



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel joins U.N. group

Israel accepted an invitation to join the United Nations' Western Europe and Others Group.

Israel and its advocates said that while they are disappointed by some of the conditions of the membership, the move will greatly enhance the Jewish state's voice in the international body. [Page 3]

100 Ethiopians arrive in Israel

The Jewish Agency for Israel flew 100 Falash Mura from Ethiopia to Israel.

The group is the first to arrive since Interior Minister Natan Sharansky visited Ethiopia last month to assess the situation of the thousands of Falash Mura, Ethiopians whose ancestors converted from Judaism to Christianity, who have amassed in transit camps hoping to emigrate to the Jewish state.

In a related development, the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency announced the allocation of about \$240,000 for extra staff people to process some 5,000 to 6,000 additional Ethiopian emigres.

UJC leaders visit northern Israel

A delegation of North American Jewish leaders concluded a fact-finding mission to northern Israel.

Officials from the United Jewish Communities said that they would likely recommend targeting some of its overseas allocations to the northern Galilee region. [Page 1]

More education funding sought

The Jewish Agency for Israel is calling on the Claims Conference to increase allocations for Jewish education. The Claims Conference is slated to meet Wednesday to plan how to allocate moneys collected from the return of communal and heirless properties. The Agency is insisting that a minimum of 60 percent of the moneys continue to be allocated in Israel.

New Hezbollah attacks expected

Hezbollah is likely to continue to try to attack Israel, especially around a disputed farm area on the eastern border, according to a senior Israel Defense Force source.

The source said Iran continues to supply weapons, training and money to the armed Islamic group, which in turn has been making contact with Palestinian groups regarding future attacks.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Northern Israelis pin hopes on economic, political security

By Michael J. Jordan

ZARIT, Israel (JTA) — Rafi Cohen did what many young Israelis from the northern hinterlands have done after high school: He served in the army, then explored a bit of the world.

However, unlike most of his peers — who headed for the better school, work and nightlife opportunities in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem — Cohen actually returned home.

At 26, he is taking over the family cow and chicken farm from his ailing father, Yossi.

While the farm offers Cohen a spectacular panorama of the Hula Valley and its apple orchards, it also promises him a life of economic hardship and grueling labor, the sort that has afflicted Yossi with chronic back pain.

Add to this the fact that this tiny moshav, Zarit, lies smack on the dreaded line of potential confrontation with Lebanon.

Now, thanks to Israel's rapid withdrawal from southern Lebanon on May 24, says Cohen, Hezbollah fighters are camped out just over the ridge from his 50-family moshav. Which makes everyone around here nervous.

They recall that 27 years ago, someone infiltrated the border and murdered a Zarit couple coming home from a wedding. It was one of many terrorist atrocities committed in the early 1970s, and ultimately led to Israel's invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon.

Cohen now packs a pistol when he escorts his cows for a graze in nearby pastures. "You know what it means — hope?" asks Cohen, a handsome Moroccan Jew who wears a bushy beard and oversized white knit yarmulke.

"I have hope for myself. I want to live a normal life, like you. I can live with a little and not complain. But I don't want to live in fear."

Indeed, in Kiryat Shmona, the largest town in northern Israel and a frequent target of Hezbollah-fired Katyusha rockets, three out of every four children suffer some sort of anxiety.

And as Israel pulled out from Lebanon, the mere presence of the Muslim fighters just beyond their front doors spurred three-quarters of Kiryat Shmona's 35,000 residents to temporarily flee southward.

So if Hezbollah, supported and financed by Syria and Iran, were to launch a fresh offensive against Israel, all bets may be off for Cohen and others living "on the fence."

According to a poll published here Tuesday, despite strong Zionist ideals that attracted many to the Israeli frontier and will keep most rooted, 28 percent of Kiryat Shmona residents were seriously considering moving southward.

The consequences of such an exodus would be enormous.

With the withdrawal from Lebanon, the military presence in northern Israel is already beefed up. If the population were to dwindle dramatically because of fear and a low quality of life, it might create a new buffer zone — this time in Israel itself, said Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

"Then where does it stop?" Meridor said in an interview Tuesday. "We can only draw the line if the population in the North is strong."

With this in mind, Israel is searching for ways to keep the northerners where they are. After years of talk and pushing the issue on to the back burner, the Israeli government has unveiled a plan to invest in the socio-economic life of the 170,000

MIDEAST FOCUS

Peace talks set to resume

Talks between Israel and the Palestinians will soon move from Sweden to the Middle East, Israel Radio quoted sources in Jerusalem as saying. The two sides were due to resume the talks almost two weeks after the Israeli representatives were ordered home because of Palestinian violence in the territories.

Lebanon withholding army units

Lebanon is sending additional police units, but not its army, to the areas from which Israel withdrew its troops last week, the nation's prime minister said. Salim Hoss said the army will not be sent in until U.N. officials verify the Israeli withdrawal and deploy additional peacekeeping forces in the region.

Police detained in self-rule area

Palestinian police detained and confiscated the weapons of a group of Israeli police officers and soldiers who entered the self-rule area in pursuit of a stolen car. The Israelis were later released and their weapons returned.

The Israel Defense Force said the commander of the Israeli unit would be tried for failing to coordinate the operation with the Palestinian liaison office.

Campaign officials questioned

A senior member of Ehud Barak's election campaign and his assistant were questioned by police this week regarding alleged violations by nonprofit organizations that worked for Barak's election. Tal Zilberstein and his assistant, Gil Holzman, invoked their right to remain silent and were released on bail.

Ethiopian emigre gets doctorate

An Ethiopian Jew who immigrated to Israel 10 years ago is the first emigre from that country to have received a doctoral degree in the Jewish state. Anbessa Teferra was one of 238 doctoral recipients at a ceremony Sunday at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Israelis who inhabit the 70 communities in the northern border region.

The wide-ranging \$381 million program would expand the infrastructure — focusing on roads, water and sewage — build schools, boost tourism and provide assistance to the neediest residents. "They have sacrificed a lot, they have suffered a lot. We owe them a lot," said Yossi Kuchik, director-general of the Prime Minister's Office.

For its part, JAFI followed up by announcing Monday that it will erase \$38 million worth of debts that had financed housing and basic infrastructure in 40 or so rural communities in the region.

Global Jewry is also being called upon to focus on the needs of northern Israel.

It swung into action this week when Meridor led a blue-ribbon task force, including Jewish leaders from the United States, Canada, Italy, Mexico and Australia, on a tour of the north. About half the 30-member delegation was North American, including Charles Bronfman, chairman of the board of United Jewish Communities, the federation system's umbrella fund-raising and social service agency. The purpose, said participants, was primarily to express solidarity and assess the region's long-term needs.

"This is no light bulb going off for me," said Eve Bernstein, incoming chairwoman of the Israel and Overseas Committee of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

The federation has had a 20-year relationship with Kiryat Shmona, including support for a local college, and last year sponsored a summer camp for kids.

"We've known about the North's problems and economic crisis. But now others realize that only with the North being safe and strong can the rest of the country be protected from its enemies."

The UJC, a major funder of JAFI, will convene a special meeting in June to discuss the findings and recommendations of the mission, according to UJC officials.

UJC officials said there would not be any special campaign for these needs, but that they would likely recommend targeting some of the overseas allocations to the northern Galilee region.

Participants came away inspired by their two-day visit with the northern settlers.

"Their strength, resolve and determination, by extension, strengthens us anywhere Jews are in the world," said Carole Solomon, chairwoman of the campaign/financial resource development pillar of the UJC.

The settlers "need to know that," she added. "But it's also a two-way street. American Jewry needs to appreciate their commitment, and support them not just with promises, but with action." □

Jewish groups help refugees

NEW YORK (JTA) — A number of Jewish organizations have launched campaigns to help some 7,000 Lebanese refugees, including former South Lebanon Army soldiers and their families, who have streamed into Israel. They include:

- **Bundles of Hope Campaign** — Local Jewish federations and organizations are mounting collection drives, and El Al has volunteered to transport the clothing, toys and toiletries to Israel. The campaign is sponsored by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the United Jewish Communities. Items can be sent, by June 2, to your local federation or to: *Met Council, 168 39th St., Building 19 North, C section, Basement Level, Brooklyn, N.Y., 11232*. To find the address of the nearest federation, go to www.ujc.org and click on "Local Links."

- **Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America** — The organization is collecting clothing and toiletries for the refugees at collection points in local communities. For information, contact your nearest Hadassah office. To make a financial contribution, send a check payable to: *Hadassah Refugee Relief Fund, 50 West 58th St., New York, N.Y. 10019*.

- **The American Jewish Committee** — The group donated \$10,000 to provide humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese refugees. The contribution is being donated to Na'amat USA, The Women's Labor Zionist Organization of America, which is providing assistance to the refugees.



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JEWISH WORLD

Israel's admission to U.N. group seen as beginning of 'a new era'

By Julie Wiener

Clinton, Barak to meet in Berlin

President Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak are scheduled to meet Thursday in Berlin to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The two also plan to discuss the implications of Israel's troop withdrawal from Lebanon.

Lipstadt speaks at Yad Vashem

An American academic spoke in Israel about how she won a libel lawsuit brought against her by Holocaust denier David Irving.

Deborah Lipstadt got a standing ovation after she addressed some 300 people Monday at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. The audience included Holocaust scholars and survivors.

Article blasted by Canada's Jews

An article in an Ontario newspaper suggesting that Jews care only about Jews and are indifferent to the suffering of others rankled the local community.

"It was a shameful, shoddy piece of journalism," Bernie Farber, director of community relations for the Canadian Jewish Congress, said of the article published in the Hamilton Spectator.

The article asserted that Jews are overly sympathetic to their own suffering during the Holocaust "while simultaneously reducing, almost to the point of nonexistence, the memory of those of other faiths and ethnicities who died."

Video focuses on Jewish families

A company that distributes videos on parenting skills has created materials focusing on Jewish families. The new video series, developed by the Atlanta-based Active Parenting Publishers and the B'nai B'rith Center for Jewish Identity, addresses general parenting issues while also discussing values related to Jewish family life.

Court rules against Avis lawsuit

A class action lawsuit against a rental car company for allegedly denying Jews corporate accounts cannot proceed, a U.S. court of appeals ruled.

The court ruled recently that the plaintiffs' claims must be regarded on an individual, not class-action, basis.

The lawsuit alleges Avis Rent-A-Car deliberately barred Jewish customers from holding accounts and labeled them with the code word "yeshiva."

Writer wins new fiction prize

A young American Jewish writer won the first fiction prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for a collection of short stories.

The award is the latest won by Nathan Englander's "For the Relief of Unbearable Urges."

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel and its supporters are applauding a breakthrough for the country at the United Nations, a body that many believe has long treated the Jewish state unfairly.

Israel — the only U.N. member country that has been excluded from a regional group — was formally invited May 26 to join the Western European and Others Group, known as WEOG.

On Tuesday, in a letter from U.N. Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, Israel accepted the invitation, saying, "We hope that this acceptance will open a new chapter in the relationship between Israel and the United Nations." Later in the day, Lancry told Jewish organizational leaders that this marked a "historic turning point for Israel."

A statement issued by Israel's Foreign Ministry said the WEOG admission "marked the end of four decades of discrimination and injustice."

The temporary membership will give Israel a stronger voice in U.N. affairs, according to Israel and its advocates.

But while heralding the move, Israeli leaders and their backers say they are still concerned about some of the membership "modalities," or conditions, imposed on its acceptance — mainly that Israel can only participate in WEOG activities coming out of the U.N.'s New York headquarters and that Israeli representatives will be barred for two years from running for positions on U.N. councils.

Israel will be excluded from WEOG discussions and consultations in Geneva, Nairobi, Rome and Vienna, thus effectively barring it from U.N. talks on human rights, racism and a number of other issues. Israel's membership in the 26-member U.N. group, which includes the United States and Canada, is temporary, on the condition that it continue to apply for the more geographically appropriate Asia group.

That group, which includes Israel's most intransigent foes Iran and Iraq, has consistently rejected Israel's applications.

Israel will be required to renew its WEOG membership every four years.

For decades, Israel has been the only U.N. member shut out of a regional group, and last week's invitation followed years of lobbying.

"We're ecstatic. Our foot is in the door. But our happiness is tempered by the fact that we will have to accept certain conditions that distinguish us from other full members," said Jeff Helmreich, press officer for Israel's mission to the United Nations.

In a statement, the executive director of the American Jewish Committee said Israel's admission marks "the start of a new era" for Israel's status in the international arena. However, David Harris' statement added that "we now look forward to early action to expand Israel's membership to include other key U.N. sites."

Harris Schoenberg, chair of the U.N. caucus of Jewish non-governmental organizations and a representative of B'nai B'rith International, described the invitation as "a huge step forward but clearly incomplete."

Both the AJCommittee and B'nai B'rith say modifying the modalities will be a priority in the future.

Nonetheless, they and the Israeli mission say they are celebrating the new status and that it will allow Israel to argue its positions from the inside, rather than the outside.

Israel was inching toward WEOG membership in the mid-1990s until the November 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The Europeans were loathe to reward his eventual successor, Benjamin Netanyahu, with WEOG membership because of his perceived intransigence in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

The European outlook changed with last year's elections of Prime Minister Ehud Barak. The vocal advocacy of Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has also been credited with moving Israel's position forward. Speaking to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on Tuesday, Holbrooke called the development a big "win."

"Does it augur good things for the whole U.N. system vis a vis Israel?" asked Holbrooke. "I think so; we're getting there bit by bit." □

Will U.S. get veto power over Israeli arms transfers?

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Clinton administration official is confirming what some analysts are calling unprecedented — discussion of a joint U.S.-Israeli commission to supervise Israeli arms deals and technology transfers.

The idea is one of the latest being considered by senior Israeli and U.S. officials in the wake of American objections to the planned Israeli sale of advanced radar systems to China.

U.S. officials have publicly criticized the planned sale, calling it “counterproductive,” given the high tensions between China and Taiwan.

U.S. officials, who have pressed Prime Minister Ehud Barak on the issue, believe the system, which would enhance the capabilities of the Chinese air force, could threaten U.S. forces in the Taiwan Strait.

Israeli officials, mostly silent on the issue because of its extreme sensitivity, have said they hope to find a compromise that would appease its closest ally while not reneging on a lucrative \$250 million contract with China.

Details surrounding the commission remain unclear, but the concept, first reported in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, would apparently involve a joint committee to supervise Israeli arms deals and technology transfers to ensure they do not contain American components or technology, and to ensure that Israel does not sell arms to countries that would raise red flags for U.S. national security interests.

There is already a joint commission addressing the sale of the PHALCON early warning system specifically. But in general, American involvement in Israeli military sales remains informal.

“It seems unprecedented,” Michael Eisenstadt, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank, said of the proposed joint commission.

“From Israel’s point of view, it can’t be good.”

The Israeli Embassy in Washington stressed that Israel is not passing and would not pass American technology to China, which would violate Israeli-U.S. agreements, and that Israel continues to take the U.S. concerns extremely seriously.

Some analysts sought to downplay the ramifications of a new institutionalized mechanism to monitor Israeli technology transfers. They said they doubted the commission would have real supervisory roles for American officials. “I’m not sure Israel would agree to have deals subject to a U.S. veto,” said an official with a pro-Israel organization who asked not to be identified.

Meanwhile, Congress remains unhappy with the planned sale and questions surround what effect, if any, the sale would have on the annual foreign aid package to Israel.

Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.), chairman of the U.S. House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, has said he would block the cost of the sale—\$250 million—in foreign aid to Israel if it goes ahead with the sale to China.

Those close to the issue do not believe Israel will stop the first part of the deal, which calls for delivery of one plane equipped with the PHALCON system by 2001. Future sales could be canceled in an Israeli show of compromise to the American position.

Meanwhile, the mood over the issue in Washington remains somber. The damage done is “not irreparable and there is no fundamental breach in the relationship” between the United States and Israel as a result of the PHALCON sale, said the administration official who confirmed the discussions.

“But it does hurt the degree of trust.” □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Italy’s Jews blast anti-gay bias, support right to hold ‘Pride’ festival

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Italy’s Jewish community has weighed in on an issue that is dividing the nation — whether Rome should host a World Gay Pride festival in July, despite protests from the Vatican and many politicians.

Amos Luzzatto, Italian Jewry’s senior lay leader, issued a statement of solidarity with the gay community and reminded Italians that gays had been victims alongside Jews in Auschwitz.

“We Jews are extremely sorry about this harsh debate against homosexuals,” Luzzatto, the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said Tuesday in a statement.

“It involves and marginalizes a minority group which has always been the object of discrimination and whose right is being contested to organize, like any other group, a rally in a place and time chosen with respect to the Constitution and the laws of the land,” he said.

Luzzatto expressed “understanding and solidarity for this group of human beings and our uneasiness before those who in the extermination camps — we with our yellow stars and they with their pink triangles — suffered all those unspeakable horrors beside us and with us.”

The issue of the World Gay Pride festival, scheduled for the first week of July with a big parade on July 8, has become a test of wills among political parties and also between Italian political forces and the Vatican.

The Roman Catholic Church has designated this year as a Jubilee, or Holy Year, marking the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity. As a result, millions of pilgrims are converging on Rome for a series of Holy Year-related ceremonies and celebrations, many of which spill outside the bounds of the Holy See.

Senior Vatican officials have made clear their disapproval of the Gay Pride Festival, saying that such a celebration — which often includes flamboyant public parodying of sexual and religious conventions — would be inappropriate during Holy Year.

Right-wing Italian politicians agree.

On Monday, Rome Mayor Francesco Rutelli drew ridicule from fellow leftist politicians when he told World Gay Pride organizers that the city council could no longer give its official backing to the event.

Rutelli also told World Gay Pride organizers that the city could not agree with some events planned for the week, including a fashion show in a Rome square that is also the site of a Catholic church.

The city council said it would still give organizers the \$145,600 it had pledged, but World Gay Pride could no longer use the Rome city logo for its events. □