

IN THE NEWS

Arrest warrant issued in AIPAC case

An arrest warrant was issued for a Pentagon staffer accused of giving classified information to former American Israel Public Affairs Committee officials.

The U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of West Virginia announced the arrest warrant for Lawrence Franklin on Tuesday on charges of possessing classified documents at his home.

A criminal complaint was filed earlier this month in a Virginia federal court, accusing Franklin of giving classified information to Steve Rosen, AIPAC's former policy director, and Keith Weissman, a former AIPAC Iran specialist.

Franklin is expected to appear in the Virginia court on Friday for a preliminary hearing.

The new charges came during AIPAC's annual policy conference in Washington.

Abbas to meet with American Jews

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will meet with U.S. Jewish leaders.

Abbas will meet the Jewish leaders Thursday morning before heading to the White House later that day to meet with President Bush.

Abbas is seeking specific pledges of assistance from Bush before Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip this summer.

Hillary Clinton: End Palestinian incitement

Incitement in Palestinian textbooks is tantamount to child abuse, Sen. Hillary Clinton said.

Addressing the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference on Tuesday, a day before thousands of delegates were to spend a day lobbying members of Congress, the New York Democrat singled out incitement in her speech.

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WORLD REPORT

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In major policy shift, AIPAC offers strong backing for withdrawal plan

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Ariel Sharon has received what he came to Washington for — the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's wholehearted endorsement of his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

AIPAC's endorsement, delivered Tuesday when Sharon earned multiple ovations and rousing cheers at AIPAC's annual conference, puts the pro-Israel lobby squarely in line with the American and Israeli governments, in favor of a policy that still is engendering tremendous dissent at home and abroad.

There never was any doubt that AIPAC would offer some measure of support for the Gaza withdrawal, since the lobby is committed to backing the policies of the Israeli government.

The only question was the degree of support: Sharon needs all the backing he can get.

Settlers continue to snipe at Sharon at home and have stirred up considerable backing in the United States. Hecklers booed the Israeli prime minister at a speech in New York on Sunday, and demonstrators outside the building where Sharon spoke wore orange T-shirts in solidarity with settlers who will be evacuated from Gaza.

A couple of hecklers at the AIPAC conference were overwhelmingly shouted down by thousands of others packed into the cavernous Washington Convention Center.

Sharon already has won the endorsement of an array of national Jewish groups — a full-page ad in Sunday's New York Times praised his "courageous disengagement plan" — but AIPAC's endorsement is the plum.

"Let there be no doubt, the disengage-

ment plan will be implemented according to the timetable and decisions authorized by the government," Sharon said to extended applause, laying to rest rumors that his advisers were counseling a postponement of the withdrawal, now slated to begin in mid-August.

Sharon needn't have worried: It was clear from the launch of this year's annual policy conference on Sunday that AIPAC was undertaking a dramatic policy shift.

For the first time since the collapse of the Oslo accords, AIPAC was envisioning Israel's pullout not just from Gaza, but from parts of the West Bank as well — and in terms that demanded less than absolute stability from the Palestinians.

"If the Palestinians transform Gaza into a reasonably well-functioning, reasonably peaceful place — not necessarily Sweden — then the world won't have to pressure Israel to do this in the West Bank," Howard Kohr, AIPAC's executive director, said at the conference.

It was enough to make one of AIPAC's most persistent critics, Americans for Peace Now, swoon with delight.

"We're very pleased that AIPAC has given its formal endorsement to the U.S. government's support for the disengagement initiative," said Debra DeLee, APN's president.

But the policy shift from AIPAC's leadership didn't necessarily trickle down to members at the conference: There were shouted arguments in the corridors between opponents of disengagement, distinguished by their orange buttons, and supporters of Sharon.

Outside the convention center, a few dozen

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demonstrators protested the withdrawal, holding up signs that said, "Let our people stay."

Delegates said they noted a marked change from last year's policy conference, when Israel still faced a major terrorist threat and delegates enthusiastically embraced AIPAC's talking points for the final day of the conference — which is spent lobbying on Capitol Hill — including support for Israel's West Bank security barrier.

"It's like 1978," said Rabbi Sidney Helbraun of Temple Beth-El in Northbrook, Ill., referring to a time when AIPAC had to accommodate another fundamental shift in ideology, when the Likud won power and began promoting a "Greater Land of Israel" philosophy.

Sharon earned thunderous praise, but judging by the applause at earlier sessions, the two other lobbying points on AIPAC's agenda this year — for continued financial assistance to Israel and for tightened sanctions on Iran — were much more popular than support for disengagement.

Still, the supportive rhetoric from Kohr and other AIPAC officials was unimaginable a year ago, when Sharon's failure to win an internal Likud Party vote on withdrawal led AIPAC to drop the issue from its policy conference agenda.

A lot has happened in the intervening year, however: Sharon won support for the pullout in the Knesset and in his Cabinet; Palestinian Authority President Yasser

Arafat, reviled by the United States and Israel, died, and Mahmoud Abbas, a relative moderate, was elected in his place; and President Bush was re-elected and is vigorously pursuing a Pax Americana in the Middle East in his second term.

Then there was the FBI investigation that came to light last August, targeting two former AIPAC employees for allegedly receiving classified Pentagon information and relaying it to Israel. The investigation has permeated the conference, with Kohr and AIPAC president Bernice Manocherian underscoring their cooperation with law enforcement.

"AIPAC is a public community trust," Kohr said. "I therefore pledge to you that I will take the steps necessary to ensure that every employee of AIPAC — now and in the future — conducts themselves in a manner of which you can be proud, using policies and procedures that provide transparency, accountability and maintain our effectiveness."

AIPAC spokesmen would not elaborate on those procedures.

The investigation didn't deter members of the Bush administration and Congress from offering AIPAC their traditional show of support.

"Judging by how many students I see in the audience today, I know that AIPAC's future is clearly going to be bright," U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said to thunderous applause at the beginning of her speech Monday.

Kohr's speech marked an end to behind-the-scenes tussling in recent weeks between AIPAC and the White House over \$200 million in U.S. assistance to the Palestinians after Israel's withdrawal.

The Bush administration wanted the assistance to go directly to the Palestinian Authority. AIPAC lobbied Congress hard to include tough oversight provisions that effectively would keep all of the money out of P.A. hands, based on past P.A. corruption and ties to terrorism.

In the end, Congress stopped short of

mandating the oversight provisions, allowing Bush some flexibility in how he spends the money.

Rice made it clear in her speech that the Bush administration was determined to support Abbas, a man whom, until recently, AIPAC seemed to trust even less than Israel's government did. Bush and Abbas were to meet Thursday at the White House.

That evening, the leaders of both parties in the U.S. House of Representatives and

the Senate made the same point in dinner speeches.

Sharon also stressed that he will support the Palestinian leader if Abbas keeps his commitments under the road map peace plan to dismantle terrorist groups.

In its opening video montage, AIPAC acknowledged the ambivalence many of its delegates must have felt over the Gaza withdrawal. Wrenching video footage showed settlers weeping as they contemplated leaving their homes. Both sides of the story were thoroughly and fairly presented.

But in the end, there was never any doubt about where AIPAC stood. The Israelis appearing in the video, and then live on the AIPAC stage, included a husband and wife who had made up their mind that the possibility of peace was worth the price of leaving Gaza. A mother and daughter who had bitterly resented their evacuation from the Sinai settlement of Yamit in 1982, but who now acknowledged the peace with Egypt that it brought, spoke as well.

More stunningly, the video, touting the "reduction in friction" that disengagement would bring, featured footage of Israeli troops lording it over Palestinians at a roadblock. The few seconds of footage were unprecedented from Israel's foremost defender.

Significant as well was the conference's first keynote speaker, Tsipi Livni, one of the strongest advocates of withdrawal in Sharon's Likud Party.

"As a Jewish and democratic state, we have no choice but to give up some of the Land of Israel," she said. "This is an understanding of the vast majority of Israelis." ■

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Debra DeLee

President, Americans for Peace Now

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Israelis must plan as Ethiopian aliyah speeds up

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Though tens of thousands of Ethiopians are anticipating making aliyah, little has been done in Israel to prepare for their move.

Officials estimate that it will cost some \$23 million for the immigration of about 20,000 Falash Mura, Ethiopians whose Jewish ancestors converted to Christianity but who have since returned to Judaism.

Beginning next month, plans call for 600 Falash Mura to make aliyah each month, twice the current level. At the new rate, it will take about two and a half years for the immigration to be complete.

The North American Jewish federation system, which is expected to fund the operation, hasn't yet begun its campaign.

Israel, too, is dragging its feet.

The Israeli Cabinet decided in February 2003 that Falash Mura who could prove a maternal link to Judaism could make aliyah.

Early this year, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and some of his Cabinet ministers decided to double the monthly immigration rate. Sharon required an interministerial committee on the Falash Mura to report back to him by April 30 on budgeting and planning for the operation, according to Joseph Feit, past president of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, or NACOEJ.

The interministerial committee hasn't yet submitted its report; the group was scheduled to meet Monday, but the meeting was postponed. Israeli Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz, who chairs the committee, is slated to travel to Ethiopia at the end of June.

The expected aliyah comes amid other developments that could hinder the operation.

For one, Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which handles aliyah, will resign next month.

Meridor was one of the Falash Mura's greatest advocates, lobbying Sharon and other key officials to support the group's aliyah. It's not yet clear to what extent his expected successor, Ra'anana Mayor Zeev Bielski, will champion the cause.

Secondly, NACOEJ, which has funded community programs in Addis Ababa and Gondar since 1992 and which helps run compounds in those cities where many Falash Mura live while waiting to emigrate, may lose its operating ability in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian government recently

stopped the group from operating in Addis because it lacked a nongovernmental-agency license.

The group continues working in Gondar, where 70 percent of NACOEJ's activities are based, and has applied for NGO status. The application is pending, Feit said.

The Jewish Agency is slated to take over the compounds three months after the expedited immigration begins, or after it has a complete list of eligible immigrants. If NACOEJ's work is interrupted,

however, the handover could become more difficult.

The \$23 million tab for Falash Mura aliyah was presented May 10 to officials of the United Jewish Communities, the coordinating body for the North American Jewish federation system, by its overseas partners, JAFI and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

JAFI is budgeting more than \$18 million for the operation; the JDC expects to pay \$4.6 million. The figures do not include the cost of absorption once the Ethiopians arrive in

Israel, said Mike Rosenberg, JAFI's director general of immigration and absorption.

At its board meeting, set for June 5-6 in New York, UJC is expected to approve a fund-raising initiative for the Falash Mura and to help absorb Ethiopians in Israel.

"UJC recognizes the imperative of this issue, and we are working on and examining it directly with the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee," UJC spokesman Glenn Rosenkrantz said.

A few years ago, UJC worked with JAFI, the

JDC, the Israeli government and Keren Hayesod, a body of world Jewish communities excluding North America, to raise money to help absorb Ethiopians in Israel.

Federations were asked to give an additional five percent above their previous overseas allocations to the Ethiopian National Project, said Richard Wexler of Chicago, UJC vice chairman.

But that campaign soon was overshadowed by a campaign to raise funds for Israel's needs during the intifada. With little advocacy for the Ethiopian National Project, Wexler said, the federations' response "was less than lukewarm."

'UJC recognizes the imperative of this issue, and we are working on and examining it directly with the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee.'

Glenn Rosenkrantz
UJC spokesman

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Germany to pay survivors' home care

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — Every May in Berlin brings the annual meeting between representatives of the German government and the Claims Conference, the main organization representing Holocaust survivors around the world.

But there was something different about the conference's talks May 18 with the German Foreign Ministry, which aimed at filling in gaps in Holocaust compensation and pushing for recognition of more survivors. This year, the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Claims Conference's negotiating committee was led by survivors.

The talks resulted in an additional payment of \$11.4 million for home care for needy Jewish survivors in 17 countries, on

top of \$7.2 million agreed to after negotiations last year.

In addition, survivors of several slave labor camps were added to those who receive pensions from Germany. Survivors incarcerated for at least six months in certain camps in Hungary, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria who meet certain criteria are eligible.

Roman Kent, an Auschwitz survivor and chairman of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors, said the message he brought to the table was, "Let's not concentrate only on the dead survivors, let's do something for the needy survivors."

Claims Conference President Israel Singer said he had "a feeling of 'genugtun,' a sense of personal satisfaction that I haven't had in the last 15 years, knowing that no Holocaust survivor in the next three years will go to sleep hungry or alone."

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Withdrawals by agreement?

Israel and the Palestinian Authority resumed talks on coordinating a Gaza Strip handover.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz met Palestinian Authority Internal Security Minister Nasser Youssef on Monday night to hear the latter's proposal for preventing chaos during the summer evacuation of settlements from Gaza and the northern West Bank.

Out for the New Year

Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip may not be completed until October, an Israeli Cabinet minister said.

Though a three-week framework has been set for completing the pullbacks, which are to begin in mid-August, the cut-off date for Israel "is the eve of Rosh Hashanah," Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra told the Jerusalem Post on Tuesday.

The Jewish new year begins Oct. 3.

Ezra said conditions on the ground — specifically, whether there is resistance from settlers slated for evacuation — will decide how long the withdrawals from Gaza and the northern West Bank take and how much they cost.

If the settlers cooperate with security forces, it could save Israel as much as \$220 million, Ezra said.

Mideast women press Laura Bush

Israeli and Palestinian women pressed Laura Bush for greater U.S. involvement in brokering peace.

"People that I talked to in civil society who talked about the Palestinian-Israeli issue want the United States to stay involved, they want the United States to push, actually, to make sure there is a withdrawal from Gaza this summer," the first lady said Tuesday on her way back from a Middle East tour.

Israel plans to pull out from the Gaza Strip this summer, leaving the Palestinian Authority in control.

Street gang for terror

Eight Arabs from Jerusalem were arrested for setting up a Palestinian terror cell in the city.

Police said Tuesday that eight residents of the Issawiya neighborhood, all of them 19- or 20-year-olds with Israeli identity cards, had been arrested for a spate of stoning and fire-bombing attacks against vehicles on the Jerusalem-Ma'aleh Adumim highway.

Magical mystical tour

Laura Bush's advance staff bought Kabbalah red string bracelets in Israel for good luck.

Six staffers on the first lady's advance team took some time off last Thursday and bought knock-offs of the bracelets in Jerusalem's Old City.

The genuine article is available at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, where they have been blessed by rabbis and are supposed to bring good luck and fertility.

Going for the imitations may have backfired: Bush was mobbed Sunday by protesters during her Old City tour.

The red strings have been made popular in recent years by celebrities, including Madonna, who dabble in Jewish mysticism.

NORTH AMERICA

Congressmen join Jerusalem brief

Fourteen members of Congress filed an amicus brief in an appeal against a court's decision permitting the U.S. State Department to leave "Israel" off the passports of Jerusalem-born citizens. A federal court ruled last year against the parents of Menachem Zivotofsky,

U.S. citizens who tried to have Zivotofsky's birthplace listed as "Jerusalem, Israel" on his passport.

Lawyers for the family are now taking the case to the appeals court in Washington.

Last week, a bipartisan slate of congressmen, led by Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), filed a friend of the court brief in support of the family.

House to Israel: Happy 57th

The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution Monday congratulating Israel on its 57th birthday.

"America's commitment to the existence and security of Israel is unwavering," Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the House minority leader, said Monday in her address to this year's American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual policy conference.

More than 200 House members and 54 senators attended Monday's AIPAC dinner.

Are there atheists in foxholes?

Jewish texts will be sent to U.S. soldiers overseas.

The Jewish Publication Society and the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council will send 2,750 copies of the Book of Psalms and the Torah to soldiers overseas in time for Shavuot.

WORLD

Nobel laureates press for end to boycott

Twenty-one Nobel Prize winners published an open letter calling on a British teachers union to overturn its academic boycott of Israel.

"Academic freedom has never been the property of a few and must not be manipulated by them," the letter read. "Therefore, mixing science with politics, and limiting academic freedom by boycotts, is wrong."

The controversial motion, passed last month by Britain's Association of University Teachers, called for the severing of ties with Haifa and Bar-Ilan universities but is expected to be overturned at the AUT's meeting on Thursday.

Israel accused of whitewash

The mother of a British pro-Palestinian activist shot in Gaza accused Israel of a whitewash as a trial over his death drew to a close.

Tom Hurndall, a 22-year-old member of the International Solidarity Movement, was shot in the head in the Rafah refugee camp in April 2003. He fell into a coma and died nine months later.

Sgt. Wahid Taysir, a 20-year-old Bedouin soldier, was court-martialed over the incident, charged with manslaughter, conduct unbecoming a soldier and obstructing justice.

Boiler explodes at site of bombing

A boiler explosion temporarily panicked employees of the Argentine Jewish center that was bombed in 1994.

The AMIA building in Buenos Aires was evacuated for several minutes Tuesday after the explosion. No one was believed to be hurt in the incident, and everyday activities continued. "My legs are still trembling. I couldn't believe it. It was strong, strong," Anita Weinstein said of Tuesday's explosion. Weinstein is a survivor of the July 1994 bombing, which killed 85 people.

Russian Jews want cemetery left alone

Authorities in the Russian city of Kaliningrad temporarily halted construction on the site of an abandoned Jewish cemetery, a Jewish group said. The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia reported the news Tuesday.

The Jewish community, which wants the cemetery recognized as a historical monument, is asking for a halt to all future construction on the site.