



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **L.A. suspect faces death penalty**

The suspect in Tuesday's shooting spree near Los Angeles faces a possible death sentence for charges that include hate crimes.

The allegations leveled Thursday against Buford O'Neal Furrow include one count of murder for the death of a U.S. postal carrier, a Filipino American, and five counts of attempted murder for shootings at a Jewish community center near Los Angeles.

The center in Granada Hills, Calif., is expected to reopen Monday.

### **Jewish security beefed up**

Representatives of 75 U.S. Jewish communities discussed security issues in a conference call organized by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs in the wake of Tuesday's shooting at a Los Angeles Jewish community center.

The New York-based umbrella organization also urged its constituents to reach out to other ethnic groups to push for gun control and hate crimes legislation and to organize rallies and vigils.

A teleconference organized by the Anti-Defamation League and the United Jewish Communities is scheduled to take place Tuesday in the ongoing effort to promote calm but efficient responses to enhanced security needs at Jewish institutions.

Meanwhile, Jewish sites across the country are beefing up security in the wake of Tuesday's shooting at a community center near Los Angeles.

In addition, some synagogues are reportedly considering increased measures to protect congregants during the upcoming High Holidays.

### **Israel may accelerate withdrawal**

Israel may withdraw from parts of the West Bank before Oct. 1 if progress is made in ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Thursday.

Danny Yatom made the comments before Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met Wednesday for the first time in 10 days.

Palestinians and Israelis have disagreed recently over a timetable for the Israeli withdrawals called for under the Wye agreement.

Barak is concerned that further withdrawals before final-status talks are conducted could leave some Jewish settlements isolated.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### **Diaspora minister wants religion to unite, not divide, world Jewry**

*By Avi Machlis*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If you passed Rabbi Michael Melchior strolling in the Knesset corridors, wearing his black kippah and long beard, you might mistakenly think he was one of many fervently Orthodox legislators in Israeli politics today.

But Melchior, who was appointed a Cabinet minister with responsibility for Diaspora relations and social affairs Aug. 5, has little in common with most Orthodox politicians, who often seek to use legislation to anchor religion in society.

Since 1995, Melchior has been chairman of the executive committee of Meimad, a centrist Orthodox movement that seeks to detach politics and religion.

Before the May elections, Meimad joined forces with Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Labor Party to form the One Israel bloc.

Campaign fliers are still piled high at Meimad's Jerusalem office, where Melchior spoke to JTA the morning after his appointment.

Between fielding congratulatory calls, Melchior explained how he plans to use his new position both to help resolve religious-secular tensions and improve Israel-Diaspora relations from within.

"The challenges are immense," he said, pointing out issues ranging from Holocaust restitution to Jewish identity and education.

"But what I really want to do is to work here to change attitudes of Israelis towards the Diaspora.

"I want to create an awareness in Israel, which unfortunately hardly exists here today, that we are part of a Jewish world."

"If we lose consciousness that there are Jews outside the borders of the state of Israel, then we have lost a basic part of our Jewish identity," Melchior said.

Melchior insisted that the new ministry be defined as "social and Diaspora affairs" because he believes that what happens in Israeli society affects the Diaspora as well.

For example, he said, the spiraling religious-secular conflict, with Orthodox and secular politicians engaged in endless shouting matches, is damaging for Jews around the world.

"If this will be the face of what will be the dominant cultural political image of Judaism, many people will eventually opt out of the relationship with Israel and opt out of a relationship with Judaism," he said.

"Therefore I think that what we do here in Israel, the changes in Israel, will affect Diaspora Jewry."

Melchior is also worried that the politicization of religion, along with the Jewish state's shift toward a post-Zionist era, is pulling Israelis away from any connection with Judaism.

"There is an increasing perception here that things are either Jewish or modern, Jewish or democratic, and what Meimad has come to the scene to show is that the message of the Torah is a combination," explains Melchior.

"You can be 100 percent committed to the Torah, without compromising any value in the Torah, and at the same time be part of the modern world."

This, he explains, means that the Torah can provide guidance to modern social issues ranging from Israel's treatment of non-Jews to social gaps in society to the status of women.

It is still unclear what kind of authority or budgets the new ministry will have for

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Barak presses Syria on talks

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak called on Syria to "quickly" find a way to resume stalled peace negotiations between the two countries.

Barak's comments to graduates of Israel's military college came amid conflicting signals from Syria on the idea of restarting negotiations that have been stalled since 1996.

An official Syrian newspaper rejected the idea Wednesday of direct negotiations between Syria and Israel, while a Syrian diplomat participated in an open academic meeting attended by Israeli researchers for the first time, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

### Israel in hot water over piracy

Israel's Justice Minister met with U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno to discuss possible U.S. sanctions against Israel for piracy.

Israel faces more than \$100 million in sanctions if it does not pass new laws protecting copyrighted computer software and music from piracy, Yossi Beilin told reporters before Thursday's meeting.

"Israel is allegedly a hub of piracy in our part of the world and possibly a candidate to be the only country in the highest level of suspicion by the United States," he said.

### Israel offers help to L.A. victims

Israeli Education Minister Yossi Sarid offered to send counseling help to the victims of this week's shooting at the Jewish center near Los Angeles.

### Turbine-moving stirs controversy

Israeli National Infrastructure Minister Eli Suissa said he would challenge a decision by Israel's High Court of Justice to allow an oversized turbine to be moved over the Jewish Sabbath.

Police have said that the turbine should be moved during Shabbat because there is less traffic then.

Melchior to implement Meimad's vision. This is the first time an Israeli ministry has been formed explicitly to deal with Diaspora affairs, although in Israel's previous government, Bobby Brown served as an adviser to the prime minister on this contentious issue.

Whatever authority he will have, Melchior will clearly play a key role in Israel-Diaspora affairs in the coming years.

Born in Denmark to an eighth-generation rabbinical family, Melchior, 45, came to Israel after completing high school and studied at Yeshivat HaKotel in Jerusalem.

He stayed for eight years, was ordained in 1980 and then appointed chief rabbi of Oslo.

Melchior chuckles at the symbolism of having served in a city where the historic Israeli-Palestinian peace accord would be signed.

But even more significant, he says, is the role he played in rebuilding a tiny, unique community of just 1,000 Jews that was devastated after World War II.

"It is an Orthodox community but it has room for everybody," he explains. "We are too small to divide up into different groups, so if there is not enough room under the roof for everyone to feel comfortable and for everyone to feel that there is full expression of their Jewish identity, then the whole thing would cease to exist.

"Actually, it has been a great model which other communities have used, and I think here in Israel we can learn a lot from it as well.

"The Diaspora can teach a lot to Israel."

After living in Oslo from 1980 to 1986, Melchior made aliyah to Israel. He continued to serve as chief rabbi of Norway, spending about 18 weeks a year in Scandinavia.

Melchior has been employed by the Norwegian government as an adviser on human rights issues, has served as the international director of the Elie Wiesel Foundation and has won several awards, including the Nobel Institute's prize for tolerance and bridge-building.

He also served as an adviser on Diaspora affairs to Rabbi Yehuda Amital, Meimad's founder, who briefly was a minister without portfolio following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

Melchior supports Barak's vision on the peace process.

But he also thinks Israelis should be more open to Palestinian suffering. Melchior himself periodically visits Palestinian refugee camps and holds talks with Muslim clerics.

In 1988, Melchior helped found Meimad as a political party, but it failed to earn enough votes to qualify for Israel's Parliament and instead transformed into a social movement.

Meimad has criticized the Orthodox community for using religious texts to bolster political positions.

The movement also advocates an end to religious coercion, while urging the Orthodox community to adopt humanistic values, respect non-Orthodox Jews and include liberal rabbis in the conversion process.

"I am an Orthodox rabbi, and I am 100 percent committed to halachah and its Orthodox interpretation," Melchior says. "But I also have very, very good relations with Conservative and Reform Jewry."

On the issue of conversions, he says, "I think the real solution is to take it out of the political realm.

"I think the state of Israel should not be dealing with who is a Jew but who is an Israeli."

In his new position, Melchior also expects to be dispatched to bolster support from Jewish lobbies in the United States when the peace process begins to move ahead.

The rabbi clearly remembers a meeting with congressmen on Capitol Hill a few years ago.

"When they saw me — as an Orthodox rabbi who looks like one — and heard what I had to say about the peace process, they nearly fell off their chairs.

"The worst thing was that I think they had the perspective from extreme right-wing activists that Judaism and peace are two opposites, and certainly religious Judaism and peace.

"And they were very surprised, I think, positively surprised."

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## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Policy shift on gun control?

The Clinton administration is seriously exploring "the possibility of requiring the licensing of all handguns," U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno told reporters on Thursday.

The possible policy shift comes in response to Tuesday's shooting at a Los Angeles area Jewish community center that left five injured. Reno condemned the shooting, telling reporters at her weekly news briefing, "Hate crimes represent an attack not just on individual victims, but also on the victims' communities. They tear at the very fabric of a people's life."

### WJC to rebut Portugese report

The World Jewish Congress will challenge a recent Portugese government report exculpating the country of dealing in Nazi gold during World War II, according to a Portugese newspaper. The paper quoted WJC Executive Director Elan Steinberg as saying a detailed reply to the report would be issued in mid-September before the U.N. General Assembly begins its 54th session.

### Vandals destroy Canadian tombs

Vandals desecrated some 200 gravestones at a cemetery in Winnipeg in two attacks Sunday and Monday. The desecration came as B'nai Brith Canada reported that anti-Semitic incidents in Canada had increased by 18 percent in the first six months of 1999. The increase came after a 14 percent rise in such incidents in Canada in 1998.

### Israel to join Mickey and Goofy

A millennium exhibit at Disney's Epcot Center in Florida will feature an Israel Pavilion showcasing the country's culture and history.

Visitors to the building will be able to take a video tour of Jerusalem through the centuries that explains the importance of the city to Christianity and Islam, while emphasizing its centrality to Judaism.

Israel's Foreign Ministry hopes the project, to which it contributed \$1.8 million, will encourage tourism to Israel during the year 2000.

### Educators urged to speak up

A U.S. group for Jewish educators is urging its members to become activists on issues such as teachers' salaries and the shortage of trained professionals in the field.

"For a long time, Jewish educators have allowed other people to call the shots for their field," said Eliot Spack, the executive director of the Coalition for the Advancement for Jewish Education, at the group's 24th annual conference this week in Columbus, Ohio. "We want them to raise their voices and concerns."

## Camp trains synagogue lay leaders in how to keep Jewish rituals alive

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Munching happily on fish sticks and french fries, the diners seated in a sun-filled corner of the dining room at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires made a surprising bunch of campers.

Indeed, the 19 adults had come to the Conservative movement's camp in upstate New York for serious summer pursuits.

Among those pursuits: learning how to run a synagogue service, how to chant Torah and Haftorah portions and how to write and deliver a d'var Torah, or biblical commentary.

For the past eight years, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism has run the IMUN Program, a training institute for lay religious leadership in smaller Jewish communities.

"It used to be that the old-timers who ran the store downtown" would lead synagogue services, said Rabbi David Blumenfeld, IMUN's program director and the head of outreach to the several hundred small congregations affiliated with United Synagogue.

As those community leaders age, concerns are growing over who will take up leadership roles and prevent the basics of Jewish ritual from seeping away.

At the same time, many small and isolated Jewish communities are witnessing a dearth of pulpit rabbis.

United Synagogue responded with a nine-day immersion in Jewish liturgy and Torah reading, as well as discussions of Jewish life cycle rituals and holidays, synagogue schools and youth programs, Jewish law and practice, and the whys and hows of the Conservative movement.

Rabbis, cantors and lecturers from the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary lead many of the courses.

The program costs \$850, but Blumenfeld said United Synagogue hasn't had any troubling filling the 20 slots open each session.

IMUN's organizers had originally considered holding the retreats in upscale urban facilities, but Ramah's rural scenery and its Jewish character attracted the group.

"We're just their hosts, but we make it able to happen in a very good setting," said Paul Resnick, the director of the camp.

"Here they wake up and hear four minyanim," or prayer services, Resnick said.

Candidates for the IMUN program, which also runs in the winter at Camp Ramah in Ojai, Calif., must be members of a USCJ congregation, recommended by the synagogue's rabbi or president, able to read Hebrew phonetically, committed to Jewish learning and prepared to take what they learn home — and use it.

The object of the program, Blumenfeld explained in an open-air interview at Camp Ramah, is for participants to build a "powerful nucleus" of lay leaders and to serve as "the driving force behind spirituality in their home congregations."

"It's not a para-rabbinic course. It's not Torah instruction, although, of course, they do learn."

"But it's not for the purpose of just learning."

"It's training," Blumenfeld said, explaining that the program's title — emblazoned on his blue T-shirt along with a design depicting a yellow flame — means just that in Hebrew.

Temple Shalom of Auburn, Maine, which has about 90 families, sent several members to the program — including Sherry Olstein, a 44-year-old nurse who is "mostly a mom" these days.

The synagogue's rabbi got his congregants involved in IMUN "so it wasn't a one-person show," Olstein said in a recent interview that interrupted a lively lunchtime discussion.

The rabbi has since left the pulpit, but Temple Shalom now has energetic and educated lay leaders to keep up its religious activities.

"Will we be doing it perfectly? No," Olstein said of her colleagues at Camp Ramah. "But at least we'll know what we're doing wrong." □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Critics say Barak ignores advice, which leads to diplomatic blunders***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — By the time U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrives in the region early next month for her peacemaking trip, the state of Israeli-Palestinian relations may have improved.

But even if there is an end to the current round of daily disagreements regarding the land-for-security Wye accord, there is an increasing number of people who are less than impressed with Prime Minister Ehud Barak's initial essays at diplomacy.

In government circles, there is a widespread discomfort over the gap that has opened up between the new prime minister's high intellectual attainments and what they view as his significantly less impressive interpersonal achievements.

As a result, while the huge fund of sympathy for Barak and his policies is far from exhausted, it has been discernibly depleted.

Summing up the assessment of the premier, one minister called Barak's recent dealings with the Palestinians "the mistake of a political neophyte."

Observers point to what they describe as a major blunder Barak made during his whirlwind round of meetings with world and regional leaders during his first weeks in office.

At that time, Barak went public with his plans to propose a revision of the Wye accord.

Pointing out that the agreement was negotiated by an Israeli government fundamentally reluctant to proceed with the Oslo peace process, Barak warned that the Israeli withdrawal from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank under Wye would leave several Jewish settlements isolated within territory controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

It would be far better, he suggested, to postpone implementation of portions of the accord until after the start of talks on a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

While some of the arguments were considered quite cogent, once Barak had made his thoughts public, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat was quick to reject them and to demand the full and meticulous implementation of Wye.

On one score, at least, Barak has been right on target.

He foresaw, and still foresees, a rash of terror incidents as Palestinian radicals attempt to sour an already fragile peace process. His prediction was borne out Tuesday, when a Palestinian twice drove his car into a group of Israeli soldiers hitchhiking on a road some 30 miles west of Jerusalem before Israeli troops shot and killed him. Twelve people suffered light to moderate injuries.

The attacker reportedly had no ties to terrorist groups, but had been reading the biography of a Hamas bomb-maker widely believed to have been killed by Israel.

In addition, a settler was ambushed while he was driving in his car Tuesday evening near the Palestinian self-rule town of Jenin.

In response, Israel sealed off part of the West Bank.

At the same time, Barak warned that Israelis can expect further attacks "by radical groups that oppose the peace process."

He gave no indication, however, that he would let the attack disrupt Israeli-Palestinian peace moves — a stance that likely

would have been taken by his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Several other incidents have occurred in recent days that also could have derailed peace talks.

Last week, two Israeli settlers were wounded in a shooting attack for which Hamas later claimed responsibility, and on Tuesday, violent clashes erupted around Joseph's Tomb in the West Bank town of Nablus. In another incident that took place in the predawn hours Tuesday, Israeli police stepped in quickly to close up an entrance to Jerusalem's Temple Mount that Islamic officials opened earlier this week.

Barak said Tuesday that Islamic officials violated the law when they excavated the opening at the Al-Aksa Mosque, and he praised the police response.

Barak's stance was viewed as a signal that he would take a tough line regarding the status quo in Jerusalem's Old City.

While few would doubt that Barak, a former army chief of staff, is soft on security issues, he is being criticized for the peremptory manner in which he deals with some members of his own One Israel bloc.

It has been widely noted that after just a month in power, Barak has managed to alienate some of his ministers.

People like Justice Minister Yossi Beilin and Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami feel they are not being consulted over the diplomatic process, despite their experience and proven expertise in this area.

Indeed, there is growing criticism throughout the political community of Barak's apparently deliberate refusal to put in place any serious consultative machinery involving ministers and top officials. Instead, he telephones people individually, often late at night, and launches into long briefings that leave them feeling fully clued in — but at the same time effectively ignored.

Specifically, the critics say, a "Kitchen Cabinet" of top ministers, had one existed, would have steered Barak away from going public with his Wye revision plan before presenting it to Arafat.

Kitchen Cabinets of four or at most five participants have been the norm in Israel since Golda Meir's day, as they are in many parliamentary democracies.

By contrast, the Security Cabinet, a body mandated by law, often includes more than half of the full Cabinet and is therefore unwieldy — and full of leaks as well.

Will Barak's secretiveness and his suspiciousness toward his fellow ministers ease as he grows into his job?

Some of those who know him say these characteristics are deeply ingrained from his army years and are unlikely to change now.

But others suggest that embarrassing rebuffs, like the one dealt him by Arafat, may provide him with a crash course on how to seek advice before making his moves. □

**Cyprus releases Israeli spies**

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two Israelis jailed as spies in Cyprus have been released after serving five months of their three-year sentence.

In a statement, Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides said the two were released this week as a goodwill gesture toward Israel. The two Israelis had pled guilty as part of a plea bargain to approaching a restricted military zone in southern Cyprus. □