

## IN THE NEWS

## Israel kills Egyptian policemen

An Israeli tank killed three Egyptian policemen on the Gaza Strip border, mistaking them for Palestinian terrorists.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon apologized to Egypt's president for Thursday's incident in Rafah, a tinderbox town on the Gaza-Egypt border that sees regular arms smuggling and clashes.

According to Israeli officials, a tank posted in Rafah was ordered to fire on a group of Palestinians who were spotted planting a mine overnight, but mistakenly targeted a group of Egyptian border policemen nearby.

## Shooting in Antwerp

A fervently Orthodox Jew died after being shot in Antwerp.

The 26-year-old British citizen and father of three was found Thursday morning in the city's diamond district, an area with a large fervently Orthodox population.

A security spokesman for Belgium's Jewish community told JTA that police had yet to establish if the motive for the attack was anti-Semitic, though some \$1,500 the man was carrying was not stolen.

## Congress opposes aid to Palestinians

The Bush administration is reconsidering whether to give \$20 million to the Palestinian Authority to facilitate elections.

State Department officials faced bipartisan opposition Wednesday when they informed congressional leaders of plans to give the aid to the Palestinian leadership, and are looking at new avenues to aid the elections, perhaps through the United States Agency for International Development, congressional sources said.

The U.S. government had refused to send money through the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat because of rampant corruption.

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# WORLD REPORT

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Paul Morse/White House

President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon shake hands during a news conference at the White House in April.

## With confluence of events, Bush seems primed for a Mideast push

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — Colin Powell: out. Condoleezza Rice: in. Ariel Sharon: hanging on. Yasser Arafat: out forever.

But the most important entry on Middle East watchers' list is George W. Bush: in for four more years.

The recent death of Arafat, the Palestinian Authority president, creates an opportunity for the United States to influence events in the Middle East, and every one of Bush's decisions in recent days suggests that he is ready to flex muscles.

Bush underlined his hopes for Palestinian

statehood in his statement Tuesday nominating Rice to replace Powell as U.S. secretary of state.

"We're pursuing a positive new direction to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, an approach that honors the peaceful aspirations of the Palestinian people through a democratic state, and an approach that will ensure the security of our good friend, Israel," Bush said. "Meeting all of these objectives will require wise and skillful leadership at the Department of State, and Condi Rice is the right person for that challenge."

Bush also appointed Rice's deputy, Stephen

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NEWS  
ANALYSIS

## ■ *With Yasser Arafat dead, President Bush makes a push for Mideast peace*

*Continued from page 1*

Hadley, to replace her as national security adviser.

Both promotions suggest a tightening of an already close U.S.-Israel relationship. Powell had been the most powerful voice in the administration arguing for greater pressure on the Israeli prime minister to ease conditions for the Palestinians; it was often Rice who backpedaled on criticisms of Israel issued by Powell's State Department.

Hadley helped draft Bush's historic April 14 recognition of some Israeli claims to the West Bank and a rejection of the Palestinian demand that refugees be granted a "right of return" to their former homes in Israel.

Still, the significance of the appointments lies less in the pro-Israel credentials of Rice and Hadley than in the fact that Bush wants to run an efficient foreign policy, without the interagency tensions that marked his first administration.

"The degree of fighting between Defense and State made things impossible," William Kristol, editor of the Weekly Standard, told this week's annual General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of the North American Jewish federation system.

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For Israel, a tighter ship in Washington means an even easier ride when the two nations are in agreement — and more pointed pressure when they are not.

Both Israel and its Arab neighbors would do well to heed advice from Rice, said Edward Walker, president of the Middle East Institute and a former assistant

secretary of state for the Near East.

"Condi has great credibility in having the ear of the president," Walker said. "When she speaks, people will be listening as if the president is talking. She's not going to have the problems Powell had; she has the kind of identification and access Colin Powell never had."

Bush's administration already has made clear its short-term policy goals in the Middle East: a clean ride for the Palestinians toward Jan. 9 presidential elections.

Bush may be more willing to take chances with a new Palestinian leadership than he was with Arafat, whom Bush rejected for his ties to terrorism, Walker said.

The administration has warned Israel that it wants to see cooperation ahead of the Palestinian election, urging the Israeli army to pull back from Palestinian towns and villages and Israeli officials to allow Palestinians in eastern Jerusalem to vote.

"It's something that needs to be discussed further as we approach the Palestinian elections," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Tuesday about Jerusalem voters.

Bush also is determined to see Israel withdraw from the Gaza Strip next year, as Sharon has promised. Bush sees the pull-out not as an end in itself but as a return to the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan and direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

■  
The pressure has had an effect.

"If in time we see that there is a Palestinian leadership that is willing to fight terror, we can have security coordination," Sharon said Tuesday in a meeting with officials from his Likud Party, according to a Reuters report.

It was the most explicit signal from Sharon to date that he could return to direct talks after the Palestinian elections.

Even if Sharon chafes at such pressure, Bush's determination may have a salutary effect on Sharon's political prospects. No potential candidate for prime minister in Israel wants to be seen as in direct conflict with Washington, and the clearer Bush's message has been, the more Sharon's potential challengers have fallen into line.

Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last week withdrew his threat to resign if

Sharon did not put the Gaza withdrawal to a referendum. On Monday, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom softened his opposition to allowing eastern Jerusalem Palestinians to vote, telling the UJC General Assembly that there would be "no booths" in eastern Jerusalem but not ruling out a repeat of a mail-in voting system like the one used in 1996.

Palestinian officials liked Powell, but say they aren't disheartened by his departure. Instead, they're looking for more signals from Bush.

"It's not a question of individuals but a larger one of policy by the administration as a whole," Diana Buttu, a legal adviser to the Palestinian negotiating team, told JTA from Ramallah.

Rice's reputation as adamantly pro-Israel may be overblown, said Buttu, who dealt with the national security adviser during Bush's efforts to launch the road map in summer 2003.

Rice "got it" when Buttu's team presented her with a map showing expanded Jewish settlement in the West Bank and a projected route of the security fence that would have sliced up the area, Buttu said.

Intense U.S. pressure led Israel to change the route of the fence, bringing it closer to the pre-1967 boundary with the West Bank.

The Palestinian leadership is split between two views, Buttu said. One has it that Bush, freed from re-election considerations, will pressure Israel so that his legacy will include a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. The other view is that Bush is irrevocably pro-Israel.

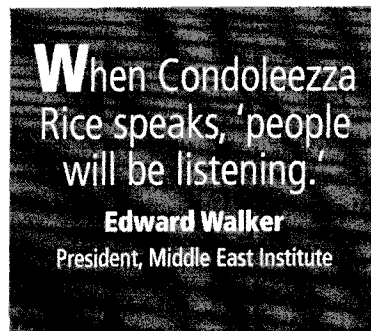
Go with the latter version, advises Tom Neumann, executive director of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

"George Bush has a commitment to Israel based on his own view of what the world is about," Neumann said.

In that view, Neumann said, support for Israel conforms with Bush's commitment to spreading democracy throughout the world.

Bush already had read Natan Sharansky's new book, "The Case For Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror," when he invited the Israeli Cabinet minister to meet last week.

Significantly, Rice told Sharansky she was reading the book too — at Bush's recommendation. ■



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# Russian Jewish leader looks to Kremlin

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Culminating a shift for his organization, the new leader of the Russian Jewish Congress has announced the group's unconditional support for the Kremlin.

In a news conference Wednesday, Vladimir Slutsker also indicated that his organization, a leading Russian Jewish organization, was unlikely to pay special attention to Israel-related matters, and would focus instead on domestic issues.

Slutsker's outlook raises the possibility that Russian Jewish organizational life will be marked by less acrimony than in recent years, but some observers worry that it also presages less independence for the group, whose founder was one of the leading critics of Russian governmental policy, particularly in Chechnya.

Slutsker, 48, a banker and member of the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of Parliament, was little known to the public until he was picked last month to head the RJC.

He said at the news conference that he would try to keep the group apolitical.

"The RJC should not be involved in politics, which means fighting for power, money or influence. It was that fight for power that led RJC to its current crisis," he said in a veiled reference to RJC's founder and former president, Vladimir Goussinsky.

Some critics accuse Goussinsky, an influential Jewish media mogul and outspoken critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, of vying for too much political power. Goussinsky was expelled from Russia in 2000 on charges of tax evasion spearheaded by the Kremlin.

Since its founding in 1996, the RJC has raised more than \$70 million from domestic donors to support various Jewish projects. The group also aspires to represent Russian Jewry on political and social issues before the government, but its role has diminished in recent years.

Slutsker, who was officially installed as RJC leader Tuesday, elicited a mixed reaction among Jewish leaders, though none appeared willing to criticize him openly.

For its part, the Kremlin welcomed the appointment.

"I am confident that under your leadership, the activities of the congress would be aimed at strengthening the unity of nationalities and religious faiths of Russia,"

Vladislav Surkov, the powerful deputy head of Putin's administration, wrote Wednesday in his official greeting to Slutsker.

At the news conference, Slutsker made it clear that under his presidency the RJC would be loyal to the Kremlin — a departure from the image the group acquired under Goussinsky and has been unable to shed since then.

When asked to describe the community's primary concerns, Slutsker said they coincide with those of Russia as a whole.

"There is an open conflict between fundamentalist Islam and the Western world going on. The interest of the Russian Jewish Diaspora is to avoid, together with other Russians, the escalation of the scenario that is currently developing," he said, referring to a growing threat of terrorism.

Under Slutsker's predecessor, Yevgeny Satanovsky, the RJC took an active interest in Israeli issues. But Slutsker's words at the news conference gave the impression that he would change course.

"By fighting terrorism in Russia, we

are helping Israel. We are Russian citizens and we are not indifferent to the fate of Israel, but RJC does not plan any special programs that would help in Israel's fight with Palestinian terror," he said.

Some Jews took Slutsker's words to mean that he would avoid Israeli matters entirely.

"If so, we are soon going to have community leadership obsessed with praising the Kremlin on any occasion, isolated in its deep focus solely on domestic matters."

Satanovsky will remain a member

of the RJC executive, overseeing the group's charitable programs, while Slutsker will take over policy and financial matters, public relations, contacts with other community groups and religious affairs.

Slutsker also announced that the RJC will establish close ties with the Federation of Jewish Communities, a Chabad-led group and the largest Jewish organization in Russia.

At the same time, Slutsker denied rumors that he was going to work toward a unified structure that would include both the federation and the RJC. ■

**'The RJC should not be involved in politics, which means fighting for power, money or influence. It was that fight for power that led RJC to its current crisis.'**

**Vladimir Slutsker**

Russian Jewish Congress President



Vladimir Slutsker, right, the new president of the RJC, and Yevgeny Satanovsky, the group's former leader, speak to the media during a news conference on Wednesday in Moscow.

# Hungarians debate hate crime laws

By **BALINT MOLNAR**

BUDAPEST (JTA) — United in their abhorrence of anti-Semitic and racist views, Hungarian liberals increasingly are at odds over the issue of hate speech and the wisdom of seeking to eliminate it through strict laws.

Such a step would move Hungary closer to stringent European standards and away from the country's American-oriented approach to free speech.

The latest round of the dispute was set off by a fringe neo-Nazi group that dominated news headlines for much of September and October through provocations carried out by its eccentric leader, a 26-year-old woman named Diana Bacsfi.

After plastering Budapest streets in late August with posters hailing Hungarian war criminal Ferenc Szalasi, Bacsfi told journalists that her group was a reincarnation of Szalasi's notorious Arrow Cross party, which came to power in a German-assisted coup on Oct. 15, 1944.

During the six months of their reign, Arrow Cross militia members rounded up thousands of Jews from the Budapest ghetto and shot them into the icy Danube River.

The dam of public outrage burst with Bacsfi's announcement that her plan to honor the Arrow Cross coup with a demonstration in front of Budapest's famed Terror House museum had received police permission.

It also brought renewed calls to tighten the penal code's provisions against hate speech, especially anti-Semitic incitement.

Nepszava, one of Hungary's four political daily newspapers, called in September for the police to revisit their decision to allow the demonstration and on political parties to pass legislation making it easier to ban extremist demonstrations.

"It's not a simple issue 15 years after the transition" to democracy, Nepszava's editor, Janos Desi, told JTA. "Full freedom of speech was one of the great achievements of that transition, and it would be a shame to sacrifice it because of a handful of idiots and political troublemakers."

But Desi said his paper's petition showed that there was wide public support for legal solutions.

"In a country where 600,000 people were murdered because of their religion or ethnicity, there must be legal ways to stop neo-Nazis from parading in the streets without

endangering free speech, as they have done in France or Germany," he said.

Other liberals also support tougher legislation.

In an Op-Ed column, Maria Vasarhelyi — a well-known sociologist whose recent study showed high levels of racism and anti-Semitism among students in university history departments — railed against the "seemingly rational arguments" that liberals line up in defense of free speech even when it upsets the sensitivities of many people, including elderly Holocaust survivors. It's exactly those sensitivities that should be appreciated more, she argued.

In the mid-1990s, many liberals opposed the introduction of stricter laws against hate speech and incitement, believing that extremist ideology and behavior would recede as democratic institutions became more stable.

"In reality, the opposite has happened: Political support for the far-right, discriminatory attitudes and public utterances of Nazi speech all grew," Vasarhelyi wrote.

But adopting stricter laws might prove difficult because of judicial precedents and opposition from prominent liberals.

Earlier this year, Hungary's constitutional court struck down a law that passed Parliament by a slim majority. It would have made it easier to prosecute cases involving hateful or racist language — which in Hungary usually are anti-Semitic — by doing away with the "clear and present danger" standard.

Based on the U.S. model, that standard requires prosecutors to prove beyond doubt that verbal or written attacks directed at a specific group lead directly to physical danger for the group's members.

The court found the new law unconstitutional and argued that free speech must enjoy wide leeway, even if it hurts some people's sensitivities.

Many prominent liberals, from Cabinet ministers to leading Jewish intellectuals, agree with the court's position and oppose stricter laws.

"As a liberal politician, I don't believe in curbing freedom of speech," Education Minister Balint Magyar told JTA.

His views find broad support in the

liberal intelligentsia, as evidenced by a statement drafted by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, signed by 120 prominent Hungarian intellectuals and published in the weekly that carried Vasarhelyi's Op-Ed.

The statement concluded, "Discriminative and extremist views can and should be fought, but not by limiting basic democratic rights, but rather by broad social consensus and the power of example."

The in-house debate among liberals appears even more complex against the background of another long-standing rift.

This one separates the governing socialist-liberal coalition and the conservative opposition, led by populist former Prime Minister Viktor Orban, and centers on the latter's controversial attitude to openly anti-Semitic senti-

ments expressed by some of his followers.

Orban and his Fidesz Party got plenty of bad publicity for pandering to anti-Semites during their stint in government from 1998 to 2002.

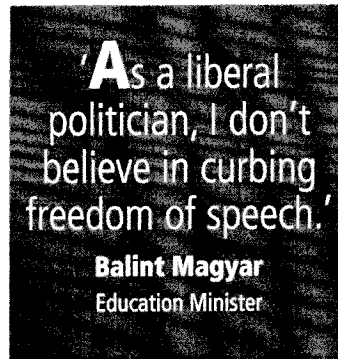
A few months ago, a prominent Fidesz member, former Education Minister Zoltan Pokorni, attended the 10-year anniversary party of the weekly magazine *Demokrata*, which has hailed Hungary's German occupiers and questioned the Holocaust. Orban also endorsed the magazine and called on his followers to subscribe to it.

At the same time, however, Orban and other Fidesz luminaries gathered supporters on Oct. 15 to lay wreaths at a Budapest plaque commemorating evangelical minister Gabor Sztehlo, who saved 2,000 Jewish orphans from almost certain death under the Arrow Cross.

Orban, Pokorni and other party leaders called for the creation of a "Memorial Wall" where victims' names would appear alongside the names of those, like Sztehlo, who tried to save them.

For some in the Jewish community, such mainstream duplicity poses a greater danger than the extremist fringe represented by Bacsfi's group.

"The reappearance of the Arrow Cross was very convenient for the mainstream political right, which was able to distance itself and point at it saying, 'They are the extremists!'" the Jewish monthly *Szombat* wrote in its most recent editorial.



# Banning of Belgian party may backfire

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — Belgian Jews are worried that a court decision to criminalize one of Europe's strongest far-right groupings might see the party bouncing back stronger than ever.

The Nov. 10 decision by the High Court in Brussels to convict the Vlaams Blok came after the court found that the group had infringed upon Belgian law by continuing to advocate a racist and xenophobic platform.

The ruling means that under its current structure, the Vlaams Blok could be stripped of its rights to state funding and television access, thereby forcing it to disband.

The racist policy in question concerns the party's advocacy of compulsory repatriation for "large groups of non-European immigrants," a platform seen as targeting principally Muslim immigrants in Belgium.

The move was condemned by Vlaams Blok leaders with the party's president, Frank Vanhecke, saying the Vlaams Blok had been "condemned to death."

However, while admitting that the current party structure, its name and constitution would now be forced to fold up, Vanhecke said that the Vlaams Blok would not be going away.

"We're going to establish a new party. One that Belgium will not be able to bury. It is going to bury Belgium," he said, referring to the party's central platform calling for independence in the country's Flanders region.

As the largest political group on the Antwerp City Council, the party has only been kept from political power by an unofficial agreement between all major parties to refuse to cooperate with it.

Nevertheless, even after the lower court ruling, the party polled close to a quarter of the votes in Flanders in European elections in June, and opinion polls regularly show it to be the leading party in the region.

The party had attempted to pre-empt the court decision by changing some of its statutes just days prior to the court's ruling.

Out, for example, went the clause calling for the expulsion of all non-European immigrants; in came a lighter one calling for the repatriation of those "who reject, deny or fight our culture and certain European values such as the separation of church and state, freedom of expression and equality between men and women."

The party is also expected to change its

name, a tactic which, at least in the short term, will enable it to avoid the ban.

Jewish groups though are not convinced by such changes, citing long-standing links between fascist elements during World War II and extreme Flemish nationalist groups, the precursors of the Vlaams Blok.

About 40,000 Jews live in Belgium — most of them in Antwerp and Brussels.

According to Claude Marinower, a Jewish member of Parliament from Antwerp, the court ruling would make the Vlaams Blok "change their wrapping but not their ideology."

"Cola-lite is still cola," he told JTA in a telephone interview.

Marinower praised the court decision because it established that "freedom of speech has its limits," although he said "it remains to be seen whether they're really going to change their behavior."

Other groups said the court ruling could end up doing more harm than good.

"This ruling could be a good thing for the Vlaams Blok because they'll portray themselves as martyrs," Diane Keeser, secretary of the Forum of Jewish Organizations, an Antwerp community umbrella group, told JTA.

Moreover, she said, the group posed specific problems for the Jewish community.

"We need to be very careful because they've suddenly become friendly with the Jews and very pro-Israel," she said.

Such positions, and particularly the party's strong anti-Muslim line, have worried community leaders in Antwerp with persistent rumors circulating that certain members of Antwerp's fervently Orthodox community have voted for the Vlaams Blok in recent local and national elections.

"The danger is that they're very careful not to do anything openly anti-Semitic," Keeser said.

Nevertheless, the party's old guard still contained a number of problematic elements, she said, pointing out an ongoing court case the forum is pursuing against Roeland Raes, a leading Vlaams Blok of-

icial, who denied the Holocaust in an interview on Dutch television.

"If you look at what they did with Raes, it says a lot. They took away his official responsibilities in the party, but they haven't thrown him out," she said.

Marinower said it was difficult to assess Jews who may have voted for the Blok because there were no statistics available, but that the phenomenon clearly existed.

"Certain people have become attached since they adopted new tactics in 2001 when there were the first incidents of attacks on Jews by youngsters of Arab origin," he said. "Evidently, this 'your enemy's enemy' approach has had an effect on some people."

But that should not mask what kind of party the Vlaams Blok was, he said.

"These are people who continue to honor the memory of the most vehement collaborators" with the Nazis, "and they are still doing it at exactly the same time we are commemorating the 60th anniversary of the liberation," he said.

Those comments refer to an August 2004

ceremony that honored three of Belgium's best-known wartime collaborators. The ceremony was attended by the Vlaams Blok's senior leadership.

For her part, Jewish leader Kouki Frohman warned that people should not be fooled by the party's

attempts to curry favor with Antwerp's Jewish population.

"It always ends with the Jews," Frohman said.

With the Vlaams Blok continuing to grow, some are beginning to consider whether blocking the party from power in regional and local government has been an effective tactic.

Known as the "cordon sanitaire," or safety barrier, the tactic has not stopped people voting for the Vlaams Blok, while the fact that it has not held power means that it has never been forced to present a positive agenda for governing, Keeser said.

"I don't believe the cordon is safe," Keeser said, adding that "once the blok is in government, people will see that they have no policies for the whole community." ■

The ruling will make members of a far-right party 'change their wrapping but not their ideology.'

Claude Marinower  
Belgian politician

# French group links up with AJCongress

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — A recent Paris conference on anti-Semitism drew senior French politicians and even one government minister — but the star of the show was the visitor who crossed the Atlantic especially for the occasion.

Jack Rosen, president of the American Jewish Congress, was in the French capital for meetings with government officials but also to cement a cooperation deal signed earlier this year between the AJCongress and the Union of French Jewish Employers and Professionals.

Under the agreement, the AJCongress is to provide logistical and financial aid to the union, a group that sees itself as the prototype for a Jewish lobbying organization in France.

Rosen spoke at a well-attended union seminar on anti-Semitism on Oct. 24, shortly after an AJCongress delegation was taken to see local victims of anti-Jewish attacks by a union-sponsored group, the National Bureau for Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism.

Like the union, the bureau believes that French Jewry's traditional leadership has been too soft in its reaction to the recent wave of anti-Semitism in France.

The AJCongress called for a boycott of the Cannes Film Festival in 2002, and relations between the congress and the CRIF

umbrella organization of French Jews are noticeably cool.

Rosen said he doesn't regret AJCongress' aggressive campaign against anti-Semitism in France, and was happy to claim credit for what he regards as a new aggressiveness by French Jewish leaders since 2002.

"We hit a hot button. CRIF wasn't paying attention before. Now, it finally has. We helped them come around to that," he said.

CRIF President Roger Cukierman has refrained from making public statements about AJCongress, though he has referred to them in the past as "not the most important American Jewish organization."

CRIF's relations with the American Jewish Committee are considerably warmer, and CRIF officials invariably are present when AJCommittee leaders meet French government ministers.

Rosen and Cukierman spoke briefly by telephone during the AJCongress visit, but the AJCongress delegation did not meet with CRIF leaders.

The union's vice president, Claude Barouch, denies that the group has become a kind of official opposition to French Jewry's main communal groups. But he told JTA that "it's difficult to change things when the Jewish community is controlled by just three institutions," a reference to CRIF, the United Jewish Social Funds and the Consistoire religious organization.

Barouch is less keen about calling his organization a "lobby," a term with pejorative connotations in France and much of Europe. Nevertheless, he told JTA that "our role is to get things moving."

"We're a pressure group. We want Jews involved in the political process. There's nothing unacceptable about that," he said.

For his part, Rosen said he was happy to give the union the benefit of U.S. Jewish groups' experience.

The links between the two groups created a recent storm in the French Jewish press, with a report in France's only national Jewish weekly, *Actualite Juive*, alleging that the union would

use some \$400,000 in AJCongress money to fund political campaigns and back candidates.

That drew a strong reaction, with the union's president, Herve Gaoui, denying any intention to fund candidates and denying that the AJCongress had given the union so much money.

Considering that many French Jewish communal organizations suffer from underfunding, the \$400,000 figure has proven embarrassing to the union. Union officials have said they received something like \$70,000,

which Barouch said would be used for "training, preparation and logistics."

Rosen told JTA the figure was "substantially more" than \$70,000. JTA has learned that the \$70,000 figure appears to be just a first payment, with total funding likely to reach the levels suggested in the French press report.

AJCongress officials say the agreement contains a "firewall" preventing the money from being used for political campaigning, though they acknowledge it will be difficult "to account for where every cent goes."

In any case, Rosen's influence on the French scene may transcend the money his group gives: He's in the unusual situation of being courted by French officials who believe as one French official put it, that Rosen is "the closest Jew to Bush."

That helped him arrange long meetings with senior government ministers, something denied to AJCongress leaders on previous visits. Union officials also were present at the meetings.

Some Jewish observers in France believe more should be done to increase Jewish influence in the centers of European power in Paris and Brussels.

But Michel Zerbib, a popular talk show host and political commentator on French Jewish radio, said the concept of a Jewish lobby in France was "badly regarded."

The union is "getting involved in serious issues," he said, "but screaming out 'Am Yisrael Chai' and calling for a Jewish lobby is not the way to go in front of non-Jewish audiences."



AJCongress

Jack Rosen, president of the American Jewish Congress.



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## 'Kantormania' exhibit highlights influential cantors

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

**H**OHENEMS, Austria (JTA) — In October 1944, a rabbi in Brooklyn turned to the Jewish Theological Seminary for advice on an unusual problem.

His cantor had received an offer to star in the Metropolitan Opera. Was there anything in Jewish law that would prevent this? Would it be contrary to Jewish tradition? Would the cantor be able to hold down both jobs?

The reply from the JTS was Solomonic.

There was no actual prohibition for a cantor to perform on the opera stage, so there were no real obstacles. But the move shouldn't be encouraged or sanctioned, either. If the cantor did take the offer from the Met, though, he must be "even more meticulous" in observing Jewish law in his personal life.

"He will undoubtedly be open to criticism and should be more careful than ever before," wrote Louis Finkelstein. It would, he added, be "intolerable" if he should violate the Sabbath.

The cantor in question was Richard Tucker, who went on to have an illustrious career at the Met before his death in 1975 — and at the same time remained a committed Jew.

Tucker's story is one of the fascinating tales presented in a exhibition called "Kantormania," now on at the Jewish Museum in Hohenems, a small town in the far western tip of Austria.

Jews once formed an important minority here, but the community was destroyed in the Holocaust. Over the past 15 years, however, there has been a growing interest in local Jewish history.

The Jewish museum opened in 1991, and the old synagogue and other buildings in the former Jewish quarter are being restored.

"Kantormania" is part of a series of events marking the bicentennial of one of the town's most famous sons — the 19th-century cantor, Salomon Sulzer.

A plaque already marks the house near the synagogue where Sulzer was born. ■

## Representatives visit Israel

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Rep. Robert Wexler has been to Israel many times. But for the first time in a while, this visit gave him a renewed sense of hope.

"On some other trips I took to Israel I left wondering if there was any light at the end of tunnel," said Wexler (D-Fla.), a senior member of the House International Relations Committee who led a bipartisan congressional delegation on a four-day visit that ended Nov. 11, the day of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's burial in Ramallah.

"On this trip, I leave with the legitimate hope that if the Palestinians act in a responsible way and evolve into a more pragmatic government that denounces and defeats terror, that there is hope," he said.

The group of U.S. congressional representatives spoke to JTA in Jerusalem as two events came together to create hope for progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace: the death of Arafat and the re-election of President Bush.

"I feel like I've been participating in a part of history," Rep. Ted Strickland (D-Ohio), on his first trip to Israel, said as he took stock of the new reality.

The group stopped in Jordan, where they met with King Abdullah II, before traveling to Israel, where they met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and other top officials.

Wexler, who represents a Jewish district in southern Florida, said he came away from his meetings with Sharon and Israeli Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with the impression that the Palestinians would find an Israeli leadership that "was willing to talk."

The Democrats on the trip expressed hope that President Bush would more aggressively pursue an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in the wake of Arafat's death.

"I've been critical of the administration's hands-off policy," Strickland said. "I hope the president has learned as a

result of unfolding events that he cannot not be engaged and involved."

The Israeli and American administrations had shunned Arafat because of his ties to terrorism, saying he wasn't a partner for peace talks. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.) said he hoped that with Arafat dead, Bush would have no excuses not to take action.

"If we are going to have peace here, Bush is going to need to broaden his perspective to a greater vision of Israel than that offered by many in the evangelical Christian movement who keep looking to a Greater Israel," Gutierrez said.

"It's not going to lead to a fruitful outcome," Gutierrez continued, adding that what is needed is two states "each living without fear of one another." ■

Bush has made the creation of a Palestinian state a centerpiece of his Mideast policy, but has said that the Palestinians first must eradicate the terrorists in

their midst and institute reforms to make their government more democratic and accountable. The Palestinians agreed to those steps in 2002 under the "road map" peace plan, but never carried them out.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), who chairs the

International Relations Committee's Middle East Subcommittee, said she doesn't expect Bush to be overly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his second term.

The Israelis and Palestinians "will be self-driven," Ros-Lehtinen said. "We've got a lot to do in Iraq still and Afghanistan, and I don't see President Bush nose-diving into the peace process anytime soon. I hope with the rise of a new Palestinian leadership," the Palestinians will move toward moderation.

The delegation came to discuss Israel's plan to withdraw soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip, the situation in Iraq and the status of Palestinian Authority leadership after Arafat. The trip was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. ■



With Arafat's death and Bush's re-election, U.S. representatives visiting Israel see light at the end of the tunnel.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Sharon: End incitement

The Palestinians must end anti-Israel incitement before the "road map" peace plan can proceed, Ariel Sharon said. Anti-Israel propaganda is "the root and foundation for the spreading of the phenomenon of terror and suicide bombers," the Israeli prime minister told Likud members Thursday evening in Tel Aviv, according to Ha'aretz.

"Palestinian education and propaganda are more dangerous to Israel than Palestinian weapons."

Sharon's comments came amid reports that foreign ministers of the diplomatic "Quartet" that backed the road map will meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders next week in hopes of reviving the plan now that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has died.

### Palestinians killed in tunnel

Several Palestinians were killed when a weapons-smuggling tunnel they were digging collapsed near the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

Up to five Palestinians were buried when the tunnel collapsed Thursday.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Clinton urges Mideast push

President Clinton urged President Bush to seize the opening for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Speaking Thursday at the opening of the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock, Ark., Clinton said, "I hope you are able to cross over into the promised land of peace in the Middle East."

Clinton called his failure to make peace in the region "the biggest disappointment for me. I tried so hard for peace in the Middle East."

### Specter to head judiciary panel

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) won the support of colleagues to serve as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Specter had been under fire for two weeks for suggesting that judicial appointees who oppose abortion would have a hard time being confirmed in the Senate.

Several conservative groups wanted Specter, the senior Jewish Republican senator, not to serve as chair of the committee, which reviews judicial appointments.

"I have assured the president that I would give his nominees quick committee hearings and early committee votes," Specter said Thursday.

### Pentagon presses Syria, Lebanon on Hezbollah

The U.S. military is coordinating with Lebanon and Syria in an attempt to stop Hezbollah from launching rockets into Israel.

"We are only initiating our relationships with those two countries, and we expect that to increase," Lt. Gen. Lance Smith, deputy commander of the U.S. Central Command, said Thursday in a Washington news conference. "But we obviously have great concern about the rockets and the efforts of Hezbollah in the area."

U.S. and U.N. officials condemned recent rocket attacks on northern Israel believed to have been fired by the Lebanese Shi'ite militia.

Smith said Centcom had just launched coordinating efforts with Israel's two neighbors.

"I think there is this hope for us to help in the Palestinian-Israeli situation through Syria and Lebanon," he said.

### O.U. applauds education bill

The Orthodox Union is pleased that a special education bill includes federal aid for learning disabled students in religious and

other private schools.

In a letter to lawmakers Thursday, Orthodox Union leaders praised the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which passed a conference committee Wednesday, saying it provides more equitable service to learning disabled students whose parents place them in private schools.

The Orthodox Union often has praised measures to give federal funding such as vouchers to private schools, while several other Jewish groups raise concerns about it crossing the line separating church and state.

But Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, said his group does not oppose the IDEA plan since the federal government has an obligation to provide proper education for students whose public schools are not positioned to meet their needs.

### Lobbyist wanted Indians to benefit Jewish school

A Jewish lobbyist under investigation by Congress reportedly asked American Indian tribal elders to name a Jewish school as a life insurance beneficiary in payment for lobbying services.

The Senate Indian Affairs committee heard evidence Wednesday regarding allegations that Jack Abramoff charged the Tigua tribe excessive fees for lobbying to allow the tribe to open casinos in Texas, the Washington Post reported Thursday.

Abramoff allegedly had been paid previously by competing tribes in a successful effort to shut down the Tiguas' casinos; he then offered his services to the Tiguas, who were unaware of his earlier work.

When the Tiguas ran out of money in 2003, having paid Abramoff millions of dollars in lobbying fees, he offered to continue representing them if elders named the Eshkol school he founded in suburban Maryland in their life insurance policies.

The elders refused.

Committee chairman Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-Colo.) said he was "horrified" about a scheme that put "prices on the lives of tribal elders," the paper reported.

## WORLD

### OSCE anti-Semitism rep to be announced

A European umbrella group is about to name a special representative on anti-Semitism, and Spain will host the next conference on the topic.

A top Israeli official said the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which brings together 55 countries including the United States, will name three special representatives at a foreign ministers conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, on Dec. 5 — one for anti-Semitism, one for Islamophobia and one for intolerance.

The appointment, and the pending U.S. establishment of an office to monitor international anti-Semitism, will reinforce efforts at the United Nations to combat the phenomenon, the senior official said.

In June, Spain will host back-to-back OSCE conferences on anti-Semitism and intolerance. Spain also will institute an annual Holocaust remembrance day, the official said.

### France, Israel close to art deal

France and Israel are close to an agreement on the permanent loan of 14 major artworks whose owners apparently died in the Holocaust.

The French were unable to track down the heirs of the original Jewish owners of the works, said a senior Israeli official who helped negotiate the deal, so the works will be displayed in Israeli museums.

The written agreement is important, the official said Thursday, because it explicitly names Israel as the inheritor of Jews who perished in Europe during the Holocaust.