy," his wife said. "He loved Israel very much and was proud of this place."

When his boss heard from a customer that the lot was still closed, he understood that something had happened to Ustinsky. He then heard of the bombing, and understood that Ustinsky had been on board.

Ustinsky left a wife, two children and two grandchildren.

Some observers noted that, given the terrorists' propensity to blow up buses because of the high number of casualties, the price of attacks is being paid by a particular socio-economic sector that can't afford other means of transportation.

One bereaved Israeli said this became acutely clear to him during a recent visit to his son's grave, which is located in a section of the Haifa cemetery for victims of terrorist attacks.

"I looked around me, and what did I see? Graves of new immigrants, children and soldiers," said Yossi Mendelevitch, whose son Yuval was killed in a bus bombing in Haifa earlier this year.

But the terrorists don't distinguish by age or race; they murder

Arabs, too. One of the victims was Ghalab Tawil, 42, a resident of the Shuafat refugee camp, located within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries.

Tawil was on his way to work at the Hadassah Medical Center in Ein Kerem. Though he had experience as a construction worker, he preferred to work as a cleaning man at the hospital: It made it easier to be close to his 12-year-old daughter, who was often hospitalized due to leukemia.

"Many nights he wouldn't come home, in order to sleep by her," a family member said.

Tawil left two wives and nine children.

"The suicide bomber was a merciless killer," one wife said. "Who will feed the orphans now?"

The next day, a bombing at a shopping mall in Afula took the lives of yet another Arab — Hassan Tawat'ha, 41, of Jisser a Zarka, a fishing village near Zikhron Ya'akov.

"After every terrorist attack I hear the families say, 'Let this be the last victim,'" said Tawat'ha's brother. "Now it is Hassan. The terrorists do not distinguish between an Arab and a Jew."

A long parade of mourners left from the local mosque, heading to the local cemetery to bury yet another victim of terrorism.

Other victims included Marina Tsahivershvoli, 44; Nelly Perov, 55; Olga Brenner, 52, whose daughter was also seriously wounded; and Roni Yisraeli, 34, all residents of Pisgat Ze'ev.

Friends and family of Perov recalled at her funeral how death was so incongruous for a woman so full of life.

Just the night before, she had celebrated the third anniversary of her immigration from Kazakhstan. She had come to Israel behind her daughter Lana, a Hebrew University student who immigrated here on the Jewish Agency's "students before parents" program.

Perov also is survived by her son, Andrei, 35.

In Monday's bombing in Afula, the terrorist — believed to be a woman — arrived at the shopping mall shortly after 5 p.m.

She ascended the steps and approached Kiril Sheremenko, the guard at the entrance. Sheremenko, 23, whisked the woman with a magnometer, which started whistling loudly.

He signaled to Hadar Gitlin, a female guard standing behind him, to help him search the woman. But the woman then detonated her bomb, killing Sheremenko in his first day at work — his first hour, in fact.

"He replaced me a quarter of an hour before the attack," his colleague Oleg Pohovitz said.

The third victim was a customer, Avi Zarihan, 36. Gitlin, 20, was seriously wounded.

Gitlin had lost her job at the shopping center three days ago, after she failed to identify a suspect in a drill in which a person carrying explosives entered the center.

On Monday, her employers gave her another chance, and she was beside herself with joy.

She was not supposed to be on guard duty at 5 p.m. but had volunteered to stay longer to replace a colleague who had not shown up for work.

An hour later she was in the hospital, fighting for her life.

Gitlin's parents, who had heard on the radio that a female guard had been killed, were sure Gitlin had died in the blast.

Only later in the evening did they learn that she had survived.

"She's in bad condition," Gitlin's father said, "but at least I still have a daughter." □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this story.)