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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Likud wants March elections

Israeli opposition leaders want to hold elections for prime minister and the Knesset as soon as March to prevent Prime Minister Ehud Barak from reaching what they perceive as a hasty political agreement with the Palestinians.

Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon vowed to challenge Barak in the general election to prevent further concessions to the Palestinian Authority in peace negotiations.

However, Sharon also offered Wednesday to continue discussions with Barak on the possibility of a national unity government. [Page 3]

Israeli troops shoot infiltrators

Israeli troops shot and killed at least two Palestinians trying to penetrate the Israeli border from the Gaza Strip, according to the army.

A Palestinian security official denied the incident had taken place.

In another incident Wednesday, the army said an Israeli motorist was shot and seriously wounded near the West Bank city of Nablus.

Albright sees return to talks

Israeli and Palestinian officials may soon be ready to stop fighting and return to the negotiating table, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said.

In a conference call with American Jewish leaders Tuesday, she confirmed earlier reports that both sides have told U.S. officials they are interested in reaching a peace accord.

Netanyahu gets parties' support

The leaders of Israel's fervently Orthodox Shas Party and the National Religious Party say they would probably back former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu if he decides to run again for prime minister. [Page 3]

Clinton pushed to free Pollard

President Clinton is getting requests to free Jonathan Pollard before leaving office. Several U.S. legislators and B'nai B'rith International are among those asking Clinton to review the case of Pollard, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst serving a life sentence following his 1985 conviction for passing secret U.S. military information to Israel.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Federations raising more money as crisis in Israel motivates donors

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County in Florida is launching its annual "Super Sunday" fund-raising telethon with a "Solidarity Sunday" next month.

The event, in which volunteers call donors and ask them to increase their annual contribution, is triggered by "what's going on in Israel and the feeling that people want to do something," said Jeffrey Klein, the federation's executive vice president.

Concern about Israel has kick-started fund raising, said Klein.

He said his community's campaign, which is just getting started for 2001, has already raised more than \$4 million, more than twice the \$2 million it had raised last year at this time.

Palm Beach is not alone. As they launch their annual campaigns, numerous American Jewish federations are focusing on Israel and finding that the crisis in Israel is fueling increased giving to their campaigns.

In addition, leaders of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization for North American federations, say they are modifying fund-raising letters and brochures to "concentrate heavily" on Israel and the need for solidarity.

The new focus on Israel is a sharp departure from recent years.

A growing number of federations — confident that peace was on Israel's horizon and overwhelmed by Jewish continuity and social service needs at home — had been keeping more of their campaign revenues at home and sending less overseas.

In 1999, federations allocated \$237.7 million for overseas needs, approximately 75 percent of which went to the Jewish Agency for Israel, one of the federation system's two overseas partners.

The Jewish Agency's primary work is to bring new immigrants to Israel and to help absorb them into Israeli society. But if Israel's woes are now spurring more contributions, it is not yet clear where the additional dollars raised will go.

Even less clear right now is whether the current concern about Israel will translate into a long-term shift in American Jews' relationship to Israel or whether it is simply a short-term reaction to the immediate crisis.

For now, various crisis-related projects are in the talking stages, but federations have not been told of specific new needs that North American Jews should be funding.

"We have suggested to our donors that they symbolically think about increasing their annual campaign gift as a measure of solidarity with Israel. But because neither the UJC nor the Jewish Agency has articulated specific human service needs associated with this crisis, it's difficult to draw a direct line between the crisis and the campaign," said Lee Wunsch, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston.

Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, agreed, pointing out that the bulk of federation allocations fund ongoing humanitarian and social service needs.

"I really believe there's no direct relation between what we're raising money for and the political crisis in Israel," he said. "We should continue to raise money, but should not be pushing the panic button," Aronson said, adding that his federation already allocates almost half its campaign dollars for overseas needs.

However, many federation officials are reasoning that as military needs demand more attention from the Israeli government and economy, it is the American Jewish

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel denies spy charges

Israel denied allegations by Egyptian prosecutors who claimed earlier this week that they had uncovered an espionage affair involving an Egyptian and a Russian national who recruited him to spy for Israel.

A statement Wednesday by the Prime Minister's Office called the allegations baseless.

Seven allegedly aided Hezbollah

Seven Israeli Arabs from the western Galilee were arrested on suspicion of spying for Hezbollah. According to details released by a Haifa court Wednesday, the suspects were recruited by Hezbollah while they were visiting relatives in Lebanon.

They allegedly informed about Israeli troop movements, planned to plant bombs and plotted to kill Arabs suspected of cooperating with Israel.

IDF revises combat eligibility

The Israel Defense Force is reportedly barring soldiers who are only sons or come from bereaved families from serving in combat roles in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported that the order replaces the previous practice of allowing such soldiers to serve in the territories if they volunteer and their parents sign a consent form.

New political party proposed

Israeli Cabinet minister Yossi Beilin is floating a proposal to form a new "Democratic Party" that would combine political parties from the left and center into a bloc that would support the peace process.

Katsav spends night in Gilo

In a show of solidarity with residents of Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood, Israeli President Moshe Katsav and his wife spent Tuesday night with a local family near an area that has come under Palestinian fire from the neighboring Arab town of Beit Jalla.

community's role to pitch in with increased resources for social needs that risk being neglected. "We already have the expectation that more and more money will go to the army, eventually at the expense of social services and the vulnerable populations," Sallai Meridor, chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency, said in a phone interview from Jerusalem.

"This is definitely a time for world Jewry to share with Israelis," he said. There are "definitely very clear and identified needs that have to be addressed," such as absorbing new immigrants, particularly Ethiopians and orphans.

Stephen Hoffman, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, said, "The things we're working on are social problems, and when you have a crisis, the social problems get worse because other people's attention gets diverted."

Steven Nasatir, president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, said Israel will definitely need more money this year, and that his federation will increase its allocations to Israel if its campaign nets more money.

"You don't have to be genius to figure it out," he said. "If the hotels are empty and the economy is taking a hit and more reservists are being called to duty, Israel will need more assistance."

In addition to helping with ongoing social needs, new projects related to the crisis are under discussion, said Meridor and Robert Schrayner, the national chair of the UJC's campaign and financial resource development. That includes potential projects to strengthen the Jewish infrastructure in Jerusalem neighborhoods, like Gilo, that have been hit by Palestinian gunfire, as well as the Jewish community in the Galilee.

Security infrastructure, such as protecting ambulances and school buses from terrorist attacks, may also be funding possibilities, said Meridor.

Also under consideration are coexistence projects for Jewish and Israeli Arabs.

Jewish concern over tensions between Israeli Jews and Arabs has grown following a series of Arab demonstrations in the Galilee in the early days of the violence.

Regardless of how the funds are spent, federation leaders say they will not rely on the problems in Israel to subsidize domestic needs such as Jewish day schools and nursing homes.

"If we raise our money more than ever before on the backs of Israel, then we have to make sure a representative portion goes overseas," said Klein of Palm Beach.

Asked if he is concerned that federations may focus on Israel in their campaigns, but keep any increased dollars raised for local needs, Schrayner said, "Good question. I hope the answer will be that we treat the Israel partnership as such and recognize that these monies being given to a greater extent are because of the conflict."

With federation allocations to Israel and Jews around the world declining overall, the UJC had created a new allocations process that was designed, in part, to reverse the trend. The vehicle for that process, the Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution committee, helps American Jewish leaders learn more about overseas needs and gives them greater control over how overseas allocations are spent.

The committee — composed primarily of federation leaders — recommended in June that federations allocate 105 percent, or at least 100 percent, of what they gave in 1998.

The recommendations asked federations to give 85 to 90 percent to a central pot divided up between the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. But it allowed federations to choose — from a list of pre-approved projects — where 10 to 15 percent of their allocations would go.

It is not yet clear how much the recommendations have been followed, since the majority of allocations will not be finalized until the end of December. Those involved with ONAD say most federations are at least maintaining their 1998 allocation, a finding confirmed through an informal sampling of large federations.

Less clear is whether the ONAD process or the current crisis — or both — will spur increased overseas allocations in the coming years.

"This is not the way we want to have heightened interest in Israel," said Alan Jaffe, chair of the ONAD committee, but added, "Sure it's going to change things."

JAFI's Meridor said, "I pray this crisis will be over soon and that at the same time we won't go back to this tendency of inwardness and less connectedness." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Argentine families plan aliyah

Nearly 40 Argentine Jewish families are planning to immigrate to Israel in the next few months, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel. The immigration from Argentina to Upper Nazareth, which has a growing Latin American population, is part of the Jewish Agency's "Aliyah 2000" program.

Wallenberg files release sought

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to release all evidence pointing to the execution of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg in a Moscow prison in 1947.

"After 55 years of lies, the world may finally learn the truth of the ultimate fate of the greatest Holocaust rescuer," the center's associate dean, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, said after a Russian panel admitted earlier this week that Wallenberg was shot.

Wallenberg is credited with saving tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews while stationed in Budapest from July 1944 to January 1945.

Australia to speed extradition

Australian politicians are calling on the government to move swiftly to extradite an alleged war criminal so he can stand trial in Latvia. The calls came after Latvian prosecutors announced Saturday that Australia could expect an extradition request to arrive shortly because lawyers for Konrad Kalejs failed to have a court-issued arrest warrant revoked.

Kalejs has for years faced charges of being involved in the slaughter of civilians when he served as an officer in a Latvian unit that collaborated with the Nazi SS.

Jewish center to open in Slovakia

Leaders of Slovakia's Jewish community are among those expected to attend the Dec. 10 inauguration of what is described as the first Jewish educational center to open in Slovakia since World War II. The center, located in the capital city, Bratislava, houses a kindergarten and a Hebrew school.

HIAS offering scholarships

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society is inviting students to apply for its 2001 Scholarship Awards Competition. The families of refugees and other immigrants to the United States who were assisted by HIAS are eligible to apply.

The awards are intended for high school seniors who plan to pursue a post-secondary education, and students of all ages already enrolled in college, university or graduate school programs.

Applications may be obtained from www.hias.org or by writing to HIAS Scholarship Awards, 333 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001.

Election date still uncertain, but Barak, opposition prepare for vote

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's political system has shifted into election mode.

After Prime Minister Ehud Barak's dramatic announcement in the Knesset on Tuesday that he would agree to early elections, representatives from the governing coalition and the opposition are planning to meet early next week to begin negotiations on setting a date for the vote.

On Wednesday, members of the opposition made it clear that they want to hold the elections for prime minister and the Knesset as soon as March to prevent Barak from reaching what they perceive as a hasty peace agreement with the Palestinians.

But observers suggested that the negotiators ultimately are likely to settle on May, which would be two years after Barak was voted into office.

"You want elections. I am ready for elections," Barak said Tuesday as the Knesset was poised to give its overwhelming backing to five separate opposition bills calling for new elections.

All of those bills were later approved — but because that happened after Barak's announcement, the votes were largely just a formality. Since several parties dropped out of his coalition on the eve of July's Camp David summit, Barak has led a minority government with the support of only 30 of the 120 Knesset members.

Political observers have suggested that Barak's sole hope for re-election is to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority in the period leading up to the vote. The election then would essentially be a referendum on the agreement.

Though public opinion polls show Barak lagging behind any Likud candidate if elections were held today, the majority of the public is still said to favor a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Likud chairman Ariel Sharon, the leader of the opposition, vowed to defeat Barak in a general election to prevent further concessions to the Palestinian Authority.

President Moshe Katsav joined the appeals to hold elections as soon as possible, saying a drawn-out campaign could lead to extremism and would not serve the national interest. Katsav also said Wednesday that in the run-up to the election, the government should not make any dramatic decisions without the support of the Knesset.

The Knesset plans to vote next week on opposition initiatives to bar a prime minister who lacks a legislative majority from signing an agreement with the Palestinians. It is not yet clear who will be the candidates in the election.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom Barak handily defeated in the 1999 race, is believed to be considering a political comeback, either as the leader of Likud or of a new, conservative party.

The leaders of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party and the National Religious Party said this week they would probably back Netanyahu if he decides to run again.

Netanyahu is currently in the United States and is expected back in Israel next week. Barak faces potential challengers within his Labor Party as well.

Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg have been named as possible contenders.

On the diplomatic front, Barak is assessing whether a resumption of peace negotiations is possible with the Palestinian Authority if violence eases in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, contradicting earlier army assessments, an Israel Defense Force official told a briefing Wednesday that the number of shooting incidents against Israeli troops and civilians increased this week.

Noting that Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants freed by the Palestinian Authority still remain at large, the official said any lull in violence may only be temporary.

During the past week, Israeli and Palestinian security officials have met in an attempt to reduce the violence.

At the same time, Israel has begun implementing confidence-building measures linked to the start of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan on Monday. Israel this week transferred nearly \$9 million in funds that it had previously withheld from the Palestinian Authority to pressure the Palestinians to quell the ongoing violence. □

In Florida, some see a chance for new black-Jewish cooperation

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's widely assumed that the black-Jewish coalition, which fought so many civil rights battles together, is a thing of the past.

But with tens of thousands of blacks, Haitian Americans and Holocaust survivors in South Florida allegedly disenfranchised in the U.S. presidential election, some activists are calling to resurrect the erstwhile bond.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson joined a handful of Jewish politicians and rabbis in a New York synagogue Wednesday and urged the crowd to "keep your eyes on the prize" and demand an accurate count of the Florida vote.

"These are real people," Jackson bellowed to a mixed audience of about 1,000 Jews and blacks.

"It reminds us of our need to be together. We are inextricably bound," said Jackson, who some Jews will always remember for referring to New York as "Hymietown" during his 1984 presidential campaign.

The event was hosted by the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, a Reform shul renowned for its tradition of social activism. The event was organized within 48 hours, as local unions spread the word and brought out many members.

The line-up of speakers included a number of prominent local Jewish politicians and offered an indication of the event's partisan slant: City Comptroller Alan Hevesi and Public Advocate Mark Green, both of whom are expected to run for mayor next year; U.S. Reps. Jerrold Nadler and Gary Ackerman; and Charles Rangel, a black congressman and senior leader of the House of Representatives. All are Democrats.

Speakers alternated between anger and frustration, while humoring the crowd with biting jabs at Republicans. Mention of Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, who certified Bush as the winner Sunday, drew a chorus of boos. Some in the audience held aloft placards that read "Count Every Vote," but one was less benign: "Bush = Fascist; G.O.P. = Gutless Oppressive Pigs."

Jackson clearly was the headline speaker.

He charged that black Floridians, in particular, were unfairly "targeted." His contention seemed to be supported by an article in Wednesday's New York Times, which said votes by blacks were disqualified at far higher rates than those cast by whites, because of the voting methods used in some heavily black districts.

Republicans, Jackson said, "want to discuss chad-ism and not racism. This is not about hanging paper, it's about hanging people's right to vote," he said, adding, "We must be vigilant about protecting that right."

However, this is a "Jewish issue" as much as it is a "black" issue, Jackson and other speakers said.

Jackson spoke of his visit to a Jewish retirement home, where a distraught elderly woman told him that "she would rather die tonight than have on her record that she voted for Pat Buchanan."

"You, in New York, you cannot abandon the Jews in West Palm Beach," Jackson intoned.

Aside from those Jewish voters, the Florida imbroglio is also a "Jewish issue" for ideological reasons, said Rabbi Balfour Brickner, senior rabbi emeritus at the Stephen Wise temple.

"All justice is a Jewish issue, unless I've misread the prophets of Israel," Brickner said. "There was not a single prophet who did not have as his primary message the message of justice."

However, prominent Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League view the Florida recount primarily as a partisan dispute and have not taken an official position.

Brickner said Jewish groups have "lost their guts," and criticized his fellow rabbis in south Florida: "I'm astonished, astounded and amazed my colleagues aren't speaking up. What are they afraid of, losing their jobs?"

At a time when polls seem to indicate the public has grown bored and impatient with the legal wrangling and want Vice President Al Gore to concede defeat, speakers exhorted the audience to mobilize and take to the streets. Rallies are planned for Friday in New York and Chicago, so far.

Whether Jewish and black activists really do revive their historic alliance, or whether the Florida recount is only a brief reprise, remains to be seen.

At the Stephen Wise temple, at least, there seemed to be only true believers.

Afterward, four members of the Department Store Workers' Union, Local 1-S, discussed future solidarity.

"Here we are, two Jews and two non-Jews" said Marilyn Ringel, a 50-something Jewish woman.

"We've got to stick together and fight for our rights as Americans. We fought too goddamn hard to get that right in the first place," she said, adding, "I don't know if you can print this, but W. can kiss my dimpled chad." □

Australian Jews say attacks are linked to strife in Mideast

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Jewish leaders here are attributing a recent upsurge in anti-Semitic acts to the ongoing crisis in the Middle East.

The leaders say they have received more than 100 reports of anti-Semitic incidents since Oct. 1, shortly after the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian violence began.

More than 50 incidents have occurred in New South Wales, Australia's most populous state. Some of the worst incidents have taken place in Sydney, which is located within the state.

The attacks prompted the premier of New South Wales to discuss the issue in Parliament.

In his address, Bob Carr described a series of firebombings on Sydney synagogues as "sickening."

He spoke of one synagogue attack in which "intruders tied ten prayer shawls together into a wick and lit them with kerosene."

Carr also told legislators about three firebomb attacks on the home of Rabbi Pinchus Feldman, the Lubavitch movement's senior rabbi in Sydney.

"Attacking places of worship is a particularly offensive crime," not only against the Jewish community "but against our Australian sense of fairness," Carr said.

A special investigative unit has been established to deal with attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions in Sydney's eastern suburbs. □