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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak may seek narrow coalition

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak could announce his government within days of the incoming Knesset's first session Monday, his top aides said Sunday.

But the coalition may be a narrow one rather than the broad-based grouping Barak originally sought, because of differences over Jewish settlements and other issues, the aides said.

Meanwhile, Barak plans to cancel economic subsidies to Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to a draft of his government guidelines. [Page 3]

Report: Assad ready for talks

Syrian President Hafez Assad is about to embark on direct peace talks with Israel without prior consultation with the Palestinians, according to sources in Damascus. Assad had always insisted that talks with Israel must take place in close coordination with other Arab states.

The sources' comments come amid reports in Israel that Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak has devised a plan for concluding a peace agreement with Syria that involves Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights in exchange for security arrangements with Damascus.

Jew to lead opposition party

A Jewish legislator is poised to be the first Jew in the history of South Africa's Parliament to become leader of the opposition, according to unofficial results Sunday from the nation's second democratic elections.

The results indicate that the Democratic Party, led by Tony Leon, will replace the New National Party as the official opposition to the ruling African National Congress, which won a landslide victory under President-elect Thabo Mbeki.

Indyk calls for 'breathing space'

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk urged Palestinians and Arab states to give Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak "breathing space" during the next few weeks as he tries to build a coalition.

Speaking last week at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, Indyk hailed Barak's victory as a "mandate for change," but urged caution.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Yugoslav Jews welcome peace, face daunting job of reconstruction

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — When Yechiel Bar Chaim, the Paris-based Yugoslavia program director for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, checked his e-mail last week he found an emotion-laden message from a Yugoslav correspondent.

"PEAAACCCE!" the message said. The Yugoslav "Parliament accepted!!!!!! I AM SOOOOO HAPPYYYY THAT IT IS PEACE!"

The prospect of a halt to NATO's air war against Serbia came as welcome news to Yugoslavia's 3,500 Jews, who throughout the NATO campaign have shared the same fears, hardships and concerns as their Serbian neighbors.

"I am desperate, hopeless, and very, very tired," Belgrade Jewish community activist Misa David told 600 delegates to the General Assembly of the European Council of Jewish Communities.

The conference was held in Nice at the end of last month, just days before the Yugoslav Parliament accepted NATO's terms.

David, and Aca Singer, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, were given special permission by Yugoslav military authorities to attend the meeting, where they issued an appeal for an end to the bombing.

"The people in Yugoslavia, including 3,500 Jews, suffer twice — from [President Slobodan] Milosevic's regime and from the NATO bombing," David said at the conference.

With peace finally near, Jews now share fears for the future in a country whose infrastructure has been pulverized, whose economy has been shattered, and whose social and political order is in turmoil.

"As a Jewish community, we are trying to prepare a program for the future," David said in an interview.

"But we will need help from all Jewish organizations.

"After the war, there will be an economic catastrophe," he said. "Factories have been destroyed.

"We need social help for the elderly and for young people. And for middle-aged people, finding jobs will be a priority."

Yugoslavia "is a country that is totally disorganized and in ruins," another Belgrade Jewish community member told JTA by e-mail.

Bar Chaim said the JDC is already planning what action to take if and when peace is finally established.

The scope of what is needed is enormous, he said, and it was not yet clear if economic sanctions would be lifted.

"We are already engaged in raising funds for rehabilitating the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia," he said.

A first priority, Bar Chaim added, would be to help the Yugoslav Jews currently being hosted in Budapest to return home.

Thanks to a contingency agreement between Yugoslav and Hungarian Jewish leaders, made months before the bombing began, as many as 500 Jews, most of them elderly people, women and children, were able to leave Yugoslavia for neighboring Hungary. About 200 of these people went on to Israel.

Other JDC priorities include:

- emergency cash relief for the elderly, who include as many as 800 destitute

MIDEAST FOCUS

Protests erupt in Bethlehem

Israeli troops dashed Saturday in Bethlehem with Palestinian stone-throwers protesting Jewish settlement activity.

No one was reported injured in the dashes, which came two days after widespread protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that were part of a "Day of Rage" urged by the Palestinian Authority to get Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak to rein in on settlements.

Lebanon's leader visits enclave

The president of Lebanon on Saturday visited a Christian enclave that had been abandoned days earlier by the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army.

Residents of the Jezzine enclave welcomed Emile Lahoud, who voiced support for Hezbollah gunmen and other Lebanese groups fighting the continued Israeli presence in southern Lebanon.

Terrorists said to be at large

Numerous Palestinian terrorists are roaming free in the self-rule areas, the head of Israel's domestic security service told the Cabinet on Sunday.

Ami Ayalon added that some of the 45 terrorists sought by Israel are serving in the Palestinian police, several of them as officers.

Peres welcomes statehood

Israel should welcome the creation of a Palestinian state, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Saturday.

"I say as a politician, there is nothing better for the State of Israel than a free Palestinian state," Peres said.

Some Israeli pundits are speculating that Peres will become a Cabinet minister in the new government.

Others say he will become U.N. ambassador or Israel's next president.

Holocaust survivors;

- new shipments of medicine to replenish the pharmacy in Belgrade, which was established long before the conflict and was maintained with the help of World Jewish Relief;

- refurbishment of the kitchen in the Belgrade community and the possible opening of soup kitchens in the Belgrade and Novi Sad communities; and

- expanded non-sectarian medical aid, to supplement medicines already provided for the sick and wounded in the Pristina Hospital and for autistic children in Belgrade.

"Also to be looked at in the days ahead," Bar Chaim said, "is the resumption of peacetime Jewish life."

Throughout the NATO campaign, Yugoslav Jewry's strong central organization helped sustain a semblance of normality for Jews in Belgrade, which is home to two-thirds of the country's Jews.

Electric power and water were cut, bombs and missiles destroyed buildings, roads and bridges, ear-splitting air raid sirens sent people scurrying terrified for shelters, and food and other consumer goods were either rationed or in short supply.

But Jews kept up a proud facade of business as usual.

This was partly the result of contingency measures adopted months before the air strikes began.

Besides arranging for hundreds of Jews to travel to Hungary, these measures included assembling stockpiles of medicine and other essentials, and making provisions for temporary housing for people afraid or unable to stay in their homes.

"We stopped most communal activities for about a month after the bombing started," David said, "but then we started up again. All community activities were moved to daylight hours, though, because of the danger of bombing.

"The Maccabi sports club began operating again, the choir went ahead with its rehearsals," he said. "We even kept publishing the community newsletter."

Indeed, the April edition of the newsletter reached Rome by normal mail. Its front page was devoted to a March 28 appeal by the Jewish community for an end to the bombing.

Community leaders in Belgrade, David said, maintained daily phone contact with the eight smaller communities in the provinces — including the tiny Jewish community in Pristina, the embattled capital of Kosovo — and provided emergency aid if needed.

Yugoslavia's Jews, though not strong supporters of Milosevic, tended to share the basic Serbian political position on the war.

As such, they felt isolated from much of the Jewish world. They complained about "one-sided" support by foreign Jews and Jewish organizations for the Kosovar refugees and the NATO bombing campaign.

Some Belgrade Jews also expressed disappointment that the Israeli ambassador to Belgrade closed the embassy and left Yugoslavia shortly after the beginning of the air strikes.

"One week before the bombing began, he said he would be the last ambassador to leave," said one Belgrade Jew.

"It is difficult for me to understand what the West intended to do with this type of campaign," one community member, who did not want to be quoted by name, told JTA before word came of a possible end to the NATO air strikes.

"The NATO attack essentially killed any opposition. It gave Milosevic the excuse to abolish normal civil rights, to impose martial law, tough restrictions on everyone," the community member added.

"I hate Milosevic, but I hate the bombing — you cannot maintain a pro-Western position when you are under such attack, and I don't think all this bombing helped the Albanians, either.

"I am very sorry about what happened in Kosovo," he said, "but NATO is partly responsible. And I don't see why NATO had to punish all the people in Yugoslavia for Milosevic's politics."

He admitted, however, that Yugoslavs, Jewish or not, were largely in the dark about what had happened in Kosovo. "I know what the Western news reports say, but I cannot believe it. Rationally, I cannot believe what they say has happened," he said. "Or, probably, we don't like to believe it." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Pope meets anti-Semitic priest

Jewish activists criticized Pope John Paul II for meeting Saturday with a Polish priest who had been banned from the pulpit for a year for making anti-Semitic remarks.

The meeting with Father Henryk Jankowski on the first day of the pope's visit to his native Poland is "sending a clear message of insensitivity to Jews," the Coalition for Jewish Concerns — Amcha, a New York-based direct-action group, and the Florida-based Shalom International said in a joint statement Sunday.

A former chaplain to former Polish President Lech Walesa, Jankowski was barred from the pulpit in 1997 after he said Jews should have no place in Poland's government. Last year, he warned voters in local elections to check if candidates were Jews or Russians before casting their votes.

Conference chairmen honored

Israel's ambassador to the United States hosted a dinner at his residence in honor of the outgoing and incoming chairmen of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Zalman Shoval hailed the service of Mel Salberg, whose term ended last week, and praised Ronald Lauder, the new chairman, at the June 3 dinner. In a short speech to the 100 guests, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk asked the new chairman for a briefing on his missions to Damascus, appearing to confirm reports that Lauder led secret back-channel talks between Israel and Syria.

Ukrainian Jew loses race

A Ukrainian Jewish leader failed last week in his bid to become mayor of Kiev. Grigory Surkis, a wealthy businessman who is president of Ukraine's top soccer team, finished second with 17 percent of the vote in the elections in the country's capital.

Surkis was instrumental in founding a new umbrella group of Ukrainian Jewish organizations, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine. Jews have served as mayors of several large Ukrainian cities since the country gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Foundation's president removed

Director Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation removed as its president Michael Berenbaum, who joined the group after heading the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's research institute.

Berenbaum, who led the foundation as it gathered thousands of videotaped interviews from Holocaust survivors, was reportedly asked to step down because of fund-raising problems and continuing criticism by scholars over the quality of the 50,000 interviews.

Barak said to be ready to exclude Likud and Shas from his government

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ehud Barak is edging closer to naming his new government, and aides to the Israeli prime minister-elect say it may wind up being a narrow one, rather than the broad-based coalition he originally intended.

Barak had originally hoped to include either the Likud or Shas parties in his government, to give him the broadest possible mandate to reach peace agreements with Syria and the Palestinians. But after difficult negotiations with Likud in recent days, his aides say he is prepared to announce a coalition that would bring together 66 of the Knesset's 120 members.

That message, delivered Sunday, a day before the incoming legislature was scheduled to hold its first session, was seen as a signal to Likud and Shas that they should not demand too much from Barak in the ongoing coalition negotiations.

The more narrow coalition would include the following parties:

- Barak's One Israel bloc, which has 26 Knesset seats;
- the dovish Meretz Party, 10 seats;
- the Center Party, 6;
- the secularist Shinui Party, 6;
- the immigrants rights Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, 6;
- the moderate Orthodox National Religious Party, 5;
- the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, 5; and
- the trade union-based One Nation Party, 2.

Despite the optimism of Barak aides', a number of obstacles still existed Sunday to the announcement of the new government. The United Torah Judaism bloc objected to Barak's plan to end draft exemptions for fervently Orthodox yeshiva students, while Meretz and Shinui were insisting that Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should no longer enjoy any special government subsidies. Yisrael Ba'Aliyah representatives, meanwhile, walked out of coalition talks Saturday night, demanding that some settlements continue to receive government support.

Settlements are among the issues covered in a draft of Barak's government guidelines that was distributed to potential coalition partners.

Barak plans to cancel economic subsidies to Jewish settlers, according to the guidelines, which also call for accelerated negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, approval by a national referendum of any final-status agreement reached with the Palestinians and a resumption of negotiations with Syria.

In addition, the guidelines call for the completion of legislation to create Israel's first constitution and for a separate law to end yeshiva students' draft exemptions.

Still harboring hopes of forging a broad coalition, Barak met Sunday for a lengthy meeting with Likud leader Ariel Sharon, who said it was still too early to say whether his party would join the coalition.

One major difficulty stemmed from Barak's reported unwillingness to name Sharon foreign minister, a post that Barak was said to have promised David Levy, the leader of the Geshet Party, which ran in the recent elections under the One Israel umbrella.

In a separate development, Sharon announced Sunday that Likud primaries for a new leader would be held on schedule in early September. His announcement came in the wake of a decision last week by the party secretariat not to elect a successor to the outgoing party leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, for another two years — which would have meant that Sharon, the party's acting leader, would hold the post until 2001.

This brought immediate protests from two other likely candidates for the party leadership, outgoing Finance Minister Meir Sheerit and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

Meanwhile, Barak aides are not ruling out a coalition that would include Shas.

Several One Israel officials spoke Sunday of bringing Shas into the government even if its recently convicted leader, Aryeh Deri, remains party chairman.

Observers point out that Shas, which has 17 Knesset seats and is relatively dovish on territorial compromise, would make a more reliable partner on crucial peace process votes than would Likud, which has 19 seats. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Latest move against Demjanjuk reopens old wounds in Cleveland**

By Marcy Oster
Cleveland Jewish News

CLEVELAND (JTA) — Just minutes after the Department of Justice recently filed papers in U.S. District Court in Cleveland seeking to revoke the citizenship of John Demjanjuk, a regional director of the American Jewish Committee got an important call.

Eli Rosenbaum, the director of the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, its Nazi-hunting unit, phoned Marty Plax about the lawsuit and urged him to call the leaders of Cleveland's Ukrainian community. Plax has had a dialogue with them since the OSI filed its first case against the Ukrainian-born Demjanjuk in 1978.

Many want to portray the Demjanjuk saga as a Jewish vs. Ukrainian issue, says Plax. But the Ukrainian and Jewish communities here have worked together for years to make sure that is not the case, he says. The result is one of the best relationships between two such communities in any American city.

"It does not matter what any body's position is "on whether or not Demjanjuk lied about his Nazi past to gain admittance and eventually U.S. citizenship," says Plax. "OSI is bringing a case against Demjanjuk. That's going to play itself out in court. We must just make sure it is not a case of one community against another."

"We get along with the Jewish community pretty well," says William Liscynsky, president of the United Ukrainian organization, an umbrella organization for Ukrainian community agencies here. "We don't need somebody to stir it up."

Still, insists Liscynsky, the Jews who head the OSI are out to get Demjanjuk — and for their own gain, he believes.

"The Jewish community should call off their dogs or muzzle them," he told the Cleveland Jewish News. "What does the Jewish community gain from this?"

The government's pursuit of Demjanjuk is a hot issue in the U.S. Ukrainian community, Liscynsky says, and it has caused some bad feelings between Ukrainian and Jewish communities in other cities.

Cliff Savren, a regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, believes it is important for everyone to recognize that the Ukrainian community is not on trial — nor is the Jewish community charging him.

"I think the essence of the case is the sanctity of American citizenship," he says. "Someone who acquired it under false pretenses should not be living as our neighbor."

The Justice Department filed the request to revoke Demjanjuk's citizenship on May 19. The case has been assigned to Judge Paul Matia, chief judge for the Northern District of Ohio — the same judge who in February 1998 restored Demjanjuk's citizenship after determining that the government was "reckless" in withholding information from Demjanjuk.

The new complaint charges that Demjanjuk, 79, was a guard at the Sobibor extermination camp and the Majdanek and Flossen-burg concentration camps, and that he was a member of the SS-run Trawniki unit. The complaint further alleges that Demjanjuk concealed these facts when he applied to become a U.S. citizen,

and should be denaturalized.

Demjanjuk has denied serving as a guard in any concentration or death camp. His attorneys and family have stated recently that he may not be capable of helping in his own defense, and that the cards are stacked against him since many of the witnesses from the original proceedings are now dead.

In 1981, the federal court in Cleveland found Demjanjuk to be "Ivan the Terrible," a gas chamber operator at the Treblinka extermination camp, and revoked his citizenship. He was extradited to Israel in 1986, convicted of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death.

But after the Israeli Supreme Court found reasonable doubt that he was Ivan the Terrible, he was released. The Israeli Supreme Court did, however, conclude that Demjanjuk was a guard at both Sobibor and Trawniki, and Majdanek and Flossen-burg.

Last year the U.S. District Court in Cleveland revoked the original denaturalization order, but left the door open for the government to refile the case.

The federal court never ruled on the Sobibor charges, deeming it unnecessary after ruling on Demjanjuk's guilt on the earlier charges.

The U.S. Court of Appeals in Cincinnati reopened the case in 1992 and appointed a special master to inquire into allegations that federal prosecutors had improperly withheld exculpatory evidence from Demjanjuk's attorneys.

The special master found that prosecutors had acted in good faith, but that they had failed to disclose certain documents to the defense. He ruled, however, that no evidence undermined the initial finding that Demjanjuk had been a guard at Trawniki, and pronounced the 1981 denaturalization order "sound." Still, the U.S. Court of Appeals determined the government prosecutors were "reckless."

The reopening of the Demjanjuk case has left Cleveland-area Holocaust survivors pleased, yet unsettled.

Gita Frankel of Beachwood, Ohio, who was stunned last year when Demjanjuk's citizenship was reinstated, says she was just beginning to put thoughts of the man she considers a Nazi behind her when she learned that the government was reopening its case.

"Every time his name comes up it just bothers me so much," Frankel said. "He should disappear out of my life after what I went through."

Whenever the Demjanjuk case or other Holocaust horrors come up in the local media, survivors are affected, says Zev Harel, a professor of history at Cleveland State University and a survivor himself.

"It's not an intellectual exercise," he says. "Everyone is back with his or her experiences."

Simon Fixler, president of the Kol Israel survivors organization, says he and his fellow survivors are glad that the government did not abandon its quest.

"I think this time they are going to boot him out," says Fixler, who attended the first trial in Cleveland. "They would not start proceedings without proof."

Avi Goldman, president of the Cleveland Holocaust Center and the child of survivors, is ready to let the court system do its work. If Demjanjuk is found guilty, says Goldman, U.S. law demands that he be denaturalized and deported.

If he is found innocent, "then I think he should get an apology from all of us." □