



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

New York federation head named

John Ruskay was named to the top professional position at the UJA-Federation of New York.

Ruskay's promotion to executive vice president from his post as one of two chief operating officers at the world's largest Jewish fund-raising and social service organization comes as his predecessor, Stephen Solender, is being named the president of the United Jewish Communities.

Misha Galperin will continue as the UJA-Federation's chief operating officer.

Court issues workplace ruling

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that two Muslim police officers in New Jersey cannot be barred from wearing beards. The court, acting without comment on Monday, rejected an appeal by Newark city officials and left intact rulings that such a ban would violate the officers' freedom of religion.

Jewish groups that have been promoting legislation to increase religious freedom in the workplace, including the private sector, hailed the court's move.

Compromise reached on route

Israel and the Palestinian Authority plan to open a safe-passage route next week for Palestinians traveling between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The announcement came after the two sides worked out their remaining differences over security procedures Monday night. [Page 2]

Israel to release more prisoners

Israel is due to release a second group of Palestinian prisoners at the end of the week, in accordance with the Wye II land-for-security accord signed last month in Egypt. Some 28 nationals of neighboring Arab states are expected to be among the 151 prisoners Israel plans to free.

Jews: Daily religion not vital

Jews are half as likely as members of other religious groups to say that their religion is "very important" to them, according to a Gallup analysis of surveys conducted between 1992 and 1999. The study, based on interviews with 20,000 Americans, found that while 60 percent of respondents said religion is very important in their daily lives, only 30 percent of Jewish Americans said this.

In picking Solender, UJC opts for head who 'understands system'

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The man chosen to head the Jewish community's central fund-raising and social service system has spent his entire career working for Jewish organizations.

In picking Stephen Solender, 61, to become the first president of the newly formed United Jewish Communities, the group's search committee opted for a man with extensive experience and intimate knowledge of the federation world.

"We were looking for people who understood the system," Charles Bronfman, UJC's chairman of the board, said in a news conference Tuesday announcing Solender's appointment.

In recent months, Solender has balanced two of the most demanding jobs in communal Jewish life: serving as acting president of the UJC — the product of the merger of the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal — while continuing his 13-year post as executive vice president of UJA-Federation of New York.

When he accepted the temporary UJC post in April, Solender said he was not interested in taking the helm of the UJC on a long-term basis.

However, in the months that followed, as the search process continued, Solender — who describes himself as a workaholic — decided to go for it after all.

Federation executives from around the country, many of whom had pushed for someone with extensive federation experience, praised the appointment.

Asked why he has devoted his career to Jewish organizations, Solender said it was out of "family tradition and a natural interest."

"What's been most rewarding is the impact we've had on so many people's lives," he said. "We've helped so many people in the U.S., Israel and around the world."

Solender is part of a three-generation dynasty of communal machers: Solender's father, Sanford, was executive vice president of what was then the New York UJA-Federation Joint Campaign, and his grandfather directed a Jewish community center in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood.

Solender's first job out of graduate school — Columbia University School of Social Work — in 1962 was working with teens for the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago. Within seven years, he had risen in the ranks to become program director and then branch director of that institution. He later worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and then became the executive vice president of The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

In New York, he oversaw the 1986 merger of the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies with the United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York to form one of the country's largest private philanthropies. He also helped craft a strategic development plan and almost triple the fund-raising revenues of the UJA-Federation of New York.

The longtime Jewish professional has been known to hammer out e-mail messages at 4 a.m. and said he goes jogging every morning at 5 a.m., "no matter where I am in the world." Asked if he sleeps at all, Solender said, "Quickly."

In the few hours that he is not working, Solender enjoys spending time with his five grandchildren, listening to music, reading biographies and nonfiction and — occasionally — joining his wife of 40 years, Elsa, for discussions about Jane Austen's work.

Elsa Solender, a former journalist, is the international chairwoman of the Jane

MIDEAST FOCUS

Report: Assad reluctant on peace

Syrian President Hafez Assad is reluctant to reach a peace agreement with Israel because it could mean that he would have to withdraw his troops from Lebanon, a senior Egyptian official reportedly said.

Egyptian presidential adviser Osama al-Baz made the assessment to Israeli Education Minister Yossi Sarid during a recent meeting in Cairo, Israel Radio reported Tuesday.

Students protest EPCOT exhibit

Palestinian students in the West Bank burned a model of the Temple as part of a protest against the Israeli exhibit that recently opened at Disney World's EPCOT center.

"We reject Walt Disney's action to depict Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and we condemn the Arab silence towards the Judaization of occupied Jerusalem," one student was quoted as saying.

Sharon: Jews should press U.S.

U.S. Jewish leaders should press the Clinton administration to oppose Syria's demand that Israel agree to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the June 4, 1967, border as a precondition for resuming bilateral talks, Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon said Tuesday.

Addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in New York, Sharon added that some of the land making up that border, which runs along the Sea of Galilee, had been taken by Syria after Israel's War for Independence.

Microsoft to ink Israeli Web deal

The Microsoft Co. is expected to sign an agreement with an Israeli company Wednesday to establish a Hebrew-language portal to the Internet.

The portal, established in conjunction with the Israeli service provider Internet Gold, will be similar to Microsoft's MSN portal.

Austen Society, an organization that — according to its Web site — "brings scholars and enthusiasts, amateurs and professionals together on equal terms to study and celebrate the genius of Jane Austen."

The couple worship at Manhattan's Or Zarua, a Conservative synagogue, every Shabbat they are in New York, said Solender.

James Tisch, president of the UJA-Federation of New York, praised Solender for his dedication and savvy.

"Steve has a phrase he loves to say sometimes in an exasperated way: 'Well, just another day of service to the Jewish people,'" said Tisch.

"The thing is, he really means it. He is totally devoted to what he does, is totally devoted to serving the Jewish people and does a phenomenal job of doing it."

Tisch added that Solender "understands the UJA-Federation world and has avoided a large number of problems that people of less capability might be able to get out of, but he never gets into."

Solender and his fans say his insider status will not be an obstacle to effecting change in the world of communal Jewish philanthropy. Solender noted that the new members of his management team — Louise Frankel Stoll, who has been named chief operating officer, and David Altshuler, who will head UJC's newly created independent foundation — bring experience from outside the Jewish federation system.

Stoll, the senior vice president for strategic planning and corporate communications for an international engineering and consulting firm, is the former assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation for budget and programs and served as chief financial officer of that department from 1993 to 1997.

A former pro-Israel activist in the San Francisco area, she has also been involved with the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League.

Altshuler is the founding director of the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York, a position he has held since 1986. Before that he occupied the Charles E. Smith Chair in Judaic Studies at George Washington University. □

Israelis, Palestinians reach a deal over safe-passage security issues

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and the Palestinian Authority have agreed to open a safe-passage route next week for Palestinians traveling between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The announcement came after the two sides worked out their remaining differences over security procedures Monday night.

Sunday's scheduled opening of the route was delayed after the two sides were unable to agree on two issues — whether Israel would be allowed to detain Palestinians traveling the route who are suspected of hostile activities, and who would be responsible for issuing the magnetic cards Israeli authorities would use to track the Palestinian travelers.

At a news conference Monday night, Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami said Israel was satisfied that its sovereignty over the route was undisputed.

At the same time, Palestinians said they had received assurances that the route would not be exploited by Israel to arrest Palestinian suspects.

The second issue, over the permits, was resolved through a compromise under which the Palestinians will handle applications for the permits, then pass them on to an Israeli liaison office, which will distribute them. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the route would operate 10 hours a day, seven days a week.

According to Israeli-Palestinian agreements, Palestinians using the route — which runs from Gaza to a town near Hebron — would be given a two-hour time frame to make the trip. Palestinians would be barred from stopping or leaving the route at any point in between. Israeli checkpoints at either end would conduct security checks.

The two sides are expected next week to work out the details for a second safe-passage route between Gaza and Ramallah. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Berlin Jewish cemetery attacked

A violent attack on Europe's largest Jewish cemetery left 103 stones overturned and nearly a quarter of them irreparably damaged, according to the head of Berlin's Jewish community.

"It looks like an army invaded and attacked. It turns my stomach upside down," said Andreas Nachama, who visited the site shortly after the vandalism was discovered. Police are investigating the incident at eastern Berlin's Weissensee cemetery, which contains more than 100,000 stones.

Slave labor talks to resume

A group of German companies is prepared to offer Holocaust survivors up to \$3.8 billion to settle claims over Nazi-era slave labor, *The Washington Post* reported. Lawyers for the survivors said the offer, which would give each victim a lump sum of roughly \$200, was far too small.

Representatives of the two sides are slated to meet in Washington on Wednesday and Thursday to try to resolve the question of how to compensate as many as 2.4 million survivors used as slave laborers by Nazi Germany.

Hillary visits Jewish school

Hillary Rodham Clinton told students and teachers at a Jewish school that she admired their devotion to their Jewish identity. The first lady's comments came as she visited the Lauder-Morasha School, which just moved to a new campus built with U.S. donations.

The school, one of only two Jewish schools in Poland, has more than 160 students this year, as compared with 18 when it was founded five years ago.

Shots fired at New Zealand shul

Assailants fired at least eight shots at the synagogue in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Rosh Hashanah eve in what communal sources described as a deliberate anti-Semitic action.

Andrew Blitz, a member of the New Zealand Jewish Council, told JTA that "there is a significant problem with skinheads and other racists in Christchurch."

Rabbi, activist dies at 41

Rabbi Julie Spitzer, a leader in domestic violence prevention, gay and lesbian inclusion, and leadership development in Jewish life, died Sept. 30 of ovarian cancer.

Spitzer, who was 41, had served as regional director of the Reform movement in the New York area, was the author of "When Love Is Not Enough: Spousal Abuse in Rabbinic and Contemporary Judaism" and edited a guide for congregations seeking to be more welcoming to gay and lesbians.

Once again, Jewish lobbyists urge Congress to protect religious workers

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For 10 years, Jewish lobbyists have been urging Congress to enact legislation that would protect religious practice in the workplace.

But the measure has failed to advance or win significant backing from lawmakers, largely due to opposition from business and labor communities.

Those interest groups have argued that altering current law to make special accommodations would exact a high cost on employers and upset labor practices by granting certain employees unique privileges. Now, the bill, reintroduced in the Senate last week, could receive a boost as another religious freedom bill founders in Congress. But it still has a long way to go.

Problems for religious people have become all too common in the American workplace, according to advocates of legislation that seeks to clarify the federal law governing the religious rights of workers.

Far too often, advocates say, observant Jews have been forced to work on Shabbat or the High Holidays. Muslim women have been asked to remove their head scarves while on the job. And devout Christians have been compelled to work on Sundays.

The Workplace Religious Freedom Act seeks to remedy that.

The bill, which has the support of an array of religious groups and every leading Jewish organization, would give employers far less latitude in deciding whether to accommodate a worker's religious needs.

"These are liberties upon which our country was founded and this legislation writes into law the intent of our founders that religious freedoms are protected," said Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.).

A bipartisan group of lawmakers have joined Kerry and the bill's other lead sponsor, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), in backing the legislation, including Sens. Tim Hutchinson (R-Ark.), Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.).

Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said, "It is quintessentially American that people should be able to expect that their religious needs will be reasonably accommodated, and they won't be forced to choose between their religion and their job. Every month that passes just brings more and more stories about this kind of problem," he said.

The bill would clarify a provision of current law that has stood unchanged for nearly three decades. Amendments passed in 1972 to the 1964 Civil Rights Act require employers to "reasonably accommodate" the needs of religious employees unless it causes the employer "undue hardship." But the law does not define undue hardship, according to proponents of the legislation.

The courts have broadly interpreted undue hardship, resulting in several rulings that give employers a high degree of latitude in deciding whether to accommodate the religious practices of their employees. The proposed new standard, based on similar language in a federal law protecting the handicapped against job discrimination, would require employers to prove a "significant difficulty or expense" if they decided not to accommodate a worker's religious needs.

For example, the Orthodox Union recently received a complaint from an observant Jew who said his employer had decided not to allow him to continue taking shorter lunch breaks during the winter months so that he could leave early on Friday afternoons.

The legislation would place the burden on the employer to demonstrate that allowing the practice to continue would constitute a significant difficulty or expense for the employer, Diament said.

"The existing law has never lived up to its promise, and that's because of judicial interpretations which have essentially made it extremely easy for employers to meet their burden under the law," said Abba Cohen, Washington director and counsel for Agudath Israel of America.

"Because the bar is so low," he added, "we've gotten to the point that employers don't even bother seeking an accommodation for their employees, and by the same token, we have employees who don't even seek to protect their rights." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israel, Syria far apart on access to important Golan water source

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — “The negotiations are over the Kinneret,” a leading Israeli diplomatic correspondent wrote this week, “not over the Golan.”

What negotiations? On the face of it, there are no negotiations. Israel under Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syria under President Hafez Assad, have failed, ostensibly, to relaunch their long-stalled peace negotiations, despite the high hopes engendered by Barak's election victory last May.

Deadlocked over their disparate definitions of “the point at which the talks were broken off,” Assad and Barak have not found a way for their delegations to return to the negotiating table.

Direct talks between the two countries were last held at the Wye Plantation outside Washington in 1996.

In fact, though, as the Israeli foreign minister, David Levy, confirmed in a television interview in New York last weekend, this ongoing dispute over procedure has not stopped an intensive dialogue over substance.

Discreet contacts are constantly under way — and apparently not only through third-party middlemen.

But that substantive dialogue, too, is deadlocked.

Syria insists on its forces taking up positions on the northeastern banks of the Kinneret, the Sea of Galilee, where they were deployed until the day before the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israel rejects this demand. It points out that the international boundary between Syria and Palestine, drawn up by Britain and France in 1923, ran a short but significant distance away from the shoreline.

Barak wants that boundary, too, redrawn in the Jewish state's favor, perhaps trading land close to the lake with other land farther south.

The difference, negligible perhaps in terms of square mileage, is vitally important both in relation to control of the Kinneret, Israel's most important water resource, and in relation to Barak's political standing and ability to win support from the Israeli public for a peace accord with Syria.

The prime minister has pledged that any deal negotiated with Damascus will be submitted to a national referendum.

Under international law, a party legally ensconced on the banks of a body of water has rights over some of that water.

For Israel to acquiesce to the Syrian demand would mean recognizing Syria's rights to fish in the Kinneret and, more importantly, to pump water from it.

Barak has committed himself to not accepting “the Syrians splashing their feet in the waters of the Kinneret,” an explicit statement that he will not be able to break easily.

Certainly he would find it hard to go into a national referendum on Israel's withdrawal from all of the Golan Heights if he could not even show that he had held firm over this last, strategically and symbolically important sliver.

Barak's readiness to withdraw from the Golan, though never publicly pronounced by the premier himself, was confirmed last week when one of his most senior political lieutenants, Deputy Prime Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, told a TV interviewer that

he favored such a withdrawal in the context of a secure peace agreement.

Ben-Eliezer is the highest-ranking government official to have spoken publicly in this way until now and while he does not commit Barak, his closeness to the prime minister is incontrovertible.

Ben-Eliezer's statement made the prime minister's own warning to Assad, delivered from the Knesset podium on Monday, all the more dramatic.

“The door of opportunity in the Middle East is open today,” Barak declared. “But no one can know for how long it will remain open.

“The time for decision is at hand.”

Barak pointedly reiterated his commitment to pull out of southern Lebanon by next July, thus firming up the time frame in which the Syrians and Israelis must decide whether a comprehensive peace is possible — or whether Israel's pullback will be unilateral.

In this way, the Israeli leadership has effectively turned Israel's ongoing Lebanese quagmire from a weapon in Syria's hands to a way to pressure the Syrian leadership.

Levy told the U.N. General Assembly last week that Israel will not be held hostage “to a stubborn and defiant attitude for much longer.

“We will make our own independent decision, as we see fit,” he said.

Assad knows that once Israel leaves Lebanon, questions will mount within the Arab world as to why Syrian forces are still effectively occupying much of that country.

The Syrians will become the sole foreign force in Lebanon, and their presence there will become awkward.

On the other hand, a broad Israeli-Syrian peace treaty, providing for an agreed-upon Israeli withdrawal, would implicitly acknowledge a continued Syrian role in Lebanon.

The procedural and substantive disputes came together at the United Nations in New York last weekend.

Syrian and Israeli officials argued over what former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had or had not promised Syria, in a message delivered by then-U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa insisted that Christopher had “deposited” a commitment by Israel to withdraw to the June 4 line.

The Syrian statesman repeated this assertion in an interview with Newsweek. “Is acceptance of the June 4, 1967 border a prerequisite even for talks?” the Newsweek interviewer asked. “Certainly,” al-Sharaa replied.

Israel's outgoing U.N. envoy, Dore Gold, took the floor to insist that there had been “no commitment to withdraw to the line of June 4, 1967.”

The United States, true to the code of diplomatic confidentiality, has offered no version of its own as to what transpired among Rabin, Christopher and Assad back in 1994.

But whatever did transpire, it seems clear that Barak, who sees himself as the slain leader's disciple, is determined to keep the Kinneret in Israel's sole control.

As long as neither he nor Assad blinks, informal contacts between the two countries will remain barren and formal negotiations will not resume. □