



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Rice calls for patience

Condoleezza Rice told Jewish leaders that Israel must be patient and allow time for new Palestinian leaders to deliver on their promises.

President Bush's national security adviser told the leaders in a meeting in the White House on Wednesday that it is important for the Palestinians to dismantle the terrorist organizations and build democratic institutions.

Jewish leaders praised the Bush administration's recent efforts in the Middle East, but several expressed continued skepticism about the Palestinians' commitment to the "road map" for peace, participants said. **[Page 3]**

### Israel withdraws from Bethlehem

Israel handed over security control in Bethlehem to the Palestinian Authority. Israeli army trucks transported equipment from bases near the West Bank city Wednesday as Palestinian police officers assumed responsibility for security.

The withdrawal comes on the heels of the Israeli redeployment earlier in the week in the Gaza Strip, also part of efforts to get the "road map" peace plan on track. The Israeli army said that it would remain responsible for the security of residents of nearby settlements.

An hour after the Bethlehem withdrawal, Israeli security forces went on high alert in central Israel following reports of a terrorist infiltration from the West Bank.

### Court: Take down commandments

A U.S. court ordered an Alabama judge to remove a Ten Commandments display in his courthouse.

Tuesday's appeals court ruling concluded that the monument in the rotunda of Judge Roy Moore's state courthouse violates the constitutional separation of church and state. The court compared Moore to white segregationists of the 1950s and 1960s because he has stated in court papers that he does not accept federal jurisdiction over the matter.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, July 4.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### As Falash Mura languish, some hope courts can force Israel's hand

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Where protests and appeals to activists have failed, 390 Ethiopians who want to immigrate to Israel hope the courts can provide some relief.

The Falash Mura, Ethiopians whose Jewish ancestors converted to Christianity, often under societal pressure, filed a lawsuit Monday against the Jewish state for allegedly dragging its feet on their immigration to Israel. At the same time, a flurry of letters urging that Falash Mura aliyah be expedited has circulated in the last three months among leaders of American Jewry, Congress and Israel.

The lawsuit highlights a growing clamor here and in Israel surrounding the aliyah of the Falash Mura, who have returned to an Orthodox brand of Judaism over the past decade while waiting in decrepit transit camps in Addis Ababa and Gondar.

In a landmark Feb. 16 resolution, Israel's Cabinet voted to immediately check the eligibility of some 19,000 Falash Mura remaining in the Ethiopian compounds. Those that can prove maternal Jewish descent would be brought over.

So far, however, little has happened to translate the decision into reality. This week's lawsuit asks Israel's High Court of Justice to force Interior Minister Avraham Poraz to enact the Cabinet resolution, or force the Israeli government to circumvent Poraz to do so, said Omri Kaufman, the lawyer handling the pro bono case for the Tel Aviv law firm of Goldfarb Levy Eran.

The lawyers are acting on behalf of 390 Falash Mara from the Gondar and Addis Ababa camps; Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jewry, an American organization that provides humanitarian aid to the Falash Mura in Ethiopia; and an Ethiopian leader in Israel.

"So much time passes without any actual deeds, only promises," Kaufman said.

The Falash Mura's eligibility for aliyah has been questioned since Operation Solomon in 1991, when Israel airlifted more than 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel within 36 hours.

Falash Mura hoping to make aliyah were refused at the time, with critics questioning their Jewishness and saying they only wanted to escape famine-plagued Ethiopia. Admission to Israel, they said, could lead to a deluge of people with dubious claims of Jewish heritage.

About 20,000 Falash Mura have made aliyah since then, mostly under Israel's Law of Return, which grants automatic citizenship to Jews or their children or grandchildren.

However, critics say Israel has not acted on the Feb. 16 decision.

Also, the interministerial committee that was to implement the Cabinet resolution has yet to meet.

It is slated to meet in a week or so, according to Tibi Robinovici, senior adviser to Poraz.

The Interior Ministry claims it's too cash-strapped to quickly absorb many Falash Mura immigrants, estimating last month that it would cost nearly \$25 million per 1,000 immigrants.

Because of the enormous cultural and socioeconomic differences, Israeli officials say it costs more to absorb immigrants from Ethiopia than from other areas.

For example, Ethiopians often spend at least a year in absorption centers, while most other immigrants are immediately absorbed through municipalities or spend only a few months in absorption centers, according to Yehuda Weinraub, spokesman for the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Mortars hit Gaza settlement

Four Israelis were wounded in mortar strikes in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli officials view Wednesday's attacks on the settlement of Kfar Darom as a serious violation of the three-day-old cease-fire.

Earlier Wednesday, two mortar shells were fired at the Gush Katif settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip, but no injuries were reported. Israeli army officials believe that a local militia was responsible for the attack, according to Israeli media.

### Israelis wary of cease-fire

Nearly two-thirds of Israelis believe a three-month cease-fire declared by Palestinian terrorist groups will last less than a month. According to a poll on Israel's Army Radio, 36 percent of those polled doubt that the cease-fire will last more than a week.

The poll surveyed 500 people.

### Press ass'n protests boycott

The Foreign Press Association in Israel criticized a government decision to boycott the BBC because of its allegedly biased coverage.

The association said in a statement that taking steps against a news outlet because its reporting is considered unfavorable contradicts freedom of the press in a democratic country.

Israel said this week that it was barring senior officials from appearing on BBC, but would continue giving the service access to news conferences. BBC has rejected accusations of anti-Israel or anti-Semitic bias.

### Protest strike ignored

Muslims in Nazareth largely ignored a call for a general strike to protest the demolition of a mosque next to a church. The call was issued by the Islamic Trust, to protest the demolition Tuesday of the foundations of the unauthorized, partially built mosque.

Agency for Israel, which handles immigration and absorption.

Poraz is "not sure the state of Israel is ready to absorb" such a "large number of people," Robinovici said.

Instead, Israel is bringing about 250 Falash Mura to the Jewish state each month.

The Feb. 16 resolution also called for financial aid from American Jewish organizations, namely the United Jewish Communities, but the federation umbrella organization apparently has not been contacted for assistance.

Israel also lowered its fiscal 2004 request to the U.S. Congress for immigration aid, from \$60 million to \$50 million. Robinovici said those issues would be addressed in the upcoming interministerial meeting.

The issue is arousing interest among Diaspora Jewry, and even in Congress.

"Like many other rabbis, I am wholehearted in my belief that the Falash Mura are part of the Jewish people and that it is a commandment that we relieve their suffering and bring them to Israel, their true home," Rabbi Hershel Billet, then-president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, wrote in a May 9 letter to James Tisch, vice chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and chairman of the board of the UJC.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, seconded the sentiment in an April 15 letter to Tisch.

Tisch told JTA he has not responded to the letters.

"I agree with everybody that this is a terrible situation and some resolution to it has to be found," Tisch said. "But the problem is that I don't think the funds are there."

"It will require a major restructuring of the Jewish Agency budget," he said. "Should the Jewish Agency take it from their operations in Russia or other countries," he asked, adding, "Where would they get the money?"

For its part, the Jewish Agency will take direction from the Israeli government, Weinraub said.

"Last time I looked, the government of Israel was also very strapped," Tisch said.

Estimating that it could cost \$100,000 to absorb each immigrant, Tisch said, "I don't see American philanthropy coming up with those funds."

Asked whether the UJC would run an emergency campaign for the Falash Mura, he said, "My sense is that whether we have a second-line campaign or not, it wouldn't be able to raise the amounts that are ultimately going to be needed."

Joseph Feit, past president of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, rejected that reasoning. NACOEJ feeds, schools and employs Falash Mura at embroidery jobs in Ethiopia, and educates them in Israel.

Early in Israel's existence it "brought hundreds of thousands of Jews, when its financial situation and that of world Jewry was incomparably worse," Feit said.

The federation system recently allocated \$39 million to help bring Argentine Jews to Israel, he added.

"Ethiopian Jews should have no less of a right just because their skin color, education level and culture may be different from ours," he said.

Even U.S. legislators have entered the fray. Reps. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) and Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) admonished Israel in a June 9 letter to Poraz.

"The Cabinet decision of February 16 was widely applauded by several members of Congress, particularly members of the black and Jewish caucuses.

"We were therefore concerned to learn that few steps have been taken to implement the Cabinet decision, and that the Jewish population in Ethiopia continue to wait in horrendous conditions of hunger, illiteracy and disease," they wrote to Poraz.

With Israel "concerned about a lack of funds to handle the costs of implementing the decision," the legislators wrote, they were "puzzled to hear Israel might be seeking fewer funds from Congress" to absorb refugees.

Ethiopian Jewish activists remain frustrated.

Poraz is "just not taking seriously our issue," said Avraham Neguise, director of South Wing to Zion, an Israel-based organization for Ethiopian Jews. He's "choking the life of our community."

For its part, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which provides medical services and extra food for malnourished children and pregnant women, is continuing its services "uninterrupted" to the population in Gondar and Addis Ababa, said Amir Shaviv, the group's assistant executive vice president. □



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## JEWISH WORLD

### Study: Argentine Jews ignored

Israel could have done more to help the Jewish community during Argentina's 1976-1983 military regime, an Israeli panel found.

Israeli officials were more interested in maintaining arms contacts with the junta that ruled Argentina than in pressing it on human rights issues, the committee found.

Up to 1,500 Jews were among tens of thousands of Argentines who "disappeared" and apparently were executed under the junta. Based on the report, Interior Minister Avraham Poraz signed an order Tuesday prohibiting the entry into Israel of 99 Argentine military and security officials allegedly involved in crimes committed during that time.

### British Jews: Ban Hamas

The central organization for British Jewry asked the government to ban Hamas and Hezbollah in Britain.

The military wings of the terrorist organizations are banned under British anti-terrorism legislation, but there are no restrictions on the activities of their political wings.

In a letter to the Home Secretary, the Board of Deputies said the organizations themselves make no significant distinction between their military and political activities, and said the European Union has recognized the close relationship between the two wings.

### France addresses church, state

French President Jacques Chirac announced the creation of a presidential commission to examine church-state issue in France. Chirac's announcement Tuesday follows widespread debate regarding the wearing of religious insignia in French schools and public institutions.

### Group opposes P.A. aid

The Zionist Organization of America is launching a campaign against U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority. The campaign comes amid reports that the United States is considering sending tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to the Palestinian Authority, and on Wednesday it was announced that the U.S. Agency for International Development will transfer \$30 million to the Palestinian Authority to rebuild infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"It is appalling that a president who has vowed to put an end to terrorist regimes around the world now plans to give U.S. taxpayers' dollars directly to a corrupt terrorist regime," said Morton Klein, ZOA's national president. The organization plans to pursue the issue through meetings with members of Congress, rallies and newspaper advertisements.

## Jewish leaders thank Rice, but show that they're still skeptical

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — American Jewish leaders may appreciate the Bush administration's efforts to forge Israeli-Palestinian peace, but some are skeptical about the "road map" peace plan and, especially, the Palestinians' commitment to it.

They made those concerns known to Condoleezza Rice, the White House's national security adviser, when she met with about 30 Jewish leaders Wednesday to discuss progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front. The meeting was one of a series that National Security Council officials held Wednesday with close to 150 people interested in the Middle East, such as think-tank advisers and neoconservatives.

Most of the questions from Jewish leaders began with expressions of respect for the time and effort the White House has put into peacemaking lately, according to participants at the closed-door meeting. But several speakers voiced concern with the Palestinians' willingness or ability to follow through on parts of the peace plan, such as their pledge to dismantle terrorist groups, said the participants, all of whom asked not to be identified.

"This is still a very difficult moment, and there's still a lot of concern about whether the Palestinians are serious," one participant told JTA.

Of note, some participants said, was the fact that none of the Jewish leaders praised the road map itself.

Seated with Elliott Abrams, Rice's Middle East director, and Tevi Troy, the new White House liaison to the Jewish community, Rice outlined the messages she had given the prime ministers of Israel and the Palestinian Authority on her visit to the region last weekend.

To the Palestinians, she emphasized that it is time to get serious about dismantling terrorist groups and laying the groundwork for real change, Rice told the Jewish leaders. She also emphasized the need for one law and one authority in the Palestinian areas.

She urged Israel to give the peace process some time and allow P.A. Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas to work toward his goals.

The best way to marginalize P.A. President Yasser Arafat, Rice told Israel, was to help Abbas deliver things for the Palestinian people that Arafat never could.

Asked about how administration officials could be sure the Palestinians want democracy, Rice compared today's Middle East to Europe in 1945, participants said, adding that the Sept. 11 terror attacks had affected the United States the way Pearl Harbor had before World War II. The goal then was to transform Europe so that it would not drag the United States into another war, she said, while in today's Middle East the goal is to create democratic systems that will dry up support for terrorism.

Wednesday's meeting was the first time Rice had sat down with Jewish leaders since the road map for Israeli-Palestinian peace was officially unveiled in May. Since then, the White House has had its most active engagement in the conflict, including recent visits to the region by President Bush, Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell.

There has been significant progress during that period: Bush held summits last month with Israeli, Palestinian and Arab leaders; Palestinian terrorist organizations have agreed to a three-month cease-fire; and Israel has handed over control of most of Gaza and Bethlehem to the Palestinian Authority.

The last time the Bush team met with American Jewish leaders, the Jews expressed great skepticism about Abbas' ability to lead and resentment that Israeli interests might be sacrificed to build international support for the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

Since that time, however, Jewish leaders have praised Bush for his actions, including the summits in Egypt and Jordan and his recent call on the Palestinians to dismantle terrorist groups rather than make do with a voluntary cease-fire.

But there may be new challenges ahead: The Bush administration is considering a welfare-type program for the West Bank and Gaza Strip that would, in theory, be run by the Palestinian Authority. That would require the United States to break from its tradition of providing money in the Palestinian territories only to non-governmental organizations through the U.S. Agency for International Development. □

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

**Even when 'road map' is rolling, groups still see role for Congress***By Matthew E. Berger*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The latest positive developments along the "road map" peace plan have come at an inconvenient time for the U.S. Congress — when it's in recess.

Lawmakers often are eager to parse the latest moves in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and weigh in with what they think the Bush administration should be doing.

But with Palestinian terrorist groups declaring a cease-fire and Israel withdrawing from the Gaza Strip this week, officials in Washington say there is little that legislators can contribute right now. They, like everyone else, will have to wait and see what develops on the ground.

Still, Congress can and does have a role to play as the process evolves — from passing resolutions to authorizing funds for the Palestinians. Which is why lobbyists on all sides of the issue continue to press their case on Capitol Hill.

Congress would, for instance, have to sign off on granting direct aid to the Palestinian Authority, which the Bush administration is now considering.

White House officials say a large-scale welfare-type program in the West Bank and Gaza — perhaps costing as much as \$1 billion — would be used to offset some of the social service programs currently controlled by terrorist organizations.

While it is up to the White House to make the budget request for the aid, it would be Congress' role to appropriate the money, and possibly to retract legislation that has been passed in previous years, declaring that no aid go directly to the Palestinian Authority.

Currently, approximately \$75 million goes to the West Bank and Gaza each year, through the United States Agency for International Development.

Prospects for such a large aid package are uncertain. Lawmakers would likely be concerned about an extra \$1 billion in foreign aid, given current U.S. activities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby that has traditionally opposed direct aid to the Palestinians, says it would reconsider its position if Israel supported it and the Palestinian Authority dismantled terrorist groups and instituted controls to ensure the aid was not misused.

Congress also weighs in on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through resolutions and letters.

Before leaving Washington for a two-week recess, the House of Representatives last week overwhelmingly passed a resolution condemning Palestinian terrorism against Israel after a June 4 summit in Aqaba, Jordan, and expressing solidarity with victims of terrorism. Leaders of Arab and dovish Jewish groups say that such resolutions, which do not call on Israel to take the steps required of it, are inconsistent with public opinion in the United States and Israel.

Thus the groups are happy that this week's developments occurred when Congress was not able to counter-balance them with "one-sided resolutions," in the words of one congressional official.

"It's time for certain segments of Congress to catch up with the peace process that is outpacing the political scene in Washington," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

Full supporters of the road map say political pressures force many lawmakers to automatically support AIPAC's position on issues, without examining them in depth.

Dovish groups contend that AIPAC has been encouraging members to take positions that contradict the road map or would undermine political support for it, such as encouraging resolutions that are largely one-sided and garnering support for letters to the president that call for sequential movements by the Palestinians and Israelis, instead of parallel steps.

"On this issue, there has been a very deliberate effort by those who support the Likud Party to use Congress against the White House and the State Department," said James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute.

Lawmakers tend to use their platform to obstruct positive developments, he said, adding that the best thing they can do is "step out of the way."

For its part, AIPAC says its main goal is peace.

"We want peace to succeed and we know that peace can't succeed unless Palestinian terrorists are defeated," said Rebecca Dinar, AIPAC's spokeswoman. "We lobby members of Congress to support initiatives that are in the interest of peace."

Arab and dovish Jewish groups have been working to show lawmakers their own perspectives.

For example, Diana Butu, a legal adviser to the Palestinian Authority, briefed lawmakers on Capitol Hill in June, explaining that a cease-fire by Palestinian terrorist groups would be more practical than a crackdown on the groups, given Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas' tentative control in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

And they are heartened by the fact that last week's House resolution, which passed 399-5, did offer some historic achievements for their cause:

It was the first time lawmakers openly supported a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, praised Palestinian Authority efforts to confront terrorism and expressed sympathy for the plight of Palestinians.

"If you scratched the surface, what you saw in that debate was a kind of support for what Mahmoud Abbas is doing," one congressional aide said. "There is a growing view in Congress that it is in their interest to keep pushing the peace process."

Morton Klein, national president of the hawkish Zionist Organization of America, said Congress still has an important role to play even when the peace process is moving forward.

"The thing that is being ignored, which is critical, is that there must be pressure to end the promotion of hatred and murder in Palestinian television and radio," Klein said.

He is advising lawmakers to keep pushing that issue, along with other steps that the road map requires of the Palestinians.

"Congress should be talking about stopping money to the Palestinian Authority if they can't do what is required," Klein said.

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), a consistent critic of Bush's Middle East policy, said Congress should remind people that in the past the Palestinians have not lived up to the agreements they have signed. "Those of us who are skeptical — while rooting for success — it's incumbent on us to keep the expectations at a reasonable level," he said.

While lawmakers are unlikely to criticize Israel for making major concessions, such as withdrawing this week from the Gaza Strip, they might criticize the Bush administration for placing Israel in an untenable position, he said. □