

IN THE NEWS
**Redeployment
on hold in West Bank**

Israel delayed a planned troop pullback from West Bank cities.

Jerusalem officials said Tuesday the handover of five cities to Palestinian Authority control, which had been expected this week, was postponed due to a flare-up of violence in the Gaza Strip.

Security sources said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would convene top Cabinet ministers Thursday to vote on when the pullbacks should take place.

**Bush to mention
Palestinian statehood**

President Bush's State of the Union speech will include a reference to his hopes for Palestinian statehood.

The references to freedom for Iraqis and Palestinians have survived 17 drafts, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said Tuesday.

"One of the areas that he has always intended to talk about was supporting the advance of freedom in the world and in places like Iraq, and the Palestinian territories, so that we can realize the president's two-state vision with a viable, democratic state emerging in the Palestinian areas," McClellan said.

Bush is due to deliver the speech Wednesday night.

**Abbas: Is he
just another Arafat?**

Mahmoud Abbas is determined to halt terrorism from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel's military intelligence chief said.

But Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday that while the Palestinian Authority president favors nonviolent tactics in pursuing a Palestinian state, his goal is no different than Yasser Arafat's.

"He seeks Palestinian statehood in all of the West Bank and Gaza, with a capital in east Jerusalem," Ze'evi-Farkash was quoted as telling the parliamentary panel.

WORLD REPORT

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New wind in Washington blows ball back into Israel's diplomatic court

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It used to be that a bipartisan barrage of Beltway backing for "democracy in the Middle East" meant something comforting for Israel: another show of solid U.S. support.

Now it could mean profound change.

Two pending congressional resolutions praising the Palestinians for their presidential elections last month, coupled with administration suggestions that substantial material support is on its way, hint at a subtle but far-reaching change in how the United States treats the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The shift is in the expectations: After four years of rhetorical "what nexts?" that primarily addressed the Palestinians, the United States has put the ball in Israel's court.

In her first chat with her staff as U.S. secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice made clear this week that Israel must understand that the administration believes a full-fledged peace with the Palestinians is at stake.

"Don't think any of us doubt that without a Palestinian state that is viable, that can represent the aspirations of the Palestinian people, that there really isn't going to be a peace for either the Palestinian people or for the Israelis," Rice said Monday.

That line was all the more significant coming just hours before Rice met with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's top adviser, Dov Weisglass. Weisglass angered administration officials last year when he suggested that after it pulls back this year from the Gaza Strip and a small portion of the West Bank, Israel might postpone further with-

drawals indefinitely unless the Palestinians make far-reaching governmental reforms and take concerted action against terrorism, as required by the "road map" peace plan.

Significantly, Rice's inaugural tour as secretary of state will include stops next week in Israel and the Palestinian areas.

"I'm going to Israel and to the West Bank on this trip," she said. "We're going to be working with the parties, now that they've begun to make those fundamental choices, to push forward toward the date when we have a two-state solution. And I think it's in our grasp, although it's still something that has to be worked toward vigilantly."

Israeli officials already are making some changes, discussing a second phase of withdrawals and dropping a demand dating back to Labor governments that Israel keep the strategic Jordan Valley — a sign that Sharon is ready to live with a Palestinian state that is contiguous and borders Jordan.

On the ground, Israel reopened the crossing Tuesday between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, and pledged to proceed with a scaling down of forces near West Bank towns — albeit at a slower pace since Palestinians are continuing to fire rockets into Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who was in Washington last week to meet with Rice, announced the reactivation of a coordination mechanism among Israel, the Palestinians and the United States to smooth over differences and work through crises, such as the rocket attacks.

Additionally, Israel's attorney general on Tuesday formally quashed government plans to

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NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ *Change in U.S. approach to Palestinians may mean change for Israel*

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appropriate acres of land in eastern Jerusalem, something that angered Palestinians.

The way forward is clear: Bush, getting ready for a tour of European capitals in which he hopes to repair strained relationships in order to solicit greater cooperation in Iraq, wants to show that he is capable of meeting some European foreign policy demands.

The administration wants nothing to get in the way. The State Department, which usually avoids comment on casualties until the circumstances are clear, rushed out a statement Monday on the death of a 10-year-old girl in Gaza, allegedly from Israeli gunfire.

"The death of any innocent individual, especially children, is a tragedy," a statement said. "We urge all parties, especially at this most promising moment for progress between Palestinians and Israelis that we have seen in recent years, to remain focused on measures to bring an end to violence and terror, and to avoid actions that escalate tension and create obstacles to implementing the 'road map' and realizing the president's two-state vision."

The tone has changed enough that Shalom remarked to reporters last week that the newly elected P.A. president, Mahmoud Abbas, and his finance minister, Salam Fayyad, "have a warm corner" in Washington.

It's warm enough that U.S. officials are being clearer than ever in promising substantive assistance to the Palestinians. William Burns, the top State Department envoy

to the region, said after meeting with Abbas last week that the administration is "looking for ways in which we can help on an urgent basis economically, both in accelerating our assistance and seeking additional assistance for the Palestinians, and revive a sense of economic hope for Palestinians."

U.S. officials won't say on the record how much aid money is being considered, but some close to the process say the figure is around \$200 million.

Burns also pledged renewed security assistance, in a deep freeze since Palestinians killed three Americans traveling with a U.S. diplomatic convoy in the Gaza Strip in October 2003. That crime has yet to be solved.

The new tone is not limited to the administration: The leadership of both parties has signed on to resolutions circulating in the House of Representatives and the Senate praising the Palestinian elections.

The draft Senate resolution, to be sponsored by majority leader Sen. Bill Frist (R-

Tenn.) and minority leader Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), goes furthest, saying the election "establishes a credible leader in President Abbas" — a sharp departure from Israel's "wait-and-see" rhetoric about Abbas pending serious moves against terrorism.

The draft House resolution, to be sponsored by each party's whips, stops short of that endorsement — congratulating Abbas but not "establishing" his leadership — but suggests that the House will not be as ready as it has been in recent years to admonish the White House when differences with Israel arise.

If anything, Congress appears determined to push Bush's agenda forward. Congressional staffers said the legislators who monitored the elections — Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), Sen. John Sununu (R-N.H.) and Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.) — were so impressed with the smoothness of the process that they determined to persuade their colleagues to bolster Abbas, leading to the resolutions.

'We're going to be working with the parties, now that they've begun to make those fundamental choices, to push forward toward the date when we have a two-state solution.'

Condoleezza Rice
U.S. secretary of state

Bracing for trouble

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel plans to train 8,000 paramilitary border policemen in riot control this year.

Officials said a new section opened at the Border Police Academy on Tuesday dedicated to dealing with nonlethal public disturbances was the result of lessons learned in October 2000, when Israeli police killed 13 Arab citizens involved in

pro-Palestinians riots.

Many expect violence if settlers resist security forces who come to evacuate them from their homes later this year under the government's Gaza Strip withdrawal plan.

Border police chief Hussein Fares said a special doctrine had been devised for dealing with settlers who fight forces that come to evacuate them but would not give details.

Israel honors Wallenberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is honoring Raoul Wallenberg.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Israel is holding commemorations for Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Jews in Hungary during World War II by issuing fake

passports.

Some of Wallenberg's relatives will participate in the events.

Wallenberg was last seen Jan. 17, 1945, when Soviet military officers escorted him to Red Army headquarters, alleging he was a U.S. spy.

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Israel will take more Falash Mura

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ariel Sharon's announcement that the Israeli government will double the rate of Ethiopian Jewish immigration to Israel is being called a breakthrough by those who long have lobbied to help the Falash Mura.

But with the bill projected at close to \$2 billion — an estimated \$100,000 for each of the 20,000 Ethiopians eligible to immigrate — no one is sure just who will pay.

The Israeli prime minister announced Monday that all eligible Falash Mura — Jews whose ancestors converted to Christianity but who have returned to Jewish practice — would be brought to Israel by the end of 2007.

Sharon's announcement came after a meeting with Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which handles immigration and absorption; Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; Absorption Minister Tzipi Livni; and Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz.

The Law of Return, which guarantees Israeli citizenship to almost any Jew who wants it, does not apply to the Falash Mura because of their past conversions. However, the Israeli Cabinet voted in February 2003 to immediately begin to determine who among the Falash Mura could trace matrilineal descent back past

the generation of converts.

The process has pattered along, with Israel sometimes citing the high cost of absorbing the Falash Mura, given the tremendous social and cultural gap separating them from other Israelis.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Agency and its primary funder, the North American Jewish federation system, have pressed Israel to bring the Falash Mura on aliyah.

When the federation system held its annual conference in Israel two years ago, then-president Stephen Hoffman personally urged Sharon to expedite the immigration.

When news of Sharon's announcement reached this week's board meetings of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for the federation system, Hoffman said the federations deserved partial credit for a step of "great historic significance."

But the federation system has yet to determine its share in easing the financial burden of Falash Mura immigration and absorption.

Observers expect payment to come from a variety of groups, including the Israeli government, the federation system and its

overseas partners, the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The Jewish Agency, which long has lobbied for quicker Falash Mura immigration, will be the group's primary caretaker, managing the compounds and handling immigration and absorption.

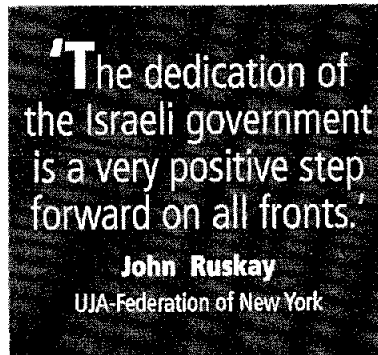
The Jewish Agency receives \$50 million a year from the U.S. government to settle immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet

Union in Israel.

The group plans to discuss fund raising for the project at its board of governors meetings in Jerusalem, to be held Feb. 20-22.

For now, the partners committed to the project only say vaguely that they can find a way forward.

"The dedication of the Israeli government is a very positive step forward on all fronts, and if the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency and world Jewry wants to resolve this issue, as it appears we all do, then I have no doubt we'll find the resources together," said John Ruskay, executive vice president and CEO of the UJA-Federation of New York, which took a prominent role on the issue. ■



BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

'When pigs fly': Political ad in Britain draws anger

By DANIELLA PELED

LONDON (JTA) — Accusations of anti-Semitism have become a part of Britain's election campaign.

In the latest of a series of high-profile spats over prejudice, Conservatives have expressed outrage over a poster produced by the Labor Party.

The image, a pun on the phrase, "pigs might fly," features the faces of Conservative leaders Michael Howard and Oliver Letwin — two of Britain's most prominent Jewish politicians — superimposed on pigs' bodies.

Labor politicians and Jewish leaders dismissed claims of prejudice, but there is concern that the scandal could distract attention from the issue of rising anti-Semitism in the country. In mid-February, a major new report by the Community Security Trust, the body that monitors threats to British Jewry, is expected to show a large increase in anti-Semitic attacks.

The political poster, intended as part of Labor's campaign for the May general elections, is one of several on the party's Web site,

with visitors invited to vote for their favorite.

Andrew Mennear, the Conservative candidate in London's Golders Green, an area with a large Jewish community, slammed the poster as "shocking and tasteless."

"I am shocked the Labor Party finds it remotely clever or amusing to impose the faces of probably the two highest-profile Jewish politicians onto flying pigs," he said.

Katia David, a politician in north London, said, "This poster is a cheap, political shot, that has been ill-thought out and is found deeply unpleasant by Jews and Muslims. I hope Labor will see sense and revoke this campaign and apologize."

Religious Jews and Muslims do not eat pigs.

The scandal erupted last week as the world marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and Holocaust Memorial Day.

The Labor Party said it had heard no complaints from Jewish groups.

But British media reported Wednesday that Labor had agreed to remove the posters. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Frost out of Democratic race

A former Jewish congressman from Texas dropped out of the race for chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Martin Frost, who was defeated for re-election in November, dropped out of the race for chairman Tuesday.

Bill would allow Holocaust lawsuits

A bill reintroduced in Congress would allow Holocaust survivors to sue the French National Railway for transporting Jews to concentration camps.

The bill, introduced Tuesday by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), would get around claims from the French government that it is immune from lawsuits because of the Foreign Service Immunities Act.

Kosher chicken recalled

More than 5,700 pounds of kosher chicken are being recalled because of possible listeria contamination.

The recall of the products by the Schreiber Processing Corporation of Long Island involves 48-ounce boxes of Empire Kosher Fully Cooked Buffalo Style Wings; Chicken Wings Coated in Sauce, with date code 1444; and 28-ounce boxes of Empire Kosher Fully Cooked, Breaded, Fried Chicken, six to nine assorted pieces, with date code 0274. No illnesses have been reported from the products.

The chicken was distributed to retail stores across the United States.

Report on Saudi-funded hate praised

The American Jewish Committee praised a media watchdog for its report on Saudi Arabia's support for anti-American invective in American mosques. Following the publication Tuesday of the Freedom House study, the AJCommittee urged the Bush administration to confront the Saudi government on its support for anti-American views.

Diversifying portfolios

The Jewish federation system is allowing the agencies it funds to sell bonds.

At board meetings this week in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the United Jewish Communities, the federation system umbrella group, decided to open its tax-free bond program to affiliate agencies such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. The program has been used to allow federations to raise funds by selling tax-free bonds to donors.

Author: CIA contacted terrorists

The CIA used intermediaries in the 1990s to communicate with Palestinian terrorist groups, a former agent said.

Melissa Boyle Mahle, who has just published a book, "Denial and Deception," about experiences that included five years in the Palestinian areas, said agency policy was not to talk to terrorists directly.

"They wouldn't actually let you talk to terrorists because they were dirt, or somehow you would be implicating yourself and the U.S. government in... talking to terrorists, being involved with terrorists. It was a real problem," Mahle said Tuesday on CNN.

MIDDLE EAST

Wild justice

Egyptian police killed a fugitive linked to bomb attacks that killed Israeli tourists in the Sinai.

The Interior Ministry in Cairo said the Bedouin man, suspected of

helping terrorists bomb three Red Sea resorts in October, was killed in a shootout Tuesday.

Unconfirmed reports said three policemen and a bystander also died.

At least 30 people, most of them Israeli vacationers, were killed in the bombings, which Egyptian authorities blamed on pro-Palestinian terrorists, while Israel suspected the involvement of Al-Qaida.

Land plan scrapped

Israel backed off from a plan to confiscate Palestinian-owned land in Jerusalem. Attorney General Menachem Mazuz ordered the government to rescind a decision made last June under which it would implement the 1950 Absentee Property Law and claim lands in eastern Jerusalem whose Palestinian owners fled during past wars.

Koehler pushes German ties

Germany's president pledged his country would support Israel forever.

"Ties between Israel and Germany today are strong and full of friendship," Horst Koehler told reporters at the outset of a two-day visit to Jerusalem.

"Relations with Israel after the Holocaust will remain forever very special."

Israeli officials said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would urge Koehler to push for stronger action by Berlin against far-right German groups.

Help at hand

Israel held a daylong fund-raising drive for victims of the Asian tsunami.

President Moshe Katsav launched Tuesday's campaign at a ceremony attended by the ambassadors of Sri Lanka, Thailand and India, as well as 100 guests who were involved in Israeli aid to Southeast Asia following the Dec. 26 earthquake and seismic sea wave.

WORLD

AMIA judge in trouble

A council of judges in Argentina criticized the judge involved in the AMIA bombing trial.

The Magistracy Council voted unanimously Tuesday against Judge Jose Galeano for what it called his poor performance in the investigation of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish center, which killed 85 people.

The most serious accusation is that Galeano paid a bribe of \$400,000 to encourage testimony against police officers accused in the bombing. The council will decide Feb. 9 whether Galeano will be suspended.

Hungary probes World War II crime

Hungary's military prosecutor launched an investigation into a man accused of World War II-era crimes.

The probe is investigating the wartime activities of Charles Zentai, who is suspected of torturing and murdering an 18-year-old Jewish man in 1944, the news portal Index reported Tuesday.

The prosecutor can bring formal charges against Zentai within a two-month period.

The 86-year-old Zentai, who lives in Australia, denied the allegations and said he was ready to return to Hungary to face charges.

The information on Zentai was provided to the prosecutor's office by the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Nazi-hunting program, Operation Last Chance.