



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 81, No. 179

Thursday, September 25, 2003

86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Shalom meets Rice

Israel's foreign minister is addressing misgivings about the West Bank security fence in meetings this week with top U.S. officials.

Silvan Shalom was slated to meet Wednesday with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and the White House national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice.

Report: Settlement growth strong

Jewish settlements in the West Bank are growing three times as fast as cities in Israel proper, a new report says.

The 2002 Statistical Abstract, to be published by the College of Judea and Samaria in the West Bank city of Ariel, says Jewish cities and towns there grew by 20 percent in 2000-2002, compared with 6.8 percent for cities and towns in Israel proper, the Jerusalem Post reported.

In the last decade, Jewish population growth in the West Bank stands at 144 percent, compared with 32 percent in Israel proper. The Jewish population of the West Bank was 213,000 at the end of 2002.

Mbeki reaches out to Jews

South African President Thabo Mbeki said Israel's deputy prime minister is expected in Pretoria in January. Ehud Olmert would be the highest-level Israeli official to visit South Africa since Ariel Sharon became prime minister.

Speaking to a meeting of the American Jewish Committee in New York on Wednesday, Mbeki said his government wants to play a role in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by supporting the "road map" peace plan. He also said his country is not biased toward the Palestinians.

Berlusconi: E.U. for Israel

Italy's president advocated Israel's membership in the European Union.

"I have already proposed that Israel should serve as a member of the European Union," Silvio Berlusconi, who currently holds the rotating E.U. presidency, said in a speech Tuesday night in New York, where he received the Anti-Defamation League's Distinguished Statesman Award.

The ADL has come under fire for honoring Berlusconi, who recently said Italy's former dictator Benito Mussolini "never killed anyone."

NEWS ANALYSIS

World preoccupation with Iraq unlikely to remove Israel from the U.N. hot seat

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — The world's preoccupation with the chaos in Iraq is unlikely to divert attention from the trademark scrutiny of Israel by the United Nations General Assembly.

It could even render Israel a red herring, according to diplomats and Jewish observers involved with this month's General Assembly opening.

Israel could become a rallying call for countries to oppose rather than "tackling tough issues," such as Iraq and terrorism, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

At the very least, the Arab-Israeli conflict is likely to be featured prominently during the assembly's three-month session, which this week brought a panoply of heads of state to the stage of the world body.

"If past is prologue," Israel will be a salient topic, said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, which has more than 60 diplomatic appointments, including meetings with officials from Egypt, Turkey and Jordan.

This year's General Assembly comes as the United States is seeking international financial and military support to ease the U.S. burden in Iraq.

Each year, the General Assembly slams Israel with some 21 critical resolutions, making the Jewish state the target of more resolutions than all other countries combined, an Israeli official said.

Last week, as the assembly opened, Syria sponsored a Security Council resolution — ultimately vetoed by the United States — calling on Israel to reject its decision in principle to remove Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Then, last Friday, the General Assembly held a special emergency session to pass a resolution demanding that Israel cease its threats against Arafat.

The Israeli-Palestinian issue "is going to be a major one in the General Assembly because of the 'road map' " peace plan and its subsequent collapse, along with escalated tensions in the region, an Israeli official said.

For Israel and Jewish organizations that hope to boost Israel's image and the peace process at the world body, the challenges are many.

One is the breakdown of the road map. Another is Europe's position in judging the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In a meeting with French president Jacques Chirac on Monday, several U.S. Jewish leaders lamented that Chirac assigned equal culpability to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Chirac "did not seem to accept our attempt to make a distinction between the arsonist and the fireman," Harris said.

Like other European leaders, Chirac has created a Catch-22 for the peace process: faulting Arafat for the intifada, but seeing him as a critical figure in ending it, Jewish officials said.

In contrast, Israel and the United States believe Arafat is a hindrance to the process.

According to Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, Chirac met with the Jews because he felt it would "help him reassert good relations with America and with Jews, both of whom he cares about."

In an address to the United Nations on Tuesday, Chirac called for an international conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and more monitoring of peace agreements.

The French president "didn't change his mind" about Israel and doesn't like Israeli

MIDEAST FOCUS

Belgium dismisses Sharon charge

Belgium's highest court dismissed war crimes charges against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Wednesday, ruling that Belgium no longer has a legal basis to charge him.

The case charging Sharon with complicity in a 1982 massacre in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, carried out by Lebanese Christian militias, brought ties between Israel and Belgium to a nadir.

An Israeli official called the decision "a political victory rather than a legal one."

Yassin: Bush wants war on Islam

The leader of Hamas said President Bush's U.N. speech on Tuesday constituted a declaration of war on Islam. Sheik Ahmed Yassin emerged from hiding to denounce Bush's speech at a hastily assembled news conference, Reuters reported.

Yassin has been in hiding since Israel targeted him in a missile strike Sept. 6, following a massive Hamas terror attack in Jerusalem.

Israeli pilots refusing to serve

A group of 27 Israeli pilots are refusing to take part in operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In a letter to the head of the air force, the group — which includes pilots on active and reserve duty — wrote that it refuses to "take part in air force attacks on civilian population centers," according to Ha'aretz.

The chief of the Israeli Air Force, Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz, said Israel's is the most moral and humane fighting corps and that the refusal to serve is an inappropriate form of protest.

Kuwait to freeze terrorists' assets

Kuwait's government announced it will freeze bank accounts belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The announcement follows intense U.S. pressure on Arab states to take action against terrorists.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "any more than he did before" the meeting with Jewish groups, Singer said.

Still, according to Harris, lobbying European leaders is critical in trying to get the message across.

"The moral center of gravity at the U.N. is the European Union," he said. "To really get movement on the anti-Israel resolutions, you need to have the European Union with you."

Indeed, France voted for last week's resolutions on Israel and Arafat in both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Germany abstained on the Security Council resolution and voted for the General Assembly resolution.

But many European nations don't buy the U.S. and Israeli position that Palestinian terrorism must cease in order to revive the peace process, Harris said.

Catherine MacKenzie, press officer for the British Mission to the United Nations, cast the conflict as one between the developed and developing worlds.

"While the developed world is saying security first," she said, it's necessary to simultaneously "deal with underlying feelings of exclusion."

She added, "If you're ignoring the other side's problems, then you're brewing up a hell of a lot of trouble for yourself."

Observers say it's problematic that many countries with strong bilateral relations with Israel remain silent when the Jewish state is attacked at the United Nations.

"I continue to be disillusioned that while we're hearing a lot of good things" in meetings with France, Turkey and Britain, for example, "when they get in the international arena, they play that pro-Arab tilt, and they're not willing to break it," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"They're not willing to stand up and say, 'Enough with this nonsense.'"

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who was scheduled to address the General Assembly on Thursday, was slated to speak before 20 heads of state this week at an anti-terrorism meeting.

In the end, observers predicted, the United States, while preoccupied with winning international support for its efforts in Iraq, is also likely to press Israel's case.

According to U.S. spokesman Robert Wood, America's focus on Iraq does not overshadow its work on the Israeli-Palestinian front.

"We can focus on a number of different issues," he said. He added that the administration's goal is to revive the road map toward a two-state solution.

According to Dan Mariaschin, executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International, the administration already proved its ability to differentiate between and uphold those priorities with the veto of last week's Security Council resolution.

Indeed, in his speech to the General Assembly on Tuesday, which also focused on countering the threat of nuclear proliferation, Bush linked the issue of Iraq to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Iraq as a democracy will have great power to inspire the Middle East," he said. "The advance of democratic institutions in Iraq is setting an example that others, including the Palestinian people, would be wise to follow."

"The Palestinian cause is betrayed by leaders who cling to power by feeding old hatreds, and destroying the good work of others," Bush continued. "The Palestinian people deserve their own state — committed to reform, to fighting terror and to building peace."

Bush urged all parties in the Middle East to carry out the commitments they made to reviving the peace process: "Israel must work to create the conditions that will allow a peaceful Palestinian state to emerge. Arab nations must cut off funding and other support for terrorist organizations. America will work with every nation in the region that acts boldly for the sake of peace."

Meanwhile, observers say peace with Israel in the corridors of the United Nations won't precede peace on the ground.

"Historically the best chance for progress at the U.N. comes when the situation on the ground is improving," Harris said.

"When the situation is either paralyzed or regressing, the chances of any breakthrough at the U.N. are pretty remote. □



Daily News Bulletin

Norman H. Lipoff, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Finance and Administration Director*

Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

JEWISH WORLD

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Enrollment up at French Jewish schools due to anti-Semitism, poor public schools

By Philip Carmel

PARIS (JTA) — A desire for stronger Jewish identity is helping fuel skyrocketing enrollment at Jewish schools across France.

That thirst for Jewishness has been compounded by disillusionment with French public schools and a wave of anti-Semitic attacks across the country.

Now, with over 30,000 students beginning the year in Jewish schools, the United Jewish Social Funds — French Jewry's umbrella social and educational organization, known by the acronym FSJU — estimates that around half of all school-age Jewish children in France attend Jewish schools.

Sabine Smadjar, a mother of two girls, lives next to a Parisian high school that a Jewish student had to leave earlier this year because of anti-Semitic abuse.

Smadjar didn't have to think hard before registering her school-age child at one of the largest and oldest Jewish schools in Paris, Lucien de Hirsch. But her child may not have a place at Hirsch this year: The school had about 1,500 applications, for far fewer spots, said Patrick Petit-Ohayon, director of education for FSJU.

Since 2000, enrollment in France's Jewish schools has risen by 3 percent a year. This year, early FSJU estimates put the growth figure at 4 percent.

Smadjar said the main reason for putting her daughter in a Jewish school was a desire to build her Jewish identity. "I don't want my kids to be in a position of not knowing about Judaism," she said.

But for Smadjar's husband, Yann, security was at least as big a concern.

"If we stay in France, it's vital that we send the children to a Jewish school," he said. "That applies as much to a nursery school as it does to a high school, because today there are so many problems with the state sector over subjects such as educating about the Shoah."

At Yabne, a big Jewish school in the south of Paris, parents who want their children to start school at age 3 have to register a child by the January following his or her birth.

Laurence Guez, a mother from an Orthodox neighborhood in Paris, said extra classes had been added this year for some grades at her children's Chabad-Lubavitch-run school, Sinai.

Guez, also director of a Lubavitch nursery school, or creche, said that this year she was unable to accept any more children at her own institution.

"It's very worrying because there's more and more demand for places," Guez said. "All the creches around here are full, so the mothers either have to stop working or look around for other alternatives."

More than 80 percent of students in Jewish schools attend private schools where the Ministry of Education pays teachers' salaries and enforces the national curriculum, Petit-Ohayon said — indicating that they are not opting out of the French school system entirely.

The other 20 percent study in fervently Orthodox schools that do not need to follow the state curriculum.

Anti-Semitism is only one of several factors leading to the shift toward private and parochial schools. Other factors are the wave of teachers' strikes in French public schools last year and higher standardized test scores at private and parochial institutions.

"There is a certain crisis within the state sector, and Jewish parents are often just as likely to send their children to non-Jewish — and even Catholic — private schools," Petit-Ohayon said.

However, he rejected the notion that FSJU was unable to meet the demand for Jewish education. He said the FSJU prefers to increase the numbers of classes within existing schools rather than building new schools.

"We have to be careful," Petit-Ohayon said. "There was a similar rise in the early 1990s and there were demands to build, but it leveled off toward the end of the decade, when the schools were still not full." □

Court sought for AMIA case

Argentina is looking for a court in a neutral country to try an Iranian diplomat implicated in the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85.

Representatives of Argentine president Nestor Kirchner, who is in the United States to attend the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, are meeting with U.S. Jewish groups to discuss the best method and location for trying the Iranian, Hade Soleimanpour.

Jewish charities ranked

A social justice foundation is first and an Orthodox outreach group last in a new charity ranking.

The Shefa Fund of Philadelphia tops the list — which rates the groups on the basis of organizational and fund-raising efficiency — while the Jerusalem branch of Aish HaTorah is ranked last.

Charity Navigator ranked 130 Jewish nonprofits among more than 2,500 philanthropic institutions evaluated at www.charitynavigator.org.

Ashrawi to get peace prize

The Sydney Peace Foundation is awarding its 2003 peace prize to Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi. The lone Jewish member of the award committee, Stella Cornelius, resigned in protest.

Ashrawi voted against changing the PLO charter to eliminate the call for Israel's destruction, maintains that Hamas is not a terrorist group and has said Israelis living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are legitimate targets for attack.

Australia probes Hamas affiliate

Australia is investigating a Perth-based group for supporting Hamas.

Attorney General Daryl Williams said an investigation of the Hamas Support Group WA is underway after Australia's lone Jewish member of Parliament, Michael Danby, asked for the probe.

The group placed a condolence notice in the West Australian newspaper last month following Israel's killing of Hamas leader Ismail Abu Shanab in Gaza.

Jewish sites in danger

Several Jewish sites around the world are in danger. The World Monuments Fund, a nonprofit group that preserves monument sites worldwide, included several Jewish sites on its List of 100 Most Endangered Sites, released Wednesday.

Among those named are the Ohel Rachel Synagogue in Shanghai, China; the Vidin Synagogue in Vidin, Bulgaria; and the Apollonia-Arsuf archaeological site in Herzliya, Israel.

WMF officials hope the list will help them raise money to fund the preservation of the institutions.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

White House gets an earful about Israeli security fence

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON (JTA)— In Washington this week to discuss the security fence Israel is building, Israeli and Palestinian lawyers spoke forcefully about money, property, final settlements and each side's sense that the other is just not interested in its needs.

Bush administration officials could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled into divorce court.

Israel is eager to keep separate any disagreements it may have with the United States about the fence from the \$9 billion in loan guarantees the United States has promised.

Palestinians argue that the fence is not a security guarantor but a land grab — an argument that, if accepted, could lead the United States to deduct some \$1.2 billion from the loan guarantees.

"We want to reach understandings with the Americans. We don't want the fence to be a problem," said an Israeli official involved in presentations made Monday by Dov Weisglass, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's bureau chief, and Amos Yaron, director-general of Israel's Defense Ministry.

Israel says the fence is purely a security measure that will keep out terrorists who have killed hundreds of Israelis since the Palestinian intifada was launched in September 2000.

The Israeli official said Monday's meetings were a success because U.S. officials — including the White House's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice — never raised the loan guarantee issue, though they still have problems with the fence.

Rice seemed pleased with what she heard.

"We have been talking to the Israelis, it's been in a friendly spirit, and we had good meetings today," she told reporters after meeting with Weisglass and Yaron. "The Israelis have some things that they want to go back and look at, and I think we'll probably get together again."

Israelis are worried because an earlier Palestinian presentation in Washington — which depicted the fence as slicing any future Palestinian state into untenable cantons — had a profound impact in the U.S. capital.

After Rice saw the PowerPoint presentation in July, she made it the central theme of her talk the following day with Sharon.

Shown similar maps by former Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, President Bush tossed them across the room in anger, according to Palestinians present at the meeting, and swore that Israel would not be allowed to build the fence as depicted by the Palestinians.

The new presentation, which the Palestinians half-jokingly call "The Fence, Part II" focuses on alleged building around Jerusalem. Its advocates hope the presentation has a similar effect.

"It's a land grab," said Anwar al Darkazally, a young Briton who is one of two PLO lawyers making their presentation this week to State Department officials, including John Wolf, the top U.S. envoy to the region. "The Israeli mantra is 'Leave the people, take the land.'"

Al Darkazally's map — based on a review of Israeli land confiscation orders, interviews with Palestinian farmers and field trips to what appear to be construction sites — describes a West Bank sliced into northern and southern sections and shows the

fence creeping through the Jordan Valley.

A Jordan Valley fence, which Israel says may be needed to protect settlements there and prevent terrorists and arms from infiltrating from the east, would keep a large chunk of the West Bank in Israeli hands and cut the Palestinians off from Jordan.

Al Darkazally also argues that the fence will run up against Palestinian homes, cutting farmers off from their land and laying the groundwork for future expansion of Israeli West Bank towns.

Israelis say the Palestinian presentation is based more on speculation than evidence and that the fence's primary function is security. In addition, they note, the fence can always be moved later, whatever the cost.

"The problematic areas the Americans are worried about are within the framework of discussion," the Israeli official said. "We want minimum impact" on Palestinian lives.

The Israeli arguments appear to have had an effect. Bush administration officials still clearly are unhappy about the fence, but also expressed understanding for Israel's security concerns.

"This wall does not really — is not really consistent with our view of what the Middle East will one day have to look like: two states living side by side in peace," Rice said. "We understand that they have some security concerns and that it is extremely important, if it is going to be built, that it not intrude — that as much as possible, that it not intrude on the lives of the Palestinians, and most importantly, that it not look as if it's trying to prejudice the outcome of a peace agreement."

Secretary of State Colin Powell described the fence as a "real problem," but said Israel is listening to American concerns.

He suggested on PBS' "Charlie Rose" program that Israel might slow down its building of the fence "when it can be demonstrated that the Palestinian side is doing something about the bombings, the terror."

The Palestinians say they hope to gain ground by connecting emotionally with officials.

"Emotionally, Bush got it" in July, said Amjad Atallah, the other PLO negotiator. "That might have led us to decrease pressure. That was a mistake."

Pro-Israel groups claim the fence addresses Palestinian humanitarian concerns.

"The security fence is a less punitive and non-lethal way for Israel to protect its citizens while significantly lessening the hardships on Palestinian civilians by reducing the number of Israeli soldiers within Palestinian areas and minimizing curfews and other security measures," the American Israel Public Affairs Committee says in a leaflet.

As much as building the fence represents a low in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, its existence could bring the sides back to the negotiating table, according to David Makovsky, an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"Depending on how it goes, if it truly is a buffer, it could save lives and stabilize the situation," Makovsky said.

Another analyst said any unilateral action is bound to make things worse.

"I don't think it's intended to be a land grab, just like the security settlements were not intended to be a land grab," said Judith Kipper of the Council on Foreign Relations, referring to outposts set up decades ago in the Jordan Valley as an early warning system. "But in the end this dispute is about land, and everything turns out to be a land grab." □