



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 234

Wednesday, December 30, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel threatens to block planes

Israel is threatening to block incoming flights into the newly opened Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip if its officials are prevented from inspecting the planes. The threat came after Israel said its officials were not allowed to inspect an Egyptian plane carrying Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. The airport opened earlier this month amid much fanfare and celebration.

More candidates for premier?

Former Israeli army chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak said he would announce next week whether he is running for prime minister, after the Knesset finalizes plans for elections scheduled to take place May 17.

The announcement would give Shahak the 100-day grace period army officers and government officials are required to observe before running for office.

Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon is also reportedly considering a run for the prime minister's post. Sharon said Monday, "There is a difference between 'I don't want to be prime minister' and running under special circumstances."

Several former colleagues of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, including former Finance Minister Dan Meridor, former Science Minister Ze'ev "Benny" Begin and Uzi Landau, have already joined the race.

Ban triggers Knesset boycott

The Conservative movement in Israel said it would ask Jewish communities in the Diaspora not to allow any lawmakers who support a proposed bill banning non-Orthodox Jews from religious councils in Israel to appear in their cities.

The Reform and Conservative movements are saying the bill, which would bypass a recent Israeli Supreme Court decision in Israel, delegitimizes liberal Jewish streams in Israel and abroad. [Page 3]

King Hussein leaves clinic

Jordan's King Hussein left the Mayo Clinic in "good health," according to a clinic spokesman. Hussein, who had been receiving cancer treatment since July at the Minnesota center, is now in Washington, where he is expected to meet with President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

THE EMERGING CANDIDATES

Shahak enjoys popularity, but political views are unclear

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Amnon Lipkin-Shahak has been watching his popularity soar in public opinion polls as he prepares to launch his candidacy for prime minister.

But even as the former army chief of staff was officially discharged last week, Israelis were still trying to figure out just who he is.

Hoping to learn his plans, a pack of journalists pounced on Shahak outside the gates of an army base after he formally retired from 36 years of service.

But Shahak remained ambiguous, saying he would wait until an election date is set before formally announcing his candidacy as part of a newly formed centrist party.

"I think many people in the State of Israel are waiting for something different," he said cautiously. "They want hope, and if I can help bring these things, I will."

Despite his reticence about his plans, Shahak, 54, has already found himself under fire from both the left and right.

The Labor Party has accused him of splitting the left-wing vote by refusing to join Labor's ranks, a move they say will only benefit Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the upcoming elections.

The Likud Party has accused him of breaking Israeli military law by engaging in politics before officially leaving the army.

Polls say Shahak could get about 20 percent of the vote in a first round of elections against Netanyahu and Labor leader Ehud Barak, and that he would beat Netanyahu by 48 percent to 33 percent if the two competed in a second-round runoff.

Born in 1944 in Tel Aviv, Shahak graduated from a military preparatory school in Haifa before joining the army in 1962.

He was awarded the prestigious medal of valor twice, first in 1968 for his handling of a raid on a Palestinian guerrilla base in Jordan. His second decoration was for a daring undercover operation in Beirut in 1973, when he led one of two commando teams. The second team was led by Barak.

Shahak rose through the army ranks to become the head of military intelligence, deputy chief of staff and, eventually, chief of staff in 1995.

Some critics say Shahak failed to address important challenges confronting the military during his tenure as chief of staff.

The only major Israeli operation during that tenure was Operation Grapes of Wrath, a 16-day blitz in April 1996 on Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon. The operation included a devastating military failure: the accidental shelling of a U.N. base that killed some 100 Lebanese refugees who had taken shelter there.

Shahak's last years in uniform will probably be best remembered for his role in negotiating the Oslo peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians.

After Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Declaration of Principles that launched the Oslo process in September 1993, then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin appointed Shahak — then deputy chief of staff — to head the team negotiating the first Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu, who was then the leader of the opposition, criticized the move, saying generals should not conduct political negotiations. Just the same, a look at Shahak the negotiator — who was highly respected both by his colleagues and the Palestinians — provides a useful glimpse into his political skills.

In "The Process," a recently published book by former Israeli negotiator Uri Savir

MIDEAST FOCUS

Orthodox students work illegally

Israeli army officials located some 500 fervently Orthodox Jews who have been working despite army deferrals that prevent them from doing so. The announcement came after an Israeli high court recently deemed illegal a long-standing arrangement under which Jews who declare studying the Torah to be their work are granted army deferrals.

Israel's High Court of Justice also recently ordered the Parliament to draft new legislation on the matter.

Palestinian sentenced to life

An Israeli court sentenced a Palestinian to life in jail for his role in a 1995 suicide bombing. In the attack, which killed 22 people, Abdel Halim Balbisy drove two suicide bombers to a Tel Aviv intersection.

Israel demolishes 2 homes

Israel demolished two Palestinian homes on the West Bank it said were built illegally. A scuffle broke out between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians during the razing. The United States has asked Israel to refrain from demolishing Palestinian homes as a gesture to advance the peace process.

AOL talking with Israeli firm

An Israeli Internet company is reportedly negotiating with the U.S. Internet-access company America Online, according to the Israeli business newspaper Globes. AOL's negotiations to enter the Israeli Internet market comes after its recent purchase of the Tel Aviv-based chat and messaging firm Mirabilis.

Israel birthrate tops list

Israel has the highest birthrate, 21.2 out of 1,000 people, among developed countries, according to a new statistical book. "Children in Israel — 1998" also found that Israeli youth spend an average of four hours per day watching television.



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
 Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
 Lisa Hostein, *Editor (on leave)*
 Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
 Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

about the Oslo process, there are several behind-the-scenes incidents involving Shahak.

On March 20, 1994, Shahak and a small group of Israeli delegates were dispatched to Tunis to try to break the stalemate in peace talks after the Hebron massacre, in which Dr. Baruch Goldstein, an Israeli extremist, killed 31 Muslims worshipping at Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs.

An uncompromising Yasser Arafat insisted that Israel remove all Jewish settlers from Hebron. Shahak took Arafat aside to the kitchen and lounge of the PLO guesthouse. When they returned, Arafat had softened.

"After talking with General Shahak, I have decided that we will return to the talks," the book describes Arafat as saying. "Prime Minister Rabin is also under pressure, and I trust him to make the right decision about the settlers."

Two factors are generally thought to be drawing Shahak to the political arena:

- the 1995 assassination of his mentor, Rabin; and
- several clashes with Netanyahu, who as prime minister reportedly tried to silence Shahak from providing military assessments related to the peace process.

Israeli newspapers, struggling to paint a picture of Shahak, have described him as a calm, self-assured man with a quiet charm and charismatic smile. He is also described as an extremely cynical man who lacks the personal ambition of either Netanyahu or Barak. Shahak is married to his second wife, Tali, a journalist, and has five children. He has a bachelor's degree in history.

While Israelis try to form an opinion about Shahak, some analysts say there is only one clear conclusion to be drawn from the remarkable popularity of a man who has yet to declare his political intentions. Israelis, the analysts say, are drawn to Shahak because they are fed up with the political system and all of the current candidates. □

U.S. Jewish group criticizes choice of Election Day in Israel

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — At least one American Jewish organization is not pleased with the date set for Israeli elections.

"A delay of five months seems sadly unresponsive to the urgent needs of this moment," Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said Tuesday after Israel's two major parties agreed that May 17 would be Election Day.

"It is especially troubling that we are told that the peace process must come to a halt during this period — bringing with it a host of negative consequences, including the effect on world opinion in the United States, Arab countries and elsewhere," Baum said in a statement.

American Jewish leaders are usually tight-lipped when it comes to publicly questioning Israeli political maneuvers, and in a telephone interview Baum said the statement was not intended as "severe criticism of anybody," but rather "musing of what we think is an unconsidered decision." He said the decision to set a lengthy campaign period, which might last through June should runoff elections be necessary, was "not cognizant" of some of the "ramifications of that longer period."

"The danger is that the world, however unjustifiably, may perceive Israel as maneuvering to put the peace process on hold during a period which encompasses and passes the May 4 date," the statement explained, referring to the end of the interim period for final-status negotiations, and the date the Palestinians have said they intend to declare statehood. Baum told JTA, however, that if the momentum of the peace process is in fact not lost, "it will alleviate some of our concern."

Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said, "I think we're all concerned about the effects of the interim period on Israel's domestic and international concerns."

Hoenlein said he was confident that the Israeli political scene would "sort itself out" in time and that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would stand by his commitment to go ahead with the Wye River peace agreement.

Ambassador Shmuel Sisso, Israel's consul general in New York, said the peace process would not be frozen so long as the Palestinians comply with Israeli demands, and that "May 17 was a date determined by the Israeli democratic process." □

JEWISH WORLD

Swiss report delayed

A report on Switzerland's treatment of Jewish refugees was again delayed. The report of the Commission of Experts, commonly known as the Bergier Commission, is now expected to be published next September. The general-secretary of the commission said the delay is being caused by the large numbers of documents the commission has to sift through.

D.C. mayor kicks off program

Washington's mayor-elect opened a yearlong educational leadership program for 12 Jewish and 12 black students from 20 area high schools. The program, Operation Understanding D.C., now in its fifth year, aims to foster greater understanding between the two communities. Anthony Williams led the opening ceremony for the program, which involves students from Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, at the District of Columbia's Jewish Community Center.

Hungary calls for looted art

A Hungarian diplomat in Russia said her country would claim art confiscated from prominent Hungarian Jewish families during World War II. In an interview published in the *Kommersant* daily newspaper, Rita Mayer, the counselor for cultural affairs at the Hungarian Embassy, specifically mentioned the names of Hungarian Jews whose collections, first confiscated by the Nazis, are now kept in state-run museums in Moscow and in Central Russia.

Last year, the Hungarian government asked Moscow about the fate of art treasures stolen by the Nazis from Hungarian citizens, including Jews, but Russia has yet to return any of the works.

Wal-Mart removes toy Nazis

A Wal-Mart store removed toy Nazi soldiers from its shelves after receiving a complaint from the Anti-Defamation League.

The manager of the store in Porter, Tex., apologized for any offense caused by the Elite Toy Command Series — Field Marshal Erwin Rommel German Soldiers, which he said were misrepresented to the store's buyer. He also said, "Our computer shows no movement of sales of this item."

Magazine aims for rural Jews

A magazine aimed at Jews living in the Midwest debuted this month. *Jewish Heartland* is being published by a Wisconsin-based husband-and-wife team and will cover issues relevant to the estimated 700,000 Jews living between Ohio and the Dakotas. Articles in the first issue address, among other things, coping with declining Jewish populations, political support by state officials for Jewish causes and local Jewish celebrities.

Orthodox pressing Knesset to undermine pluralism ruling

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The pluralism battle in Israel is heating up again, with the Knesset taking a first step to undermine a landmark Supreme Court ruling.

On Monday, Orthodox parties won support in the first of three Knesset votes on a bill designed to bypass a recent Supreme Court decision requiring the government to appoint Reform and Conservative representatives to local religious councils. The bill was approved 51 to 46, with 2 abstentions.

The Reform and Conservative movements are furious, saying the bill mocks the court and delegitimizes liberal Jewish streams in Israel and abroad.

After the court issued a landmark ruling in November requiring that Reform and Conservative representatives be installed on local religious councils in five Israeli cities, some Orthodox groups vowed to undo the ruling through Knesset action.

Non-Orthodox leaders say they will take their seats on the religious councils even if the bill is eventually enacted into law.

"I will not give those people the satisfaction and pleasure of bypassing the authority of the Supreme Court," said Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti movement, as the Conservative stream is known in Israel.

Bandel was slated to take his seat on the Jerusalem religious council after the recent court ruling.

He said Tuesday that he would ask Jewish communities in the Diaspora not to allow any lawmakers who support the bill to appear in their cities.

Orthodox Knesset members were not immediately available for comment. In the past, they have opposed placing Reform and Conservative members on the religious councils. They say it is a violation of the religious status quo established in the early years of the state of Israel, adding that Judaism is not pluralistic.

According to the bill, every member of a religious council will be required to abide by rulings of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. Along with placing them under Orthodox control, this provision could be used to keep the Reform and Conservative delegates from funding their synagogues.

The local religious councils, supervised by the Religious Affairs Ministry, have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage, kashrut, burial and other religious matters for all Jews living in Israel. Members of each council are appointed by the local municipal council, the religious affairs minister and the local chief rabbi.

The councils are supposed to include delegates in proportion to the composition of political lists on local city councils. The secularist Meretz Party has supported the inclusion of representatives from Judaism's Conservative and Reform streams.

Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, said the bill is "designed to castrate the Supreme Court's decisions" and "bring Israel back to a dark era in which the rabbinate will expand and the rule of law will be diminished."

The bill includes another clause that has angered the non-Orthodox movements. Under this clause, religious council members will pledge allegiance to the state of Israel — but not to its laws.

Other civil servants, such as judges and Cabinet ministers, pledge allegiance to Israel and its laws. The exclusion in the bill is seen by non-Orthodox groups as an attempt to delegitimize the secular legal system.

North American Reform and Conservative leaders are also angry.

In a letter sent to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Dec. 24, the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism protested the bill, saying it denies non-Orthodox Jews their rights in Israel.

The bill "may lead to a potential rupture between Israel and Diaspora Jewry," and so "must be avoided for the sake of Klal Yisrael," said the council, which includes the heads of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Women's League for Conservative Judaism and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs. Together, these groups represent more than 1.5 million Conservative Jews in North America. □

Forum enables Jewish women around globe to share research

By Julia Goldman

WALTHAM, Mass. (JTA) — A search for "Jewish Women" on the Barnes & Noble Internet site produces a list of 405 titles.

But few of these volumes focus on Jewish women living outside North America and Israel: The groundswell of scholarship on Jewish women's issues that has occurred since the 1970s and the feminist breakthrough has yet to hit the shores of the rest of the Diaspora.

"There is no book-length study" on the Jewish women of Chile, Marjorie Agosin, an author and professor of Spanish at Wellesley College, told a recent gathering of about 100 Jewish women scholars and communal activists at Brandeis University.

Chile is not alone. Several countries with long, proud Jewish histories have no monographs on the contribution of Jewish women.

Enter Brandeis' International Research Institute on Jewish Women. The institute grew out of a need for more research on American Jewish women, which the National Commission on American Jewish Women recognized in the 1995 study "Voices for Change," sponsored by Hadassah — the Woman's Zionist Organization of America.

The 23-member commission was chaired by Shulamit Reinharz, director of women's studies at Brandeis, who now serves as a co-director of the research institute with author and Brandeis Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman. Barbra Streisand is the institute's honorary chair.

Since its founding in 1997 by Hadassah, the institute has developed into a resource for funding and disseminating scholarship on Jewish women by publishing studies, books and articles, and by sponsoring research projects and a World Wide Web site.

But even before those activities get into full swing, conferences like the recent one held at Brandeis are creating an international network of women who can benefit from each other's research and experiences.

This year's conference, "Studying Jewish Women," featured historical chronologies and documentary slide shows peppered with personal anecdotes. The atmosphere in the brick-walled room overlooking the campus was warm and intimate.

"It was family," said Ellen Canon, professor of political science and public policy at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. "It wasn't statistics."

Farideh Dayanim Goldin, a native of Shiraz, Iran, now living in Virginia, said the conference gives women "courage to do research on subjects they otherwise might not."

Goldin has submitted her collection of contemporary Persian Jewish women's poetry to the institute for publication.

Her account of her young life in Iran and her subsequent efforts to compile the anthology was one of the most moving of the conference's presentations, which included a keynote address by Alice Shalvi, the doyenne of Israeli feminism. Shalvi said Americans can play a catalytic role for Jewish women across the globe by setting an example as an academic and social presence.

But to conference participants — which included women from Argentina, Algeria, Colombia, Mexico, Hungary and Russia — perhaps the most important contribution the institute can make to the field is creating an environment of cross-cultural exchange.

"We think only about Israel and America, and whoever is

making aliyah," said Gail Twersky Reimer, director of the Jewish Women's Archives in Brookline, Mass., which compiles and chronicles Jewish women's history, focusing on the United States, through conferences, educational programs and a Web site.

"It's important to be reminded of communities all over the world, with their own sets of issues," Reimer said.

Some of the issues raised by the international panelists at Brandeis centered on Jewish women's roles in helping communities adjust to decolonization and migration, women's physical experience and their response to memory and death.

"For me, one of the most exciting aspects of the IRIJW conference was the medium, rather than the message," Susan Weidman Schneider, founder and editor in chief of Lilit magazine, and a member of the research institute's academic advisory board, wrote in an e-mail message after the Dec. 16-18 gathering.

She said she would include the names of the speakers and participants in Lilit's Talent Bank, a resource of Jewish women experts. "It was a wonderful opportunity to be under one roof with women whose work we may know but whose faces were, until last week, unfamiliar," she wrote. She added that two upcoming issues of Lilit will deal with topics covered at the conference: Jewish women's writings from Latin America and the experiences of women in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism.

Tania Reytan-Marincheska, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women in Bulgaria, called the conference "a revelation."

Reytan-Marincheska, who runs a program for refugees and migrants at the Bulgarian Helsinki Project, said was impressed by the academic level of discourse and the universal themes she heard in the presentations of the other speakers.

"I really feel part of a small world," she said. □

Yeltsin to combat anti-Semitism

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin has promised to launch a "major offensive" against anti-Semitic and extremist statements.

Russia's Justice Ministry said earlier this month that it would send the draft of a new bill against political extremism and anti-Semitism to Parliament before the end of the year.

Experts believe that such a bill has little chance of passing the Communist- and nationalist-dominated Parliament, but Yeltsin's statement could indicate that he intends to enact the law by presidential decree.

The actions come after a slew of anti-Semitic incidents in Russia in the past three months placed the issue of anti-Semitism onto Yeltsin's agenda. Last week, Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov sent a letter to the Justice Ministry in which he blamed "Zionist capital" for the collapse of the Russian economy and the poverty of the ethnic Russian population.

In his first television interview in four months, Yeltsin said, "In this law, we will have to get tough on these issues and toward all those people, from government representatives to ordinary citizens, who reflect" anti-Semitic and extremist ideas.

Russia's criminal code prohibits inciting racial and religious hatred, but the laws have rarely been applied.

Earlier this fall, the Kremlin vowed to fight political extremism and ultranationalism in response to earlier anti-Semitic statements by Communist lawmakers. No concrete actions have been taken so far. □