

IN THE NEWS
Israeli envoy protests Iranian statements

Israel's U.N. envoy protested recent threatening statements against the Jewish state by Iran's president.

In a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Israeli ambassador Dan Gilleman asserted that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's "highly appalling and offensive statements" constitute a violation of the U.N. Charter and an incitement to racism and genocide.

"Every member state must, on account of its membership in the United Nations, denounce and reject these hateful words," Gilleman wrote Monday.

Gilleman sent copies of the letter to the presidents of the U.N. Security Council and the General Assembly.

Israel-U.S. to develop plane defense?

Israel and the United States are considering the joint development of defense systems for civilian aircraft.

Shaul Mofaz, Israel's deputy prime minister and former defense minister, met Monday with U.S. transportation security officials and discussed Israel's development of anti-missile systems for civilian aircraft.

Officials traveling with Mofaz said U.S. officials planned to visit Israel to study its plans with a view to collaboration.

Israel halts its tunnel hunt

Israeli forces wrapped up a tunnel-hunting operation in the southern Gaza Strip.

Troops and military engineers pulled out of Rafah, a town straddling the Gaza-Egypt border, on Tuesday after exposing and destroying 15 tunnels used by Palestinian terrorists to smuggle in arms.

At least four Palestinians who tried to attack Israeli forces during the almost weeklong mission were killed.

WORLD REPORT

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Olmert moves to shore up coalition, but will it cost him Labor's support?

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a bold gambit designed to bolster his shaky coalition, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is bringing a hawkish party into his coalition, guaranteeing him the support of 78 members of the 120-seat Knesset and possibly one of the most stable governments in Israeli history.

The move significantly strengthens Avigdor Lieberman, hardline leader of the Yisrael Beiteinu Party, and leaves the rest of the Israeli right in disarray.

It also raises questions for the dovish Labor Party, Olmert's main coalition partner.

The accession of Yisrael Beiteinu could herald the end of any potential peacemaking between Israel and its neighbors, and Labor will have to decide whether it can continue serve in the same government. The fact that Lieberman has been accused of racism with regard to Israeli Arabs compounds Labor's dilemma.

Lieberman wants to focus on the strategic threat posed by Iran as well as on reforming Israel's notoriously unstable form of government. A Yisrael Beiteinu proposal to adopt a full-blown American-style presidential system is unlikely to pass, but Lieberman's drive for reform probably will spur changes aimed at strengthening the larger parties within the current European-style parliamentary system, paving the way for more stable government.

Indeed, the reason Olmert turned to Lieberman was because his coalition, barely six months old, was under pressure over the state budget. To avoid yet another

early election, Israel's prime minister needs to pass the budget by the end of each year, but with Labor rebels threatening to vote against it, pundits were predicting elections by spring.

With Lieberman in the coalition and assuming Labor decides to stay, Olmert's budget worries are over. With his own Kadima Party, Labor, Yisrael Beiteinu, the Pensioners Party and the Sephardi Orthodox Shas Party, Olmert's coalition includes nearly two-thirds of the Knesset and is unlikely to face any serious challenge to its parliamentary majority — unless

one or more parties defect.

Olmert describes the new coalition as perfectly balanced, with Yisrael Beiteinu to the right, Labor to the left and Kadima in the center, which is precisely where he wants it to be in terms of electoral appeal.

But whether the left-right balance makes for levelheaded decision-making or instead creates paralysis is one of the perennial conundrums of Israeli politics. In the letter, left-wingers fear Lieberman may be able to stymie any peacemaking initiatives and even prevent the evacuation of illegal Jewish outposts in the West Bank, as called for by the "road map" peace plan that remains nominally operative.

Evacuation of outposts could be a first test case. Defense Minister Amir Peretz, the Labor leader, has instructed the army to come up with detailed evacuation plans, and there could be a showdown within the next few weeks.

Lieberman has signed onto the guidelines of Olmert's coalition, which include

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■ *Bringing Yisrael Beiteinu into the coalition could cost Olmert the support of Labor*

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outpost evacuation and peace moves, but pundits are asking whether being in government will moderate Lieberman or whether Lieberman will radicalize the government.

Left-wingers also are highly critical of Lieberman's appointment as strategic affairs minister, with special responsibility for the Iranian threat. They say Lieberman — who once spoke of bombing Egypt's Aswan Dam — is the last person who should be dealing with the threat posed by Iran's drive for nuclear weapons.

In an editorial entitled "Lieberman is a strategic threat," the left-leaning Ha'aretz wrote that "the choice of the most unrestrained and irresponsible man around for this job constitutes a strategic threat in its own right. Lieberman's lack of restraint and his unbridled tongue, comparable only to those of Iran's president, could be disastrous for the entire region."

Lieberman was born in Moldova in the former Soviet Union in 1958, and immigrated to Israel when he was 20. He came to prominence as Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu's right-hand man, rebuilding the party from 1993-1996 and helping to mastermind Netanyahu's national election victory in 1996.

A would-be playwright, Lieberman made his name as a political strongman, earning the sobriquet "director-general of the country" when he ran the Prime Minister's Office under Netanyahu.

After falling out with Netanyahu, Lieberman left the Likud in 1999 to found Yisrael Beiteinu, a mainly Russian immigrant party, winning four seats that year, three in 2001 and 11 in elections last May.

Uncompromisingly hawkish, he opposed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal, once resigning from a Sharon government and once being fired.

That did not stop Sharon from describing Lieberman as one of the best ministers in his administration, and few doubt Lieberman's competence. The problem left-wingers have is with his hawkishness on regional affairs, and his perceived racism with regard to Israeli Arabs.

Lieberman caused a furor in the Knesset last May when he labeled Arab legislators who expressed sympathy for the terrorist group Hamas and refused to honor Israel's Independence Day "collaborators."

"The Second World War ended with the Nuremberg trials and the execution of the Nazi leadership. Not only them, but all those who collaborated with them. I hope that will be the fate of the collaborators in this house," Lieberman declared from the Knesset podium.

Arab Knesset members were outraged. Legislator Ahmed Tibi retorted

that Lieberman was "a man for whom fascism has become a way of life and racism a tool of the trade."

The Yisrael Beiteinu leader also has two controversial proposals with regard to Israeli Arabs: He wants to pass an amendment to the citizenship law that would require them to swear an oath of loyalty to the state, and favors a land swap with the Palestinians that could leave more than 250,000 Israeli Arabs on the Palestinian side of the border.

Such views are enough for some Laborites to rule out any possible coalition with Lieberman, but others say that whether Labor remains in the coalition depends on the government's policies and actions.

Labor's Central Committee is set to meet Sunday to decide. Most pundits believe the decision

will be to stay, at least for the time being.

Ironically, Lieberman's move fragments the right at a time when opinion polls show the Israeli public shifting rightward after the Lebanon war. The big loser is Netanyahu — who, before Lieberman's move, seemed poised to return to power in early elections next year.

Now, if the new coalition holds, elections are due only in 2010 — by which time the polls likely will be giving very different answers to very different questions.

'Lieberman's lack of restraint and his unbridled tongue, comparable only to those of Iran's president, could be disastrous for the entire region.'
Ha'aretz

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Lawmaker sues state over protest

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli lawmaker plans to sue the government over injuries he suffered during a political protest.

Arieh Eldad of National Union-National Religious Party was among scores of protesters who suffered injuries while trying to prevent the police demolition February of Amona, a West Bank settler outpost. Eldad, a former military medical officer and practicing doctor, said he

tore tendons in his wrist, compromising his surgical skills.

Eldad's attorney, Avi Naor, told Yediot Achronot on Sunday that he would seek unspecified financial compensation from the state.

The suit will argue that Eldad may want to return to medical practice if his party loses Knesset seats during the next election, but may be prevented from doing so because of his injury. The Justice Ministry had no comment, pending the lawsuit's submission.

Lawyer's fee in Holocaust case sparks row

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — The success of a landmark \$1.25 billion settlement for Holocaust victims risks devolving into a bitter public spat over the fee an attorney is charging on the case.

A ruling is expected any day on whether Burt Neuborne, the New York University law professor who served as lead settlement counsel for survivors in the Swiss bank case, should be paid \$4.76 million for his efforts.

Neuborne worked pro bono in winning the original settlement, but he's seeking payment for seven subsequent years of work representing hundreds of thousands of claimants during the complex process of disbursing the funds.

Holocaust survivors involved in the case say Neuborne never disclosed his intention to seek remuneration and were shocked to learn he was asking for a multimillion-dollar fee.

"It is, to me, an outrageous thing," said Roman Kent, chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and a member of the committee that negotiated a similar settlement with German corporations and government in the 1990s. "I can only tell you that as far as I'm concerned, he never told me that he's going to get paid for the work. He told me on numerous occasions that he is working pro bono."

Survivors were further outraged last week when the Anti-Defamation League gave Neuborne its American Heritage Award in recognition of his work promoting human rights and democratic ideals.

"There was a time when we all thought of the ADL as a paragon of justice and honor," a group of survivors wrote to the ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman. "Most of us and many other survivors have supported ADL financially and with our work in the community. Your disrespect for us and our martyred loved ones will tarnish this organization forever."

Foxman responded by acknowledging the complaint "from the heart and as a Holocaust survivor" but stood his ground, saying the controversy "does not detract from our honoring Burt Neuborne."

In a written statement provided to JTA, Neuborne says he always intended to seek compensation. "I disclosed my post-settlement fee arrangement to the German Holo-

caust Foundation, the U.S. Supreme Court and the parties in open court," he wrote.

Several lawyers who worked on the case support that position, saying it was well understood that Neuborne's post-settlement work was not free.

Michael Hausfeld, a lawyer who worked on behalf of survivors on the case, says there was no "technical disclosure" but that Neuborne's intentions were well understood.

"Burt never said in any public filing, 'From here on in, I'm going to be calculating a fee,'" Hausfeld said. "But everybody understood who remained involved in the case that Burt's work would have to be compensated."

Apparently not. Several survivors, lawyers and community professionals connected to the case told JTA that Neuborne had every opportunity to inform them he was seeking payment for post-settlement work, but did not do so.

In a number of court papers, Neuborne refers to the fact that he worked on the case without fees; Neuborne says those statements are being misconstrued.

Thane Rosenbaum, a Fordham University law professor and author of a book on the moral basis of restitution claims, says such ambiguity is precisely the problem.

"This isn't some mom-and-pop local magistrate in upstate New York. This is federal court in Brooklyn," Rosenbaum said. "This is a lawsuit with international implications, precedent-making. There's going to be books and articles written about it. How can there not be technical disclosure?"

The question of attorney fees is not the first controversy to hit the case, in which Swiss banks were accused of hiding Holocaust-era bank accounts belonging to Jews.

A group of American survivors filed an appeal to block a plan to send a large percentage of the settlement funds, earmarked for needy survivors, to survivors in Europe and the former Soviet Union. The presiding judge, Edward Korman, rejected that appeal, a decision Neuborne supported.

"I feel he betrayed us," said David Mermelstein, 77, a survivor from Miami who participated in the appeal. "He was supposed to have been our representative and it turned out he betrayed us."

Neuborne calls that charge "so incredibly unfair," arguing that survivors in the former Soviet Union had as much claim on his services as those in the United States. He says he turned his life "upside down" working on the case, even persuading Congress to make the settlement money tax-free, which saved more than enough to cover his fee.

He notes that his fee, if spread across the several hundred thousand survivors who received compensation, amounts to only about \$10 a head.

For some, the disclosure issue only partly explains the reaction. The fact that Neuborne calculated his fee at \$700 an hour after having already earned more than \$4 million for work on the German claims case appeared to them to be the height

of greed.

"Putting aside the legalities involved, Professor Neuborne wants to walk away from his involvement with Holocaust-related cases on behalf of survivors as a very rich man," said Menachem Rosensaft, a lawyer and founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. "He wants to have enriched himself to the tune of more than \$9 million for his work. That, to me, is not just unseemly, it is obscene."

The controversy over Neuborne's compensation has built since he filed his fee application in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn in December.

Neuborne says he has no quarrel with those who question the size of his fee, but is stung by accusations that he's profiteering from the suffering of Holocaust survivors, tarnishing what he calls "the proudest achievement of my career."

"It's painful to think that Holocaust survivors who I wanted to help, at the end of this process, have a negative view of me," Neuborne says. "I just hate that idea." ■

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Roman Kent

Chairman, American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Russia: Go easy on Hamas

Russia's foreign minister called for Hamas to be included in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking efforts.

Sergei Lavrov said in an interview published Tuesday that it's unrealistic for Western powers to shun the radical Islamist group to get it to recognize Israel's right to exist and renounce terrorism. "I have said repeatedly that asking Hamas to change its positions 100 percent is not realistic.

We must look at what is possible," Lavrov told the London-based newspaper *Asharq al-Awsat*.

"Undoubtedly, Hamas, as the power that received a mandate from voters, must be a part of the solution and not the problem itself. As we know from our dealings with Hamas and its representatives, Hamas is ready to move toward common ground."

Russia broke with the United States and European Union by engaging Hamas politically after it won Palestinian Authority elections in January.

The group has said it could enter a long-term truce with Israel but would never recognize the Jewish state.

French man fined for anti-Semitic letters

A French court fined a man for sending anti-Semitic letters.

The court in eastern France fined Emmanuel Rist some \$875 on Monday for sending letters with the words "Jew equals Zyklon B" to local papers, a local Jewish organization and two local members of the local Jewish community.

Rist is also suspected in a 2004 attack on a Jewish cemetery.

Argentine woman pays fine to Jewish couple

An Argentine woman was ordered to pay \$11,500 in damages to a Jewish couple after she refused to rent them an apartment.

The woman first agreed to rent the apartment to the couple in 2001, but changed her mind when she learned they were Jewish.

She argued she wouldn't rent her apartment in Buenos Aires to "Jews, Chinese, Koreans or homosexuals."

MIDDLE EAST

Report: Illegal W. Bank construction up

Israel reportedly has suppressed a government report revealing large-scale settlement expansion in the West Bank.

Ha'aretz reported Tuesday that a study conducted over the past two years found that settlements and outposts often have been expanded without government permission, and on Palestinian-owned land in the West Bank.

The newspaper alleged that unnamed officials in the Defense Ministry's Civil Administration have removed information on settlement expansion from a government database to obscure the extent of the construction. The Defense Ministry confirmed that a study had been put together, but said its contents were classified since it hadn't yet been submitted to the Cabinet.

The U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv declined comment on the report, saying only that Washington expects Israel to keep to its commitments under the "road map" peace plan, which include a freeze on settlement expansion and the dismantling of illegal outposts.

Israeli leader invited to Qatar

Israel's foreign minister was invited to Qatar. Israel Radio reported Tuesday that Tzipi Livni was invited to attend a conference on emerging democracies next week in the Persian Gulf state.

Political sources confirmed the invitation but had no immediate

word on whether Livni would go, but it would be the highest-level Israeli visit to Qatar since 2001.

Israel long has had a trade mission in Qatar, which is one of the more moderate Arab states and recently has been involved in trying to soften the diplomatic platform of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

NORTH AMERICA

Congressman: Help Bangladeshi journalist

A U.S. congressman called on the Bush administration to intervene on behalf of a Bangladeshi journalist facing sedition charges for advocating ties with Israel.

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) wrote to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asking her to "use the full influence of your office to correct a grave injustice" being committed against Shoab Choudhury, editor of the English-language *Weekly Blitz* newspaper.

Environmentalists oppose Shabbat boundary

An attempt to build a Shabbat boundary in southern California is running into environmental opposition.

Observant Jews have applied for permission to build the eruv in the sands of Venice Beach, but environmentalists say the boundary would violate a California law that protects beachside views and bird habitats.

The boundary, which would allow observant Jews to carry on Shabbat, is the last part of an eruv begun in 2002, *The Associated Press* reported.

The California Coastal Commission is expected to decide on the \$20,000 proposal — the costs would be picked up by a local synagogue — next month.

Palestinian kicked off Phoenix commission

A Palestinian man was kicked off Phoenix's Human Rights Commission for alleged intolerance against Israel, Jews and at least one Muslim. The Phoenix City Council removed Marwan Ahmad from the commission last week, the *Arizona Republic* reported.

The council didn't specify why Ahmad was removed after more than five years on the commission, but he publishes a *Multicultural Yellow Pages* that excludes references to Jewish institutions and omits any phone, plane or restaurant listing having to do with Israel.

He also publishes a Muslim newspaper that ran an editorial cartoon depicting a local Muslim as a dog.

Borat speaks Hebrew

Comedian Sacha Baron Cohen substitutes Hebrew for Kazakh in his satirical movie "Borat."

The anti-Semitic Kazakh television personality, one of several satirical creations by Cohen, a British Jew, for his "Ali G" show, appears in his own movie next month.

The opening sequence of the film was released Monday on YouTube.

In it, Borat takes leave of his ancestral village, telling one resident, according to the subtitle, "Doltan, I'll get you a new arm in America."

In fact, Cohen says in Hebrew, "I'll buy you some kind of a new arm."

The film covers Borat's travels through the United States, revealing his own bigotries, sexism and backwardness as well as those of the people he encounters.

Appalled by the success of the character, Kazakhstan's government has launched a counter-campaign extolling the Central Asian nation's virtues.