

IN THE NEWS

Kerry supports Israeli retaliation

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said he supports Israeli retaliation against Palestinian terrorists and would move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem.

The presumptive Democratic candidate for president sent out talking points to Democratic activists in the Jewish community last week, outlining his positions on Israel. The two areas in which he notably differed with President Bush were on dealing with Hamas and on moving the embassy.

Bush spokesmen have described Israel's targeted assassinations of terrorist leaders as "unhelpful." Bush says he remains committed to moving the embassy, but has postponed the move every six months, citing national security reasons.

Sharon fills several vacated Cabinet posts

Likud Party stalwarts took over the Cabinet seats of three right-wing Israeli ministers who left due to their opposition to the Gaza pullout plan.

The Finance Ministry's Meir Sheetrit replaced Transportation Minister Avigdor Lieberman, former Shin Bet deputy chief Gideon Ezra took over for Tourism Minister Benny Elon, and Immigration and Absorption Minister Tsipi Livni replaced Housing Minister Effi Eitam. The departing Cabinet ministers either quit or were fired last month over their opposition to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan.

Tie goes to Sharon

Ariel Sharon's government survived a no-confidence vote Monday. The vote over non-payment of salaries in the public sector ended in a 56-56 tie.

The motion was rejected as a result of the tie, but it also showed that the Israeli government's support is slipping. The government can fall only if a motion passes by an absolute majority of 61 votes.

WORLD REPORT

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Everyone on board for Gaza plan, but who will secure the region?

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Egyptians are on board, the Jordanians are ready, Israel's fractious government has gotten its act together, and the "Quartet" has signed on. For all concerned, it should be full speed ahead for a Palestinian takeover of the Gaza Strip.

For all concerned, that is, except the Palestinians.

According to just about everybody involved but the Palestinians themselves, the Palestinian Authority is not ready to assume control once Israel leaves.

Silvan Shalom, Israel's foreign minister, is meeting this week and last with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser, to discuss the specifics of Egyptian plans to secure Gaza once Israel leaves.

Shalom's is the first such visit since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon managed to plow approval of his Gaza withdrawal plan through his Cabinet early last month, effectively negating the setback in May when his Likud Party rejected the plan.

Bush also has scored successes securing support for the plan — most notably, persuading the European Union to specifically mention Egyptian proposals in the June 26 U.S.-E.U. endorsement of the Gaza plan two weeks ago.

This nudged the Europeans away from their prior support for P.A. President Yasser Arafat.

That's because Arafat stands to lose from the Egyptian plan, which consolidates a

myriad of security forces under one command, clearing the way for second-tier Palestinian leaders — a cadre that Israel and the United States believe shows promise for accommodation — to assume security control.

Two days prior to the E.U.-U.S. statement, William Burns, the top State Department envoy to the region, extracted similar support from the Quartet, the body driving the "road map" peace process, which brings together the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia.

Around the same time, Jordanian King Abdullah II also signed on to the plan, key to replicating in the West Bank the Egyptian commitment to train Palestinians to enforce security in Gaza.

But despite such diplomatic and political victories, Arafat, considered by Israel and the United States as a pariah beyond repair, still exerts ironclad control over the Palestinian security services.

Egypt has given the Palestinians until the end of the summer to get their act together, and Arafat has named a coordinator to do the job, but Arab diplomats say they are not optimistic.

Shalom said Israel believed that even two months was giving the Palestinians too much time to get their act together.

"Arafat wants to buy time until the U.S. elections," Shalom told reporters last Friday after meeting with Rice. "The Palestinians must start fighting violence now. They must close the weapons factories and stop the weapons smuggling."

Shalom credited the Egyptians, for their part, for cracking down on smugglers, but

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ANALYSIS

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said more must be done.

The United States also is not optimistic.

"We have confidence in various members, individual members of the Palestinian Authority," Richard Armitage, the U.S. undersecretary of state, told Hugh Hewitt last week on Hewitt's radio show.

"But at the end of the day, come back to the question of how much authority that they're granted by Mr. Arafat, and if he's not going to let go, if he's not going to let the Palestinian Authority take the responsibility for everything from security to economics, then, as a body, you can't put much confidence in them."

U.S. officials in recent months have shed their reluctance to deal with senior P.A. officials — a reluctance borne of the group's failure last year to crack down on terrorism. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei has met Powell and Rice, and two weeks ago Powell met with Saeb Erekat, a top P.A. negotiator.

That led the Palestinians to hope that a page had been turned and that the Americans were ready to nudge Sharon into accepting them back at the negotiating table. But Erekat found that although Powell was ready to listen, the Americans were not ready to restore full negotiating status to the Palestinian Authority.

Powell rebuffed Erekat's proposal for elections within six months and instead told him the Palestinians first must clamp down on terrorism.

Erekat was visibly frustrated.

"We have been exerting every possible

effort as the Palestinian Authority" to prevent suicide bomb attacks, he said at a June 24 news conference in Washington.

Privately, Palestinian officials say elections are key to sidelining Arafat. His reputation as father of the Palestinian movement will keep him as president, they say, but Palestinian frustration with corruption and with the destruction wrought by the intifada will get opponents and dissenters into the legislature.

There, they say, they will be able to water down Arafat's powers.

Americans and Israelis are skeptical, however. "What you hear in meetings isn't matched by what you see on the ground," said one U.S. official who asked not to be identified.

It doesn't help that Erekat, Qurei and others speak of bringing terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad on board to help run the Palestinian-populated areas after Israel's expected withdrawal.

That brings Israel and the United States

back to planning for a Gaza withdrawal by next year without a viable entity in place to assume control there.

It's a question made especially urgent by the killings last week in the Israeli town of Sderot, where a toddler and a man were killed by Palestinian rockets launched from the Gaza Strip.

Shalom brought the Sderot killings up in his meeting with Rice, saying they underscored the need for a secure Gaza as a prerequisite for withdrawal.

Shalom also is likely to talk up a greater

Egyptian and Jordanian security presence to take the place of Israeli forces, but the Egyptians and Jordanians say that's out of the question.

Not surprisingly, the Palestinians agree.

"There will be no Egyptian soldiers, there will be no Jordanian soldiers," Erekat said at the news conference. "Their role will be restricted to training and re-equipping."

**What you hear
in meetings isn't
matched by what you
see on the ground.**

U.S. official

German Reform Jews get recognition

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — After years of bitter fighting among Jews, the Reform movement is regaining an official place in the landscape of German Jewry.

The Central Council of Jews in Germany has taken its first steps to welcome congregations affiliated with the Union for Progressive Judaism in Germany, Germany's Reform group, under its umbrella.

Council board member Dieter Graumann said last Friday that the 15 Reform congregations now can apply for a share of the approximately \$4 million in federal funding that the Central Council distributes to its 84 member congregations.

The announcement follows years of intense lobbying by the Progressive Union.

For the Reform group, the issues involve recognition of the historical place of Reform Judaism in Germany and support for the movement's growing numbers. Germany's 15 Reform congregations total about 3,000 members.

The Central Council has argued that

the Progressive Union threatened to split German Jewry over money. Furthermore, they said the liberal congregations were lax on the definition of who is a Jew.

Germany's Reform movement requires that members have a Jewish mother or convert to Judaism. But the movement opens its doors, without offering membership, to non-Jewish spouses and children.

Ultimately, the Central Council, which slowly has increased support for non-traditional congregations over the past decade, decided it was better to include the Reform congregations than to fight them.

Leaders of German Reform Jewry saw the move as a milestone in the history of the movement, whose roots are in 19th century Germany.

"We are finally on the right path," Jan Muhlstein, head of the Progressive Union in Germany, told JTA.

The Central Council's move does not mean the Reform groups are now members of the umbrella organization. That status will depend on each congregation's obtaining legal corporate status.

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In shift, Allstate won't blacklist Israel travelers

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two years ago, Allen Estrin was in the process of applying for life insurance when he took a trip to Israel.

Upon his return, Estrin discovered that the Banner Life Insurance Company of Rockville, Md., had denied him coverage based on a single factor: his visit to Israel.

THIS WEEK

TUESDAY

■ Silvan Shalom, Israel's foreign minister, meets with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to discuss Israel's Gaza withdrawal plan. U.S. officials are eager to hear details of Israel's talks with Egypt about securing the border after an Israeli withdrawal.

WEDNESDAY

■ Reform Jews open a spiritual retreat of study, worship and song in the redwood forests of Northern California. The kallah will be held through Sunday at the University of California at Santa Cruz. A similar East Coast retreat will be held July 21-25 at Franklin Pierce College in Rindge, N.H.

■ The Israel Democracy Institute's 12th annual Caesarea Conference, focused on the Israeli economy, takes place in Jerusalem through Thursday. The conference, which brings together high-level Israeli political and economic officials, will be broadcast live at www.idi.org.il with simultaneous translation into English.

■ The Washington-area Jewish Community Council hosts an interfaith vigil to protest the killing of black Sudanese by government-backed Arab militias. Jews, including Holocaust survivors and the Reform movement, have called attention to the mass killings, describing them as genocide.

FRIDAY

■ The International Court of Justice at The Hague delivers its ruling on the legality of Israel's West Bank security barrier. Israel says the fence has prevented dozens of terrorist attacks, but Palestinians depict the fence as a land grab. Israel says the court, whose advisory opinion will have no legal ramifications but could spur a U.N. Security Council debate on the fence, has no jurisdiction in the matter.

SUNDAY

■ Hadassah opens its 90th annual convention in Phoenix. Among the highlights will be sessions on intermarriage, Jewish bioethics, counterterrorism, this year's presidential election and training sessions on Israel advocacy.

"To deny coverage to someone going to a democracy, an ally of the United States, makes no sense to me," Estrin, a TV writer, screen-writing teacher and radio talk-show host from Hollywood, told JTA.

Estrin was among those nationwide hit by insurance redlining in which the nation's top underwriters refused to sell insurance policies to those who have traveled to, or plan to visit, Israel and other nations subject to U.S. State Department travel advisories.

In April, Estrin sued Banner and 13 other top underwriters for unfair business practices in California Superior Court in Los Angeles.

Last week, one of the targeted insurers, Allstate of Northbrook, Illinois, announced it would reverse its policy.

"Allstate is committed to protecting customers who choose or need to travel to Israel, the West Bank or Gaza for work or to be with family," said Casey Sylla, Allstate's chairman and president. "Upon further review, we decided the benefits to our customers outweigh the risks."

Allstate's move comes as political pressure is building on the insurance industry to halt the practice. Rep. Rahm Emanuel, (D-Ill.), a member of the U.S. House of Representatives' Financial Services Committee, which oversees insurance practices, drafted a bill this spring to stop the Israel travel ban. New York's legislature is considering a similar bill from Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

Critics of these policies say they not only unfairly lump Israel with world danger spots — despite statistics showing that Israelis have a longer life expectancy than Americans — but could slow tourism to Israel at a time the Jewish state can least afford it.

"From a pure, unadulterated risk standpoint, the risk of traveling to Israel is no greater than visiting any major city in the world," said Steve Katz, an insurance wholesaler from Philadelphia.

Katz, president of Premier Brokerage Services, a company that specializes in finding high-risk policies for insurance agents and their clients, maintains that

the Israel redlining is affecting many of the estimated 200,000 people who visit Israel each year.

Katz said insurance companies base their risk analysis on sometimes sensational media coverage around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which may skew the reality on the ground. "More people die here in Philadelphia in a weekend by gunshots than die in Israel in an entire month" by violence, he said.

Emanuel, a former Clinton administration adviser who served in the Israeli army and was said by an aide to be "alarmed" at the Israel travel ban, welcomed Allstate's move.

"I encourage other insurance companies to follow Allstate's lead and stop denying coverage based on travel destinations," Emanuel said in a statement. "Allstate's decision is a good first step, but we need to make sure that all insurance companies stop discriminating based on either past or

future travel."

Emanuel's legislation remains before the Financial Services and Energy and Commerce committees during the congressional summer recess. An aide said the bill has won 22 co-sponsors so far.

Under the bill, insurance companies would not be allowed to deny life insurance, or change the rates on existing policies, to Israel visitors. It does not cover those planning to go because that would be "too hard to legislate," the aide said.

Policies on Israel travel vary among top insurance companies, with some considering past travel enough of an indicator that future travel might occur, while others considering only future plans.

Meanwhile, some companies appear to be adjusting their approach to Israel travel, Katz said.

Mass Mutual Financial Group recently announced it was offering up to \$1.5 million of life insurance coverage to Israel travelers at no premium, though Katz said others are tacking on extra charges.

To those affected by such policies, the Israel redlining seems to make little sense.

"Israel is being unfairly singled out," he said.

Insurance companies base their risk analysis on media coverage of Israel that some say misrepresents reality.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S.: Israel not keeping promises

The United States criticized Israel for not dismantling illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank.

"You can't create an illegal outpost one day and subsequently declare that it's legal," said Paul Patin, spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. A new Israeli report shows 28 illegal outposts in the West Bank, noting that the government is working to retroactively approve 16 of them.

According to the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan, Israel is to dismantle all illegal outposts, but U.S. officials say only a handful have been removed. In a meeting last Friday, Silvan Shalom, the Israeli foreign minister, handed Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser, a list of outposts shut down since 2002. Of 81 such outposts, only 28 remain, Shalom said.

In those cases, legal obstacles were still in place, but Israel expected to move soon, he said.

California teen sues over remark

A Los Angeles-area teenager sued school officials, saying he suffered anti-Semitic harassment.

Samuel Goldstein, 16, of Ventura County, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court alleging that a coach at his former high school said "God didn't like him because he was a Jew," while students and teammates made anti-Semitic remarks and Hitler salutes and drew swastikas, without any school response, the Los Angeles Jewish Journal reported.

District officials declined to discuss the case, the paper said.

Glickman gets movie job

Dan Glickman, a Jewish former congressman and secretary of agriculture, will oversee a powerful Hollywood lobbying group.

Glickman was named July 1 as chairman of the Motion Picture Association of America, replacing Jack Valenti, who held the position for more than 38 years.

Before serving in President Clinton's Cabinet, Glickman represented Kansas in the U.S. Congress from 1977-1995.

The father of a movie producer, he lobbied for the Walt Disney Co. after leaving government service.

MIDDLE EAST

Rabbi: Settlers' violence not OK

Israeli settlers cannot fight political changes with violence, Israel's chief rabbi said. Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yona Metzger, said Monday that Jewish law prohibits settlers from violently fighting Israeli security services.

Metzger's comment came as Israel's Shin Bet chief, Avi Dichter, said he is worried about increasing extremism among the Israeli right wing as Israel prepares to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

Gaza arms factories hit

Israeli helicopter gunships hit two Gaza Strip arms factories. Six Palestinians were lightly hurt in Sunday night's airstrikes on Gaza City and the Jabalya refugee camp.

Security sources said the factories were used to make Kassam rockets for Hamas to fire at Gaza settlements and Israeli towns.

Palestinian gunman killed

Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian gunman in the West Bank.

The terrorist, a member of the Al-Aksa Brigade, died Monday in a shootout in Jenin.

Arrest made in shooting of Israeli

Israeli troops arrested a Palestinian suspected of shooting an Israeli to death over the weekend. Monday's arrest of Yusuf Kandil came after Victor Kreiderman was shot and killed in the northern West Bank on Sunday.

Israel launches nuke Web site

Israel launched a Web site on its nuclear program.

The launching of the site, www.iaec.gov.il, came days before a visit to Israel by Mohammed ElBaradei, head of the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency. The site notes Israel's two nuclear research centers, but makes no reference to nuclear weapons.

Israel blocks New Yorker

Israel refused entry to a New York woman who says she was planning to participate in pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

Israel determined that Ann Petter, 44, was a security threat when she tried to enter the country at Ben Gurion International Airport on June 23, The New York Times reported, because of her involvement with the International Solidarity Movement, a pro-Palestinian protest group.

Israeli officials say the group interferes with security operations, and two members of the organization have been killed by Israeli forces in the past two years. Petter has chosen to fight the deportation, and remains in custody.

Georgian fresco in Jerusalem defaced

A Georgian fresco in Jerusalem was defaced weeks before the former Soviet republic's president is slated to visit Israel.

Georgia's envoy in Israel called on Jerusalem police to catch those responsible for vandalizing the fresco of the medieval Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli, which is on a wall of a Greek Orthodox monastery in Jerusalem's Valley of the Cross. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili is slated to arrive in Israel on July 28.

WORLD

Israelis plead guilty in New Zealand

Two Israelis accused of being Mossad agents pleaded guilty to unlawfully attempting to obtain New Zealand passports.

Justice Judith Potter of Auckland's High Court kept Uriel Kelman, 30, and Elisha Cara, 50, in custody. Cara and Kelman were arrested four months ago following a foiled bid to obtain New Zealand passports, using details of a critically ill man suffering from cerebral palsy.

Jews attacked in Belgium

Two Jewish men were attacked in separate incidents near Antwerp on July 1.

Rocks and bottles were hurled at a Jewish cyclist in the suburb of Berchem by a group of around 15 youths, the daily Le Soir reported. The man was lightly injured.

In another part of the city, a middle-aged Jewish man was hospitalized after he was attacked and beaten.

Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt promised Jewish community leaders that security would be stepped up around Jewish institutions.

French officials in Israel

Mayors and officials from some 50 French towns and cities are visiting Israel this week. The local representatives will take part in the Franco-Israel Forum, an organization set up to build links between French local authorities and their Israeli counterparts, from Saturday to Tuesday in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.