



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Likud: 'They want us in'

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak wants the Likud Party to be his junior coalition partner, members of the outgoing Likud said Tuesday.

"They want us in," outgoing Tourism Minister Moshe Katsav was quoted as saying after participating in meetings with Barak's coalition negotiating team. "It will be good for the country if the Likud is in the coalition."

Speaker promises vote on Iran

Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) promised a vote next month on a new bill aimed at ending Russian missile cooperation with Iran.

Speaking Tuesday to American Israel Public Affairs Committee delegates at a rally at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, Hastert promised that the historic U.S. support for Israel "would not change on my watch."

Earlier, Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) promised the pro-Israel lobby to seek the additional aid to Israel and the Palestinian Authority that was promised during last October's Wye peace talks.

Poland vows to remove crosses

The Polish government said Tuesday it will remove hundreds of crosses that have been erected near the Auschwitz death camp. The crosses were put up during the past year by radical Roman Catholics in defiance of opposition from the Polish National Catholic Church and Jewish groups, who oppose all religious symbols at Auschwitz.

Gore plan gets mixed response

U.S. Jewish groups gave a mixed response to Vice President Al Gore's call in a speech Monday to provide government funds to religious institutions' social service programs. The Orthodox Union applauded Gore's backing of the "charitable choice" initiative, but the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism called Gore's proposal an "alarming alteration of the careful balance between church and state."

Because of the Memorial Day holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, May 31.

NEWS ANALYSIS

AIPAC must again shift gears to reflect a new Israeli regime

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A decision to drop its long-standing opposition to a Palestinian state could not have come at a better time for the pre-eminent pro-Israel lobbying group.

Stung by attacks from aides to Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak who have charged that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee is a Likud-oriented organization that has never fully supported the peace process, the group wanted to prove that it is not out of step with Israel. Even Likud's acting leader, Ariel Sharon, has said that a Palestinian state is "inevitable."

Barak's Labor Party dropped its own opposition to statehood three years ago. So with a sense of drama, AIPAC's executive committee convened on Sunday, one year after the body — following heated debate — failed by a slim margin to adopt the same position.

This time around, the executive committee overwhelmingly killed the 15-year-old policy after a brief debate behind closed doors that focused more on grammar than substance.

To be sure, AIPAC did not come out in support of Palestinian statehood.

Instead, the group, which celebrated its 40th anniversary during its annual policy conference here this week, endorsed a "political solution" that would "permit the exercise of Palestinian self-government while excluding those powers that would endanger the security of Israel." Whether the Palestinian entity becomes a state is a matter for negotiations, the group said.

Although AIPAC's shift on Palestinian statehood proved to be a coincidence of timing — the group's leadership had been pushing for the policy change to happen this week, not knowing whether a new Israeli prime minister would be elected without a runoff — the shift gives the organization some much-needed ammunition in its effort to reposition itself behind the new prime minister. It also reflects a reality of American Jewish life. AIPAC, like most Jewish organizations, is once again being forced to adjust to a dramatic shift in the Israeli government.

This shift is particularly significant for AIPAC, which lobbies in support of Israel on Capitol Hill and with the U.S. administration.

The latest change leaves many wondering what Barak's Washington agenda will be and whether he sees AIPAC as a vehicle for achieving that agenda.

Just months ago, with Benjamin Netanyahu leading Israel, AIPAC found itself playing a pivotal role at a time of strained relations between Israel and the Clinton administration. As the U.S. administration was snubbing Netanyahu and pressuring him to move forward on the stalled peace process, AIPAC mobilized Congress on numerous occasions to protect Israel against pressure from the White House.

Now AIPAC will be called on to support an Israeli government that has promised to move forward with negotiations with the Palestinians, and possibly the Syrians as well.

This means that instead of focusing its lobbying efforts in Congress to press the Palestinians to comply with its commitments, AIPAC will have to shift gears.

At the same time, the group is in a wait-and-see mode with Barak, who will likely take a tough position with the Palestinians. AIPAC officials say they will have to work to lower expectations in Congress for an immediate peace agreement. Once Israeli-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Aides: Premier is on the job

Aides to outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are denying reports Tuesday that he has not done his job since his electoral defeat last week.

Israeli newspapers are quoting senior security officials as saying that Netanyahu has not met with them since the May 17 election.

Author attacks interest groups

Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua criticized "special interest groups" that he believes are threatening Israeli society.

Yehoshua said he believed Israeli society faced threats from both the fervently Orthodox Shas Party and the Russian immigrant parties, according to a report last week on Israel Radio.

Miss Israel says she is shunned

Miss Israel is charging that Arab judges and contestants are shunning her during the Miss Universe competition in Trinidad.

"It really did not please the two Syrian judges" when she appeared on stage wearing a white-and-blue dress decorated with the Star of David, Rana Raslan told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot in an interview published Tuesday.

The first Israeli Arab ever crowned Miss Israel, Raslan also said Miss Egypt had called her an Israeli collaborator. "Before I arrived, I was certain I would take one of the top five spots" in the competition, she added. "Today, I am no longer sure."

Technion honors candle power

The Technion — Israel Institute of Technology hosted a competition Monday in which university students were asked to build a vehicle powered only by two Sabbath candles. The winning entry — a 15-inch-long, four-wheeled buggy — traversed a 45-foot course in two minutes and 15 seconds.



Daily News Bulletin

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Palestinian negotiations resume, the parties are going to be immersed in the most difficult issues yet, including final borders, statehood, refugees, water and the status of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, AIPAC will continue to work, as it traditionally has, as a primary proponent of foreign aid. And it will continue to focus, as it has in more recent years, for legislation that impedes Iran's ability to acquire missile technology and nuclear capabilities. But the organization would also like to be seen as a key player as the peace process returns to center stage in U.S.-Israel relations.

Lonny Kaplan, president of AIPAC, says the group is up to the task. "We have structured our work in such a way to be ready for the twists and turns" in the political landscape, he said. With this in mind, AIPAC leaders dramatically changed the rhetoric and tone of this year's conference.

"Anyone who cares about Israel should support peace, should be working with every fiber of their being to attain it," AIPAC's executive director, Howard Kohr, said in his convention address.

Part of the challenge for AIPAC will be to convince the Barak-led government that it stands behind him.

Barak aides had been incensed when he was not originally invited to participate in this year's AIPAC conference. Thinking that an election runoff was in the works and that Netanyahu would still be Israel's prime minister, AIPAC officials chose to invite only the sitting premier.

AIPAC received the same complaint from Likud in 1996, when Netanyahu, who was running against Shimon Peres, was excluded from the annual conference.

As soon as the election results were clear last week, AIPAC quickly reversed course, withdrawing the invite to Netanyahu and issuing one to Barak. Barak declined, pleading a tight schedule as he works to put together a government coalition.

And while bad feelings linger among some in the Barak camp, Barak and his most senior deputies have signaled in private conversations with AIPAC leaders that he is ready to bury the hatchet, according to AIPAC and Labor Party officials.

In a letter to the delegates, Barak said, "Historically important tasks lie ahead of us, and only joining hands together can bring about their successful accomplishment.

"AIPAC will work tirelessly with the new prime minister as he endeavors to strengthen Israel, her economy, her military and her people," Kohr said in his speech.

"And, Mr. Barak, we look forward to working with you in your most awesome task of all: the pursuit of peace," he said.

Indeed, the new AIPAC message appears to be: Let Israel make its own decisions when it comes to talks with its Arab neighbors.

As Betty Ehrenberg, the Orthodox Union's representative at the conference, said in explaining her decision to reverse course with regard to AIPAC's position on Palestinian statehood: "We need to give the new government room without stepping on its toes. This leaves the decision up to the Israeli government."

But it's going to take more than speeches at a policy conference for AIPAC to truly get behind the Barak government. For one thing, Barak's supporters are waiting to see if AIPAC will encourage Congress to change its approach from lashing out against the Palestinians to encouraging peace initiatives.

They specifically want to see AIPAC thwart efforts in Congress by forces in the American Jewish community who are likely to oppose some of Barak's policies.

This is hardly the time for tension between Israel's government and AIPAC, activists argue. Barak will not always agree with the Clinton administration and when it does not, he's going to need AIPAC, they say.

But if AIPAC stumbles in its support for Barak, the group is facing a new reality on Capitol Hill, where the Israel Policy Forum has emerged as competition for AIPAC.

Both AIPAC and Israel Policy Forum officials say that the IPF cannot replace AIPAC. But the group has already put the pro-Israel lobby on notice.

"The Israeli people have spoken. They have chosen the path to a secure peace," the group said in a prominently placed ad published in The New York Times on Tuesday, the last day of the AIPAC policy conference.

"Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak has spoken. He has pledged to restart the peace process as soon as possible," the ad continued. "Now, American Jews must speak out too." □

JEWISH WORLD

Berlin chief refused security

Berlin's police chief refused offers from the German Interior Ministry to reinforce security around the Israeli Consulate in Berlin a day before Kurdish demonstrators attacked it on Feb. 17, according to a transcript of a conference call involving all state interior ministers and several police commanders the day before the attack.

Three police officers guarded the Israeli Consulate on the day of the attack, while hundreds of officers were guarding other foreign missions.

French Jews invite WJC

French Jewish leaders invited the World Jewish Congress on Monday to visit France to discuss Holocaust-restitution issues.

The invitation was viewed as an attempt to mend fences.

The French leaders had previously charged that the WJC has been too aggressive in seeking restitution from French banks.

Poles seek equal compensation

Germany agreed that Nazi-era slave laborers from Poland should get the same compensation as those living in other countries, a Polish official said Tuesday.

Some 400,000 Poles are seeking a total of more than \$2 billion in compensation for their slave labor, and they want compensation equal to what Jewish advocates have been negotiating for with Germany.

Exhibit opens at State Dept.

An exhibit on World War II concentration camps opened last week at the main entrance to the State Department in Washington.

The exhibit, which focuses on Japanese interned in the United States and Jews interned in Europe, carries a disclaimer explaining that the use of the term "concentration camps" is not meant to imply any moral equivalence between the two types of camps.

The exhibit is co-sponsored by the Japanese-American National Museum in Los Angeles and National Museum of American Jewish Military History in Washington.

Groups collaborate on opera

German, U.S., Israeli and Polish musical groups are collaborating to stage a Kurt Weill opera next month to help build a synagogue in a German town whose shul was destroyed in 1938 during Kristallnacht.

The production of "The Eternal Road," which is based on the Old Testament, will take place in Chemnitz.

The town, home to 3,500 Jews before the war and 20 after, now has about 300 Jews.

Poll: Almost half of U.S. Jews support Palestinian statehood

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Almost as many American Jews as all Americans support the establishment of a Palestinian state, according to two polls released recently.

While some 44 percent of 1,000 American Jews polled by the American Jewish Committee support Palestinian statehood, 66 percent said the "goal of the Arabs is not the return of the Occupied Territories, but rather the destruction of Israel." A Gallup Poll taken earlier this month of all Americans found that 53 percent support Palestinian statehood. In last year's AJCommittee poll, 42 percent of Jews said they accepted Palestinian statehood.

Thirty-nine percent of the Jews surveyed in the poll said Israel should accept a unilateral declaration of statehood as threatened by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. Some 21 percent said Israel should break off negotiations if a declaration of statehood was made, while 17 percent said Israel should respond to such a declaration by annexing West Bank lands not yet turned over to the Palestinians.

On another key issue in the peace process, 42 percent said Israel should be willing to compromise on Jerusalem's current status as a united city under Israeli jurisdiction. Some 55 percent oppose any compromise. In last year's survey, 33 percent favored a compromise on Jerusalem.

Other results of the survey of Jewish opinion include:

- 88 percent said "conversions performed in Israel by Reform and Conservative rabbis should be recognized as much as Orthodox conversions";
- 78 percent blamed "ultra-Orthodox Israelis" for the increase in tensions between "secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews";
- 88 percent said the Palestinian Authority is not doing enough to implement the agreements with Israel compared with 43 percent who said Israel is not doing enough to implement the same agreements;
- 91 percent said the Palestinian Authority is not doing enough to control Palestinian terrorist activity against Israel; and
- 76 percent said caring about Israel is a "very important part of my being a Jew."

The poll of 1,000 American Jews was conducted by telephone between March 29 and April 18 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

Results of the Gallup poll of American opinion include:

- 86 percent said Israel as a country is vital to U.S. interests;
- 26 percent view Arafat favorably; 44 percent hold an unfavorable view.

The Gallup telephone poll of 1,025 was conducted May 7 to 9 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent. A smaller sampling of 501 Americans, with a 5 percent margin of error, showed that support for the creation of a Palestinian state remains virtually unchanged at 53 percent since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993. □

Russia lifts tax on Holocaust funds

MOSCOW (JTA) — Payments from a Swiss fund for needy Holocaust victims to survivors in Russia will be exempted from Russian income tax, according to a recent decision made by the outgoing Russian Cabinet.

The decision — one of the last decrees passed by Yevgeny Primakov's government before President Yeltsin fired Primakov — lifts the major hurdle that had prevented Russian survivors from receiving the one-time \$400 payments from the Holocaust Memorial Fund.

Leaders of the Russian Jewish community demanded last year that the compensation be exempted from Russian taxes.

More than 2,000 Jewish survivors of Nazi ghettos and concentration camps currently living in Russia are expected to receive the payments.

Survivors in several other former Soviet states — such as Ukraine, Belarus and Latvia — have already received the payments from the fund, which was established in 1997 by several leading Swiss banks. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak's toughest task is bridging the great secular-religious divide

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the election dust settles and coalition-building tensions grow, religion is emerging as the most dominant factor in Israel's current political cataclysm.

More than the peace process, more than the economy and unemployment, certainly more than the Sephardi-Ashkenazi divide, the religious-secular conflict proved a key element in the way hundreds of thousands of Israelis chose to vote.

And it continues to be a key element in the way Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak is shaping his new government.

As they were in the elections, pro-Orthodox and anti-Orthodox sentiments are vying for dominance in Barak's search for a workable governing coalition.

Some observers prefer to sidestep the seemingly self-evident conclusion that the 17 seats the fervently Orthodox Shas Party won in last week's election — up from 10 in the outgoing Knesset — signify a mass religious revival sweeping a sizable sector in Israeli society. Indeed, the other haredi, or fervently Orthodox, grouping — the United Torah Judaism bloc — also did well last week, increasing its Knesset representation from four to five seats.

These observers, either unwilling to face this reality or uncomfortable with it, look for social and economic factors to help explain the meteoric success of Shas, which was founded barely 15 years ago. They cite ethnic sentiments, cultural resentments and a sense of economic discrimination.

But, as a leading commentator on the Israeli religious world, Dov Elboim, noted in the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* last weekend, religious revivalism cannot be supplanted as the strongest single reason for Shas' success.

This does not mean that every Shas voter is Orthodox, or even traditional, in his or her personal religious practice.

But it does seem to clearly indicate that a new or renewed affinity for religion and religious practice is taking hold of Shas' still-growing following — the many hundreds of thousands of Sephardim who do not unequivocally identify as secularists.

By the same token, and more so than in any previous election, hundreds of thousands of avowedly secularist Israelis voted last week specifically in response to the growth and aggressiveness of Shas, which they see as a threat to Israel's democracy. This assertion is easy to substantiate: The Shinui Party, running on a one-issue, anti-haredi platform, won six seats in the new Knesset.

In addition, the showing of the left-wing Meretz Party, which increased its Knesset representation to 10 seats from nine, can also be ascribed in some measure to that party's firm stand against what it sees as haredi exploitation of the system: securing draft exemptions, taking welfare payments and getting state financing for the yeshiva networks.

Moreover, the shift in the support of the Russian immigrant community from outgoing Premier Benjamin Netanyahu to Barak is ascribed unanimously by political observers to the vigorous campaign launched by the immigrant rights *Yisrael Ba'Aliyah* Party against Shas' control of the key Interior Ministry.

Netanyahu was seen by the Russians as in the thrall of Shas and the other Orthodox parties. Barak's promises not to "kowtow

to extremists" fell on willing ears. Now, those same angry and divisive considerations that motivated the various groups of voters are troubling the man elected by a landslide to serve as the next premier.

The question of whether Barak will invite Shas into his coalition has been the focus of political speculation almost since the moment the polling stations closed and the television exit polls pronounced the demise of the Netanyahu government.

Because of the poor showing of his own One Israel faction, which ended up with only 26 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, Barak will need either Shas or the Likud, which has 19 seats — or both parties — to join him and ensure a stable government.

Barak's office was inundated with faxes, phone calls and e-mails this week from supporters around the country, pleading with him either to take in or shut out Shas from his government.

The media have been similarly divided.

Staunchly dovish columnists are veritably begging the new premier to ally with Likud, previously the target of their most withering verbal fusillades. Peace with the Palestinians can wait, they contend. First Israel must put its own house in order.

Others, staunchly secularist, vigorously advocate an alliance with Shas, a movement they previously excoriated, with no less vigor, as a threat to the very existence of a democratic Israel.

The stalled peace process, this latter group argues, is the more urgent and existential threat. With Barak's election victory, the window of opportunity for moving ahead with negotiations has opened again. Shas and democracy, they say, can wait.

Barak's pre-election pledges and post-election pronouncements emphasize his dilemma rather than ease it.

He is strongly committed to the rule of law — and therefore insists that the convicted Deri remove himself, not just formally but also in practice, from the leadership of Shas.

But he is as strongly committed to creating a wide and inclusive government.

"I will be everyone's prime minister," he has proclaimed repeatedly since election night. "Of those who voted for me and those who opposed me."

And he promises to bridge the Orthodox-secular divide, pointing to his inclusion of the moderate Orthodox Meimad movement into his One Israel bloc as an important first step in that direction.

Barak's first public appearance on the morning after the election was a visit to the Western Wall — a symbolic step that his political mentor, Yitzhak Rabin, pointedly declined to take when he was first elected prime minister in 1974.

On Sunday, Barak visited Israel's two chief rabbis to receive their blessing and encouragement for the tasks now facing him. He also took that opportunity to stress his desire to heal society's wounds gently, rather than by confrontational cauterization.

He told Chief Rabbis *Yisrael Meir* Lau and *Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron* that his bill to abolish haredi draft exemptions still stands — but that he would seek consultations with haredi rabbis to work out ways to implement it. The task of reconciling ideological polar opposites is bound to be fraught with difficulty.

The Knesset election results truly reflect the fractured and fragmented state of Israeli society.

But Barak's convincing victory in the prime ministerial race gives him the moral authority, if not the parliamentary strength, to launch a healing process. □