

## IN THE NEWS

### Five killed in Gaza raid

Israeli troops killed five Palestinians in a hunt for Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

The army said troops who stormed Abassan village outside Khan Yunis on Sunday opened fire on a Hamas fugitive who tried to flee. Explosives he was carrying blew up, killing him and a woman nearby.

Palestinian medics confirmed the Hamas man's death and said his 65-year-old mother also had been killed. Two other terrorists and an unidentified fifth man were among the casualties.

### Mistaken identity

Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement apologized after its gunmen killed an Israeli Arab they thought was a Jew.

George Khouri, a 20-year-old Christian student from Jerusalem, was shot dead while jogging in the capital city's French Hill neighborhood last Friday night.

The Al-Aksa Brigade, the terrorist wing of Fatah, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying initially that it had killed a Jewish settler. [Story, pg. 3]

### Reconstructionists back gay marriage

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association endorsed civil marriages for same-sex couples.

At its annual convention last week in Wyncote, Pa., the rabbinical arm of the Reconstructionist movement unanimously approved a resolution urging "full and equal civil marriage for gay men and lesbians."

Reconstructionism, which according to the National Jewish Population Survey represents 3 percent of the 4.3 million religiously active Jews nationwide, was the first movement to ordain gay rabbis in 1984.

In 1993, the movement approved religious rituals for gay unions. The Reform movement also allows gay commitment ceremonies and backs gay civil weddings.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Bush, once reluctant on sanctions, prepares for tough line with Syria

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush is ready to impose tough sanctions on Syria because of its support for terrorism, its failure to secure international borders and its weapons of mass destruction programs — all elements that threaten not only Israel, but the United States, too.

Bush reviewed the text of an announcement of sanctions on March 16, and U.S. officials expect an announcement within days. The sanctions are likely to be tougher than initially thought and will probably include a ban on oil trade.

The Bush administration's deepening involvement in the Middle East has led it to embrace sanctions legislation that it once reviled. And Syria is about to be sidelined by the resistance to change that just three years ago made Syria's Assad dynasty a bulwark of Arab nationalism celebrated in the Arab world.

The Syria Accountability Act may have been framed by some of Israel's best friends in Congress to rein in a threat to the Jewish state, but it is about to become a reality because of the threat Syrian recalcitrance poses to U.S. interests in the region.

The legislation, which Congress passed in November and which was signed into law by President Bush on Dec. 12, requires the president to report to Congress on how to implement the sanctions.

Instead of dragging out the report until a June deadline, as he first indicated he would do, Bush now appears set to move ahead and implement the sanctions this week.

"It's important to the United States that

Syria look at the situation; that Syria understand that there is a changed circumstance in the world, in the region; that Syria stop its support for terrorism," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said within hours of the news of the March 11 suicide bombings in Madrid.

"If Syria chooses to ignore all those facts and ignore the positions that we and others have taken, then there's not much prospect for our relationship," he said.

The implication was clear: In the war against terrorism, Syria can no longer play both sides.

"It's much more about America than about Israel now," said one official in a pro-Israel group who asked not to be named. "It's about the war on terror and how free countries will deal honestly with repressive dictatorships."

Syria has failed to fully meet any of the provisions under the act that might have averted punitive measures: a crackdown on Palestinian terrorist groups under Syrian control; a pullout from Lebanon; an end to weapons of mass destruction programs; and the securing of its border with Iraq.

Bush aides who suggested just weeks ago that the president would seek to water down the sanctions in the legislation now tell friends in Congress and Jewish community officials that Bush probably will go for the tougher sanctions among six outlined in the measure.

The legislation mandates an immediate ban on trade in "dual-use items" — material that could be used for weapons manufacturing — and allows Bush to choose two from a

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menu of six other sanctions.

Among them are three tough economic sanctions: A ban on U.S. investment in Syria, at a time when U.S. oil companies have expressed interest in exploring the country for reserves; a ban on U.S. exports to Syria; and a freeze on Syrian assets in the United States.

"They're telling us they're going to choose at least one economic sanction," a senior congressional aide told JTA.

That's likely to mean an end to the contracts of oil explorer ConocoPhillips, which Syrian officials say is the single-largest U.S. company now in Syria. The Syrian ambassador to Washington, Imad Moustapha, says British, Russian and French companies are already bidding to replace the contracts.

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The other three possible sanctions reduce diplomatic relations, restrict the movement of Syrian diplomats in the United States and restrict Syrian access to U.S. airspace.

U.S. officials emphatically have counted on recalling the freshly appointed U.S. ambassador to Syria, Margaret Scobey. The other two possible measures are largely symbolic, given Syria's small representation here and the low frequency of Syrian flights to the United States.

The measure was pushed forward in Congress last April by U.S. Reps. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, (R-Fla.), the chairwoman of the Middle East subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee.

Engel had called for years for punitive measures against Syria because it harbored Palestinian terrorist groups and actively backed Hezbollah in south Lebanon, even after Israel's withdrawal in May 2000.

Initially, Bush administration officials, especially Secretary of State Colin Powell, balked at the act.

They saw it as hindering their efforts to bring Syria on board the effort to reconstruct Iraq. Powell flew to Damascus a year ago to meet with Syrian President Bashar Assad and elicited commitments from him to crack down on terrorists and secure the border with Iraq, then newly occupied by the U.S.-led coalition.

Assad failed to do just about everything he promised. He nominally shut down Palestinian terrorist offices, but effectively allowed them to function. Security on the border with Iraq was sporadic at best.

It was a slap in the face to Powell. Assad's failure to act cornered the administration, and it could no longer ignore legislation that was becoming overwhelmingly popular in Congress.

Bush signed the act on a Friday night, the time the administration reserves for activities it would rather not share with the public, and a White House statement on the subject implied that the step was being taken reluctantly.

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If that was a signal to Syria that it had time to catch up with the requirements to avoid the sanctions, Assad was not listening.

Officials at the State Department — who had been unenthusiastic about embracing any congressional act that tied their hands — gave up on the Syrians in January, when they confirmed initial intelligence reports that Syrian relief planes returning from Iranian earthquake zones in December were loaded with weapons destined for Hezbollah.

After that, one State Department official said, everything the Syrians promised was taken "with a grain of salt."

After learning of the arms run, Powell dropped his attempts to contain the act's proponents in the administration.

Israel, of course, is pleased with the turn of events.

"I think the time is right," Effi Eitam, the Israeli housing minister, told JTA. "At a time when Syria is more and more isolated, when America is trying to establish a chain of pro-Western regimes — Iraq, Israel, Jordan — it will reduce support for Hezbollah among the Lebanese."

Now, with the Madrid bombing — and partial U.S.-European rapprochement on Iraq — the Syrians are likely to lose European support, which

could have provided an insurance policy of sorts against the U.S. sanctions. The Europeans have suspended talks on a trade agreement with Syria.

Moustapha said the United States had more to lose than Syria, and predicted that Syria's trade with other countries would make up any losses from the U.S. sanctions.

He said the Syrian-U.S. intelligence relationship had deteriorated in the months since Bush signed the act because of U.S. "elements who feel uncomfortable with Syria."

U.S. officials have said Syrian intelligence was key in preventing potentially lethal Al-Qaida attacks in the months after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The Syrian ambassador said the sanctions act was counterproductive at a time when, he said, Syria is working with Egypt and Saudi Arabia to resuscitate a pan-Arab peace initiative to Israel.

Arab leaders have suggested their land-for-recognition initiative would help goad the Palestinians to take measures against terrorism that would bring the sides back to negotiations.

"You cannot have peace if you seek to ostracize one party," Moustapha said.

The problem the Syrian regime faces is how radically it can reverse decades of support for anti-Israel rejectionists, said Stephen P. Cohen, a scholar with the Israel Policy Forum.

"It may take the Syrians to the area where they are questioning themselves how much further can they go," Cohen said. "I'm sure that is being discussed there at this time." ■

The State Dept. learned that Syrian relief planes returning from earthquake zones in Iran were loaded with weapons destined for Hezbollah.

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## THIS WEEK

## MONDAY

■ Maimonides experts from around the world mark the scholar's 800th yearzeit in New York on Sunday through Tuesday. They are discussing how Maimonides' views of religious law, philosophy, science and medicine impacted the Jewish world. New York University and Yeshiva University are co-hosting the event.

■ A weeklong festival of Jewish culture continues in Vienna through Friday. Called "TschikTschak" — Hebrew for "fickety-split" — it includes performances, exhibitions, film presentations and symposia.

■ Nearly 2,000 young Jewish leaders from North America are in Washington through Tuesday for the United Jewish Communities' Washington 14 Conference. Attendees are hearing from top U.S., Israeli and Jewish political, media and community figures, and are discussing critical issues affecting the Jewish community with their representatives on Capitol Hill. Insiders say activists will lobby Congress on Tuesday to seek federal dollars from the Homeland Security for the protection of Jewish sites.

## WEDNESDAY

■ Leading scholars meet at Brandeis University for a two-day conference on the "new anti-Semitism." The scholars coming to Waltham, Mass., include Germany's Dan Diner, Israel's Arieh Kochavi and American Bernard Lewis. The scholars will tackle such questions as whether Israel's existence sparked a new chapter in anti-Semitism and if anti-Zionism is a guise for anti-Semitism.

## THURSDAY

■ The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations holds its annual leadership day in Washington. The group will meet with Bush administration officials and U.S. senators. Conference officials are expected to address the U.S.-Israel relationship, Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace and "the hijacking of the U.N." by Arab countries.

■ The United Jewish Communities holds a conference call to approve overseas allocations. The UJC's board of trustees is expected to endorse a deal that aims to boost overseas funds and maintain the 75-25 split in allocations between the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, respectively.

## FRIDAY

■ The Israeli group Amishav, which seeks descendants of Jews around the world, holds a seminar in Madrid through Sunday for descendants of Jews in Spain and Portugal who converted to Christianity to avoid the Inquisition. Some 50 participants are expected.

## Terrorists mistakenly kill Arab

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If ever there were a poster boy for the tragically blurred borders of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, George Khouri is it.

Palestinian terrorists gunned down the 20-year-old student as he jogged through the dark streets of Jerusalem's French Hill neighborhood on Friday night. The Al-Aksa Brigade, the terrorist wing of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, boasted that it had killed a Jewish "settler."

But the claim quickly turned to shame when it became clear that the victim was in fact Arab, the scion of an Israeli Christian Arab family long linked with Palestinian nationalism.

"Mistakes happen. We consider George a martyr for the cause," a spokesman from the Al-Aksa Brigade told Israel's Channel 10 television station on Sunday.

Arafat aides phoned the victim's father, civil-rights lawyer Elias Khouri, to apologize.

It wasn't the first time the family, despite its support for the Palestinian cause, has suffered from Palestinian terrorism. The dead man's grandfather was killed in 1975 by a bomb that terrorists planted in downtown Jerusalem.

Though he reiterated his support for the Palestinian cause, Elias Khouri had harsh words for Palestinian terrorist groups and, indirectly, for Arafat.

"The Al-Aksa Brigade are individuals who are trying to impose their way on everyone," Khouri said, according to Ha'aretz. "This act was carried out by a group that undermines the issue of Palestinian justice, and harms the Palestinian interest and takes it back years."

In veiled criticism of Arafat, Khouri added, "Fatah today is a crumbling movement that has no leader. The chaos in the movement does not help the Palestinian cause. I hope that this case will awaken the Palestinian public from its tranquility to say its word."

There was political argumentation of a different sort in the Israeli capital on

Sunday, as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened fellow Likud Party ministers in a bid to win their support for his plan for Israeli disengagement from the Palestinians.

Likud endorsement of the plan, which entails removal of most Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and some in the West Bank, is important for Sharon's credibility ahead of an upcoming visit to Washington to seek the support of President Bush.

But the Israeli prime minister will have to do some last-minute maneuvering, given that seven Likud ministers are opposed to the unilateral disengagement plan and another two are undecided.

Media reports in Israel said that Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is second only to Sharon among conservative leaders in Israel, wants Washington to rule out any Palestinian "right of return" to Israel — barring Palestin-

ian refugees and their descendants from automatically becoming citizens of the Jewish state — in exchange for the Israeli withdrawal.

But the Bush administration is unlikely to place too many demands on the Palestinian Authority at this stage: U.S. officials fear that the authority might collapse in the wake of an Israeli troop withdrawal from Palestinian-populated territory, paving the way for a takeover of those areas by radical Palestinian Islamic groups.

Already, Hamas and other radical groups are staking claims in Gaza, prompting frequent Israeli anti-terror sweeps.

On Sunday, three terrorists and two bystanders were killed in an Israeli army raid outside the Khan Yunis refugee camp, in southern Gaza. One of the bystanders was the wife of a local Hamas chief, who was killed along with her husband when he set off a suicide bomb-belt as troops closed in.

"We have become blinded by hate," veteran Palestinian politician Ziyad Abu Ziyad told Israel Radio. "Who knows where it will lead." ■

The Al-Aksa Brigade thought the Jerusalem jogger was a Jew, so they killed him. 'Mistakes happen,' the terrorists later said.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Abdullah brings concerns to Sharon

Jordan's King Abdullah voiced concerns about Israel's West Bank security barrier in a secret meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Abdullah flew to Israel on March 18 for the meeting on Sharon's Negev ranch.

Abdullah told Sharon that construction of the fence could cause Palestinians to move to Jordan. Abdullah also expressed concerns about Israel's plans to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, telling Sharon it must be the start of a "comprehensive Israeli withdrawal" and not a tactical move to transfer settlers to the West Bank, the Jordanian news agency Petra reported.

### Sharon woos Likud ministers

Ariel Sharon sought the endorsement of 13 Likud Cabinet members for his plan for Israeli disengagement from the Palestinians.

Sunday morning's meeting came as the Israeli prime minister prepared for a visit to Washington to present his disengagement plan to U.S. President Bush.

Backing by the Likud Party is important for Sharon's credibility, but so far seven Likud ministers oppose the removal of settlements entailed in the plan, and another two are undecided.

### Israeli tank flips; Palestinians hurt at protest

Four Israeli soldiers were injured over the weekend when Palestinians detonated a bomb near their tank in the Gaza Strip, flipping it over. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack.

Last Friday, five Palestinians were injured in a confrontation with Israeli forces during a protest against the West Bank security barrier.

Israeli security forces fired rubber-coated bullets at the protesters near the city of Modi'in. The demonstration drew about 500 Palestinian, Israeli and foreign protesters.

### Eli Cohen, traitor?

An Israeli man suspected of planning to sell missile parts to Iran was arrested. Police said Sunday that Eli Cohen of Binyamina had been arrested after a shed belonging to him was found to contain parts for Hawk anti-aircraft missiles.

A second man, Avihai Weinstein, also is under suspicion, Ha'aretz reported. The sting was launched March 18 at the behest of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which had information that Cohen was involved in arms deals with Iran.

Last Friday, a U.S. Jew named Leib Kohn was indicted in Bridgeport, Conn., for allegedly buying components for Hawk missiles and Phantom radars on behalf of partners in Israel, Ha'aretz reported.

### Eitam defends lobbying against Sharon

Lobbying against one's own government in Washington is legitimate and even patriotic at times, an Israeli Cabinet minister said.

Housing Minister Effi Eitam held closed meetings last week with leading pro-Israel legislators in Washington and argued against Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plans to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip. Israeli newspapers have criticized Eitam and Tourism Minister Benny Elon for visiting Washington to criticize their boss.

### Israeli investments reach record

Israeli private investment reached an all-time high.

During January, public assets in stock holdings, bonds and savings plans rose by 1.2 percent to some \$310 billion, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Stocks also rose as a percentage of all assets, from nearly 19 percent to 20 percent.

## Passover terrorism advisory

Israelis were warned not to spend Passover in the Sinai Desert or Turkey. The two destinations, favored by Israelis for their proximity and cheap vacation deals, were new additions to the annual terrorism advisory put out by the Israeli Prime Minister's Office.

Issued Sunday, the advisory also urged Israeli tourists to exercise caution in Thailand, the Philippines, India and Nigeria.

## WORLD

### Hitler controversy melts wax museum

A Berlin wax museum that opened in January closed following controversy over a figure of Hitler.

The operator of the museum, Inna Vollstadt, received notice from her landlord after a slew of articles in Israeli and German newspapers drew attention to the exhibit. Vollstadt said Hitler was just one of the attractions, but critics warned that the Hitler figure might attract people to the waxworks for the wrong reasons.

### PETA: 'Holocaust on your plate'

A court order stopped an animal rights campaign in Germany from comparing livestock to Holocaust victims, but it went ahead in Switzerland. Swiss Jewish leaders are incensed that PETA's "Holocaust on your Plate" campaign opened March 19 in the main Zurich train station.

Thomas Lyssy, vice president of the Swiss Israelite Council, said the council was looking into other ways — including an appeal to Switzerland's anti-racism laws — to ban the "perverse" campaign.

### Nazi war crime suspect to be tried

A suspected Nazi war criminal will stand trial in Germany for alleged involvement in 164 murders in Slovakia in 1945.

Ladislav Niznansky, 86, was arrested in Munich in January and has been in a jail hospital since. Niznansky was commander of a Slovakian Nazi unit, Edelsweiss, that routed out resistance fighters.

### French to monitor Web anti-Semitism

The French government and the country's leading Jewish organization will jointly monitor anti-Semitic Web sites.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin announced on March 18 the creation of a direct Internet liaison between the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews, Internet providers and the Central Office against Criminality over the Internet.

The government also announced a study to examine how young children pick up anti-Semitic sentiments.

## NORTH AMERICA

### House bill backs fence

A few congressmen introduced a bill on March 18 backing Israel's West Bank security barrier. The bill criticizes the Palestinian Authority for bringing the matter of the security fence to the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

"In going to the ICJ, the Palestinians have yet again shown their preference for scoring propaganda points instead of doing the hard work needed to achieve peace," said one of the bill's sponsors, Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.).

### Virginia federation stays in UJC

A Virginia federation voted to maintain its membership in the umbrella group of North American Jewish federations.

In January, the United Jewish Communities threatened to oust the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater over delinquent dues payments. The Virginia federation voted last week to pay its dues of \$175,000.