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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel freezes goodwill gestures

Israel said it would not make any more diplomatic gestures until the Palestinian Authority cracks down on terrorism.

Israel will not release any more prisoners or transfer control of West Bank cities to the Palestinians until the Palestinian Authority takes "serious" steps against terror, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz decided.

They made the decision Wednesday, a day after two Israelis were killed in a pair of suicide bombings in Israel and in the West Bank.

Jew nabbed in missile sting

An American Jew was arrested in a missile sting linked to terrorist arms dealings.

Yehuda Abraham is one of three men arrested after one tried to sell a surface-to-air missile to FBI informants posing as terrorists who wanted to shoot down a commercial plane.

Abraham, an Afghan Jew in his 70s who lives in Queens, New York, helps to run a family jewelry business in Manhattan called Ambuy, associates said.

He is expected to face charges that he illegally transmitted money to finance the missile scheme.

Ambuy has a store in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and sells jewelry to members of royal families, according to the company Web site. An associate described Abraham as an occasional synagogue-goer who gives to charity.

Years ago, he was involved in bringing Jews from Afghanistan to the United States.

Israel demolishes home

Israel destroyed a building it said was the house of a suicide bomber who carried out one of Tuesday's attacks.

But Israeli officials indicated that a widespread military retaliation would not take place after the attacks in Rosh Ha'ayin and Ariel.

Instead, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is expected to press Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas at a meeting later this week to crack down on terrorism.

Two Israelis were killed in Tuesday's attacks, which wounded more than a dozen. Nine of the wounded are still hospitalized; three are in serious condition.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

With loan sanctions a possibility, Congress may weigh in on fence

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. lawmakers are gearing up to defend Israel's security fence to the Bush administration, which continues to raise concerns about the barrier being erected between Israel and the West Bank.

The White House has acknowledged Israel's right to construct a fence to prevent terrorists from infiltrating from the West Bank. But the administration repeatedly has raised concerns about the fence's route, agreeing with Palestinian and dovish Jewish leaders who describe it as an attempt to expand Israel's borders.

President Bush said Friday that he believes the fence is a problem because it "kind of meanders around the West Bank, which makes it awfully hard to develop a contiguous" Palestinian "state over time."

The fence issue is likely to remain a political hot potato in the weeks and months ahead. Even with Congress on recess, many lawmakers are gearing up for a fight on Israel's behalf.

Several lawmakers spoke up last week, when the Bush administration floated the idea of reducing its loan-guarantee package to Israel to reflect the cost of the fence where it crosses the "Green Line," the boundary that divides Israel proper from the West Bank, captured from Jordan in 1967.

"While we commend you and the administration for engaging in a concerted effort to bring stability and security to the Middle East, we urge you not to use U.S. assistance to dictate how the State of Israel addresses its security needs," Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) wrote in an Aug. 5 letter to Bush. "The focus of U.S. policy must be on eliminating terrorism in order to build a solid foundation upon which future negotiations can stand."

Congress passed the loan guarantees last year with the condition that expenditures on settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be deducted from the \$9 billion total.

Officials in the Bush administration have argued that the clause also applies to spending on the fence. Many lawmakers, however, say the provision was meant to halt the expansion of settlements, not to penalize Israel for security expenditures.

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the House minority whip who last week led a Democratic delegation that was the largest congressional group ever to Israel, told JTA he believes Bush administration officials were unfair when they said that deducting the money would carry out Congress' intent.

"An overwhelming majority of this delegation sees the need for the fence and believes that it serves to prevent terrorist attacks," Hoyer told JTA on Friday from Jerusalem. "It would contribute to the security of Israel and contribute to the peace process itself."

Hoyer said he believed the delegation — which was sponsored by the American Israel Education Foundation, an affiliate of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee — would speak out on the issue when Congress returns to session next month.

A delegation of Republican lawmakers, which AIEF is bringing to the Middle East next week, likely will speak out as well. Sources in the Jewish world said the goal is to show a largely united front on the issue, making it difficult for the White House to expend political capital on the issue without the risk of being seen as opposing Israel's

MIDEAST FOCUS

Temple Mount may reopen

Jerusalem's Temple Mount may soon reopen to non-Muslim visitors.

The head of the Wakf, the Islamic Trust that controls the site, made the comments this week in an interview with the Jerusalem Post. He said the Wakf should have a decision on the matter by next week.

Visits to Judaism's holiest site resumed in June after a hiatus of nearly three years, but they were stopped soon thereafter after threats of Palestinian violence.

Hezbollah, Israel spar

Hezbollah fired on Israeli jets doing reconnaissance missions over southern Lebanon.

These incidents occur regularly, but the U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon said it was concerned about the large number of missions on Wednesday.

On Sunday, an anti-aircraft shell fired by Hezbollah killed an Israeli teenager in the northern Israeli town of Shlomi.

Birthright israel wraps up tour

Some 4,000 young Jewish adults from 21 countries finished a 10-day visit to Israel on Tuesday night.

The birthright israel program ended with a festive ceremony in Jerusalem attended by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Birthright offers free trips to Israel for Jews aged 18 to 26 who have never been to Israel on a peer trip. Some 42,000 people have visited Israel on the program since it was launched in 1999.

Militaries hold joint exercises

Israel, the United States and Turkey are holding joint air and naval exercises in the Mediterranean.

The exercises are part of ongoing military cooperation among the three countries.



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security needs.

Hoyer plans to write a letter to the president and an Op-Ed piece on the issue. So far, no related legislation is in the works.

"Over a majority of Congress will not support any reduction of funds authorized or appropriated to Israel as a result of the security fence," said Hoyer, whose delegation visited parts of the fence.

The administration is trying to downplay the disagreement with Israel, noting that Israel has agreed to allow the United States to consult on the fence's route and that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has promised Bush that the fence will be built so as to minimize its impact on Palestinian commerce and travel.

But those against the fence's route also are vying for the administration's attention.

Palestinians and dovish Jewish groups are concerned that the fence pre-empts peace talks by unilaterally setting a border — and are especially incensed that the border might incorporate part of the West Bank, which the Palestinians claim as their own.

Palestinian officials have told Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and others in Washington that the fence separates some Palestinian farmers from their agricultural land — though Israel says the farmers will be able to access their fields via gates in the fence — and cuts off some villages from the cities they depend on for commerce.

Americans for Peace Now wrote Bush, backing the idea of reducing the loan guarantees. "We hope you will make it clear to Israel that the U.S. opposes these ill-advised policies and that settlement-related expenditures — including subsidies and costs of route deviations in the security barrier — will be deducted from loan guarantees available to Israel in the coming years," said the letter, signed by APN Chairman Luis Lainer and CEO Debra DeLee.

"Such deductions would be consistent with the letter and the spirit of U.S. law, as well as with your ongoing commitment to Israeli security — security that has been harmed, rather than served, by the Israeli government's expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza," they wrote.

APN would support a fence, provided it is built precisely along the Green Line. One congressional aide said supporters of APN's position in Congress have not begun to strategize how to make their voices heard when Congress returns to session, but they believe "there are many members in Congress who agree with President Bush that the security fence is a problem." □

Hospital 'cleans' HIV-infected sperm

JERUSALEM — An Israeli hospital is birthing healthy babies with the sperm of HIV-infected men.

The Rambam Medical Center in Haifa is using an innovative system that "cleans" the sperm of HIV before injecting it into the wombs of the men's wives. According to Rambam hospital, 600 healthy children already have been born to couples where the husband had HIV.

The process reportedly is not yet authorized in the United States. □

Abrams pressed to resign

NEW YORK — A New York newspaper is demanding that an aide to President Bush resign because he opposes Jewish intermarriage.

Philip Weiss, a columnist for the weekly New York Observer, said Elliott Abrams, a special assistant to the president on Middle East affairs and a National Security Council member, should "either give up his job or step back from his extreme views" on American Jewry.

The paper took Abrams, who is Jewish, to task for a 1997 book, "Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America." The book called intermarriage a "tragedy" that "afflicts" American Jews.

Abrams also called on Jews to send their children to Jewish day schools, which the paper termed "separatist."

The paper said Abrams may suffer "a lack of balance" on Middle East affairs. □

JEWISH WORLD

Holy man gone bad

A U.S. rabbi pleaded guilty to arranging a sexual encounter with an undercover officer he thought was a 13-year-old girl.

Israel Kestenbaum of Highland Park, N.J., is expected to be sentenced to five years' probation.

Kestenbaum is an ethics watchdog for a national group of pastors, and he has been honored for his work at Ground Zero.

Australian editor says sorry

The editor of two leading Australian newspapers apologized for a cartoon comparing the security fence Israel is building with the wall surrounding the Warsaw Ghetto.

The cartoon showed one wall with the caption "Warsaw 1943" and another wall next to it with the words "West Bank 2003."

Mark Scott, editor in chief of the Sydney Morning Herald and the Melbourne Age, told the Jewish press corps, "As editor in chief, I am aware that the cartoon caused significant offense to many readers, and I want to apologize to them."

HIAS to U.S.: Protect refugees

The U.S. government should not deport asylum-seekers before their claims are processed, Jewish groups said.

In a letter Wednesday to Attorney General John Ashcroft and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and a coalition of Jewish groups say the refugees should be allowed to stay temporarily even if they entered the United States with false documents.

"Because of the lessons of the Holocaust, our community is particularly sensitive to the realities that refugees may be forced in desperation to obtain false travel papers," the letter said.

Legislator complains about bar

New York State may change the date of its 2004 bar exam, which is scheduled to take place on Tisha B'Av.

The move to change the July 27, 2004, date comes after complaints from legislator Ryan Scott Karben.

Site matches kosher roommates

Finding a kosher place to live in the United States is now just a click away.

A new Web site at www.KosherRoommates.com maintains a geographically based database of kosher rooms available for rent.

The service is free.

Star makes waves in Jewish circles; Philadelphia Inquirer cartoon spurs fury

By Faygie Levy and Alexandra Perloe
Philadelphia Jewish Exponent

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — A cartoon that first appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer is having repercussions as far away as Seattle, where the cartoon also appeared.

The editorial cartoon by Tony Auth, which first appeared July 31, depicts a wire fence in the shape of a Jewish star.

Enclosed in each of seven sections — the six points of the star, as well as the center — stand groups of Palestinian men, women and children.

According to Auth, the drawing was designed to illustrate "that the State of Israel is building a fence that separates Palestinians and is an obstacle to peace."

But that's not how many people saw it.

"It was really outrageous," said Israeli Consul General Giora Becher. "It was insensitive for the cartoonist to use the Jewish symbol of a Magen David, and to use it with barbed wire and some connotation of the concentration camp."

Harold Goldman, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, said, "The Tony Auth cartoon crossed a line between what is acceptable political commentary and satire to what is clearly anti-Semitic and anti-Israel commentary."

Nancy Baron-Baer of the regional Anti-Defamation League office added that the cartoon evoked memories of the Holocaust, "where the fence was used to commit atrocities, equating that to the Israelis' building a fence to keep terrorists from committing atrocities."

By using a symbol of the Jewish faith, she added, Auth "has put his criticism forth to say that it's representative of all Jews, not just the State of Israel."

Auth responded that over the years he has drawn many cartoons critical of suicide bombers.

He also said that those who seek to peg him or the Inquirer as anti-Semitic are dead wrong.

"It is only possible to regard me and my work as anti-Semitic by selectively looking at certain cartoons," he said.

Several groups — including the federation; the ADL; the Zionist Organization of America; the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia; the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, and others — lodged formal complaints with the paper.

A letter written by the local JCRC and the Vaad: Board of Rabbis said the groups were "appalled that Mr. Auth can take a symbol of the Jewish people, the Star of David, and so distort and pervert it — that it borders on desecration."

The cartoon, said Steve Feldman, executive director of the ZOA's Philadelphia branch, "defames the Jewish people and defames Israel."

"It's the furthest thing from the truth," he said of the cartoon's message. "Israel is trying to protect itself, not fence anyone in."

People also took issue with the fact that no suicide bombers were depicted in the cartoon, even though the security fence is designed to keep terrorists — not ordinary Palestinians — out of Israel.

The Israeli government has noted that a similar fence around the Gaza Strip, in place since the mid-1990s, has been successful at keeping out terrorists.

It should have been clear to Auth that "we're not building it to discriminate against the Palestinians, but to protect ourselves against the vicious attacks," Becher said.

Auth said that "the overwhelming majority of drawings" he has done on the Middle East criticize Palestinian suicide bombers and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, and are "greatly sympathetic to Israel."

"It's as if any criticism of Israel has to be accompanied by a history of the region," he said. "Our readers are relatively well-informed readers. This medium is essentially excellent for making one point at a time."

He noted that he's "received a lot of positive response from the cartoon — from Jewish peace activists who probably feel like they're in a lost cause." □

Israel's Black Hebrews gain permanent resident status

By Loolwa Khazzoom

TEL AVIV (JTA)— There are 2,500 new permanent residents of the State of Israel, but not one of them is new to the Jewish state.

Israel's Black Hebrews, a group that traces its origins through Chicago and, they claim, all the way back to the biblical Jewish kingdoms, have been given a home in the Jewish state.

Though the Black Hebrews began immigrating to Israel from the United States in 1969, it was only last week that the community in southern Israel was granted permanent residency status. It has been 34 years of bitter struggle, community members say.

"It seems that we are now at the doorstep of citizenship," says Atarah Yafah Kitanah, spokeswoman for the Black Hebrew community of Dimona. "We are happy," she says of the development. "We now move forward."

As permanent residents, Black Hebrews can serve in the Israeli army and establish government-recognized villages, the Interior Ministry says. Permanent resident status generally leads to full citizenship after an unspecified period of time, Interior Ministry spokeswoman Tova Ellinson says.

Many Black Hebrews say a Jewish past would help explain otherwise inscrutable aspects of their identity.

"My great-great-grandmother had a Hebrew name, and there were certain practices that were passed down from generation to generation that nobody understood," Kitanah recalls.

"There were a lot of different things passed on, like my grandmother telling me our people — our ancestors — came from the Holy Land, and we have a history there, and one day we will return," she says.

Black Hebrews say they are descendants of the Jews expelled by the Romans in 70 C.E. According to Black Hebrew legend, some of those Jews reached West Africa, and many generations later their descendants were among the slaves brought to the United States. Few in the Jewish establishment accept the Black Hebrews' claims, however, and Israel's Rabbinate ruled that they are not halachically Jewish.

In 1966, the community's spiritual leader, Ben-Ammi Ben-Israel, said he had a vision that it was time for the Black Hebrews to return to their "homeland" of Israel. In 1967, he left Chicago along with 430 followers and led them deep into the Liberian bush to re-enact the Jewish exodus from Egypt.

"As our fathers needed to sojourn before passing into the Promised Land, to shed their slave mentality, so we had to sojourn in Liberia," Ben-Israel once explained to the Jerusalem Post.

Community members stayed in the African bush for the next two years, braving heavy rains in leaky tents.

Ravaged by poverty, hunger and illness, they tried to learn to live off the land. Two years later — after nearly three-fourths of the group had returned to the United States — 120 of the Black Hebrews moved to Israel.

They were joined over the years by others who entered Israel as tourists and stayed on after their visas expired.

The Black Hebrews' path toward Israeli citizenship has been long and arduous.

Originally offered citizenship under the Law of Return in

1969, the community's status later was challenged and revoked. From 1973 through the early 1990s, the community had no legal status, and many members of the group — who had renounced their U.S. citizenship — were left stateless. As a result, Black Hebrews could not hold legal jobs, send their children to Israeli schools or utilize national health care services.

The Black Hebrews' cause was not helped by their insistence that they were the true Jews and that the Israelis were usurpers. As their case made its way through Israeli courts, they mounted a campaign against the state that many saw as vitriolic and anti-Semitic.

The community's newspapers compared Israelis to Nazis and included images of money-grubbing Jews.

An Israeli government report issued in 1980 recommended that the Black Hebrews be taken through a gradual process of naturalization that would lead to citizenship. The government worried that deportation back to the United States might raise charges of racism. The report's recommendations were never implemented, however.

In 1989, then-Interior Minister Aryeh Deri visited Ben-Israel.

"There was an understanding, principles of agreement, between the community and the Ministry of the Interior," Kitanah says. "The Ministry of the Interior was to grant us legal status."

A year later, the ministry offered community members work permits, and in 1993 it granted them temporary resident status.

"After temporary residency, we were to receive permanent residency and receive citizenship, but it didn't go as planned," Kitanah says.

Interior Ministry officials deny any such commitment.

They periodically extended the community's temporary resident status, and in 1999 they offered community members Israeli identity cards. However, many Black Hebrews said they weren't able to get the cards.

The struggle for citizenship has been mired in controversy focused around the Black Hebrews' purported lineage.

Early on, the Israeli Rabbinate determined that the Black Hebrews are not halachic Jews. Israel's Supreme Court offered the community citizenship on the condition that they undergo formal Orthodox conversion.

But Ben-Israel refused, explaining that conversion would imply a rejection of the Black Hebrews' lineage.

The Black Hebrews also resented being treated differently than the non-Jews among the more than 1 million immigrants who arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s. Though up to a quarter of the immigrants were not halachically Jewish, they were granted Israeli citizenship because of their family ties to Jews.

"Russian and other immigrants come in and introduce prostitution and other vices," says Andrew Butler, a Black Hebrew performance artist living in Tel Aviv. "They don't even want to abide by Jewish laws, and still Israel gives citizenship to them."

Despite their struggles for acceptance, the Black Hebrews established a fast growing community. Members say it is deeply rooted in Biblical teachings, though they reject latter-day interpretations of the Bible, including such injunctions as the rabbinic prohibition against polygamy.

Adherents follow a strictly vegan diet; eschew caffeine, alcohol, drugs and cigarettes; and experiment with no-salt days, sugar-free weeks and raw-food weeks. □