



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Congress moves on statehood

The U.S. Senate passed a resolution opposing a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has threatened to declare a state on May 4, the end of the interim peace period established by the 1993 Oslo peace accord. [Page 2]

Israel blamed for death

The Palestinian Authority blamed Israeli soldiers for the death of at least one of the two teen-agers killed during a violent confrontation Wednesday in the Gaza Strip between Palestinian protesters and police with the self-rule government.

Israel promptly denied that its soldiers had fired at any of the protesters, who took to the streets after a Palestinian court passed a death sentence in a politically charged murder case.

The violent protests continued for a second day Thursday, during which Palestinian police detained six journalists attempting to film the demonstrations.

Jews hail Norwegian fund

Norwegian Jewish leaders hailed a decision by the nation's Parliament to create a \$58 million Holocaust fund.

Some \$26 million of that total will be given to Jewish victims of the Nazis, with the remaining \$32 million earmarked for various projects, including the creation of a Holocaust studies center in Norway.

Some 2,200 Jews were arrested in Norway during the Nazi occupation.

Of the 767 who were deported to Nazi death camps, only 30 survived.

Pentagon to sell jets to Egypt

The Pentagon is ready to sell Egypt \$3.2 billion worth of fighter jets, tanks and Patriot missiles, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen told reporters before leaving Cairo for a visit to Israel.

He defended the sale, which would be funded from the \$1.2 billion Egypt gets in annual U.S. military aid, by saying that if the United States did not sell the arms, there would be plenty of other countries ready to fill the vacuum.

The arms sale offer was the latest of several that Cohen made to Arab states during his nine-nation trip to the Middle East.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Largest acquisition of Israeli firm spurs debate over high-tech's future

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the announcement of the largest-ever foreign acquisition of an Israeli firm, Israel's high-tech sector is once again basking in the international spotlight.

But although there is a consensus in Israel that the increasing number of mergers and acquisitions is a vote of confidence in Israel's technological prowess, not everyone is celebrating.

A debate over the future of Israel's high-tech sector is heating up, and some high-tech players are worried that Israeli entrepreneurs are selling out too fast.

On Monday, BMC Software of Houston, a company with \$958 million in annual revenues last year, said it had agreed to acquire New Dimensions Software of Tel Aviv for nearly \$700 million in cash.

The agreement came less than a year after America Online paid \$287 million in cash to purchase Mirabilis, a small Israeli company that develops technology for the Internet.

And just two days after the BMC Software announcement, SunGard Data Systems of Pennsylvania said it would acquire Oshap, another software group, in a stock transaction valued at about \$210 million.

According to Giza Group, a Tel Aviv investment bank, the value of mergers and acquisitions between Israeli and foreign technology groups climbed from \$1.5 billion in 1997 to a record \$2.13 billion in 1998. After this week's deals, the total has already reached \$1.1 billion in 1999.

But critics say that Israeli companies, which are often weak at marketing and management, are not willing to take risks to try and go global themselves.

They are too easily seduced, say the critics, by the prospect of quick cash, after which they are often swallowed up and become local research and development centers for overseas giants.

Even Dan Barnea, New Dimensions' chief executive, was not all smiles after cutting the BMC deal.

His dream of nurturing New Dimensions into a global company was cut short when the firm's main shareholders, who had been at loggerheads over internal issues, accepted BMC's offer.

"If not for the shareholder's dispute, I would have dared to go further," Barnea said.

"I really hoped we could grow and prove that an Israeli company could become a big player on international markets."

According to Barnea, the enormous financial burden required to build sales and distribution channels discourages many Israeli entrepreneurs from trying to expand internationally on their own.

"Being in Tel Aviv — far from key markets — just makes it harder," he said.

"When people face these difficulties, and have an alternative like cooperating with foreign groups that already have these channels in place, they go for it."

After the BMC-New Dimensions deal, some critics even urged the government to intervene to stop future deals.

But Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of industry and trade, said on Thursday that Israel is committed to a free market. "We have nothing to fear," Sharansky told Max

MIDEAST FOCUS

Iranian leader plays both sides

Iran's president reiterated during private meetings with Italian leaders his country's stance that Israel has no right to exist, according to the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*.

But in his public comments, *Mohammad Khatami* made no reference to Israel and attempted to portray himself as a moderate. His trip to Italy marked the first time an Iranian president had visited any Western country since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Report: Minister dissolves council

Israel's religious affairs minister reportedly dissolved the Jerusalem religious council. The move by *Eli Suissa*, a member of the fervently Orthodox *Shas* Party, came after the council failed to have a quorum for the fourth consecutive time.

Orthodox council members have been boycotting the sessions to protest a recent Supreme Court ruling calling on all religious councils to include representatives from Judaism's liberal streams.

Mordechai supports settlements

Israel's centrist candidate for prime minister pledged to support the growth of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"Settlement is crucial for controlling the land and preserving the homeland," *Yitzhak Mordechai* was reported as saying during a Wednesday campaign rally.

Mossad official found guilty

An Israeli court found a former Mossad official guilty of fabricating reports about Syrian military plans. *Yehuda Gil*, 64, faces a maximum 15-year prison sentence for attempting to harm state security.

After *Gil* was arrested in 1997, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported that the false information he provided may have helped bring Israel to the brink of war with Syria in September 1996.

Watson, BMC's chief executive, who was in Israel to seal the deal.

The investment, said *Sharansky*, proves that Israel has become one of the most interesting research and development centers in the world and an attractive target for foreign investment.

But this is precisely what is ringing warning bells among some high-tech analysts, who fear Israel's technology sector may be destined to become one big R&D subsidiary of Silicon Valley, and will never emerge as a viable, productive sector to drive economic growth in the 21st century.

"Israeli entrepreneurs have yet to show the business leadership needed to become global players," said *Charlie Ben Chabat*, head of research at *Robertson Stephens Evergreen*, an investment bank.

"Many Israeli companies are afraid to take the financial risk needed to climb past a certain plateau."

Ben Chabat believes the time has come for Israeli companies to start setting their sights higher.

He thinks Israeli companies should get aggressive and start buying foreign companies themselves — as a few of the more successful Israeli high-tech companies have done.

Ben Chabat is also afraid that the trend could have a negative effect on Israeli society.

"A society cannot sustain itself solely on R&D and engineers," he said. "R&D is usually only 15 percent of a company's budget."

"If there is no marketing and production in Israel, society will become more polarized because there will be no middle-class professions, such as clerks and accountants."

Still, some say it is wrong to tell Israeli entrepreneurs not to accept attractive offers.

"If shareholders want to sell, why shouldn't they?" said *Zvi Schechter*, managing director of the *Giza Alex Brown* venture capital fund in Tel Aviv. "It's best to specialize in what you are good at, and Israelis are good at the early stages of building a company."

But *Nir Barkat*, managing director of *BRM Technologies*, a U.S.-Israeli investment firm that specializes in developing Israeli companies, said his group has turned down several tempting offers to sell their holdings.

"We have a clear preference for building big companies," said *Barkat*, whose group helped found *Check Point Software*, one of Israel's most successful software companies.

"You shouldn't stop trying to grow just because someone waves money at you," he said.

The problem, *Barkat* said, is that when an overseas group makes a lucrative offer, investors often put pressure on entrepreneurs to sell.

"The solution is to network with strong partners overseas to build a richer environment that increases the chances of success," he said.

"If Israelis learn how to build big companies, they will start turning down the money." □

Senate opposes Palestinian statehood

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Senate passed a resolution opposing a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood.

Palestinian Authority Chairman *Yasser Arafat* has threatened to declare a state on May 4, the end of the interim peace period that was established by the 1993 Oslo peace accord.

The resolution, which passed by a 98-1 vote, also calls on the Clinton administration to increase its opposition to such a move.

The resolution has stalled in the House of Representatives, where Rep. *Sam Gejdenson* (D-Conn.) is blocking a committee vote on the measure.

Gejdenson has told colleagues that he fears the resolution is one-sided, and that it appears to support Israeli Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu* during the Jewish state's election campaign. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Group opposes bank merger

The World Jewish Congress said it would urge U.S. banking officials to oppose a French bank's plan to acquire two rival banks.

The Banque Nationale de Paris, which announced this week its planned \$37 billion takeover of Societe Generale and Paribas to create the world's largest bank, must do more to resolve Holocaust-era claims, the WJC said.

While the merger would take place in Paris, it would need the authorization of American banking officials to take effect in the United States.

Israel condemns shul bombing

The Israeli Embassy in Moscow said it is alarmed by the "dangerous trend" of growing Russian anti-Semitism.

Issuing a statement after vandals went on a rampage in a synagogue in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk earlier this week, embassy officials said such incidents "pose a danger not only for Russian Jews, but for Russian society as a whole." Thursday's statement came two weeks before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is slated to visit Russia.

Far right concerns Austrian Jews

Austrian Jewish leaders are concerned after a far-right politician won a provincial election in the southern state of Carinthia.

The leaders said Jorg Haider has never recanted statements he made praising Hitler. Ariel Muzikant, the leader of Vienna's Jewish community, released a list of statements made by Haider since 1985, including one that concentration camps were really punishment camps for criminals.

Rescuer found for Jewish paper

An Israeli-born daughter of Holocaust survivors agreed to salvage a German-language Jewish newspaper that was on the brink of shutting down operations.

Chaja Koren's decision to buy Aufbau, which was founded in 1934 to serve German Jews fleeing the Nazis, came after the paper issued an appeal for funds. Aufbau, which is based in New York, has a circulation of 5,000.

Church to help N.Y. synagogue

Saint Thomas Church in New York is holding a March 28 benefit concert to raise funds for a nearby synagogue.

After a five-alarm fire devastated the Central Synagogue last summer, congregants have been holding services in their community center across the street. Restoration of the synagogue is expected to be completed by the end of next year.

World Reform leaders heckle Sharansky, and cheer Amoz Oz

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of industry and trade, encountered hostility this week at a meeting of world leaders of the Reform movement.

Sharansky initially was greeted warmly when he arrived to address the World Union for Progressive Judaism's 29th annual convention in Jerusalem.

But seconds after taking the podium, a rabbi hurled insults at the former Soviet Jewish dissident, who was an icon in the struggle led by U.S. Jewry to free Soviet Jews during the 1970s and 1980s.

"He's been voting against us all the time," shouted Rabbi David Liliental of Amsterdam.

"He owes us and he's betrayed us."

Liliental was referring to support given by Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, the immigrant party that Sharansky leads, to Orthodox-backed legislation in the Knesset that Reform Jews say delegitimizes liberal Jews.

Sharansky replied that fervently Orthodox Cabinet ministers have been accusing him of not backing their cause strongly enough, and said he was "proud of his role" in building bridges among religious streams.

But many of the 250 Reform rabbis and community leaders from around the world attending this week's conference said they were disappointed when the Soviet-dissident-turned-Israeli-politician failed to address the issues that have been straining Israel-Diaspora relations.

Instead, he talked about a recent trip to Russia.

At the end of his address, another participant shouted: "Why did you vote that we are not rabbis? Why did you vote for the conversion bill?"

Sharansky said he was in favor of dialogue, but did not want "legislation or the Supreme Court" to decide the issues.

The hostile atmosphere put a damper on what the Reform movement hoped would be a festive occasion, as it presented Sharansky with the first-ever Russian-language Reform prayer book.

Only a small portion of the crowd cheered when he left.

In contrast to Sharansky's cool reception, Amos Oz, the secular Israeli author, drew cheers as he repeated a recent pledge to join the Reform movement in its struggle against the Orthodox.

He also charmed the crowd with insights on the pluralism conflict, peppered with humor and literary language.

Oz said the heated debate between religious and secular Jews was actually a healthy manifestation of traditional Jewish culture.

He added that the debate will never spark a "full-scale civil war" like those that had devastated Europe and the United States.

"I don't think Israel is going to give the world this horrible spectacle," he said, adding that in 50 years, "this will be the world's most popular city for a healthy argument."

Oz also urged the Reform movement to refocus its struggle on providing an alternative to "a deep-seated emotional and intellectual stagnation" that he feels characterizes fervently Orthodox Judaism today.

He said the battle for equal rights would not be won only in the Knesset or Supreme Court, but through an "erotic game" of education.

"We need to attract, we need to seduce," he said, commanding: "Thou shalt make your kind of Jewishness desirable."

On Saturday night, the conference is expected to pay tribute to Rabbi Richard Hirsch, executive director of the World Union, who is retiring from the movement after 25 years of service.

Hirsch was instrumental in moving the Reform movement's headquarters from the United States to Israel, and played a crucial role in bringing the movement back to Zionism. □

PROFILE

Jewish wrestler and icon goes to the mat for animals

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Washington has its share of menacing lobbyists — power players whose mere presence is enough to command the respect, even the fear, of the establishment.

But in the annals of strong-arm politicking, no one cuts as intimidating a figure as a man by the name of Bill Goldberg, who made his debut on Capitol Hill last month.

Known simply as Goldberg to his fans, the World Championship Wrestling star packs a persuasive argument for just about anything into his 6-foot-4, 285-pound frame. Making the rounds with lobbyists for the Humane Society of the United States, he came to defend animal rights and specifically to push for an end to cockfighting and other forms of animal blood sport.

Lawmakers would be well advised to pay heed: This is a man who makes a living pummeling his opponents into submission — a man who, if need be, could bench-press the entire congressional delegation from his home state of Oklahoma.

This is Goldberg, the head-shaven, tattooed flag-bearer of professional wrestling, and by all accounts, the most burly, fearsome Jew in professional sports today.

He catapulted to the top of the wrestling world last July by defeating "Hollywood" Hulk Hogan for WCW's heavyweight championship title. Scores of competitors have since lined up to take their poundings from the man clad in black boots and black briefs, and nearly all have found themselves staring up at the arena lights, pinned by his signature "Jackhammer" maneuver.

Although he lost his championship title in December, Goldberg, 31, is still the rage among millions of Americans with an appreciation for violent theater — and one of the biggest reasons why WCW's "Monday Nitro" has become one of the most widely watched television shows in the country.

His fame has spawned a complete line of products, including what is believed to be the world's first Jewish action figure. Wherever he goes, a faithful army of fans — some with their heads shaved in tribute to their hero, others hoisting Star of David placards high in the air — greets him with a ritual chant: "GOLD-berg! GOLD-berg!"

The phenomenon was on display on Capitol Hill last month as an overflow throng packed into a Senate briefing room to catch a glimpse of the absurdly large man stuffed into a black pinstripe suit. Congressional staffers, interns, pages, local fans and a wide-eyed contingent of visiting high school students formed a ring around the wrestling star.

Jesse Ventura may have already blazed the trail from wrestling to politics, but with all due respect to Minnesota's new governor, he couldn't carry Goldberg's tefillin strap.

Despite being out of his element, Goldberg pulled off his first foray into politics with aplomb.

His message was simple: "When I step into the ring, that's my choice. But these animals, they have no choice. It's sick," he said, throwing his weight behind a bill that would make it a felony to transport fighting roosters across state lines. He worked the crowd with grace and patience, signing every last autograph, posing for

every last photo, ruffling the hair of every last young fan.

So, how did a nice Jewish boy from Tulsa, Okla., the son of a Harvard-educated doctor and a classical musician, get into the business of body-slammng guys named Macho Man and Undertaker on national television?

There were early indications of the career path Goldberg would take when, four years removed from his Bar Mitzvah, he took his first job as a bar bouncer. He gained notoriety playing football in college and made it to the NFL as a defensive tackle with the Atlanta Falcons in the early 1990s before a severe muscle tear put an end to his brief career. After toiling as a trainer in a gym for a few years, Goldberg entered the wrestling world in 1997 intent on changing the stereotype associated with the sport and helping bring it into the mainstream.

He wanted to create a no-nonsense character people would like without relying on a cheap gimmick. Although he briefly entertained the idea of naming his character "Mossad," a nod to the Israeli secret service, he said he ultimately decided against using a pseudonym in favor of "my nice Jewish name."

"I wanted to come out and be myself and show that wrestlers can be professionals, that we can be someone like the guy next door," he said in an interview, adding, "I'm just a normal guy — that likes to beat people up."

He is not, however, exactly what you would call a normal Jew. And that's part of his appeal to Jewish fans. Not only has he bucked Jewish stereotypes — he has turned the notion of Jew as victim on its head.

As one devoted Jewish follower of pro wrestling, 27-year-old Lou Kipilman of Corte Madera, Calif., put it: "He's a proud Jew, a righteous kicker of goyim tuchas and a shooting star who's beloved by every stripe of wrestling fan."

Rabbi Irwin Kula, the Goldberg's family rabbi, sees Goldberg as a positive symbol for Jews struggling with their identity.

Watching Jewish fans revved up by Goldberg, Kula, president of CLAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, said he is struck by what he recognizes as a "deep thirst in Jewish life" for the idea that a "Jewish good guy can exercise power and win," and "that gentiles can stand up and applaud a Jew that uses power."

For his part, Goldberg says he never intended to make an issue out of his Jewishness, but nonetheless feels honored to be thought of as a Jewish role model. Although he does not consider himself religious, he declined to wrestle last year on Rosh Hashanah — something that didn't go unnoticed by his fans.

"I wanted to give the Jewish public someone to hold onto," he said, "someone as a positive role model that didn't go out and cuss, didn't go out and cheat, someone to look up to."

As for his future, the natural question arises following his political debut: Is Goldberg looking to become the next Jesse Ventura?

"Nah," he demurred. "I'm here for a specific purpose. That and that only. I'm not here to do anything else than lend my time and heart to this cause."

Of course, if he changes his mind, he'd probably win a welcome reception on Capitol Hill from House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a former wrestling coach. And all the trash talk and cheap blows exchanged inside the dome would make him feel right at home. Besides, as one congressional staffer noted, "some folks here could use a good knocking around." □