

IN THE NEWS

Pro-Syrian forces demonstrate in Beirut

Up to half a million pro-Syrian protesters rallied in Beirut.

Chants and signs at Tuesday's rally, organized by Hezbollah, called on Western countries, Israel and the United Nations to halt its pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon.

Syria announced this week it would begin redeploying troops closer to the Syrian border, but Israeli and U.S. officials have said the redeployment would not be sufficient.

Rice meets Israeli foreign minister

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom met with Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state, and discussed the timetable for implementing Palestinian-Israeli pledges at last month's summit.

Shalom met Rice in Washington on Tuesday, and agreed with her that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had made progress in stopping missile attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel and in destroying arms-smuggling tunnels.

But he said he still wanted to see terrorist groups dismantled.

Jews win right to ritual slaughter

British Jews won an 18-month battle to gain government assurances protecting the community's right to practice ritual slaughter.

The future of such slaughter, or shechitah, in Britain had been threatened following a June 2003 report from the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommending the government repeal the right of the Jewish community to carry out kosher slaughter.

The council asserted that animals killed according to Jewish law, without being pre-stunned, were "likely to experience very significant pain and distress."

But the government decision Tuesday accepted evidence put forward by Jewish lobbyists who argued that ritual slaughter is humane.

WORLD REPORT

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Optimism over Mideast democracy tempered by fears of the unknown

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush's jubilant predictions may be right and democracy may be coming to the Middle East — but the road ahead is not without its dangers.

"Don't start uncorking the arak," David Makovsky, a top analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, quipped, referring to a popular Middle Eastern liqueur. "We don't know yet how this plays out."

Bush made burgeoning anti-Syrian protests in Lebanon and progress in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks the centerpiece of a major policy speech Tuesday to the National Defense University in Washington.

"For the sake of our long-term security, all free nations must stand with the forces of democracy and justice that have begun to transform the Middle East," Bush said.

But experts cautioned that democracy could produce militant leaders, who would not serve American, Israeli or international interests.

In his speech, Bush went further than ever in demanding a Syrian withdrawal from its 29-year occupation of Lebanon, saying that unless the Syrians are gone by May, he would not consider the Lebanese elections scheduled for then as being free and fair. He also called for international observers.

"Today I have a message for the people of Lebanon," he said. "All the world is witnessing your great movement of conscience. Lebanon's future belongs in your hands, and by your courage, Lebanon's future will be

in your hands. The American people are on your side."

Bush has led international support for the popular Lebanese anti-Syrian movement that burgeoned after last month's assassination of Rafik Hariri, a former Lebanese prime minister who was leading efforts to end the Syrian occupation.

Many in Lebanon blamed Syrian agents for the attack, although the Syrians have said they had nothing to do with it and insist that it has been counterproductive to their interests.

Still, under pressure, Syrian President Bashar Assad this week pledged a limited withdrawal by the end of this month. News reports said that a partial redeployment into eastern Lebanon had begun on Tuesday.

It is not clear if the redeployment simply will be toward the Syrian border, or if any of the 14,000 occupying troops actually will cross back into Syria.

Imad Moustapha, the Syrian ambassador to the United States, told CNN Tuesday evening that all Syrian troops would be gone from Lebanon.

Syria was central to Bush's appeal on Tuesday, but he sees events there as the bulwark of regional change.

He noted Saudi Arabia's recent municipal elections, but said next time they should allow women to vote as well. He also commended Egypt for its plans to open up its presidential elections to opposition candidates.

He especially praised Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, citing

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his January election as a beacon of the democracy he hopes will spread.

"The people of the Palestinian territories cast their ballots against violence and corruption of the past," he said.

The problem, though, is that democracy is often messy, and experts warned that the consequences of recent events are not yet clear.

"Democracy can produce militants," said Moshe Maoz, Israel's leading Syria expert, who is on leave this year with the U.S. Institute for Peace.

"Look at Algeria in 1993. With militants it's hard to make peace, but you can make peace with autocrats, like in Jordan and Egypt."

David Mack, a former assistant deputy secretary of state for Near East affairs who also served at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, was appalled at the prospect of an electoral victory in Lebanon for Hezbollah, the Shi'ite terrorist group that brought tens of thousands of pro-Syrian protesters into the streets on Tuesday.

"Hezbollah will likely be returned as the largest group in parliament," said Mack, the vice president of the Middle East Institute, a think tank.

"Call me an old fashioned Arabist, but the question is: Are we, in Washington and Jerusalem, going to be able to celebrate results of that? I wouldn't want to bet on it."

Silvan Shalom, the Israeli foreign minister, who was in Washington Tuesday to meet with U.S. Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice, praised Bush's speech as outstanding, especially when Bush noted Syria's role in harboring the terrorists behind last month's suicide bomb attack in Tel Aviv.

But he acknowledged fears that a Shi'ite ascendancy in Lebanon could bring similar results in more moderate Arab states, including Jordan.

The threats inherent in democracy resonated closer to home, too, Shalom suggested. In recent days, he was spending much energy explaining to his Western counterparts that any victory by Hamas in forthcoming Palestinian legislative elections should not give legitimacy to the terrorist group.

"We're worried about Hamas being seen as a legitimate political party," Shalom said.

Tom Neumann, the executive director of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, acknowledged the serious short-term risks of democratization, but said that in the case of Lebanon, they were outweighed by the reality of Syria's negative influence there.

"Anything anti-Syrian right now is good," Neumann said. "Syria is a cause for lots of problems in Israel, in Iraq, in Lebanon."

In any case, Assad may not be ready to fold.

Syria has too much at stake in Lebanon. It is an outlet that bypasses existing and potential sanctions and provides jobs for about a million Syrian workers.

Even if Syria does remove all its troops, experts say, it will still keep its

broad network of proxies and intelligence agents in Lebanon — and maintain its toxic influence.

A negotiated withdrawal could avert that possibility, as opposed to the forced pullout that reportedly began on Tuesday, Maoz said.

"One should use carrots and not just sticks," he said.

Yet sticks were all that legislation proposed in the U.S. Congress on Tuesday promised.

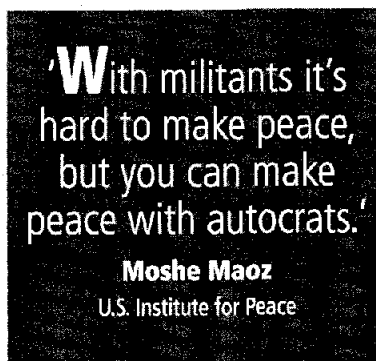
The Lebanon and Syria Liberation Act, introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by U.S. Reps Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), would expand the sanctions made available in the Syria Accountability Act, an Engel-Ros-Lehtinen bill that overwhelmingly passed in 2003 and was implemented by Bush last year.

The prospects of the new legislation passing were not clear. Bush did not appear eager to mimic its tough language, which goes further than the Accountability Act because it would sanction third parties that deal with Syria.

In his speech, he stopped short of threatening further sanctions or any other action and emphasized the international unanimity in calls on Syria to leave Lebanon, citing the support of France, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

"He's trying for the multilateral, diplomatic press," said Makovsky of the Washington Institute.

"We have to be very careful," he said. "This is not 1989," when pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe had much clearer, more widespread support. ■



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Times ombudsman: A word's a word

NEW YORK (JTA) — Attacks against civilian targets in Israel should be called terrorism, The New York Times' public editor said.

Writing Sunday in his regular column in the paper's Week in Review section, Daniel Okrent said that his definition is simple: "Beheading construction workers in Iraq and bombing a market in Je-

rusalem are terrorism pure and simple." Okrent added: "Given the word's history as a virtual battle flag over the past several years, it would be tendentious for The Times to require constant use of it, as some of the paper's critics are insisting.

"But there's something uncomfortably fearful, and inevitably self-defeating, about struggling so hard to avoid it." ■

Coalition wants Israel travel ban lifted

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — In a new campaign, a group called Caravan for Democracy is asking the U.S. State Department to reconsider its warning against travel to Israel.

As a result of the warning to Americans planning trips to Israel, updated with more severe language in the spring of 2002, nearly all of the more than 100 U.S. colleges with study abroad programs in Israel suspended those programs or established barriers that deterred prospective students.

As a result, Jewish and Zionist identity experiences for many college students are at risk, Jewish officials have argued.

That rationale forms the basis for the latest campaign for reconsideration of the ban, which was launched with a March 2 news conference on Capitol Hill by Caravan for Democracy, a program of the Jewish National Fund, Media Watch International and Hamagshimim.

The coalition is asking people to sign an online petition asking U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to reconsider the travel warning.

Students also are asked to present the signed petitions to campus administrations that have canceled their Israel study abroad programs, and to ask them to both resume and promote the programs.

The campaign comes as Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, raised the issue with Rice in a meeting today. Shalom told Rice that lifting the warning would spur Israel's economy and help bring peace to the region. Shalom told JTA that Rice was "more positive" about the issue than in the past.

The campaign also comes after a similar campaign was launched in September. Called "Let Our Students Go!" it is run by the Israel on Campus Coalition, a group of 26 Jewish organizations with campus programs.

Among its other activities, the coalition issued a declaration that encouraged its constituent groups to press universities on the issue.

In part, Caravan for Democracy's project is "our way of contributing to the overall campaign" of the Israel on Campus Coalition, said Mara Suskauer, director of JNF's College Activists Department.

Moreover, "the atmosphere is ripe for change," she said.

To be sure, with a renewed peace effort under way, the climate in Israel has changed. And despite a recent suicide

bombing at a Tel Aviv nightclub, the number of suicide bombings has slowed dramatically in the past two years.

While the U.S. State Department regularly issues travel warnings to Israel as it monitors the region, the warning in place since the spring of 2002 reflects the "the highest range of warning," said Wayne Firestone, director of the Israel on Campus Coalition.

"It's always an issue of the severity of the language," Firestone said. "From spring 2002 on, it's always been in this extremely heightened area that makes everybody nervous that not following it, you're in a risk area in terms of liability." That's why universities have canceled programs, he added.

In an interview with JTA, a State Department spokesman said he is unaware of any move to change its travel warning, which updates would-be travelers about the circumstances in Israel, noting, for example, suicide bombings and the instability created by the death of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

It does not mention peace initiatives under way.

"Travel warnings are very carefully prepared by our consular affairs bureau," said State Department spokesman Steven Pike. "They are there for the benefit of American citizens to inform them of realistic and factual conditions in any country around the world and to give them information that they can use to judge the risks and to keep themselves safe."

Pike noted, for example, the more tepid tenor of the warning to Israel in comparison to a country like Saudi Arabia. American citizens are "strongly urged to depart" that country.

In advising about travel to Israel, "the Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens to depart Gaza immediately and to defer travel to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza due to current safety and security concerns."

The number of American students in Israel has plummeted since the start of the intifada, mostly because of a fear of terrorism.

For the first three years of the intifada, about 1,000 American students studied in

Israel each year, down from a peak in 1999, when some 4,000 American students went to Israel, according to Firestone. That does not include about 2,000 yeshiva students, whose numbers have remained relatively constant over the course of the intifada.

But in 2004 about 1,500 Americans studied in Israel, and the numbers continue to rise.

With more than 200 U.S. students this year, Tel Aviv University nearly doubled its enrollment from the previous year, which doubled enrollment from the year before.

"If the trend continues, then maybe two years from now we could look at numbers similar to the numbers that we saw before" the intifada, said Ami Dviri, U.S. director for Tel Aviv University's overseas programs. "We're not there yet but we're definitely making huge progress," he said, adding that American enrollment is up in all Israeli universities.

Additionally, since the start of the "Let Our Students Go!" campaign, between one and two dozen colleges have removed barriers to Israel study, primarily by allowing interested students to sign a waiver, freeing the university of liability, Firestone said.

Recently, the University of Wisconsin has reinstated its program.

Another effort under way is the 10-day mission of university study abroad officers to Israel that began March 1. Before the intifada, study abroad officers regularly traveled to Israel but this mission, arranged by the Israel University Consortium — comprised of Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University, University of Haifa and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev — and co-sponsored by the ICC, is the first of its kind in five years.

One of the eight universities represented is the University of California at Berkeley, whose Israel program remains suspended.

"This is really the time when schools are a little more open," said JoAnn Panzella, business manager of Hebrew University's Office of Academic Affairs in New York. Panzella surmised it was because of student pressure on universities. If the latest campaign helps to "tip the scales in our favor, then that's great."

We're not there yet but we're definitely making huge progress.

Ami Dviri

Tel Aviv University

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Palestinians to control towns

Israel plans to hand Jericho and Tulkarm over to Palestinian Authority control in the coming days.

The decision was reached Tuesday in talks between Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on restarting goodwill gestures that had been suspended after the Feb. 25 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.

Under last month's cease-fire deal between Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Palestinian Authority is to regain control of five West Bank cities.

Outposts helped out

Illegal settler outposts in the West Bank are expanding with government help, an Israeli report said.

"The process of outpost expansion is in full swing," former chief prosecutor Talia Sasson said Tuesday in a report commissioned by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Although the U.S.-led "road map" obligates Israel to remove all outposts erected in the West Bank after March 2001, enforcement has been slow.

Furthermore, Sasson said, there was evidence that the military and the Housing Ministry had directly or indirectly facilitated outpost construction.

Sharon's office had no immediate comment.

Long arm of the law

Israel captured a Palestinian policeman who allegedly took part in the 2000 lynching of two of its army reservists.

The Palestinian, who fled to Egypt after allegedly taking part in the mob killing in the West Bank city of Ramallah, was arrested in January upon returning through the Gaza Strip, the Shin Bet said Tuesday.

According to Israeli sources, dozens of Palestinians are in custody for the lynching at a Ramallah police station. Footage of the attack was broadcast on television and shocked the Jewish state.

The two victims had entered the city by accident after taking a wrong turn in the West Bank.

Israel accountable for bombing?

Mahmoud Abbas said Israelis are responsible for the deadly suicide bombing last month at a Tel Aviv nightclub.

Asked in a Time Magazine interview who was responsible for the Feb. 25 attack in which five people were killed, the Palestinian Authority president responded: "It was individuals. We arrested five. If you ask me who is responsible, the Israelis are responsible. The bombers came from the suburb of Tulkarm to Tel Aviv, crossing the wall. So who is responsible? The wall and the Israelis."

NORTH AMERICA

Syria sanction bill proposed

U.S. lawmakers introduced a bill pressuring Syria to withdraw from Lebanon and end its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

The Lebanon and Syria Liberation Act would sanction foreign individuals and governments that transfer technology or assistance to Syria for its weapons program, and assist pro-democracy advocates in Syria and Lebanon.

The bill, introduced Tuesday by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), also would create initiatives to cooperate with regional allies on controlling the Syrian threat.

"This legislation converts policy into action," Ros-Lehtinen said. "It sends a clear message that there is a price to pay for these threaten-

ing policies, and Syria and its accomplices will be held accountable."

Bush names Boschwitz ambassador

President Bush named a Jewish former U.S. senator as ambassador to the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

Rudy Boschwitz is expected to take a leave of absence from the board of directors of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to serve the new post.

He was first elected to the Senate as a Republican from Minnesota in 1978.

In his new post, Boschwitz will represent the United States at a six-week session in Geneva.

The meeting has often become a forum for anti-Israel rhetoric and resolutions.

Court rules against AJCongress

A U.S. appeals court ruled against the American Jewish Congress in its lawsuit against the AmeriCorps program.

Reversing a lower court ruling, the court ruled Tuesday that AmeriCorps' offering grants for the teaching of secular programs by grantees that also offer religious education does not violate the Constitution's Establishment Clause.

The AJCongress, concerned that programs like AmeriCorps would have "discretionary religious preference" in choosing who could receive grants and how they would be used, brought the case.

Marc Stern, AJCongress' general counsel, said he was not surprised by the ruling of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, and would consider taking the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Orthodox Union praised the court's decision, saying it favored governmental neutrality toward religion, rather than discrimination.

WORLD

Nazi experiment victims to be compensated

Jewish victims of Nazi medical experiments will receive a second compensation payment.

The Claims Conference said payments to 2,432 Jewish victims are expected this week.

Each of the recipients, including 962 Americans, will receive approximately \$3,200. Victims received a payment of \$5,400 last year.

Nazi scandal helps bring college president down

The president of the University of Colorado resigned, in part over a scandal in which a professor compared Sept. 11 victims to a Nazi leader.

Betsy Hoffman said Tuesday she would resign effective June 30.

Hoffman has been embroiled in a controversy over Ward Churchill, the professor who has compared some victims of the Sept. 11 attacks to Adolf Eichmann.

Hoffman's announcement came as Colorado also faces ongoing pressure over the alleged use of sex, alcohol and drugs in recruiting football players.

Anti-Semitic Web site hurts German singer

A German TV station fired a singer from a benefit program for making anti-Semitic statements on his Web site.

Christian Anders was to appear in a benefit on ProSieben, but instead he will never work for the station again, a spokesperson told Der Spiegel Online magazine.

Anders, 60, recently posted a poem on his Web site based on the anti-Semitic hoax "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," in which he blames Jews for Germany's current economic crisis. The poem also suggests that Jews have infected the world with AIDS so that they can earn money by treating the illness.