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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Disney World exhibit links Jerusalem to Israel, without a mention of capital

By Julia Goldman

Israel exhibit opens at Disney

The Israel exhibit at Walt Disney World's Millennium Village makes no explicit mention of Jerusalem as Israel's capital — a subject that had sparked calls for a boycott by some Arab and Muslim groups in the United States and had drawn the attention of the Arab League. But in remarks delivered at the exhibit's preview, the Foreign Ministry's director general, Eitan Ben-Tsur, referred three times to "Jerusalem, the capital of Israel." [Page 1]

Albright: Fate of Iran 13 uncertain

The trial of 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel is believed to have been postponed indefinitely, said the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Malcolm Hoenlein reported that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had told his group messages from Iran continue to be mixed, with some parties saying the death penalty is never implemented in peace time and others saying the Jews will likely be executed.

Memorial held at Babi Yar

Jewish activists joined Ukrainian leaders for a memorial Wednesday honoring the memory of Jews slaughtered at a ravine near Kiev.

Nazi forces killed more than 33,000 at Babi Yar during two days in September 1942.

Overall, an estimated 100,000 people, most of them Jews, were killed at the site during World War II.

White House honors Spielberg

Director Steven Spielberg was among nine people honored with a medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"On top of his creative mastery, Steven has devoted enormous time and resources to preserving Holocaust testimonies and supporting righteous causes," President Clinton said at Wednesday's ceremony. "I think he'd most want to be remembered for his contribution to humanity."

REMINDER: Because of Simchat Torah, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Oct. 4.

ORLANDO, Fla. (JTA) — The Israel exhibit at Walt Disney World's Millennium Village makes no explicit mention of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

But there is no doubt that the exhibit inextricably links Jerusalem with Israel and that Israel intended that message to come across loud and clear in the 2,200-square-foot exhibit designed to evoke Jerusalem's Old City.

In remarks delivered Wednesday at a special opening reception attended by officials from Disney and the state of Florida, the director-general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Eitan Ben-Tsur repeated three times, "Jerusalem, the capital of Israel" — to the rousing applause of hundreds of Jewish community representatives who had also gathered at EPCOT for the event.

Wednesday's special preview answered the \$64,000-question whose answer had been shrouded in secrecy — how exactly would Jerusalem be depicted.

The question had sparked international controversy when Arab groups charged the entertainment company with taking Israel's side on the status of Jerusalem — a matter that is still on the table in Middle East peace negotiations.

Riled by reports that Israel had agreed to participate in the project only if the exhibit emphasized Jerusalem as its capital, some Arab and Muslim groups, including the Palestinian Authority, threatened a boycott against Disney.

Israel contributed \$1.8 million to the pavilion, which cost a reported \$8 million, and worked with Disney to develop its content.

The Arab League threatened to take unspecified measures if it detected a political message in the exhibit.

But last Friday, after a meeting between Disney officials and Arab League representatives, the Arab League said it was satisfied by Disney's written assurances that the exhibit was strictly entertainment.

Israeli officials admit the exhibit changed in the wake of the Arab protest, but by all accounts the changes were minor.

There were no "substantive" changes, Israel's ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, told Jewish organizational officials in a recent conference call.

All along, Israel said publicly that while the exhibit would show Jerusalem's centrality to the Jewish people, it would also present the city as a holy site for Christians and Muslims.

Shoval indicated in his public address at the opening on Wednesday that Disney had not caved in to Arab pressure.

"Any blackmail is objectionable because it affects the lives of people," he said. "Political blackmail is objectionable because it affects the lives of many people. Political blackmail is another word for terrorism.

"We praise Disney for not letting it pass."

Although the controversy seems to have largely died down, at least one Arab American group said it intended to distribute leaflets to Disney visitors to counter what it called the "misleading" impression that Jerusalem is Israel's undivided capital.

Fifty countries are represented in the pavilion, which opens to the public on Friday and will run for 15 months.

Eight of those countries, including Israel, have a more substantial, walk-through experience rather than a smaller display. Those countries are Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Scotland, Eritrea, Easter Island, Chile, and Brazil.

What visitors to Israel's exhibit see is an arched structure made of gold-colored

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak restates withdrawal pledge

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak reiterated his campaign pledge to withdraw troops from southern Lebanon by July. He also warned Thursday against Hezbollah attacks after the withdrawal. "I don't recommend that anyone test us or our reaction after we are on the international border."

His comments came a day after his deputy defense minister, Ephraim Sneh, said Israel would only withdraw as part of an arrangement with Syria, prompting speculation that Barak was backing off his pledge.

Reform, Conservative ads slated

The Conservative and Reform movements in Israel are reportedly planning new ad campaigns to draw followers to their synagogues. The campaigns are planned for Passover, following a media blitz by the two movements before Rosh Hashanah.

Vanunu supporters demonstrate

Supporters of jailed nuclear spy Mordechai Vanunu demonstrated for his release Thursday in Israel. The protest coincided with the 13th anniversary of the day Vanunu was kidnapped and brought back to Israel to stand trial.

Vanunu has served 13 years of an 18-year sentence he was given for disclosing Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities to The Times of London.

PFLP member arrives in Jericho

A senior member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine arrived Thursday in the West Bank town of Jericho. Abu Ali Mustafa, the deputy leader of the Damascus-based group that opposes the Oslo peace process, was given an entry permit by Israeli officials.

Mustafa has been involved in recent efforts by Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat to reconcile with the PFLP and other so-called rejectionist groups.



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stone, situated next to an international food court and a gift shop.

What they hear — in the video presentations that make up the centerpiece of the exhibit — is that Jerusalem was "the capital of the millennium" and the "heart of Israel."

They also hear a disclaimer that says the exhibit is sponsored by Israel's Foreign Ministry and "is based on their perspective."

In addition, a general disclaimer at the entrance to the pavilion says the stories at all the exhibits "represent the views of our exhibitors and sponsors."

On the way to the simulated "Journey to Jerusalem" on Wednesday, young Israeli guides — posing as Disney "cast members" — pointed out landmarks of the three monotheistic religions on a wall-sized photograph of the Old City.

"Where is Rehavia?" one visitor asked.

"Where is the King David Hotel?" another shouted to Galit, one of the guides, who helpfully pointed out the Hyatt hotel as well.

The "Journey to Jerusalem" begins with a video tour that races through modern Jerusalem to set the stage for a simulated ride through the city's history.

Then visitors are strapped in for an eight-minute virtual roller-coaster — which gives the sensation of movement using specially designed motion platforms — that takes them through "Stories of Faith," a dizzying dash to scenes of Abraham and Jesus and references to Mohammed.

The American group protesting the exhibit, the American Muslims for Jerusalem, issued a statement Thursday, saying that after viewing the exhibit, it was particularly concerned about a video "showing the Dome of the Rock, one of the holiest mosques in the world, fading away to be replaced by the Star of David."

The experience ends with the words "Faith, Hope and Peace" emblazoned on three screens in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

Outside the auditorium, visitors enter a room displaying some of Israel's technological and agricultural advances. There they can send e-mails to be inserted in the cracks of the Western Wall.

The crowds Wednesday evening included hardy travelers from Atlanta who had risen at 5:30 a.m. to make it to Orlando, as well as a delegation from New York and a handful of leaders of national Jewish organizations.

Morton Klein, the president of the Zionist Organization of America, said he found the historical presentation to be "sanitized" so as not to offend, and was "deeply disturbed that evidently reference to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was intentionally deleted."

He said that when he questioned the Israeli army graduates who make up Disney's "cast" on the status of Jerusalem, he was told that "Israel believes Jerusalem is its capital."

But asked directly, another crew member said, "In my own opinion, of course," Jerusalem is the capital, but at Disney, "we are here to share it."

But most of the people who responded to the Israeli invitation to get a sneak peek at the exhibit expressed delight at the idea of having an Israel exhibit at Disney.

Those interviewed said they felt it did a good job of paying tribute to Christianity and Islam alongside Judaism.

Mostly, though, visitors saw the exhibit as a source of Jewish pride.

"I've been to EPCOT many, many times," said Marcia Greenberg, a tour operator who has also been to Israel 51 times.

"I always missed having our country here," said Greenberg, who was part of the 130-strong delegation from the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach.

Cara Ginsburg, a senior at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla., was there with a dozen members of her contemporary Jewish literature class.

"It was obviously Jewish, definitely, but I didn't mind," she said of the exhibit, noting especially a dance performance of a stylized Chasidic wedding that is Israel's contribution to the cultural performances at the Millennium Village.

"Finally," she enthused, "we can teach other people the beauty of our culture."

Anne Krautman, also of Palm Beach, said she was impressed by new Israeli methods of growing square vegetables for more efficient shipping.

She said she told the Israeli cast member, "I'll take a little piece of pepper, a little piece of tomato and some low fat dressing."

"He said, 'You can't: It's plastic.' "

□

JEWISH WORLD

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Anti-Semitic, anti-foreigner party expected to gain in Austrian vote

By Ruth E. Gruber

VIENNA (JTA) — A far-right political party with a xenophobic platform is poised to make big gains in next week's general elections in Austria — and could become the country's second biggest political force.

Once a pariah in national politics, the Freedom Party, led by 49-year-old populist firebrand Jorg Haider, received 27.5 percent of the vote in regional elections in Vorarlberg on Sept. 19. This total represented a leap of more than 9 percent over regional election results there five years ago and appeared to confirm public opinion polls that indicate the party has become the country's second largest.

"It's like a turbocharger in the home stretch to parliamentary elections," said Peter Westenthaler, Freedom Party general secretary.

The party won 22 percent of the vote in Austria's last general elections in 1995.

Nationwide polls earlier this month indicated that the party would win 28 to 29 percent in the elections on Oct. 3. That would put it well behind Chancellor Viktor Klima's Social Democratic Party, which is projected to win 35 to 38 percent of the vote — but well ahead of the conservative Peoples Party, with 23 to 24 percent.

These two parties, which have dominated Austrian politics for half a century, ruled in a coalition in the outgoing government.

The results could take Haider, the son of Nazi supporters who repeatedly praised Hitler's regime in the past, closer to his goal of becoming chancellor of Austria.

Observant members of Austria's 7,000 to 10,000-strong Jewish community may not be able to vote in the Oct. 3 election because it is scheduled on Simchat Torah.

The Interior Ministry suggested that observant Jews could vote by absentee ballot two days before the election at the Austrian Embassy in nearby Slovakia. The Jewish community issued an indignant statement calling this solution "unacceptable."

Freedom Party posters promise "Austria First" and depict Haider as someone who "speaks our language." Some show Haider and one of his candidates with thumbs up, with the slogan "Two Real Austrians." They call for a stop to "foreign infiltration" and "the abuse of asylum" — code phrases for a total ban on immigration. □

Ukrainian Jewish youths allowed into Israel after compromise reached

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After months of delay, Ukrainian officials have agreed to let some 500 youths come to Israel to participate in a Jewish Agency for Israel program.

Israeli Interior Minister Natan Sharansky succeeded in persuading Ukrainian officials to drop their objections to the Na'aleh program, a Sharansky spokesman said this week. Ukrainian officials have delayed issuing the necessary visas, claiming that the program, which promotes immigration to Israel, was recruiting the best and brightest among the country's youth.

According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Ukraine agreed to drop its objections after the Interior Ministry offered to alter the status of Ukrainian guest workers who until now had been in Israel illegally. The friction over the youth program was fueled in part by frustration among Ukrainian officials that relations with Israel are not deeper, particularly with regard to economic development and investment, Ha'aretz added.

During the past decade, Ukraine has been the source of 50 percent to 60 percent of all immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union. Ukraine has an estimated 500,000 Jews. More than 250,000 Ukrainians have immigrated to Israel since 1989.

Ukrainian officials have repeatedly expressed discontent with the Na'aleh youth program, which recruits 15- and 16-year-olds to finish high school in Israel. Most of the participants adopt Israeli citizenship. More than 8,000 youths from the former Soviet Union were enrolled in the program in the spring of this year. □

Scrolls moved from Uzbekistan

In a sign of warming relations between the former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan and its once-large Jewish community, Jews from the Bukhara region have moved six Torah scrolls from Uzbekistan to North America. Jewish leaders say this is the first time the Uzbek government gave permission for such a move.

The majority of the community left Uzbekistan in 1992 and 1993, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and new Bukharan synagogues are proliferating in North America and Israel, according to Boris Kandov, president of the newly formed Congress of Bukharan Jews in the United States and Canada.

Looted art winds up on the strip

A Las Vegas casino purchased a Nazi-looted painting that was returned to the heirs of a Jewish art collector.

The Bellagio resort added Henri Matisse's "Odalisque" to its art collection in the casino. In June, the Seattle Art Museum returned the work, valued at \$2 million, to the heirs of Paul Rosenberg after it hung in the museum for years.

Jesse Ventura takes on religion

The governor of Minnesota body slammed organized religion in an interview with Playboy magazine. "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers," said Jesse Ventura, a former Navy SEAL and professional wrestler. "It tells people to go out and stick their noses in other people's business."

Cowboys regret Hitler reference

A weekly published by the Dallas Cowboys football team apologized to a Jewish group for a column that used the term "Hitler" to describe another club's owner.

The comparisons between Washington Redskins owner Daniel Snyder and the Nazi dictator in the Sept. 25 issue of The Official Dallas Cowboys Weekly were "outrageous," said an official with the Zionist Organization of America in Dallas. The publisher of the weekly, Russ Russell, vowed to publish a formal apology in next week's issue.

German firms asked to join fund

A U.S. Jewish group said it wrote to 117 German companies asking them to join the 16 firms that have already agreed to provide compensation to Nazi-era slave laborers.

"Compensation is a moral, historical and political obligation for the German government and German industry as a whole," the American Jewish Committee said.

NEWS ANALYSIS**Experts warn Israel must change budget process to sustain growth***By Avi Machlis*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The captains of Israel's economy this week told world economic leaders at the annual conference of the International Monetary Fund that Israel's sluggish economy is set for a revival after a three-year slowdown.

Rosy government forecasts have been backed by a series of recent reports issued by leading financial analysts, who see Israel's economy pulling out of the slowdown since 1997 that has pushed unemployment up to nearly 9 percent.

But at the same time, some economic experts are warning that despite signs of an upturn, the prospects of Israel enjoying sustainable long-term growth are unlikely without a serious change in the composition of the budget and the political framework that creates it.

Speaking to the Ha'aretz daily newspaper from the Washington conference, Avraham Shohat, Israel's finance minister, said he believes Israel has turned the corner.

"One cannot say for sure that we have already reached rapid growth," Shohat said.

"I feel that we're passed the lowest point. It depends on a lot of factors, but there are definitely positive indicators."

Shohat said he believes the economy will grow at about 3 percent next year. Israel's gross domestic product — the total amount of goods and services produced in an economy and a standard measure of economic growth — grew only about 2 percent in both 1997 and 1998, and a mere 0.3 percent during the first half of this year. In contrast, the gross domestic product grew at a rapid rate of about 6 percent a year during the mid-1990s.

Shohat's optimism was confirmed by reports released last week by Salomon Smith Barney and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, two leading investment banks, which argued that Israel's credit ratings should be raised.

These ratings are measures of an economy's overall status and stability, and higher ratings can help a country raise funds at lower interest rates.

Both reports cited Prime Minister Ehud Barak's recent election, and his determination to forge regional peace and to maintain stable economic policies. Salomon Smith Barney said Israel's leaders have decided "that the country's future lies in deeper and broader integration with the world economy" and praised the government's "commitment to prudent economic policies and structural reforms."

The reports were referring to the Israeli Cabinet's decision to approve a budget for the year 2000 based on cuts of about \$1.4 billion to projected spending for next year. This allayed fears that Shohat, who served as finance minister under the previous Labor-led government from 1992 to 1996, would continue his previous policy of high government spending, which fuels inflation.

However, when Knesset members and ministers return from their Sukkot vacations next week, the annual slugfest over the budget will promptly begin. The budget is scheduled to be raised for the first of three parliamentary readings by mid-October, and must be approved by year's end.

This, say some critics, is the real problem. Even if the budget framework is reasonable, they say, political pressures prevent a distribution of funds to sectors that can give a boost to the economy and create jobs. The way to boost growth, they say, is not a matter of how much is spent, but how it is spent.

For example, government investment in public works projects such as roads and infrastructure is considered a key to economic revival. Although the government has pledged to increase such spending, it is still unclear to what extent this will be reflected in the budget.

Pinchas Landau, a veteran Israeli economic commentator, said the current Israeli political system, in which every faction fights for funds without considering the bigger picture, has created a "warped and flawed" budget composition in which Israeli government expenditures will always rise — and in the wrong directions.

In a study published by the Israel Center for Social and Economic Progress, a liberal economic think tank, Landau argues that this trend means that despite the rosy reports in recent days, Israel will not reach sustainable long-term growth if the budget composition is not addressed by the government.

The study shows that while defense spending has steadily fallen, from 30 percent of the gross domestic product in 1980 to about 15 percent today, the overall level of government spending remains very high compared to most Western economies. This is because at the same time, welfare spending — also known as transfer payments — have climbed from about 20 percent of the gross domestic product to more than 30 percent. Meanwhile, to support perpetually high spending, the government is now considering levying new taxes — a move that also bodes ill for the prospects of reviving growth.

Although some welfare payments are important to address social problems such as poverty and unemployment, in many cases high welfare payments are not crucial, critics say.

For example, the government provides child allowances, often reaching hundreds of dollars, to all Israeli families regardless of their income. During the recent budget talks, a proposal to scrap the payments for families with middle to high incomes was quickly shot down, indicating the political pressures even on moves to reduce welfare payments.

"Transfer payments have now become the biggest single item in the budget," Landau said, noting that the rise of welfare spending parallels the rise of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party as a political force that depends on welfare spending to boost its power base.

In the long term, he said, this will be unsustainable: "Either it will just roll on until it blows up — and that is the more likely scenario — or there will be a change in the focus of the government." □

Efforts to rebuild Temple intensify

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A group that hopes to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem is planning to search through phone books and public records to find descendants of the Jewish priestly caste.

A group known as Chai Vekayam said Monday in Jerusalem that the Kohanim, as well as their assistants, the Levi'im, will be necessary to perform certain tasks in case the temple is rebuilt. Muslims also claim the Temple Mount, the area in Jerusalem where the group wants the Temple to be rebuilt, as holy ground. □