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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. backs backdoor agreements

The Bush administration has decided to encourage unofficial Israeli-Palestinian peace proposals to break the diplomatic impasse.

An administration official said the new policy was reflected in Secretary of State Colin Powell's praise for the "Geneva accord" and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's support for the People's Voice grassroots petition — two recent, unofficial peace plans.

The statements of support roiled Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government, which has denounced the plans as unauthorized and unduly concessionary.

The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told JTA that the Bush administration remained committed to the "road map" peace plan. But, frustrated with the lack of diplomatic movement, "We're sending signals encouraging projects such as these, where parties — not the parties, but parties — are talking about the issues," the official said. "Maybe these discussions are one way to get back into it."

U.N.: Fence to disrupt many lives

Israel's security barrier would disrupt the lives of 600,000 Palestinians, a U.N. report said.

The U.N. report said the fence as planned would put about 15 percent of the West Bank on the Israeli side.

Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the U.N. figures "nonsense," saying that no more than 20,000 Arabs would be affected, unless Jerusalem's Arabs were included.

Arafat offers olive branch

Yasser Arafat offered Israel an olive branch as the Palestinian Authority Parliament approved a new Cabinet.

"We do not deny the right of Israelis to live in security alongside the Palestinian people in their own independent state. Let us end the cycle of fighting," Arafat said on Wednesday in an address that dwelled on Israeli military crackdowns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The speech made no mention of Palestinian terrorism.

Dore Gold, an adviser to the Israeli prime minister, rejected the call as insincere. "You can't hold an olive branch in one hand and a ticking bomb in the other," Gold said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Qurei's new P.A. Cabinet approved, but Israel expects few breakthroughs

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ahmed Qurei pledged to stand tough. He pledged to insist that his man control the Palestinian Authority's myriad security services.

But when all was said and done, the 26-member government that the P.A. prime minister put together left P.A. President Yasser Arafat firmly in control of the security services — much to the chagrin of Israel and the United States, who fear Arafat will continue to foil moves to end violence and make peace.

The Palestinian legislative council approved the Cabinet on Wednesday.

In an address to the council, Qurei urged an end to armed "chaos" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of efforts to put peacemaking with Israel back on track.

"It is not acceptable to any of us to see the chaos of weapons and shelling among the public," Qurei said.

But the one who should be proudest is Arafat: Despite all the obstacles, he proved once again that no one can challenge his near-absolute rule in the Palestinian Authority.

Qurei had threatened to quit if his favorite, Nasser Youssef, wasn't appointed interior minister and given extensive powers over security.

But Arafat vetoed Youssef's appointment. In the end, the new interior minister will be Hakam Balawi, a PLO veteran and Arafat favorite who is not expected to take serious steps to crack down on terrorism and impose order on the Palestinians' chaos of security services and armed militias.

In addition, the security organs are subordinate to the national security council. And who chairs that council? Again, Arafat.

Arafat spoke to the Parliament on Wednesday before Qurei.

"We do not deny the right of Israelis to live in security alongside the Palestinian people in their own independent state. Let us end the cycle of fighting," Arafat said in an address that dwelled on Israeli military crackdowns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip but made no mention of Palestinian terrorism.

Dore Gold, an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, rejected the call as insincere.

"You can't hold an olive branch in one hand and a ticking bomb in the other," Gold said.

However, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said that if Qurei is serious about cracking down on terrorism, Israel would be willing to work with him toward peace.

What happened to Qurei? Why did he give in to Arafat? Why didn't he simply give the keys back to Arafat, as his predecessor Mahmoud Abbas did in September after just 129 days in office?

Qurei did not offer an explanation. He merely issued a statement saying he had reached an agreement "on a formula to unify the work of the security services . . . to fulfill all the obligations to end chaos and achieve security."

Qurei apparently understood that for the time being, nothing could be done in the Palestinian Authority without Arafat. He would not repeat the mistake of Abbas, who challenged Arafat in his first week in office in a famous speech at the June 4 summit in Aqaba, Jordan.

"The dilemma of every Palestinian leader is between meeting the national consensus and pleasing the Americans and the Israelis," Guy Bechor, of the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, told JTA. Abbas "made a clear-cut choice. He chose a dialogue with

MIDEAST FOCUS

Iran admits to nuke breach

Iran admitted that it didn't comply with international rules on nuclear nonproliferation.

After a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had separated uranium and enriched plutonium, Iranian officials said their breaches of nonproliferation rules had been minor.

Bibi: Hunker down in Iraq

The United States should plan for a long-term stay in Iraq, Benjamin Netanyahu said.

"It's going to take longer than a matter of months," the Israeli finance minister said Wednesday in Washington, where he briefed senators on Israel's economy.

The United States should not leave until solid democratic institutions are in place, Netanyahu said.

Peacenik backs Likud

The author of a recent Israeli-Palestinian peace plan said Israelis must not return the left wing to power. Ami Ayalon, a former head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, who leads the People's Voice for Peace grass-roots campaign, sent a letter to top members of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Likud Party urging them to accept a peace proposal he formulated with Palestinian intellectual Sari Nusseibeh.

Ayalon also said the Likud should stay in power, since it alone has the clout to uproot Israeli settlements from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

News agency files last story

Itim, Israel's domestic news agency, folded. An acronym for Israeli Press Cooperative, Itim was founded in 1950 as a joint venture by Israeli daily newspapers, but was \$440,000 in debt.

The agency's last story, filed Tuesday night, was on the municipal elections in Eilat, the Jerusalem Post reported.



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America and Israel, ignored Arafat and the internal scene — and paid the price."

Bechor, author of a "Who's Who" guide to the Palestinian Authority, said he believes Qurei's Cabinet will last much longer than Abbas' did.

Shalom Harari of the Interdisciplinary Center, a former Arab affairs adviser at the Defense Ministry, said Qurei is better equipped for the task than Abbas but will face the same dilemmas.

"Qurei is much more sophisticated," Harari said. "He knows how to maneuver in Palestinian politics. Precisely because he is aware of the dilemma between the internal necessities and outside pressures, he may be more successful."

The new Cabinet includes a majority of Arafat loyalists.

"Our top priority is to release all our prisoners from Israel, lift the siege imposed on our people, halt the construction of the separation fence and settlements, and open new horizons for the peace process," Qurei said this week.

That statement was a far cry from Abbas' speech in Aqaba, in which he denounced terrorism and called for the renewal of peace talks with Israel. Qurei so far has refrained from strong anti-terrorist messages and still hopes to reach a general cease-fire without alienating Palestinian terrorist groups.

Qurei enjoys a number of advantages over Abbas, analysts say:

- Arafat likes him better and trusts him more.

- Unlike Abbas, who returned to the area from the Palestinian diaspora, Qurei is a resident of Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, and his wealthy family is deeply rooted in the West Bank. He thus has much more popular support than Abbas.

- As the former speaker of the Palestinian Parliament, Qurei is better acquainted with the labyrinth of internal Palestinian politics.

- As one of the architects of the Oslo Accords, Qurei knows the Israelis well.

- Israel and the United States have learned from Abbas' failure. Though they will continue to demand that terrorist organizations be dismantled, they will be more careful about putting pressure on the new P.A. Cabinet.

"Both Israel and the U.S. are now more aware of the limitations in their demand for democratization and dismantling of terrorist organizations as a precondition for talks," Bechor said. "When you combine a more sober American view and an Israel which is tired of terrorism and wants an arrangement, there is more than a 50 percent probability that this can work."

But, Bechor warned, "this demands creativity from both parties."

In any case, the obstacles ahead are considerable.

Tensions between Arafat and Qurei continue.

Neither Hamas nor Islamic Jihad has joined the Cabinet. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine also are not represented.

The Cabinet relies heavily on the old cadre of Fatah movement leaders, with the addition of representatives from several splinter groups. Therefore, it may be difficult to convince radical groups to lay down their arms.

Israel says it intends to renew contacts with the P.A. Cabinet as soon as it is approved, but Israel is unlikely to respond favorably to Qurei's main demands — a halt to settlement building in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a freeze on construction of the security barrier and a wholesale release of prisoners.

Israel's foreign minister said Sunday that the new P.A. government "will be judged by its actions," but, Shalom added, "Leaving security authority in Arafat's hands is not promising."

"If terrorism continues," said Harari of the Interdisciplinary Center, "then nothing will change."

That view was shared by former Defense Minister Moshe Arens.

In an interview with JTA, Arens made several observations about Israeli policy toward the Palestinians.

Though he said he is disappointed that Arafat maintains his control of the security forces, Arens suggested that Israel stop threatening Arafat.

"We should leave him alone, simply ignore him," Arens said. "When our ministers appear time and again and blame Arafat for every terrorist attack, this is a demonstration of lack of intelligence and is probably untrue. It is counterproductive because it shows lack of thinking. By magnifying his role, we only do him good service." □

JEWISH WORLD

Soros compares Bush to Nazis

Philanthropist and Holocaust survivor George Soros compared President Bush's slogans to those of the Nazis.

Soros told *The Washington Post* this week, "When I hear Bush say, 'You're either with us or against us,' it reminds me of the Germans," adding that it reminded him of the slogans such as "Der Feind hort mit" — "The enemy is listening" — which he said he heard growing up in occupied Hungary.

Soros made waves last week when, in a meeting first reported by JTA, he told the Jewish Funders Network that the policies of the U.S. and Israeli administrations are responsible for increased anti-Semitism.

Accord reached in plane tragedy

The families of the victims of an October 2000 plane accident will get millions of dollars in compensation from Ukraine.

The families of 78 passengers, most of them Israeli, will each receive several hundred thousand dollars in compensation from Ukraine for the plane accident.

The agreement comes more than two years after the plane was accidentally shot down by a Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile over the Black Sea. The plane was flying to Novosibirsk, Russia, from Israel when it was struck.

Court to rule on Pollard march

Israel's Supreme Court will rule on whether supporters of Jonathan Pollard should get a permit to march in Jerusalem.

Police wanted the supporters to curtail the march, which would take place Sunday during the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly, in order to prevent traffic jams.

Supporters of the Pollard march are arguing that police officials are allowing participants in the assembly to demonstrate through downtown Jerusalem on Monday.

Ten Commandments judge on trial

A trial got under way of an Alabama judge who refused to remove a Ten Commandments monument from a state building.

If Roy Moore, chief justice of Alabama's Supreme Court, is convicted of violating judicial ethics, he could face penalties ranging from fines and suspension to removal from office.

A federal court ordered the monument removed on the grounds that it violated the Constitution's ban on government promotion of religion.

The case became a cause celebre for Christian activists.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Non-Jews in Krakow help confer new status on city's Jewish history

By Carolyn Slutsky

KRAKOW, Poland (JTA) — Krakow used to be a mecca for Poland's Jews, a center of cosmopolitanism and Jewish life in what was Europe's most heavily Jewish country.

Now that there are few Jews left in Poland, Krakow still holds some Jewish allure, but for a very different group: With only about 200 Jews left in the city, Krakow has become a center for non-Jewish Poles interested in Judaism and Jewish life.

Students from all over the country come to Krakow's Jagiellonian University, the country's oldest, to study Jewish studies.

Approximately 150 students, few of them Jews, are enrolled in the university's Jewish studies program, studying the history and politics of the Jewish people in addition to Hebrew and Yiddish.

What's more, they're not only studying Jewish life in school; they're commemorating it with passion and vigor outside of the university.

Some of the students are members of the Polish/American/Jewish Alliance for Youth Action, an organization founded three years ago by a group of Americans and Poles interested in combating prejudice, intolerance and ignorance in Poland and among U.S. Jews. The group promotes dialogue among U.S. Jews and Poles and creates educational projects for the two communities.

Last month in Krakow, the group held an event honoring many of Krakow's 56 Righteous Gentiles — non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

The alliance's president, Dennis Misler, an American Jew who is in Krakow for a year to promote the group's programs, said he hopes that Polish and Jewish young people are coming together "to ensure that the future is free of the suspicions, prejudices and misunderstandings that too often manifested themselves in the past."

Maciej Kozłowski, Poland's former ambassador to Israel, also spoke at the event.

Most Jewish events in Krakow take place in Kazimierz, the historic Jewish quarter of the city where Steven Spielberg shot several scenes for "Schindler's List."

But the alliance's student members got permission from the city to hold their event honoring Righteous Gentiles — called "In Honor of Those Who Acted" — in one of Jagiellonian's main auditoriums, conferring special status on an evening that surpassed the often small, religious atmosphere of most Jewish-related gatherings in the city.

University Rector Franciszek Ziejka came, as did Tadeusz Jakubowicz, president of Krakow's Jewish community.

There are many reasons drawing non-Jews to the university's Jewish studies program. Young Poles who grew up after the fall of Communist rule often had little or no exposure to Judaism. Some of them see Judaism somewhat mystically, defined by an absence of Jews in the villages, towns and cities once full of Jews.

For others, such as Karolina Komorowska, whose great-grandmother was a Righteous Gentile, the family legacy of reaching out to Jews was passed through the generations, spurring her to learn the language and culture of the people her progenitor found it in her heart to rescue.

Maciek Zabierowski, a student involved in the alliance, said that the event honoring the Righteous Gentiles was "very fruitful because young people were given the opportunity to learn about real heroes. Events like 'In Honor of Those Who Acted' create possibilities for taking Polish-Jewish dialogue a step further by spreading knowledge about common history and mutual understanding."

In his remarks, the alliance's president reiterated the importance of honoring Righteous Gentiles and their impact on future generations of Jewish people.

In founding the alliance and engaging in Polish-Jewish dialogue, Misler said, he "learned that a country is neither bad nor good, but that the people within the country act as individuals and make their own individual choices."

Speaking of the Righteous Gentiles, Misler added, "May none of us ever be put to the test that they so magnificently passed." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Germany pins hopes on future as it marks pain of Jewish past

By Toby Axelrod

MUNICH (JTA) — The laying of the cornerstone for a new Jewish community center here, where Hitler attempted his failed coup in 1923, represents a milestone in postwar Jewish life in Germany.

The event, both solemn and joyful, marked the 65th anniversary of the Kristallnacht pogrom of Nov. 9-10, 1938, when hundreds of synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses were destroyed across Germany and Austria by Nazi-inspired thugs.

"Those who build, stay," Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Jewish community of Munich and Upper Bavaria, told some 700 guests Sunday under a tent at the construction site.

Recalling the terror of Kristallnacht, Knobloch, who survived the war in hiding, said, "The tears that I shed as a 6-year-old girl have never stopped."

Today, many Jews here still say they live with a packed suitcase always at the ready. But now, Knobloch said, she was ready to unpack her symbolic bags.

"Because today, exactly 65 years later, I have really come home," she said.

The event contrasted with what happened in Austria, where clashes erupted at a Vienna ceremony marking Kristallnacht's anniversary after protesters waved Palestinian flags and yelled anti-Israel slogans.

At the German commemoration, clergy and politicians from across the spectrum agreed that the building of a Jewish community center in the middle of the Bavarian capital was a sign of confidence in the future, despite recent scandals involving anti-Semitism in the Parliament and army, and despite the arrest in September of 14 neo-Nazis who allegedly planned to detonate a bomb at the ceremony.

"We can feel how contradictory the feelings and thoughts are on this day," German President Johannes Rau said, adding that it is the duty of Germans "to do everything possible to ensure that such things will never happen again." Then the day of remembrance "can also be a day of joy and optimism," Rau said.

As neighbors watched from windows and balconies, three small boys in yarmulkes placed memorial items in the triangular cornerstone, which was lowered into place at the construction site.

The sounds of the El Maleh Rachamim memorial prayer echoed across the tiled roof of the adjacent Munich City Museum.

In a tent at the construction site, the guests watched the event — which also was broadcast live on TV — on large video screens.

"We think of all those Jews who ever lived in Munich, we think of those Munich Jews who lost their lives in pogroms in the Middle Ages," Hans-Jochen Vogel, the former mayor of Munich, said in his speech dedicating the cornerstone.

Vogel, who as a boy watched his town's synagogue burn down before becoming a soldier in the Nazi army years later, said he — like many others — had failed to oppose the Nazi regime despite his own questions and doubts.

He said he had tried, since 1945, to learn from the past.

The new community center, with a synagogue, kindergarten, school and museum, is expected to meet the needs of a growing

population.

Since 1990, the number of Jews in Munich has doubled to 8,000. During that time, the overall Jewish population in Germany has tripled to 100,000, thanks to the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

Unlike many prewar Jewish venues, the center will not be located in an interior courtyard, out of view of the public.

The cost for the land and the complex is estimated at approximately \$82 million and will be covered by the Jewish community, the state of Bavaria, the semi-private Bavarian state trust, the city of Munich and private donations. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2006.

The event, which took place under sunny skies and with tight security, capped a day during which the names of Jews deported from Munich were read aloud at solemn gatherings across the city.

Munich's prewar Jewish population was about 9,000. Many fled, but an estimated 5,000 were deported and very few survived the Holocaust.

Speakers also condemned the recent anti-Semitic statements of Christian Democratic Union lawmaker Martin Hohmann, whose Oct. 3 speech comparing Jews in the Russian Revolution to Nazis has set the stage for his ejection from his party.

"Such unholy historical comparisons are the beginning — they lead in the end to deliberate falsification of history," said Edmund Stoiber, governor of Bavaria state and member of the Christian Democratic Union's sister party, the Christian Socialist Union.

Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said Germans are becoming dangerously accustomed to hate crimes and right-wing extremist views.

"Indifference makes it easier for right-wing, anti-Semitic arsonists to spread their views," Spiegel said. Hohmann's presence in Parliament should be unacceptable to everyone, not just members of minority groups, he said.

Incendiary statements are only the first step, Rau said. Those who relativize history "are placing explosives at the cornerstone of our society."

In fact, right-wing extremists had considered exploding 3.5 pounds of TNT at the construction site. The Federal Prosecutor's office recently confirmed reports that, in February, Jewish groups and Munich Mayor Christian Ude had received letters warning about violence if work continues on the Jewish community center.

Their plans were thwarted, but the news sent alarm through Germany's Jewish community, which also sees threats coming from Islamic extremists.

Members of a fundamentalist Islamic group who are on trial in Dusseldorf recently said they had been staking out Jewish venues in Berlin and Dusseldorf for possible attacks.

The dangers should not be overlooked, said Bernd Wagner, director of the Berlin-based Center for Democratic Culture. Though right-wing extremists and Islamic extremists normally do not cooperate, sometimes they join forces when it comes to their common enemy, the Jews, Wagner said in an interview.

Many German Jewish leaders said threats like the thwarted attack on the site of Munich's future Jewish community center do not shake their confidence.

"There are always some minorities who want to destroy everything, but the majority of the German population — and not just the government, is enjoying this event today," said Nathan Kalmanowicz, a vice president of Munich's Jewish community and a board member of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. □