



IN THE NEWS

Condoleezza Rice visits the Holy Land

Condoleezza Rice began her first Middle East mission as U.S. secretary of state.

Rice flew in to Tel Aviv from Turkey on Sunday and visited Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial. [Story, Pg. 3]

Report: AIPAC-linked officials hire lawyers

At least six Bush administration officials reportedly have retained defense lawyers in connection with a probe into allegations of leaks to a pro-Israel group.

David Ignatius, a Washington Post columnist, reported last Friday that an FBI investigation of classified leaks to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee was still ongoing in late January. "More than a half-dozen officials in the Bush administration who are apparently suspected of leaking classified information to AIPAC have had to retain defense lawyers," Ignatius said.

The columnist also reported that a former senior government official was interviewed by the FBI in late January.

FBI agents asked the official if Steve Rosen, AIPAC's foreign policy director, had ever asked for classified information; the official said Rosen never did, and told Ignatius he thought it was a "fishing expedition."

AIPAC, the most powerful pro-Israel lobby, has been under FBI scrutiny since August.

AIPAC officials told JTA they had no comment on the Ignatius column.

Russians blast anti-Semitic letter

Russian legislators rebuked some lawmakers who recently signed an anti-Semitic letter.

The letter later was revoked and most of its signatories repudiated their signatures, but the Duma resolution, which passed 306-58 last Friday, said that the fact that such a statement could appear at all leaves the lower house of Parliament concerned.

WORLD REPORT

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Massive aid pledge to Palestinians startles Jewish groups, worries some

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Once President Bush's stunning \$350 million offer to the Palestinians is broken down into line items, Israel's government will find a few pleasing entries — and many that may raise concerns about a U.S. tilt toward the Palestinians.

Bush's request to Congress for the money in his State of the Union speech Feb. 2 caught Palestinians, Israelis and pro-Israel groups off-guard. Even the senior officials in the Bush administration who deal with the Middle East were scrambling to figure out how Bush added up the numbers.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said Jewish groups would seek assurances that the money would be used strictly for reforms subject to U.S. review and scrutiny, not direct grants to the Palestinian Authority.

"We have to see how they define it," he said.

One thing was for sure: The money underscores Bush's commitment to the success of Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority president elected last month to succeed the late Yasser Arafat.

"The beginnings of reform and democracy in the Palestinian territories are now showing the power of freedom to break old patterns of violence and failure," Bush said. "The goal of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace is within reach — and America will help them achieve that goal."

A breakdown provided to JTA by a senior administration official set aside \$50 million

for "bridge building" between Israelis and Palestinians, a euphemism for the high-tech terminals that Israel says will drastically quicken the transit of Palestinians and goods between Israeli- and Palestinian-controlled areas.

That's money Israel has been seeking since it ran a test on the terminals late last year and found that they reduced passage to about three minutes.

Palestinians and dovish pro-Israel groups have been worried about the terminals, because they fear Israel will use them along its West Bank security fence, perhaps making it more likely that the barrier will become a permanent border.

"We would be supportive of improving crossing points on the Green Line," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now, referring to the pre-1967 boundary between Israel and the West Bank. "But we would have problems with contributing to the fence in the West Bank."

American Jewish officials later said they understood the money will strictly be reserved for crossings on the Green Line.

Other projects to be funded, as described by the administration official, sound innocent enough, but could prove worrisome to Israel once further details are announced.

The official said \$150 million would go toward home construction for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, expansion of educational opportunities, development of economic infrastructure for a Palestinian state and social services for the poorest Palestinians.

Israel wants the Palestinian Authority to

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ANALYSIS

■ Jewish groups taken aback at Bush's promise of huge aid to Palestinians

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prove that it has removed anti-Israel incitement from its textbooks before more money goes to P.A. schools.

Israel also would want to make sure new homes and social-service money do not go to terrorist groups or their leaders.

Israeli officials and most of Israel's supporters in Washington were silent on the announcement, not wanting to confront a president they consider to be the most pro-Israel in history.

But one pro-Israel group already said the aid was too much, too soon for a Palestinian Authority that has yet to prove that it will crack down on terrorists.

"We find this to be a mistaken policy of appeasement, and we're deeply disappointed that Bush is not holding the P.A. accountable for its obligations to end terror and incitement," said Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America.

Another concern is where the money comes from. The administration official said \$200 million — the money that would pay for the enhanced checkpoints and infrastructure development — would come in supplemental budget requests for the financial year beginning in October, to be formally presented Monday.

An additional \$150 million would be in

the budget itself, double the \$75 million that U.S. administrations began setting aside for the Palestinians each year in the mid-1990s, during the Oslo peace process.

No one anticipated that Bush would double the \$75 million, and pro-Israel groups were taken aback by the proposal. More worrisome to them was that the administration would not say now where the money would go, though officials have suggested it might go to P.A. security services — another area where Israel would want intense scrutiny, given the security services' collaboration with terrorist groups during the intifada.

In addition, the Palestinian Authority has yet to solve an October 2003 bombing in the Gaza Strip that killed three Americans traveling with a U.S. diplomatic convoy — and until now, U.S. officials have said a resumption of security assistance would be dependent on a resolution of that case.

Furthermore, Condoleezza Rice was to announce an additional \$50 million for rapid-response projects Monday, when she

is in the region on her inaugural tour as secretary of state. She also will ask world leaders for additional assistance.

The \$50 million, which Rice will say must be spent within 90 days, will go to job-creating infrastructure projects such as building agricultural roads and cisterns.

Israel has no problem with such projects. It's the money itself that is a concern. It is drawn from a pool of about \$400 million that Congress had allocated to the Palestinians over the years but had not spent because of P.A. corruption and security lapses.

The Bush administration's willingness now to spend money that is no longer subject to congressional scrutiny rattles pro-Israel supporters who count on Congress to keep tight control of that money.

Israel's allies in Congress said they would keep a close eye on the money. One senior staffer to a persistent critic of Bush policies in the region said the new activism is welcome — but noted skepticism among his colleagues about a president that has used past State of the Union addresses to propose grand plans to combat AIDS in Africa and bring man to Mars, only to seemingly forget them.

"The administration has to provide specifics," the staffer said. "You've got to have a plan to get from A to B." ■

U.S. aid to Palestinians underscores Bush's commitment to the success of P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas.

Israeli diplomat leaves Australia

By HENRY BENJAMIN

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — An Israeli diplomat was forced out of the country's embassy in Australia in an operation that neither government is eager to discuss.

Israeli and Australian governments acknowledge that Amir Lati, a diplomat with responsibility for consular affairs, returned to Israel in December at the behest of the Australian Department of Affairs and Trade, but remain tight-lipped about the reason.

Speculation in the Israeli media has been rife since the Ma'ariv and Yediot Achronot newspapers broke the story last week.

Ma'ariv reported that the expulsion may be connected to the arrest and imprisonment of two Israelis in New Zealand last year for fraudulently attempting to obtain New Zealand passports. Israel's diplomatic affairs with New Zealand are conducted from the Australian embassy.

Members of the New Zealand government claimed the passport affair was connected to the Mossad, but that hasn't been confirmed. New Zealand's prime minister, Helen Clark, imposed heavy sanctions on Israeli diplomats following the trial of the two men, who are now back in Israel.

In December, a former Israeli ambassador to Australia and New Zealand, Gabby Levy, returned to the Canberra embassy for a month. Levy had enjoyed a close personal relationship with Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer during his term as ambassador, regularly playing tennis with him.

But some speculate that the reason for Levy's trip wasn't just to visit old friends.

In early February, Nati Tamir presented his credentials as the new Israeli ambassador to Australia, a few weeks before the arrival of President Moshe Katsav on an official visit. For most of 2004, there was no Israeli ambassador in Canberra. ■



WORLD REPORT

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THIS WEEK**MONDAY**

■ President Bush unveils his budget to Congress and the public. In his State of the Union address, Bush said he would cut 150 government programs "that are not getting results, or duplicate current efforts, or do not fulfill essential priorities." Several Jewish groups are concerned these cuts could include programs that aid Jewish institutions or promote Jewish social justice initiatives. The budget also will include a boost of as much as \$350 million for the Palestinians.

■ U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meets Israeli and Palestinian leaders during her inaugural trip to the Middle East in her new job. Rice wants to come away with assurances from the Israelis that they will coordinate the Gaza Strip withdrawal with the Palestinians.

■ Nikolai Butkevich, research director for the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, speaks at a congressional briefing on religious freedom in Russia.

TUESDAY

■ Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas meet at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheik. They will discuss coordinating the Israeli withdrawal this summer from the Gaza Strip and a small part of the West Bank.

■ Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carri will lead a discussion in New York City aimed at bolstering latino-Israeli ties.

THURSDAY

■ The Anti-Defamation League holds its national executive committee meeting through Saturday in Palm Beach, Fla.

■ The U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee convenes to consider the Middle East peace process. Congress overwhelmingly commended the Palestinians last week for their elections, and is expected to support President Bush's new assertive posture in the region.

FRIDAY

■ The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations begins a mission to Europe and Israel. The group will acknowledge Bulgaria's role in protecting Jews during World War II. They also will meet the leaders of Romania. The Presidents Conference wants to understand these countries' effects on the European Union and NATO.

SATURDAY

■ The Democratic National Committee vote for a new chairman. The front-runner is former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean. Some Jewish donors have balked at the prospect of a Dean-led party, saying his talk during his presidential candidacy about a more "even-handed" approach to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations worries them.

Rice prods sides to make peace

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice came vowing a light American touch in the latest round of peacemaking, but left no one in doubt that Washington will be pushing Israel and the Palestinians toward rapprochement.

"This is a time of opportunity and it is a time that we must seize," Rice said Sunday at the start of her first Middle East tour as President Bush's top foreign policy official.

The secretary of state will be conspicuously absent from this week's summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Yet in a two-day round of meetings, Rice appeared to be setting the tone for the talks, which some hope could

break a more than four-year diplomatic deadlock.

"This is a hopeful time, but this also is a time of great responsibility for all of us to make certain that we act on the words that we speak," she said after meeting Sharon, referring to obligations Israel and the Palestinian Authority undertook as part of the U.S.-led "road map" for Middle East peace.

In an apparent nod to critics who have accused the Bush administration of guiding the peace process unilaterally, Rice said Israel and the Palestinians should work free of mediation.

"I hope we would all get into a mindset that says if the parties are able to continue to move on their own, that's the very best outcome," Rice told reporters in Turkey before setting off for Tel Aviv.

In a BBC interview, Rice voiced reservations about Israel's West Bank security barrier, saying that it "prejudges the final-status borderlines" on land Palestinians want for a future state.

But she was firmer still in pushing Bush's call for an end to terrorism and incitement against Israel — not just by the Palestinians, but also by their champions in the Arab world.

"Israel deserves to live in peace in the Middle East and the Jewish people deserve the respect of their neighbors," Rice said.

"We have been very clear that incitement cannot be ignored, that it is not possible simultaneously to say that you want a peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians that is lasting, and at

the same time ignore some of the most horrific caricatures of Israelis or anti-Semitism in any form," the secretary of state said.

This appeared to be a clear message to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the host of Tuesday's summit between Sharon

and Abbas, and to the Egyptian media, which often is charged with incitement against Israel.

Egypt currently is the site of unilateral cease-fire talks between Hamas and Islamic Jihad, whom Abbas has failed to dismantle as required by the road map, preferring to win over the terrorist groups through negotiation.

Israel, for its part, already has scaled back its military operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a gesture of goodwill to Abbas, and the Bush administration apparently is content with this entente for the time being.

Indeed, for now, all sides appear ready to settle for any means of pulling off Sharon's plan to withdraw Israeli troops and settlers from Gaza this summer with minimum casualties.

Rice, who is to meet Abbas on Monday, made do with urging the Palestinian leader to mount "an effective fight against terrorism" and praised him for showing "desire for a peaceful future with Israel."

This is a hopeful time, but this also is a time of great responsibility for all of us to make certain that we act on the words that we speak.

Condoleezza Rice
U.S. secretary of state

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Prisoner dispute deferred

Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed to postpone a dispute over prisoner releases that had threatened their upcoming summit.

Under the accord agreed to over the weekend, the final roster of Palestinian prisoners to be freed from Israeli jails will be decided after Tuesday's meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel currently plans to release 900 prisoners.

The Palestinian Authority wants the number to be boosted considerably and include prisoners serving lengthy terms for murder.

Silent protest

Many Israeli rabbis urged Jews to take a vow of silence to protest Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to quit Gaza.

At least 300 synagogues and religious academies across the country have agreed to take part in the 12-hour "speech fast" beginning Monday morning, protest organizer Yehuda Cohen said.

Among the sages who issued the edict over the weekend was a former Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel, Mordechai Eliahu.

Israel warns on Hezbollah

Israel fears Hezbollah will orchestrate terrorist attacks in order to ruin peace talks with the Palestinian Authority.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Cabinet on Sunday that the Lebanese militia could step up attacks on Israel's border or encourage attacks by its Palestinian proxies.

Israeli police were put on a high alert that is expected to last through Tuesday's summit between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Egypt.

Groups slam Peres for 'schlemazel' remark

Several Jewish groups criticized Shimon Peres for calling settler backers "schlemazels."

The Israeli deputy prime minister said last week that a protest against plans for Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip mostly drew "schlemazels," a Yiddish word roughly meaning an inept idiot.

He also noted the lack of secular representation in the demonstration. "We believe that no matter what decisions will be taken by the Israeli government regarding these communities, the residents must be treated with utmost understanding and sensitivity," the Orthodox Union wrote to Peres.

NORTH AMERICA

NJDC blasts Hastert tie to Holocaust denier

A Jewish Democratic group criticized the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives for accepting money from a man who has accused Jews of manipulating the Holocaust.

Myron Kuropas, who was part of a presidential delegation to the Ukrainian presidential inauguration last month, reportedly gave \$1,500 in campaign contributions to Rep. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.).

"The GOP leader of the House should not profit from the funds of someone who attacks Jews for exploiting the Holocaust. Speaker Hastert should return this tainted money at once," said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

A spokesman for Hastert, John Feehery, said Hastert "doesn't know this gentleman and does not endorse his views."

Report: Canada still anti-Israel at U.N.

Canada has not changed its anti-Israel stance at the United Nations, although the country said it would, a new report says.

B'nai Brith Canada argues in its study that Canada continues to back anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations.

The organization recently met with Canada's foreign minister to show him the results of the study, which is available at http://www.bnaibrith.ca/UN_MiddleEast_Voting.html.

Wisconsin professors support divestment

A faculty body at a Wisconsin university demanded that the school divest from companies doing business with the Israeli army.

The resolution, which passed the University of Wisconsin-Platteville's Faculty Senate by a vote of 7-6, with one abstention, on Jan. 25, is part of the University of Wisconsin Divestment from Israel Campaign, led by Al-Awda Wisconsin (The Palestine Right to Return Coalition) and the Alternative Palestinian Agenda.

The resolution urges divestment from specific companies that supply the Israeli military with weapons, equipment and supporting systems.

A university spokesman said the Board of Regents will review the resolution.

Jewish QB is a hall of famer

Benny Friedman, a Jewish quarterback who was a pioneer in developing the forward pass, was elected to pro football's Hall of Fame.

Friedman starred for the University of Michigan and later played professional football from 1927-1933. Friedman, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, was born in Cleveland. He died in 1982.

WORLD

NGOs want bias blinders

A group of nongovernmental organizations asked the United Nations to reverse U.N. resolutions condemning anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Christianophobia.

The group, which includes Quakers, Lutherans, the Roman Catholic Franciscan Order and the International Association for Religious Freedom, says condemning specific prejudices creates a hierarchy favoring certain religions.

In a statement submitted in Geneva, the group instead urged the U.N. Human Rights Commission, which begins a six-week session in March, to treat all religious discrimination equally. Jewish groups say anti-Semitism should be singled out because it led to one of history's greatest genocides.

Reunion, 66 years later

Two sisters separated by the Holocaust were reunited with help from a computer database.

Klara Blire, 81, and Hanna Katz, 78, last saw one another in 1939, when the Nazis invaded their native Czechoslovakia and they were sent to live with separate uncles in Hungary.

After the war they immigrated to Israel; each convinced the other had died along with the rest of their family.

But a chance visit by Katz's granddaughter to the new Yad Vashem database of Holocaust victims turned up testimony by Blire, and the two women were brought together late last week.

Jewish leader appointed in Ukraine

A prominent Jewish leader was appointed transport and communications minister in Ukraine.

Yevgeny Chervonenko, a lawmaker and close aide to new President Viktor Yushchenko, was approved by the Ukrainian Parliament last Friday.

Chervonenko, 45, is a businessman and vice president of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, an umbrella group.