

## Mideast: PM warns of "madness"

Paris. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi indirectly described anti-Israeli comments by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as "madness" while addressing a Jewish association in Paris on Tuesday. "We must all be extremely wary of the madness of those who say, even if only for domestic political reasons, that Israel must be wiped off the world map," Berlusconi said, in reference to comments made by Ahmadinejad last October. "We don't believe such things are real, but there has already been a certain gentleman who initially seemed to be a democrat but who went on to do what he did," he said, referring to Hitler. Berlusconi made his comments after receiving a prize from Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner on behalf of the Keren Hayesod Association, the central fundraising organisation for Israel, in recognition of his work in support of Israel and world peace. In his acceptance speech, the premier said he had long been pushing for Israel to join the European Union as "a state that belongs to the West in terms of its values, culture and democracy". He went on to mention his proposal to create a so-called Marshall Plan to relaunch the Palestinian economy and his offer of Erice in Sicily as a venue for a Middle East peace conference, saying "any free Western man would do as I have done". "I've always been, I would say naturally, a friend of Israel," the premier added. "In my childhood I had Jewish friends who I loved and who loved me back. Then I visited Auschwitz and in that moment I felt Israeli too". The prime minister also met French President Nicolas Sarkozy on Tuesday, with immigration on the agenda. Photo: Silvio Berlusconi.