



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel loosens its grip

Israel eased some restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank. Blockades on Palestinian cities were lifted, with the exception of Nablus and Jenin. Public transportation for Palestinians also will be expanded, and some permits for private cars will be issued.

The moves come after Israeli defense officials called for loosening restrictions, and amid meetings between top-level Israeli and Palestinian officials to restart diplomatic talks.

Prisoner swap nearing?

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon soon will ask his Cabinet to approve a possible prisoner swap with Hezbollah. As part of the deal, Israel is expected to recover kidnapped businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum, along with the bodies of three kidnapped Israeli soldiers, Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad. Israel would release some Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners, including Hezbollah's Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid and Shi'ite activist Mustafa Dirani.

Soros: Israel causes hatred

Billionaire financier and philanthropist George Soros said Israel's policies fuel anti-Semitism.

In a rare appearance before a Jewish audience Wednesday, Soros said, "The policies of the Bush administration and the Sharon administration contribute" to the "resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe." He added, "If we change that direction, then anti-Semitism also will diminish." Soros spoke in New York at a conference of the Jewish Funders Network.

More funds for JDC?

The United Jewish Communities is considering giving an additional \$13 million to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The plan was one of three proposals by UJC subcommittees appointed to determine allocations for the federation system's overseas partners, the JDC and the Jewish Agency for Israel. A second subcommittee proposed keeping the funding the same for the JDC and Jewish Agency for their work in Israel. A third subcommittee determined that savings from a decrease in aliyah should go toward the Jewish Agency's absorption services.

The recommendations are expected to be considered on Dec. 8 in New York.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

In placid Ohio, Jews bracing for pro-Palestinian conference

By Rachel Pomerance

COLUMBUS, Ohio (JTA) — On the flat road from the Columbus airport to Ohio State University, 1950s-style billboards for Wonder Bread and Wendy's, which got its start here, hang over square parcels of land.

It's a fitting welcome to this conservative Midwestern town, an unusual host for the upcoming North American Conference of the Palestine Solidarity movement.

In contrast to schools like Berkeley or the University of Michigan — which hosted the previous two conferences and where anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism have risen during the intifada — Ohio State is a peaceful campus with plenty of pro-Israel support.

Several of the university's key institutions, in fact, are named for members of Columbus' Jewish community. Students and faculty say the campus is apathetic about politics, with most locals driven by a different agenda: the college football schedule.

In fact, the pro-Palestinian conference, scheduled for Nov. 7-9, will no doubt be overshadowed by a major home game, when Ohio State's beloved Buckeyes, currently ranked seventh in the nation, take on Michigan State, ranked 14th.

Conversations with students on campus revealed that most had no idea or only vague knowledge of the pro-Palestinian event.

"It's so easy to live in a bubble at Ohio State," said junior Kara Silverman, co-chair of the campus' Israel Action Committee, a group associated with Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, that works with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"People get really wrapped up in school and don't so much pay attention to this conflict," she said.

The conference, which hopes to get universities to divest their holdings in companies that do business with Israel, was moved from Rutgers University to Ohio State due to internal squabbles.

That split could represent discord in a pro-Palestinian movement that is floundering, according to Wayne Firestone, director of the Israel on Campus Coalition, an umbrella organization for 26 Jewish groups.

Those groups largely are downplaying the Ohio State conference and the pro-Palestinian movement in general.

"The division is one indication that not only is there dissent, but following last year, when you look at what they have to show for their efforts, there frankly is very little," Firestone said.

Firestone said pro-Palestinian activists are mounting "small, fairly unsophisticated grass-roots" efforts to portray Israel's security fence as a racist separation wall and to compare the U.S. occupation in Iraq to Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza. "By moving to the wall and the occupation as being their major arguments, they still have no answer to the resounding American abhorrence of terrorism as a strategy."

Meanwhile, the divestment campaign is widely considered a failure. Signatures on divestment petitions have been far outnumbered by counterpetitions, and hundreds of university presidents have signed or issued statements rejecting divestment from Israel.

But the Committee for Justice in Palestine's faculty adviser — a Jewish professor who hails from an Orthodox background — says the divestment movement can be useful in engaging students. The conference is meant to determine "how to get the movement progressing," Joseph Levine said.

For their part, Jewish groups seem to shrug off the conference as the antics of a few

MIDEAST FOCUS

Russian-Israeli oil deal

Russian oil will flow through an Israeli pipeline. The deal was announced Wednesday as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon returned to Israel from a three-day visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The oil will flow through a line run by the Eilat-Ashkelon Oil Pipeline Company, the firm said. The oil will travel to Asia.

Yukos deputy now Israeli

A former deputy of the embattled Yukos oil firm, who also is a Russian Jewish leader, was granted Israeli citizenship.

Leonid Nevzlin, a former president of the Russian Jewish Congress, arrived in Israel on a tourist visa two months ago. Nevzlin, whom Forbes ranks as the 386th richest man in the world, controls some shares in Menatep, Yukos' holding company.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who is currently in a Russian jail on tax evasion and fraud charges, resigned as head of Yukos this week.

Jews, Arabs clash in Jerusalem

Fervently Orthodox Jews and Arabs clashed in Jerusalem.

Wednesday's clashes in the Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim began when the Jews shouted racist slurs at the Arabs, according to Yediot Achronot. One Arab was lightly injured in the clashes, and two fervently Orthodox men were arrested.

Molotovs hurled at bus

Palestinians hurled two Molotov cocktails at Israeli civilians riding a bus in the West Bank.

There were no injuries in Wednesday's attack on the bus, which was traveling on the Jerusalem-Hebron Road. Also Wednesday, Israeli soldiers found a weapons cache containing mortars, M-16 rifles and bullets in an olive grove in Hebron.



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fringe elements. They even welcome the energizing effect it has had on Jewish students on campus.

Opinion on U.S. campuses tilts toward Israel despite a few centers of anti-Israel activity, some Jewish leaders say. Still, they hope to influence the silent middle ground.

Except for the New York-based group, The Coalition for Jewish Concerns-Amcha, which is trying to coordinate a 500-person protest on Sunday, most Jewish groups are trying to downplay the conference.

They decided on that course after consulting with national Jewish groups and Jewish groups at universities that hosted previous divestment conferences.

"The sense was that if we don't give the group attention, the likelihood is that they themselves will not get attention here at Ohio State on a Michigan State football weekend," said Marsha Hurwitz, CEO and president of the Columbus Jewish Federation.

Instead, Jewish groups on campus, along with the local Columbus community, are pursuing a strategy of proactive programming. On Oct. 28, for example, Ohio State saw the launch of an "Ambassadors for Israel" program organized by Chabad-Lubavitch in partnership with Hillel, AIPAC and the Jewish National Fund's campus program, Caravan for Democracy.

Chabad flew in Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz to talk to 56 Jewish students — chosen as "ambassadors for Israel" — about the merits of the Jewish state.

Dershowitz was the first in a series of speakers, including former presidential hopeful Alan Keyes and Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister for Diaspora affairs, who urged the students to become advocates for Israel.

As part of the proactive strategy, the local Hillel and Ohio Jewish federations bought full-page ads in the student newspaper backing Israel. This semester, the Israel Action Committee also rolled out a Web site, Buckeyesforisrael.org.

A pro-Israel rally coordinated by the Columbus Jewish Federation will be staged this weekend at the city's Jewish Community Center, far from campus. Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, will address the rally, which Hurwitz expects to draw hundreds.

Officials from Amcha, which staged a protest rally outside the University of Michigan's divestment conference last year, say it is a mistake to downplay the event.

"We can't allow this message of hate to be stated without any response," said Joshua Chadajo, Amcha's executive director. "If the KKK were holding a conference on campus, would people say, 'Oh, let's just ignore it,' or would people say, 'We should speak out?'" he asked.

Silverman, of the Israel Action Committee, said she regrets Amcha's plans to hold a rally. "We're trying to create a culture of proactivity where we set the agenda."

But some say that keeping a coherent message isn't easy for the pro-Israel group.

Not everyone agrees on the issues, said David Kaplan, a senior involved with the Jewish Business Students Association and the Israel Action Committee. But, he said, "we don't want to become too soft or extremist."

Meanwhile, the Jewish community has received several signs of campus support.

"I assure you that the university has no intention of altering its current investment policies, and divestment has not been proposed and is not under consideration," Zuheir Sofia, chairman of Ohio State's board of trustees, wrote to Richard Weiland, board president of Ohio Jewish Communities, a state lobbying group.

Faculty and school officials say the university's Near Eastern studies department has remained untainted by politics. Cooperation between Jewish and Arab professors is said to be excellent.

But the conference has stirred elements of conflict. Organizers of the divestment conference have set up dummy Web sites to divert Internet surfers from the pro-Israel Web site to a pro-Palestinian one. And the Jewish studies department recently had its outdoor sign torn up — an incident the police currently are investigating.

Tamar Rudavsky, director of Ohio State's Melton Center for Jewish Studies, said the campus is polarized.

"What you don't have is the middle ground, people who are genuinely looking at both sides," she said. "That's the very thing we should have at the university, and that's what's missing." □

JEWISH WORLD

E.U. does damage control

A European leader reassured Jewish leaders after a poll showed more Europeans identify Israel as a threat to peace than any other country.

Romano Prodi, the E.U. commissioner, reassured the Anti-Defamation League and the World Jewish Congress in a meeting Tuesday in New York.

Prodi and the Jewish leaders agreed to organize a seminar in Brussels to address the issue.

Jews decry 'partial birth' ban

Jewish groups denounced President Bush's signature of a bill banning "partial birth" abortion.

Hadassah called the ban on the controversial late-term procedure "a chilling step in the ongoing assault on reproductive freedom." The National Council of Jewish Women and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism also condemned the signing of the bill into law on Wednesday.

Opponents of the ban are especially concerned that the ban does not exempt cases where the procedure is needed to preserve a woman's health.

Bush and others say the procedure is unnecessary and is never used to save lives.

Brouhaha over Shoah memorial

Another German firm may lose its part in the construction of Germany's new Holocaust memorial because of its ties to Zyklon B.

According to the Rheinische Post newspaper, Woermann Bauchemie GmbH may be relieved of its task of pouring the cement slabs for the memorial. The firm is a spinoff of Degussa, a company that lost its contract for the memorial because it partially owned the firm that supplied Zyklon B to Nazi death camps.

British Jews join birthright

Britain is planning to send up to 200 young adults to Israel on the first birthright Israel trip from the United Kingdom.

The United Jewish Israel Appeal trip will run from late December to early January. Birthright Israel has been running trips from the United States and Canada since 1999.

Maryland to up Israel ties

The governor of Maryland is expected to agree to increase trade and defense ties with Israel.

Robert Ehrlich left Tuesday on a five-day trip to Israel, where he will meet with several top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He also is slated to visit a Hadassah hospital to see what Maryland can learn from Israel's handling of trauma patients, and to meet with Seth Mandell, the father of a teenager and Maryland native who was beaten to death in 2001 by a Palestinian assailant.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel goes on the offensive at the United Nations, for first time

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — After dodging bullets at the United Nations for half a century, Israel has decided to switch tactics.

For the first time, the Jewish state introduced its own resolution in a General Assembly committee, voicing concern for Israeli children living under the threat of Palestinian terrorism.

"Until now we were only playing defense. Now we are playing offense," said Ambassador Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.

Introduced Monday, Israel's resolution comes in the wake of an Egyptian-sponsored resolution concerning Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation.

It also comes as Israel fights off several Arab and European attempts at the United Nations to force Israel to make concessions.

Two major efforts under way have materialized the fears that Israel's U.N. ambassador, Dan Gillerman, expressed in a conference call to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations about a month ago.

One was a Syrian-sponsored resolution at the Security Council — whose resolutions are binding — to force Israel to stop building its West Bank security fence.

That resolution was vetoed by the United States. It later passed in the General Assembly — whose resolutions are not binding — by a 144-4 vote.

The second was a Russian resolution circulated last week pressing for implementation of the "road map" peace plan. Pro-Israel activists say that would usurp U.S. influence and empower the United Nations, which is seen as biased toward the Palestinians.

In what has become an annual ritual, the General Assembly passes nearly 20 anti-Israel resolutions, almost by rote. Israel chose to respond to the recent Egyptian resolution because it represented a relatively new addition to the batch.

Israeli officials who tried to lobby diplomats against the other resolutions were told to give up, since the resolutions were so ingrained in the system as to be almost automatic, Mekel explained.

Israel's recent resolution adopts similar language to the Egyptian one, even invoking the same U.N. conventions.

For example, the Egyptian resolution expresses concern over the "continuous grave deterioration of the situation of Palestinian children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and about the severe consequences of the continuing Israeli assaults and sieges on Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps, resulting in the dire humanitarian crisis."

Israel's version expresses concern for the "continuous grave threat to Israeli children from Palestinian terrorism, and about the severe consequences of continuing terrorist attacks by Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade directed against Israeli civilians, including children."

"We are presenting them, we believe, with a moral dilemma," Mekel said. "We are putting them to the test."

The United Nations is likely to fail that test, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

"For dead Jews they have sympathy," he said, but when it comes to protecting living Israelis from harm, "a lot of them will not likely support" the bill. It will "expose the hypocrisy of the United Nations," Hoenlein added.

But Mekel wants to give the assembly a chance.

Israelis long have reacted to the United Nations with disdain, with some considering it an empty and silly institution that is antagonistic toward the Jewish state.

But, Mekel said, "we believe the time has come" to "take an active stance, and that is what we are doing."

In coming weeks, Israel will send letters to U.N. members asking for support on the resolution, and the Jewish state also will reach out to American Jewish groups. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel, wary of European bias, finds confirmation in a new poll

By Philip Carmel

PARIS (JTA) — If Israelis needed confirmation of their fear that Europeans have a negative image of the Jewish state, a recent poll has provided it.

The poll, part of an opinion survey conducted for the European Commission called "Iraq and Peace in the World," shows that more Europeans consider Israel a threat to world peace than any other country.

Offered a simple yes or no response to the question of whether certain countries threaten world peace, 59 percent of Europeans answered in the affirmative about Israel — placing it at the top of a list that included Iraq, Syria, Iran and Pakistan, among others.

Jewish organizations and the European Union plan to organize a seminar to examine why so many E.U. citizens consider Israel a threat to world peace, the European Commission said Tuesday.

Among the 15-member European Union, only Italy gave Israel a score lower than 50 percent.

The highest negative scores came from the Netherlands at 74 percent, Austria at 69 percent and Luxembourg at 66 percent.

Following Israel on the list of threatening states were Iran, North Korea and the United States — each with a 53 percent response. Iraq got 52 percent and Afghanistan 50 percent.

Questions have been raised about the poll's statistical veracity, since considerably fewer than 500 people were interviewed in smaller states like the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

In addition, the poll's margin of error rises considerably — as the pollsters, EOS Gallup Europe, freely admit — when the results hover around the 50 percent mark.

The European Union initially attempted to downplay the poll's significance.

Many Israeli and Jewish leaders reacted with undisguised anger to the poll. Some of the strongest criticism came from the California-based Simon Wiesenthal Center.

"These shocking poll results defy logic and demonstrate a racist flight of fancy that only proves that a systematic campaign vilifying Israel by European institutions, leaders and the media has embedded anti-Semitism more deeply within European society than in any other period since the end of World War II," the center's dean, Rabbi Marvin Hier, said.

Such results should disqualify the European Union from any future role in the Middle East peace process, he added.

Similar reaction came from the Israeli mission to the European Union in Brussels, which said in a statement that Israel was "not only saddened but outraged" by the findings. "Europeans appear to be blind to the sufferings of Israeli victims" of terrorism.

The statement also criticized the manner and background in which the poll question had been asked, pointing out that "those who ask biased questions should face the consequences resulting from the biased responses they receive."

The survey, conducted among more than 7,500 people representing all 15 E.U. member states, principally dealt with European opinion regarding the aftermath of the U.S.-led war in Iraq and its implications for the European Union.

It found, for example, that some 68 percent of Europeans

believe military intervention in Iraq was "unjustified," with Denmark the only country in the bloc to support intervention.

The findings also show widespread support for E.U. involvement in the reconstruction of Iraq and for increased European input in the Middle East peace process, which 81 percent of respondents supported.

In the states where opposition to the war was strongest, respondents generally didn't perceive Israel's neighbors as threats to world peace.

This finding is particularly marked in the case of Greece, which gave considerably lower scores than the rest of its European partners for countries such as Iran, Syria, Libya and North Korea.

Conversely, 88 percent of Greeks saw the United States as a threat to world peace, compared to 60 percent of Greeks who said the same about Israel.

In an interview Sunday with the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom referred to the tendency in the poll to place European Middle East policy within a wider geopolitical context.

"This isn't necessarily a matter of anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian; it's a much broader issue of expressing views different from the U.S., to establish itself as a power," Shalom said of the European Union and the poll's findings.

Nevertheless, European leaders were worried that the poll reflected a negative image of Israel and Jews in Europe.

European Commission President Romano Prodi said Monday that he was "very disturbed" by the findings, which he said reflected "neither the view nor the policy" of the European Union.

The results "prove the existence of a preconception which should be condemned without hesitation," Prodi's office quoted him as saying.

Italy, which holds the rotating E.U. presidency, was quick to condemn the poll. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said the results had emanated from "an ambiguous question."

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi personally called his Israeli counterpart, Ariel Sharon, to express what his spokesman said was "surprise and indignation."

E.U. leaders called the poll question deficient in that Israel was the only option for respondents to blame for the Middle East conflict — something the European Jewish Congress also noted.

"By singling out Israel as representing the Middle East as a whole and excluding any mention of the Palestinians, those who commissioned the survey knew exactly what they were looking for," the EJC said in a statement. "As any pollster knows, 'the answer lies in the question.'"

The Palestinian Authority had been left out of the poll "because it is not a state," according to a European Commission spokesman. □

Ministers to go to Washington

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Two senior Israeli Cabinet ministers will be in Washington next week to explain Israeli policies on the Palestinians.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz will meet with his U.S. counterpart, Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser.

Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will appear in Congress to explain budget cuts designed to revive Israel's economy. □