



IN THE NEWS

Sharon wants Gaza shuls moved

Ariel Sharon ordered settler synagogues in the Gaza Strip to be relocated to Israel.

Meeting with security chiefs Wednesday, the Israeli prime minister also said they should try to persuade settlers with loved ones buried in Gaza to allow the graves to be dug up and moved to Israel as part of this summer's planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Properties other than synagogues in the 21 Gaza settlements likely will be razed, though some Israeli officials have called for them to be handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

Bush, Abdullah to meet at ranch

President Bush and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah will meet at Bush's ranch, a report said.

Reuters said the two will meet by the end of the month, within weeks of another Crawford, Texas, summit between Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Bush, who reserves Crawford for his highest-level meetings, likely will bring up rising oil prices, democratic reform and Arab political and financial support for the renewed Palestinian-Israeli peace process with Abdullah.

Ukrainian vows to fight anti-Semitism

In a speech before a joint session of the U.S. Congress, Ukraine's president pledged to fight anti-Semitism.

"The 60th anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazism once again calls upon us to fulfill our obligation to root out any expressions of anti-Semitism and xenophobia, to secure minority rights and liberties," Viktor Yushchenko said Wednesday.

Yushchenko also toured the U.S. Holocaust museum and met with U.S. Jewish leaders.

WORLD REPORT

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Abbas fights for political life as militants press for advantage

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Four months after he was elected president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas is fighting for his political life — and possibly for the survival of the peace process.

Last week, Abbas fought off militants' attempts to challenge the authority of the Palestinian government and dismissed a number of senior officers who had failed to prevent the challenge.

Abbas forced the resignation of West Bank security chief Ismail Jaber after riots aimed at the P.A. president ended with shots fired at his Ramallah headquarters.

Abbas took the move primarily to prevent the possible collapse of his rule, but it also is an advance payment to President Bush, with whom he was scheduled to meet later this month. According to the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan, the many P.A. security bodies should be whittled down to three.

Jaber had been commander of the national security force, which with 15,000 police officers is the largest security body in the West Bank. Israel recently has exerted a great deal of pressure on Abbas to get rid of Jaber, considering too weak to cope with terrorists.

Avi Dichter, head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, recently met with Abbas and expressed Israel's concern at the P.A.'s failure to reform the security services, disarm militant groups and stop terrorist attacks against Israeli targets. Even in Jericho and Tulkarm, the two cities Israel already has handed to P.A. control, the Palestinian Authority is

refusing to implement promises to disarm specific wanted terrorists and restrict their freedom of movement.

As a result, Israel has delayed handing over additional cities to P.A. control.

Abbas issued a presidential decree over the weekend mandating the forced retirement of thousands of police officers over age 60, cutting both the size of the armed forces and his budget. Yet in a confrontation with the core of his opposition, the Al-Aksa Brigades, the terrorist militia of his own ruling Fatah party, Abbas backed down.

In an apparent initial attempt to restore law and order, P.A. officials last week ordered six terrorists who had found shelter at the Mukata, Abbas' headquarters in Ramallah, to give up their weapons, join the P.A. security forces or leave the compound.

Instead, the men instead went on a rampage. They were joined on March 30 by other brigade members, who fired shots at the Mukata and in the streets of Ramallah and damaged businesses and restaurants that senior P.A. officials frequent.

Abbas was in the Mukata during the shooting, but escaped unharmed under heavy security. Similar incidents were reported in other places in the West Bank, especially in the Bethlehem and Tulkarm regions.

Some Al-Aksa terrorists threatened to violate the truce declared Feb. 8 if the Palestinian Authority continued to pressure their men.

After the March 30 riots, Abbas ordered

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THE
HEADLINES

■ Peace process at stake as Abbas fights off militants

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a crackdown on the militants. He fired the Ramallah commander, Younis al-Hass, whose men did nothing to stop the gunmen.

But he did not go further, and ultimately he agreed to a deal allowing the terrorists to keep their weapons. That showed Abbas still has a long way to go on implementing Palestinian promises to take the weapons from all but authorized members of the P.A. security services.

The riots, and Abbas' failure to cope with them, intensified the P.A.'s internal crisis. To protest Abbas' deal with the terrorists, the commander of the general intelligence forces in the West Bank, Tawfik Tirawi, resigned March 31, charging that his fellow security commanders were not doing enough to restore law and order.

As the commanders met with Abbas, Tirawi told him, "The commanders around you are not telling you the truth. I cannot work when others do not do their job and when the Palestinian resident is deprived of the necessary feeling of security."

Abbas turned down Tirawi's resignation and Tirawi eventually withdrew it.

P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei condemned the March 30 riots and called on Palestinians to abide by the law.

"These acts serve the interests of those who are against our people," he said. "We must all respect the rule of law."

But Qurei's own relations with Abbas have deteriorated considerably in recent months. Ehud Ya'ari, Arab affairs ana-

lyst for Israel's Channel Two television, reported over the weekend that Qurei was keeping information from Abbas in order to weaken the president.

According to Israeli intelligence, senior figures surrounding Abbas are compartmentalizing him, reporting to him in a distorted manner or ignoring his orders altogether.

Abbas might name Jibril Rajoub, the P.A.'s national security adviser, to Jaber's old job as head of all West Bank security services. Can Rajoub meet the complex challenges of the job?

Rajoub, 52, was Yasser Arafat's longtime national security adviser until the two had a falling-out and Arafat fired him.

He is considered a pragmatist in terms of relations with Israel and is feared on the Palestinian street. If anyone can confront the militants, it is Rajoub.

Only if Abbas and Rajoub succeed in stabilizing the situation will the Palestinians be able to demand that President Bush pressure Israel to speed up the timetable for handing over additional Palestinian cities and dismantling West Bank roadblocks.

Palestinian officials have claimed time and again in recent weeks that it has been difficult to gain popular support for anti-terrorist measures because Israel is dragging its feet on relaxing security restrictions.

They also have been discouraged by Israel's plan to expand the settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim to effectively link it to

Jerusalem from the east, inconveniencing Palestinians traveling between the northern and southern parts of the West Bank.

Israel rejects Palestinian claims that P.A. security forces have been so crippled by Israel's anti-terror operations during the intifada that they now can't act.

However, after four years of intifada, power on the Palestinian street flows from the barrel of a gun, and for many, especially the young, weapons are a major source of respect, authority and livelihood.

The militants are feared but at the same time are still popular, considered by many Palestinians as the heroes of the intifada.

Meanwhile, the fundamentalist terror group Hamas grows stronger each day. Abbas has to take drastic measures to take the P.A.'s reins, and Israel has to prove to the Palestinians that they can gain more with Abbas at their helm than anyone else.

If there is no progress, Hamas may turn out to be a decisive political force in Palestinian parliamentary elections scheduled for this summer. Then P.A. officials may rue their failure to confront the terrorist groups during the 12 years since the Oslo peace process began. ■

'These acts serve the interests of those who are against our people. We must all respect the rule of law.'

Ahmed Qurei
P.A. Prime Minister

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U.S.: Coordinate withdrawal

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States is concerned at the lack of coordination between Israel and the Palestinians before Israel's withdrawal this summer from the Gaza Strip.

Spokesmen for the White House and State Department made a point Wednesday of encouraging the sides to coordinate, which they have not done, although the pullout is to begin in less than four months.

"It's important they coordinate the

disengagement, that we all work to resolve problems that could occur with the disengagement, because it is essentially a very important step forward and we want to make sure it succeeds," said Richard Boucher, the State Department spokesman.

"So we're taking up with the parties all the various aspects of this to help make it succeed."

White House spokesman Scott McClellan also mentioned the need for coordination. ■

Anti-Semitism down, anti-Semitic acts up in U.S.

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Even as anti-Semitic attitudes become rarer in the United States, the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the United States increased to the highest level in nine years.

"Americans have come a long way in their attitudes toward Jews, but America is not immune to anti-Semitism," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, which commissioned the poll.

Released Monday, the poll showed that 14 percent of Americans were deemed "anti-Semitic," a three percent decrease from a 2002 poll. The poll also found that one in three Americans believe American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the United States, and 30 percent believe Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus.

The ADL's annual round-up of anti-Semitic incidents found a 17 percent increase in the number of cases in the United States in 2004. The audit found 1,821 incidents last year, compared to 1,557 incidents in 2003.

Though the numbers pale in comparison to the rise of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe, they do show that a small batch of extremists believe they have more latitude to commit attacks against Jews, Foxman said.

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Taken together, the results suggest a greater appreciation for American Jews in general society, but a continuing acceptance of so-called "big lies" that have dogged Jews for decades, such as the loyalty question and the Christ-killer theory.

Both issues have been in the headlines in the past year. Many American Jewish leaders were concerned that Jews would be seen as more loyal to Israel than to the United States when the American Israel Public Affairs Committee was accused of passing classified documents to the Jewish state last summer.

And many believed that Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" would heighten American perceptions that Jews killed Jesus.

"Well, he certainly didn't help," Foxman said of Gibson. Considering that one in four Americans believed that Jews were responsible for Jesus' death in 2002, Foxman suggested that the film solidified those views in some parts of the country and may have led to the five percentage-point increase.

Foxman said the Jewish community often has been unwilling to combat such

perceptions of Jews because they do not want to give the views any legitimacy.

"I think we need to begin to deal with the loyalty issue, and not hide from it and believe it's going to go away," said Foxman, noting that the Jewish community had taken a proactive stance against Holocaust deniers.

The poll, conducted last month by the Marttila Communications Group, asked 1,600 Americans a series of questions about their views on Jews. People were considered "anti-Semitic" if they agreed with six or more of 11 statements, including "Jews have too much power in the U.S. today" and "Jews have a lot of irritating faults."

The percentage of Americans who responded positively to all 11 statements either dropped or stayed the same since the last poll was taken. Only 15 percent of Americans said Jews hold too much power in the United States, down from 20 percent in 2002, and 15 percent also said Jews were more willing to use shady practices, down from 19 percent in 2002. The poll has a 2.8 percent margin of error.

When compared to ADL polls commissioned in 2002, 1998 and 1992, the latest polls show a stabilization in the types of people who are considered anti-Semitic, which can help educators tailor their programs, Foxman said. For example, adults over 65 are twice as likely to be anti-Semitic as are younger Americans. That number has remained constant even as Americans have aged.

"It's a natural tendency," Foxman said, noting that senior citizens worry less about being politically correct. But concerns arise when older Americans teach their children and grandchildren anti-Semitic lessons that could undo positive messages the students receive in schools and society.

■

Similarly, the poll found that more educated people were less likely to be anti-Semitic. Only five percent of people with post-graduate degrees fell into the most anti-Semitic category, compared with 13 percent of college graduates and 35 percent of people with only a high-school degree.

"Education is a key, key convergence,"

said John Marttila, the poll's author.

The poll confirmed newly identified trends about American anti-Semitism. It found 29 percent of Hispanics polled held anti-Semitic views, but that foreign-born Hispanics were significantly more likely to be anti-Semitic than Hispanics born in the United States.

It also found that black Americans are four times as likely to be anti-Semitic than whites, by 36 percent to 9 percent. That number has remained relatively stable over the past 13 years.

Foxman said the Jewish community has had trouble convincing black leaders that there are anti-Semitic trends in their community, which has made it more difficult to combat such attitudes.

The poll also found a rise in perceptions of Jewish power in the United States. Among those deemed anti-Semitic, 90 percent believed Jews like to be in charge of things, and 82 percent believe Jews have too much power in business. Marttila said such views of Jewish power have replaced negative stereotypes of Jews as less honest and ethical in business.

Of those surveyed, 28 percent believed pro-Israel lobbying groups have too much influence over U.S. policy in the Middle East. More results about U.S. views on Israel will be released next week, timed to coincide with President Bush's meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The audit found anti-Semitic incidents at their highest level in the United States since 1995. The increase was caused by more organized neo-Nazi hate-group activity and a rise in anti-Jewish harassment in schools.

Foxman said "The Passion of the Christ" may have been responsible for some of the school incidents.

There were 1,177 incidents of harassment last year, a 27 percent increase, and 644 incidents of vandalism.

New York had the highest number of reported anti-Semitic incidents last year, with 350, a decrease of 14 from the previous year. New Jersey came in second with 297 incidents, followed by California with 237, Florida with 173 and Massachusetts with 128.

'Americans have come a long way in their attitudes toward Jews, but America is not immune to anti-Semitism.'

Abraham Foxman
National director, ADL

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

No change in Conservatives' gay policy

The Conservative movement's policy on homosexuality will remain unchanged for the time being.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the movement's rabbinical arm did not change its position during a two-day meeting on the subject, and will meet again in June to continue its discussion, representatives of the Rabbinical Assembly told JTA.

In 1992, the committee voted against ordaining gay rabbis and officiating at same-sex weddings. The group met Tuesday and Wednesday at a retreat center in Maryland.

"The movement reaffirmed our commitment to respect the human dignity of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or their marital status," Rabbi Susan Grossman, chair of the subcommittee on family, gender and human sexuality, told JTA.

While the committee stressed that heterosexual marriage is "a centerpiece of Jewish life," Grossman said, it also found that it's "unrealistic for many Jews."

Grossman said she wasn't speaking on behalf of the committee, but as an individual.

Bill would close PLO office

A U.S. congressman proposed a bill to close the PLO's office in Washington.

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) proposed legislation Monday that would downgrade the organization's Washington office because of calls by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to unite with Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are on the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization list.

The Palestinian Authority and the PLO are closely linked.

Gaza solidarity trip planned

A leading U.S. supporter of Israeli settlements is leading a solidarity trip to the Gaza Strip.

Dr. Irving Moskowitz will lead the mission to Israel, which begins Thursday, where participants will spend Shabbat in Gaza in a show of solidarity with Jewish settlers there.

"Over a period of 30 years, the Jewish people living in communities in Gush Katif have established families, schools, businesses, synagogues and cemeteries where their loved ones are buried. Now they are under the threat of eviction because they are Jews. All people of good conscience who believe in democratic values should join us to show support and love to the residents of these threatened communities," Moskowitz said.

The trip comes as fears grow in Israel that settlers will violently resist Israel's evacuation of Gaza this summer.

Judge: Prosecutor lied on Jewish jury issue

A former prosecutor lied when he said he and the judge kept Jews off juries in capital cases because they won't vote for the death penalty, an investigator said.

Judge Kevin Murphy ruled Tuesday that John Quatman lied when he told a California court recently that the late Stanley Golde told him he wanted to keep Jews off juries in capital cases because they would never vote for the death penalty.

Murphy's opinion will be passed on to the state Supreme Court, which will rule on whether Quatman's statement will enable a death-row inmate sentenced in Golde's courtroom to be granted a new trial.

MIDDLE EAST

Fence protest turns violent

Four Palestinians were hurt by Israeli gunfire during a protest against the West Bank security fence.

Several dozen Palestinians demonstrated Wednesday against a section of the fence being erected at the village of Rantiss, north of Ramallah.

When protesters began throwing stones, Israeli guards at the site opened fire, wounding four Palestinians.

Three were hospitalized in Israel.

Rice concerned about settlement destruction

Condoleezza Rice said she is concerned about "wanton destruction" of the Gaza Strip as Israel withdraws this summer.

In an interview Monday with the Associated Press, the U.S. secretary of state said she wants housing to fit the needs and circumstances of Gaza residents once Israel vacates the settlements, and that Israeli and Palestinian leaders should coordinate the transition.

Rice: Iran major terrorism exporter

The world should recognize Iran as the foremost exporter of terrorism in the Middle East, Condoleezza Rice said.

"The Palestinian rejectionists, those who are trying quite literally to blow up the prospects for peace, are getting an awful lot of their support from Iran," the U.S. secretary of state said Tuesday at a meeting of newspaper editorial writers.

"The rest of the world and we cannot favor a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians and turn a blind eye to what the Iranians are doing in their support for terrorism."

Nablus cell cracked

Israeli security forces arrested three Palestinians believed to be Hezbollah spies.

The three Nablus residents were taken into custody Feb. 25 and confessed to working for the Lebanese terrorist group, the Shin Bet said Wednesday.

Among their assignments was gathering intelligence on Israeli military installations and locating an unnamed Israeli public figure for possible assassination, according to the Shin Bet.

But security sources said Hezbollah is expected to reduce pressure on its Palestinian proxies to carry out attacks, at least until after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip this summer.

Hezbollah's main backer, Syria, is wary of drawing more international scrutiny at this time, the sources said.

Settlers clash with soldiers in Hebron

Settlers scuffled with Israeli troops and police in Hebron.

Wednesday's violence, in which a policeman's arm was broken and at least eight settlers were arrested, erupted when the army erected a protective wall around the home of a Palestinian who had complained of being harassed by Jews.

Scores of settler children were involved in the confrontation, lobbing paint and eggs at security personnel.