

IN THE NEWS
Israeli hand-over of towns delayed

Israel's hand-over of Jericho to Palestinian Authority control was delayed.

Security responsibilities for the West Bank city were to be handed over Wednesday.

But the move was postponed after the Palestinians demanded control over checkpoints around Jericho as well, something Israel ruled out as a security risk.

The hold-up threw into doubt the hand-over of four other West Bank cities, a goodwill gesture agreed upon at last month's peace summit but hindered by the Feb. 25 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.

Abbas: Attacks on Israel inevitable

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said further attacks on Israel from the West Bank and Gaza Strip are inevitable.

"They must understand that we cannot achieve 100 percent control, but we exert 100 percent effort," Abbas told Reuters on Wednesday, referring to Israeli demands for counterterrorist crackdowns as required by the U.S.-led "road map" for peace.

"We must expect more attacks because there are some who want to sabotage efforts," Abbas, who next week begins cease-fire talks with Palestinian terrorist groups in Egypt, said he was confident they would lay down their arms.

"The war between us and the Israelis is over," he said.

2 neo-Nazi groups banned in Germany

German officials banned two neo-Nazi groups.

The Berliner Alternative Sued-Ost and Kameradschaft Tor Berlin were outlawed for glorifying Nazi officials and wanting to remove non-native-born Germans from their neighborhoods in eastern Berlin.

Several members of the groups are being investigated on hate-crimes charges.

WORLD REPORT

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Administration presses Israel as Congress acts on aid to P.A.

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The battle between the Bush administration and the U.S. Congress over how much to push the Palestinians and Israel intensified this week.

Just hours after Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who was in Washington on Tuesday, heard clear calls for a crackdown on settlement outposts during meetings at the State Department and White House, Congress put restrictions on aid to the Palestinians.

In approving President Bush's request for \$200 million in aid for the Palestinians, the House Appropriations Committee also removed President Bush's right to waive tough conditions on delivering that aid.

The removal of the waiver means that the White House must run each dollar of the \$200 million through congressional oversight.

The House committee, in approving Bush's overall \$81 billion supplemental request for the war on terror, including funds for the Iraq war, on Tuesday, also set aside \$5 million for an audit of aid to the Palestinians.

The White House says it needs the \$200 million now to bolster P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas in his peace efforts.

While Congress is trying to put restrictions on aid, the Bush administration is pressing Israel to move quickly to dismantle illegal outposts.

The simultaneous developments illustrated the differing emphases of the administration and Congress.

The issue of the outposts came up in a meeting here between U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Shalom on Tuesday, the same day that the Israeli government was

rocked by an internal report alleging its complicity in illegal settlement activity.

"It's long been our policy that unauthorized outposts be removed," a State Department statement said on Tuesday.

"We hope that this comprehensive report which was commissioned by Prime Minister Sharon will be used by the government of Israel to meet its previous pledges on stopping construction of unauthorized outposts and removing existing ones."

Israel's former state prosecutor Talia Sasson's report, released this week, not only confirmed charges that Israel has been slow to crack down on unauthorized West Bank outposts as required by the U.S.-led peace "road map" — it also indicated that some officials had knowingly helped with their expansion.

"These actions seriously undermine the rule of law and democratic running of the State of Israel," Sasson, whose probe was commissioned by Sharon, told reporters on Wednesday.

"I recommend the transfer of these findings to the attorney-general to determine whether there is room for legal action," she said.

According to Sasson, the Housing Ministry, military and immigration officials have funded or facilitated construction of around 105 outposts. Of these, 54 were built on land that did not belong to Israel, including 15 built on Palestinian land.

She recommended that the Cabinet deal directly with outposts, rather than delegating the issue to various government ministries.

Sharon's office declined comment on the report pending a decision by Attorney-General Menachem Mazuz on whether to press charges. Channel 2 television, citing Justice

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■ Administration, Congress move in different directions on Israel, P.A.

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Ministry sources, said that only minor officials, if any, would face prosecution.

Recent government shake-ups appeared to work in the prime minister's favor. Many of the outposts cited by Sasson were erected under former Housing Minister Effi Eitam, whose rightist National Religious Party quit the coalition last year.

Eitam's successor, Isaac Herzog of the center-left Labor Party, was quick to distance himself from the scandal.

"Since I took over, measures have been made. We formed a committee to ensure not one penny is transferred to this kind of outpost," Herzog told Israel Radio.

"We will study the report. If there is a need to transfer authority from one area to another, we will transfer it."

Under the road map, Israel is obligated to dismantle any West Bank outposts put up by settlers since March 2001. A spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv said Washington continued to expect full implementation of this clause.

In Washington, senior Israeli officials at the meeting suggested that Rice was impatient with Israel, especially given Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' successes in reducing rocket attacks and in destroying some arms-smuggling tunnels. The sense was that Abbas was meeting his Sharm el Sheik summit commitments, and Israel was not.

But a Sharon adviser told JTA there would be delays.

"The prime minister is busy pushing through disengagement," said the adviser, requesting anonymity and referring to

withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank planned for this summer. "No one is looking for more points of friction with the settlers."

According to the adviser, Sharon's turnaround from champion of settlement in the West Bank and Gaza to the first Israeli leader to order evacuations from the territories had won him enough international goodwill to weather the Sasson storm.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Shalom acknowledged some progress by Abbas, but still wanted to see him dismantle the terrorist groups.

As it stands now, the congressional legislation that includes aid for the Palestinians omits the president's right to waive oversight conditions for national security concerns; such waivers routinely have featured in past aid packages.

It is not clear when the whole House will vote on the aid, and whether there is room for changes.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee applauded the congressional moves.

"There is an historic opportunity for progress at the moment," said Josh Block, AIPAC's spokesman. "AIPAC is supportive of aid to the Palestinians with the right oversight to ensure that such aid is used

properly to help the Palestinian people and advance America's interests."

But the Israel Policy Forum disagreed.

'We are particularly disturbed that the committee has eliminated the traditional presidential waiver.'

Seymour Reich
Israel Policy Forum

Seymour Reich, the president of the IPF, said the amendment countered the new goodwill between the Palestinians and the United States.

"We are particularly disturbed that the committee has eliminated the traditional presidential waiver," he said. "Even in the Arafat era, a president could

waive conditions on aid to the Palestinians on national security grounds."

Meanwhile, seven U.S. lawmakers proposed a bill that would cut aid to the West Bank and Gaza until the Palestinian Authority took steps toward peace.

"The P.A. has a history of supporting terror and stalling the peace process," said Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), the bill's sponsor. The bill would require the president to inform Congress that the Palestinian leadership is not tainted by violence and has rebuked Palestinian violence and incitement before the money would be distributed.

While the measure is unlikely to garner much support, it indicates the mood among some on Capitol Hill about the need to move cautiously with the Palestinians. ■

(JTA correspondent Dan Baron contributed to this report.)

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Jewish candidate barely out in L.A.

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES, (JTA) — It was a game try, but Robert Hertzberg has fallen just short in his attempt to become the first Jewish mayor of Los Angeles.

Hertzberg just missed second place, which would have qualified him for the runoff election May 17.

Antonio Villaraigosa, a liberal Latino politician who had widespread Jewish support, came in first by a considerable margin, followed by incumbent Mayor James Hahn.

Hertzberg trailed Hahn by 5,768 votes,

with 24,000 ballots yet to be counted. On Wednesday morning, Hertzberg conceded that the margin was too wide to allow him to catch up.

Beyond the results, the most interesting aspect of the mayoral contest is that it appears to signal "the first election of Los Angeles' emerging post-ethnic area," as political analyst Joel Kotkin put it.

None of the five serious candidates in the race, whether Latino, black, WASP or Jewish, could count on the backing of his own ethnic group, with such factors as age, income, geography, ideology and lifestyle outweighing ethnicity. ■

U.S. Jews hit back at French Jewish official

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — A European Jewish official has ruffled some feathers among American Jewish organizations, saying the groups have harmed French Jewry's ability to deal with the government on issues of anti-Semitism.

French philanthropist Pierre Besnainou, vice president and treasurer of the European Jewish Congress, said that since the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee and American Israel Public Affairs Committee have become involved in French affairs, "their manner has come across as presumptuous and somewhat patronizing, placing us in a delicate situation."

"Four years ago, when anti-Semitic acts once again began to taint the honor of the Republic and increased the concerns of our community, the American Jewish organizations began a constant, obstinate and aggressive campaign of 'crying wolf,'" Besnainou said in a Feb. 7 letter to Roger Cukierman, president of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews.

"They accused the French government of complicity, not of weakness, not of unrealism, but of complicity. Some even pushed this attitude of tactlessness and blindness by calling for the boycott of French products."

JTA has obtained a copy of the letter, which was released last week.

After learning about the letter, American Jewish officials fired back.

"As far as the American Jewish Committee is concerned, his views are simply ill-informed and totally erroneous," David Harris, the group's executive director, told JTA. "From the beginning we consulted closely, if not intimately, with the leadership of CRIF and other leading French Jewish personalities.

"What was missing in his statement — but was at the center of our approach — was a French word that we take very much to heart: nuance," Harris added. "And we know that our efforts have made a difference in helping the French Jewish community address the very real problems it has been facing. We're proud of that role and we fully intend to continue that effort."

The back and forth highlights the difficulties that can arise — and the sensitivities that can surface — when U.S. Jewish groups get involved in Jewish issues abroad.

After taking heat for turning a blind eye to growing anti-Semitism in France, in the past year Paris has made statements and launched initiatives to address the concerns.

In February 2004, Israeli President Moshe Katsav visited France and met with his French counterpart, Jacques Chirac. After the meeting, Chirac spoke of his government's "unflagging determination to fight against all forms of racism and anti-Semitism."

French officials moved to increase security measures at Jewish institutions after a meeting with Jewish community leaders in the aftermath of Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin in March 2004.

Last June, after gathering with Jewish leaders, Chirac called on judges to hand down tough sentences to those found guilty of anti-Semitic actions. He said, "Justice should be pronounced with severity, punishment should be exemplary and it should be widely publicized," a presidential spokeswoman told reporters at the time.

At a September ceremony awarding American Jewish filmmaker Steven Spielberg France's Legion of Honor, Chirac praised the director's work in preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

But Besnainou, who recently founded a group dedicated to helping French Jews immigrate to Israel, said that although the U.S. groups had been too aggressive in their initial attacks on the French government, later they rolled over too easily in the face of a French charm offensive.

"The ADL, the AJC and AIPAC became the enthusiastic admirers and supporters of the French government," the letter said, "We have tried in vain to explain to them that the French government is not innocent in the stirring up of anti-Israel feelings and must share in the responsibility, but we have been unable to either slow or stop the attitude from the other side of the Atlantic."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, called these claims "ugly, insult-

ing, degrading and unwarranted."

"If you ask somebody to do something and then they do it, the polite and the proper thing is to acknowledge that they've done so," Foxman said.

France, he added, has "begun to take hold of the issue and the French government time and time again stands up to speak out against it."

But Besnainou is sticking to his guns.

"I've had people in France calling me all week congratulating me on taking this stance," he said. "There are representative Jewish organizations in Europe who know the territory, who have years of experience in dealing with politicians and who know what works and what does not."

Both Foxman and Harris wondered why Besnainou's letter was made public, and why he didn't get in touch with them to discuss his concerns.

"It's just another unfortunate example of Jews sniping at other Jews in public and ultimately doing more damage to the Jewish community than anything else. These days, we need that least of all," Harris said.

An AIPAC spokesman declined to comment specifically on the letter.

"We have tremendous respect for the CRIF and the work they do to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment in Europe," Josh Block said.

CRIF's Cukierman, for his part, said that the letter simply represented Besnainou's "perfectly valid" opinion.

"We have an excellent relationship with the Anti-Defamation League, with the American Jewish Committee, with the World Jewish Congress and with the Presidents Conference," he told JTA by phone from Paris.

But last month, Cukierman upbraided a Los Angeles philanthropist, who had claimed that European Jewish groups were responding too meekly to anti-Semitism.

The philanthropist, Newton Becker, had suggested that American groups should pick up the Europeans' slack. ■

'We know that our efforts have made a difference in helping the French Jewish community address the very real problems it has been facing.'

David Harris
American Jewish Committee

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Leader: Time to bring the synagogue to life

Conservative synagogues need to be reinvigorated, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary said.

While Jewish education and teacher training are dynamic and strong, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch said, many of the movement's best and brightest are "often off at Orthodox shuls."

Schorch made the comments in an address Sunday at the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly in Houston, a spokeswoman for the movement's rabbinic arm told JTA.

Much of the substance "in our shuls is geared towards 'entry-level' Jews and not 'advanced' Jews," he said.

And while these "advanced" Jews remain intellectually Conservative, he added, they have trouble finding satisfaction at Conservative shuls.

Schorch suggested several remedies, among them that the movement must become more entrepreneurial and should reaffirm the validity of halachic boundaries.

JCCs raise money online

A new agreement will allow JCCs in North America to use online auctions for fund raising.

The centers' umbrella organization, the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America, announced a partnership with cMarket, which provides Internet auction platforms.

Raising funds online is becoming increasingly popular for Jewish organizations — the Greater Boston JCC recently raised 40 percent of its funds through an online auction.

Hooping for terror victims

More than 240 basketball players competed in a basketball tournament at the Dallas Jewish Community Center to raise money for young Israeli victims of terror.

The third annual three-on-three tournament, organized by a high school group, Students Against Terrorism, chooses a different charity to play for each year, the Texas Jewish Post reported.

This year, the event, which includes both child and adult teams, raised \$33,000 for Camp Koby, a summer program in Israel that eases the psychological and physical wounds of nearly 700 teenagers who have lost an immediate family member to terror.

The camp is named after Koby Mandell, a 13-year-old boy who was abducted and stoned to death in the West Bank in May 2001.

MIDDLE EAST

Lebanon talk touchy

The United States reportedly asked Israel to refrain from calling on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon.

Ha'aretz said Wednesday that the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Dan Kurtzer, made the request in light of Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom's repeated public comments on the matter, which Washington fears could endanger its efforts to end Syrian occupation and bring about free elections in Lebanon.

Addressing hundreds of thousands of pro-Syrian protesters in Beirut on Tuesday, Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah accused Israel of orchestrating the international pressure on Damascus.

Israeli and U.S. officials declined comment on the Ha'aretz report.

Rabbi calls Sharon 'evil'

A leading Israeli rabbi called Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "evil" because of his plan to withdraw settlers from the Gaza Strip. In his

weekly sermon Tuesday night, former Sephardi chief rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual head of Shas, said, "God should strike him a fatal blow, that he should go to sleep and never get up," Army Radio reported.

But Yosef said he is opposed to a referendum on the issue, saying he does not believe the people of Israel have enough information to make government decisions.

Sources within Shas say Yosef's words did not refer to Sharon's death but were a call for the death of the disengagement plan, the Jerusalem Post reported.

WORLD

Plan to reduce emissaries blasted

Some Israeli lawmakers criticized the Jewish Agency for Israel for planning to reduce its emissaries in the former Soviet Union.

Lawmakers said the agency's decision could harm efforts to bring immigrants to Israel at a time when anti-Semitism appears to be on the rise in the region.

Jewish Agency officials defended the decision, saying it stems from budget cuts and fewer people from the former Soviet Union making aliyah during the past few years.

German suspects admit to synagogue bomb plot

Two Germans believed to be neo-Nazis admitted they planned to bomb a new synagogue and community center.

The two confessed in a German court on Tuesday that they planned to bomb the inauguration of the center in November 2003.

The two are part of a group of nine men charged with belonging to an illegal neo-Nazi group that planned the bombing.

Students champion London mayor

London Mayor Ken Livingstone was appointed the first-ever honorary president of the students' union at a school at the University of London.

The university's School of African and Oriental Studies students' union voted to elect the beleaguered mayor, who recently sparked outrage after refusing to apologize for accusing a Jewish journalist of being like "a concentration camp guard."

Describing Livingstone as "a champion of liberation campaigns," the motion proposing his appointment defended him as the victim of "an unfair and totally biased media campaign aimed at discrediting his attempts at encouraging unity and diversity in London."

The union was accused of pro-Palestinian bias after it tried to block an official from the Israeli Embassy from addressing a Jewish society event last month.

They were forced to back down by college authorities who ruled the ban breached the right to freedom of speech.

The school also hosted a conference on strategies to resist "Israeli apartheid" last year.

Swastika greets passengers in Germany

A large swastika was carved in snow near a Berlin airport, visible to passengers as they landed.

The Nazi symbol, fashioned on a frozen lake near the Tegel airport, was 26 feet by 16 feet in size, Reuters reported.

It was visible most of Monday morning, until police tested the thickness of the lake's ice and took the slippery walk out to remove it.

A pilot who noticed the swastika upon landing informed the police. The symbol is banned in Germany.