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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon, Qurei to meet

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will meet his newly confirmed Palestinian counterpart within 10 days.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom announced Sharon's upcoming talks with Ahmed Qurei on Thursday and voiced hope for reviving the peace process.

"We have taken all the necessary steps to ensure this round of negotiations will start on the right foot," Shalom told *Army Radio*. "This government is a day old. We must see it is serious about moving toward peace."

On Wednesday, the Palestinian Authority Parliament ratified Qurei's Cabinet, which disappointed Israel and the United States because it leaves key security powers in the hands of P.A. President Yasser Arafat and his loyalists.

Moore is benched

Jewish groups praised the removal of an Alabama judge who refused to remove a Ten Commandments monument from a courthouse.

"It's a verification that the rule of law will prevail," Steven Freeman, director of legal affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, said Thursday of the State Court of the Judiciary decision to remove Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore from the bench.

Moore defied a court order to remove the monument, which was deemed an unconstitutional promotion of religion by the government.

Marc Stern, a lawyer for the American Jewish Congress, praised Alabama's legal establishment for its decision, but he remains concerned that Moore has gained enough popular support in the state to mount a serious challenge for Alabama governor or senator.

Pollard loses again

A U.S. judge rejected a claim by convicted spy Jonathan Pollard.

On Thursday, Judge Thomas Hogan dismissed a claim by Pollard, who was convicted of spying for Israel, that his previous lawyers did not do all they could to free him.

Hogan also denied a request by Pollard's lawyers to gain access to classified documents that could help his release.

Pollard, a former U.S. Navy analyst, is serving a life sentence in a U.S. jail.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Visits by Israeli politicians spark speculation on Sharon succession

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON (JTA)— Three possible candidates to succeed Ariel Sharon spent the week cultivating a constituency crucial to anyone seeking to become prime minister of Israel: the U.S. government.

One attribute Bush administration officials were seeking was a willingness to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Education Minister Limor Livnat all were in Washington this week for long-planned visits — but the coincidence of their arrival at a time when Sharon is in political trouble at home inevitably raised the issue of their future ambitions.

"There can be no doubt that they have that in mind," Israeli political analyst Yossi Alpher said of hopes for the premiership. "All three are serious contenders."

An ability to work well with Washington is considered an electoral asset in Israel. Discord between Washington and Jerusalem helped scuttle re-election bids by incumbents Yitzhak Shamir in 1992 and Netanyahu in 1999.

Sharon's policies vis-a-vis the Palestinians have not been well received in Washington recently, and the Bush administration's frustration with the lack of progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front is evident in its encouragement of independent peace negotiations.

That sentiment was affirmed by an administration official who noted last week's praise by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz for informal Israeli-Palestinian peace proposals.

The official said the administration was not worried that Israelis would perceive such support as interference because Israelis know they have a strong ally in the United States, and because Sharon is coming under domestic pressure to accelerate negotiations with the Palestinians.

Sharon's domestic popularity has suffered from influence-peddling allegations against his sons, the economic situation in Israel and increasing disquiet in the army with perceived hard-line policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Troubles at home spelled opportunity for the ministers here.

Livnat planned to meet Thursday with U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige and address the conservative Hudson Institute about the intersection between education and incitement to terror — a topic dear to conservatives in Israel and to some U.S. Jews whom Livnat might target for future fund raising.

Netanyahu also was burnishing his statesman's credentials, meeting Thursday with President Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice.

The showpiece of his visit was an appearance Wednesday before a group of senators, at which Netanyahu claimed credit for what he said was an emerging economic turnaround in Israel. He also thanked the United States for helping Israel out with loan guarantees.

Netanyahu came armed with a proposal for a rail link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea — the kind of grand economic vision he has used effectively throughout his political career. He stressed the plan would need U.S. financial support and left little doubt that he was the man to do it — as prime minister. A key element of his pitch was a pledge to include the Palestinians in any ensuing economic miracle.

And Netanyahu couldn't resist waxing nostalgic for his own 1996-1999 term as

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon sees anti-Semitism

Anger over Israel's crackdowns against Palestinians often is anti-Semitism, Ariel Sharon said.

Addressing Canadian Zionists in Jerusalem on Thursday, Israel's prime minister said those who deny Israel's right to self-defense deny its "birthright to exist." Sharon added, "Regrettably, we see this phenomenon among many nations in the world community, and I would say that this is a new form of anti-Semitism."

News of Israeli Arab arrests

Four Israeli Arabs are being held on suspicion of joining Hamas while on a pilgrimage to Mecca. On Thursday, the Shin Bet allowed publication of details in the summer arrests of the four, who study at a university in Amman, Jordan.

The four are suspected of having undergone weapons and explosives training in Saudi Arabia and of being assigned to collect intelligence in Israel that would facilitate suicide bombings.

Conviction in disco bombing

An Israeli court convicted the man who drove the suicide bomber to the Dolphinarium disco attack, which killed 21 people. On Thursday, the court said Mahmoud Na'adi ignored warning signs on June 1, 2001, of his passenger's intentions.

Israel freezes out its spokesman

The Israeli government refused to hire permanently the director of its press office. Danny Seaman, who has been acting director of the Government Press Office since the Palestinian intifada began, was turned down even though he was the only applicant when the permanent position was posted this summer, Ha'aretz reported Tuesday. Reports said he was passed over for the job because of his contentious relations with some foreign correspondents.



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Israeli prime minister. "You know how many terror bombings we had in the three years I was prime minister?" Netanyahu asked. "We had three."

Netanyahu also has been discussing investments in Israel with major U.S. Jewish contributors, another important constituency for those seeking the top office in Israel.

Mofaz is in the most sensitive position. The defense minister has been closely associated with Sharon government policies that have irked the Americans, including a proposal to build a security barrier that runs inside the West Bank and reticence to dismantle illegal settlement outposts.

One strategy for Mofaz has been to emphasize what Israel and the United States have in common.

In his meeting with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Monday, Mofaz raised Iran's nuclear ambitions — a conversation fortuitously timed for the day a U.N. agency criticized Iran for hiding evidence of uranium and plutonium enrichment.

"There is a concerted effort needed to stop or prevent an Iranian nuclear program," Mofaz told the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on Wednesday.

Validations of Israel's decades-long suspicions about the Iranian regime reinforce the Bush administration's post-Sept. 11 appreciation for Israeli prescience.

Mofaz and Rumsfeld also discussed Syria, another country on which Israel and the United States agree more than ever. Bush has said he understands Israel's recent bombing of suspected Palestinian terrorist camps in Syria, an unusual expression of support for an attack on another nation's territory.

Mofaz underscored that in his Washington Institute talk, saying, "I believe Syria is continuing to support and to bait terrorist activities against the State of Israel, and I will not be wrong to say Syria is a continuation of support against U.S. forces in Iraq."

Mofaz was planning to meet Rice, Powell and Vice President Dick Cheney on Thursday, where, observers said, Mofaz could expect less accord.

Powell and Rice have criticized Israel's security barrier, and Powell has expressed support for an unofficial Swiss-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian peace proposal that the Sharon government has criticized as unauthorized and unduly concessionary.

The Bush administration expects Israel to accelerate the peace process now that Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei is ready to present his new government, said David Makovsky, an analyst with the Washington Institute.

The collapse of P.A. Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas' government in September gave Israel a breather from U.S. aggravation over some Sharon policies, but the installation of another relatively moderate Palestinian will return peace negotiations to the forefront of Israel-U.S. relations.

"The message will be that they've been on vacation for two months; now school's back in session," Makovsky said.

With an eye to showing the kind of moderation that would win him a future election, Mofaz was expected to use the meetings to express readiness for a Qurei proposal for a cease-fire that would include Palestinian terrorist groups.

Speaking at the Washington Institute, Mofaz suggested Israel would not discourage the truce, and backed off from demands that P.A. President Yasser Arafat cede control of security — essentially the P.A. armed forces. Instead, he suggested that while Arafat's continued control of security was worrisome, he would judge Qurei more on how he dealt with Palestinian terrorist groups.

In a goodwill gesture, Mofaz last week lifted some restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank.

Ghassan Khatib, the labor minister in both the Abbas and Qurei governments, said another sign of goodwill would be a lifting of travel restrictions on Arafat, who has been marginalized by Israel and the United States because of his links to terrorism.

"You cannot expect the only Palestinian leader who can deliver the Palestinians into any serious process to stay under house arrest," Khatib said in a telephone interview from the West Bank.

Khatib said Qurei was hoping to co-opt Arafat by conceding security control to the president. Abbas quit partly because his attempts to circumvent Arafat failed.

"I believe that within the current situation, with the minimum level of tension between the prime minister and president, it is more likely this government will more efficiently fulfill its obligations," Khatib said. □

JEWISH WORLD

AMIA extradition denied

A former Iranian diplomat accused of helping bomb an Argentine Jewish center will not be extradited to stand trial.

A British judge ruled this week that there was not enough evidence to extradite Hadi Soleimanpour to Argentina.

The Iranian diplomat was arrested earlier this year in Britain for suspected involvement in the 1994 car bombing of the AMIA center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. Soleimanpour was Iran's ambassador to Argentina at the time of the attack.

Meanwhile, Argentina's Justice Ministry confirmed that suspicious Swiss bank accounts connected to former Argentine President Carlos Menem have been found, but none that connect Menem to a multimillion-dollar bribe he allegedly received from Iran to hinder a probe into the bombing.

Degussa back in on memorial

In a reversal, the company linked to supplying Zyklon B to Nazi camps will take part in building Germany's Holocaust memorial.

The panel overseeing the construction of the site decided to allow Degussa to continue working on Berlin's memorial, Wolfgang Thierse, the president of Germany's Parliament said Thursday.

The country's Jewish community reportedly opposed the decision.

Compromise on Pollard march

A compromise was reached over a march in Jerusalem in support of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard. The compromise route for Sunday's march came after an Israeli judge urged the two sides to find middle ground.

Pollard is serving a life sentence in a U.S. jail for spying on the United States on behalf of Israel.

The rally will take place on the first day of the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly, which runs through Nov. 19.

HIAS wants religious workers in

A Jewish group is seeking to ensure that the Dept. of Homeland Security allows foreign Jewish religious workers to enter the United States.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society said a misinterpretation of a statute by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, part of the Homeland Security Dept., may be preventing foreign religious workers from coming to the United States.

HIAS said the statute requires workers to have a relationship with a church, synagogue or mosque, but that many Jewish groups do not have relationships with synagogues because of the way U.S. Jewish groups operate.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

After years of effort, Italian rightist granted legitimacy of an Israel visit

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — An official visit to Israel later this month caps nearly a decade of effort by Italy's deputy prime minister to shed the jackboot image of his party's neo-fascist roots and fully emerge as a mainstream rightist leader.

Gianfranco Fini, head of the right-wing National Alliance party, is to visit Israel Nov. 23-26, less than a week after a scheduled visit to Italy by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Pier Fernando Casini, president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, is in Israel this week.

Italy currently holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is regarded as one of Israel's best friends in the union.

The Israeli Embassy in Rome said Fini will meet with Sharon, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, President Moshe Katsav and Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres.

He also will lay a wreath at Yad Vashem. Amos Luzzatto, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, will accompany him.

The trip will represent the culmination of a process that began in 1994 when Fini, then the leader of a fringe neo-fascist group called the Italian Social Movement, began pressing his party to move into the conservative mainstream.

The movement had been founded after World War II by loyalists of the defeated fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Fini himself once had described Mussolini as "the greatest statesman of the 20th century."

At a convention in January 1995, Fini formally proclaimed the Italian Social Movement's transformation into the National Alliance.

The convention condemned "every form of totalitarianism, racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism" and called for the building of an "Italy that is based on liberty and democratic values." It also recognized "the crucial historic role played by the anti-fascist movement in restoring democracy to Italy."

Jews, including Luzzatto, were slow to accept this change of direction and remained skeptical as Fini took steps to demonstrate his ideological turnaround.

Among other things, he paid homage at Auschwitz and other Holocaust sites, and last year he publicly apologized to the Jewish people for Italy's persecution of Jews under Mussolini, which began with anti-Semitic racial laws in 1938.

Fini also has thrown his support firmly behind Israel. Last week, for example, he backed the security barrier Israel is building in the West Bank. He also dismissed as "crazy" a recent E.U. poll showing that more Europeans consider Israel a threat to world peace than any other country.

The Israeli Embassy spokesman played down the historic significance of Fini's trip, saying Fini's visit was as Italy's deputy prime minister, not as head of a political party.

Israeli officials indicated two years ago that Jerusalem was willing to set aside longstanding objections and allow Fini to visit the Jewish state. At the time, however, Italian Jewish leaders cautioned against a trip.

Luzzatto's accompaniment of Fini indicates Italian Jews have accepted Fini.

Still, Jewish community spokesman Riccardo Pacifici cautioned, "it will be important to look out that the visit does not get manipulated, either by the government or by the left-wing opposition."

The announcement of Fini's trip came as a public opinion survey indicated that more than half of Italians feel little "sympathy" for Israel, 70 percent consider Israeli policy mistaken and a vast majority believe in Israel's right to exist. The poll, carried out on behalf of the Corriere della Sera newspaper and published Monday, indicated that one-third or less of the population knows the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

It also showed that about 20 percent of Italians harbor anti-Semitic sentiments.

"Disinformation about the reality of events and the consequent greater readiness to accept the most simplistic interpretation also appear to depend on anti-Jewish sentiment and, in turn, contribute to shape it and reinforce it," wrote sociologist Renato Mannheimer, who oversaw the survey. □

Patience and wisdom needed for Sept. 11 funds administrator

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Kenneth Feinberg knew that handing out federal money to victims of terrorism would at times demand the wisdom of Solomon. He didn't anticipate needing the listening skills of a rabbi.

"I vastly underestimated the degree of emotion that would be exhibited by these families," the special master of the victims' compensation fund for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks told JTA. "I just kept listening, and over a period of time, came to grips with the emotional horror exhibited by these survivors."

Congress gave Feinberg little to go on when he became special master in 2001 — how much a victim earned was one consideration, and so were collateral sources of income like life insurance. But in the end, paying families for the loss of their loved one was a tough chore — one made even harder when some family members accused him of demeaning the memory of their relative.

He sought guidance, at times from Jewish texts at the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conservative movement's rabbinical school in New York.

"This was not a designed research process," he said in an interview. "It was an effort for me to try and come to grips with how you value life."

The texts weren't too helpful, Feinberg repeatedly told an audience in Washington last week at an event sponsored by JTS — but eventually he found guidance in Leviticus 27:2-7.

"Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When a man explicitly vows to the Lord the equivalent for a human being, the following scale shall apply," the passage begins.

It describes how to allocate contributions to a place of worship: Men aged 20 to 60 years should give 50 silver shekels, women of those ages should give 30 shekels. Younger and older men and women give less.

The passage helped Feinberg explain to victims that he is not calculating the value of their loved one's life, only what they likely would have earned through their lifetime.

"God does not suggest us to determine the value, the objective worth, of human beings," he told the audience. "We turn to God alone, I guess through Leviticus, to determine our self worth, our potential to blossom and our ability to flourish, which is endless."

Feinberg seems, at times, frustrated by his burden.

Establishing the first compensation program in the country's history may have helped circumvent lawsuits, Feinberg said, but it also raised questions. Are victims of the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center worthier of federal dollars than those who died in the 1993 attack, or the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City?

"This problem of a free society carving out for special treatment a discrete group of beneficiaries is very challenging and problematic," he told the audience. "Can we discern equitably and morally that a special group of victims gets compensated by the public and not other people?"

In the end, the average award for the families of men and women who died in the attacks is \$1.7 million.

Compensation for physical injuries were wide-ranging, from \$500 for a broken finger to \$7.8 million for a man with

third-degree burns over 87 percent of his body.

Victims and their heirs have until late December — two years from the fund's creation — to submit requests, and Feinberg anticipates an onslaught of new claims in the next two months.

There have been unforeseen issues along the way. With so few of the young victims having wills, families have squabbled over the money. Fiances have sought compensation from the fund despite not being legally married to the victim. Same-sex partners of victims have done the same.

"I am not Solomon, or anything like Solomon," he said in his speech. "I try to work it out the way a rabbi would work it out and say, 'Let's be reasonable.'"

The compensation fund is expected to shut its doors in June, and Feinberg said he plans a long vacation, followed by a return to his work as an attorney and mediator. □

Ohio tax payers may get the bill for recent Palestinian conference

By Daniel Newman
The New Standard

COLUMBUS (JTA) — Security was tight at Ohio State University on Sunday — and it wasn't because of the football game against Michigan State.

Six police officers, the Ohio Union internal security personnel and a considerable force of private security staff were brought on campus to protect participants at the Palestine Solidarity Movement conference, pro-Israel counter-protesters and the general student body.

The pro-Israel protesters "have created the need for security outside" said Bill Hall, OSU's vice president of student affairs.

Just before sunset last Friday, the two groups of protesters clashed at the corner of 15th and High streets, the traditional gateway into the university. The voices got louder on both sides and the Jewish group attempted to drown out the speakers at the pro-Palestinian rally.

"That's when I decided that I needed more people for a buffer zone between the two groups," Hall said. "It's the aggression and passion that is causing the additional security."

Hall made clear that the money for security comes from a fund allocated for occasions like these.

"There's a point when you wait too long and things get out of hand, and you can't get it back under control without an injury or them using some kind of force," Hall said.

Amcha-The Coalition for Jewish Concerns, based in New York, is one of a half dozen groups that organized a protest rally outside the Ohio Union. Shmuel Herzfeld, the group's vice president, took issue with Hall's statements.

"We brought our own security, which has a working relationship with the Ohio State campus police," Herzfeld said.

Asked about the claim that Amcha's presence required more security and cost Ohio tax payers, Herzfeld said, "The tax payer's money should not be spent. It shouldn't have to be spent for us to voice our outrage to counteract evil, and it should not be used right now inside the Ohio Union supporting hate speech."

Hall would not say how much conference security would end up costing the university, but independent estimates from security personnel on location put the tab at \$8,000 to \$10,000. □