



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 4

Friday, January 5, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak: Sharon is to blame

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak indirectly blamed his challenger in the Feb. 6 prime ministerial election, Likud Party Chairman Ariel Sharon, for a series of controversial moves, such as launching the current crisis with the Palestinians with his visit to the Temple Mount in late September.

"All the troubles an entire nation is struggling so hard to solve can be traced" to one man, the prime minister said.

Before the campaign began, Barak had said the Palestinians used Sharon's Temple Mount visit as a pretext to attack Israel.

Barak vows to consult rabbis

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak promised Israel's chief rabbis in a letter that he would not make any decision to give up sovereignty over the Temple Mount without consulting them first.

The chief rabbis expressed disappointment, saying that in previous conversations Barak had more clearly opposed the transfer of sovereignty over the site.

Meanwhile, Barak sent top Israeli negotiator Gilad Sher to Washington for talks with American officials.

Arab ministers: Arafat, negotiate

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa said Arab officials want Yasser Arafat to agree to more negotiations with Israel.

Moussa made his comments after the Palestinian Authority president met with foreign ministers representing nine Arab countries.

But Moussa also said the ministers do not agree with a key provision of President Clinton's latest proposal aimed at reaching a peace accord — giving up the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees who fled Israel in 1948.

'Yale Four' lose appeal

A U.S. appeals court ruled against four Orthodox Jews suing Yale University for allegedly violating their religious beliefs.

The three-judge panel this week upheld an earlier court decision rejecting the former students' claims that Yale violated their beliefs by requiring them to live in coeducational dormitories.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

No Jews named to Bush Cabinet, but most Jewish groups don't care

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As President-elect George W. Bush unveiled his Cabinet over the last few weeks, the buzzword has been diversity.

A Republican Party with a reputation for appointing mostly white males welcomed several members of ethnic minorities to the administration's highest offices.

Jews, however, were left out of the mix.

The omission has left several Jewish leaders concerned about their relationship with the new White House, but most dismiss the notion that Jews must have a representative in the Cabinet.

"The Jewish community has graduated beyond the point where, at every election, we have to hold a stopwatch and count how many people cross the finish line," said Jason Isaacson, director of government and international affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

Jews make up 10 percent of the Senate, and there are 27 Jews in the 435-member House of Representatives.

Two Jews sit on the Supreme Court.

With a few notable exceptions, almost all the Jewish political officials are Democrats.

That's not surprising, as American Jews are predominantly Democratic and voted overwhelmingly for Vice President Al Gore in November.

Bush, on the other hand, made unprecedented overtures to Arab American voters, especially in states like Michigan and New Jersey where they are an important constituency.

Nonetheless, some Jewish leaders expected a seat at Bush's Cabinet table.

Five Jews served in President Clinton's Cabinet.

And while no Jews served in the Cabinets of Reagan or Bush pere, there were four in President Carter's Cabinet and several in the Ford, Nixon, Johnson and Kennedy administrations.

Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, said the absence of a Jew in the Cabinet does not bode well for the community's influence with the Bush White House.

"Either their circle of friends doesn't include Jews or the Jews just didn't get picked," Forman said.

"I think it is the former."

Marshall Breger, who served as President Reagan's liaison to the Jewish community, said the Republican Party does not believe ethnic or other minority groups hold entitlements to a Cabinet seat.

"That is not the rhetoric in the Republican world," Breger said. "You don't have interest groups demanding Cabinet offices like trophies."

But the absence of Jews is made more striking by the evident pains Bush took to diversify his Cabinet. Among his selections were two African Americans, Gen. Colin Powell and Rod Paige; an Arab American, former Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.); and several women.

The only Jew to receive serious thought was Paul Wolfowitz, considered for defense secretary before Bush selected Donald Rumsfeld.

Wolfowitz had served as undersecretary of defense in the administration of the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Panel would try to end violence

A U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian committee will be formed to try to end the ongoing violence in the Middle East, according to an Israeli spokesman.

The committee will be made up of CIA director George Tenet, Israeli Cabinet minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and Mohammed Dahlan, the head of Palestinian security in the Gaza Strip.

Violent climate worries officials

Israel is worried that a right-wing extremist may try to assassinate Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a top defense official said Thursday. Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh said the atmosphere in Israel is similar to the climate before the November 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Bombs were soaked in poison

Two roadside bombs neutralized by Israeli troops this week in the Gaza Strip had been soaked in poison, Army Radio reported.

The bombs apparently had been covered with an agricultural pesticide to increase their lethal effect.

Sharansky: Clinton proposal dead

Israeli politician Natan Sharansky said he told Vice President-elect Dick Cheney that the peace plan proposed by President Clinton "has absolutely no chance of being approved by the Israeli public," and that the role of the next White House "should not be to draw maps, but to create an atmosphere for dialogue." Sharansky met Cheney on Thursday in Washington.

Hummus sales rise

Hummus sales appeared to rise sharply in Israel this week following reports that two Hebrew University researchers found that chickpeas help prevent heart disease and cancer, according to restaurant owners in the Tel Aviv area.

elder Bush and was foreign policy adviser for the Republican campaign during the past year.

Linda Chavez, Bush's selection for labor secretary, is married to Christopher Gersten, a former executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, and their children are being raised Jewish.

Ari Fleischer, who was named White House press secretary last week, said Wednesday that any criticism of the Bush White House's composition is premature because several important positions remain vacant.

Fleischer will be one of several prominent Jewish faces in the White House, even if they will not hold Cabinet rank. Former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith, who served as Bush's domestic policy adviser during the campaign, is expected to receive a White House job.

In addition, Joshua Bolten will be Bush's deputy chief of staff for policy.

Several Jewish leaders cited Fleischer's appointment as a significant one, as he will be the administration's mouthpiece and will have the president's ear.

"There are enough people in the administration and in the office of the president to ensure that Jewish concerns are going to be closely articulated," said Breger, a professor of law at Catholic University.

He said it is too early to claim that Jews have been left out of the loop because sub-Cabinet positions, such as undersecretaries and assistant secretaries, have not been filled.

Breger also said organizations like the RJC have access to all levels of the incoming administration.

"People are looking for a chance to claim that they have been dissed," he said. "We haven't seen any signs of it."

While acknowledging disappointment among the Jewish community, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said the issue is not that important.

"We, as a community, once we broke that initial ceiling, have never been in favor of quotas," Foxman said.

But while it may not be a make-or-break issue for the community's relationship with the Bush camp, several Jewish leaders said they were saddened to see no Jew named to the Cabinet.

Ironically, this comes just after Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), Gore's running mate, became the first Jew chosen as a major party's vice presidential candidate, seemingly heralding a new level of acceptance for Jews in American political life.

"It's a little distressing that" Bush "sought to diversify the Cabinet and people on the extremes of American life, and no Jew was chosen," said Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

But Baum said he is more concerned with the policy positions the Cabinet nominees take than with their religious affiliation.

Other Jewish leaders echoed those remarks, saying they question the policies being initiated by the new White House and the domestic policy agenda of several nominees, especially the attorney general-designate, former Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.).

On the other hand, Jewish leaders have been impressed by the pro-Israel positions of several of the Cabinet selections.

"The irony of it all is this is a guy who set up a Cabinet that is closer to what America is, and he isn't getting credit for it," Foxman said. "The only ones who are asking 'Where are we?' are the Jews." □

Sharon election posters defaced

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Vandals in Tel Aviv have altered election posters for Likud prime ministerial candidate Ariel Sharon.

Posters with the slogan "Only Sharon Can Bring Peace" were altered to read "Only Sharon Can Bring Peace for Galilee."

"Peace for Galilee" was the code name for Israel's controversial 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which was master-minded by Sharon, defense minister under Prime Minister Menachem Begin. □



Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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JEWISH WORLD

Birthright backers: Communities must find new ways to fund trips

By Avi Machlis

Poll: Israelis want Diaspora ties

Some 85 percent of Israelis support strengthening ties with world Jewish communities, according to a new poll.

The survey of 504 people was conducted by Gallup Israel and commissioned by Birthright Israel, which provides trips to Israel for young Jewish adults. The poll also showed that 80 percent believe the Israeli government should invest in projects that bring Jews on a first trip to the Jewish state.

German bank slogan offends

Protesters are calling on a German bank to halt an advertising campaign that employs a slogan inscribed at the gate to the Buchenwald concentration camp.

A spokeswoman for Merkur Bank said management would discuss whether to end the campaign, which features brochures with the slogan, "To Each His Own."

Outrage at German police action

The leader of Germany's Jewish community is outraged over police treatment of an elderly Jewish couple subject to anti-Semitic taunts.

After youths in an eastern German town erupted in anti-Semitic chants beneath the couple's window, the police offered to take the couple into "protective custody," a term the Nazis used for arbitrary arrest and deportation to concentration camps.

Lieberman quits O.U. board

Sen. Joseph Lieberman resigned from the board of the Orthodox Union.

The former vice-presidential candidate's press secretary said the move is part of a larger effort by Lieberman to "limit outside affiliations."

Egyptian festival to proceed

A Jewish festival in Egypt will go ahead as planned next week despite reports that local authorities had canceled it out of sympathy with the Palestinians.

The Moulid of Abu Hasira celebrates the life of a Moroccan Jew whom some Sephardi Jews consider holy.

Marty Glickman dead at 83

Marty Glickman, a track star who believed he was denied a chance to run in the 1936 Berlin Olympics because he was Jewish, died Wednesday at the age of 83. The coach in charge of the 400-meter relay team dropped Glickman and another Jew from the team the day before the race.

Glickman later became well known as an announcer for New York professional sports teams.

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jewish communities must start thinking about new means of funding to sustain the Birthright Israel program, which sponsors free Israel trips for young Jewish adults, according to the philanthropists who have supported the trips until now.

In 2004, the program will send 25,000 people to Israel, philanthropist Michael Steinhardt said at a news conference in Jerusalem. "If we are to succeed in our dream, we have to not only inspire our communities but to generate more philanthropic support."

The five-year program is financed by \$70 million from 14 Jewish philanthropists, \$70 million from the Israeli government and \$70 million from world Jewish communities. The philanthropists — most prominent among them Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman — will withdraw their support for Birthright after five years.

Bronfman said the time is coming when the Jewish community would have to address the question of "when does" the philanthropists' "responsibility end and somebody else's responsibility start."

The comments were made as 5,000 Jewish students from 21 countries traveled around Israel in the first round of this year's Birthright project. Some 14,000 students are expected to participate in Birthright programs through this summer, compared with 8,000 last year.

Bronfman said implementing the program amid the current crisis in Israel was a far more complicated task than it was last year, when the program debuted.

Shimshon Shoshani, chief executive of Birthright Israel, said the program has increased security in reaction to the crisis. Every Birthright bus must check in daily with the program's situation room. The program also gets formal approval from the Israeli army and police for all field trips.

The crisis has also created opportunities for students to get a firsthand view of Israeli politics and the issues the country faces. "Many Israeli politicians will take part by appearing in front of the groups," Shoshani said.

Steinhardt said he was with one group at the Western Wall during a protest led by Israel's chief rabbis against ceding sovereignty on the Temple Mount. Students watched in awe as hundreds of protesters began to blow shofars simultaneously in the shadow of the Wall, one of Judaism's holiest sites. □

School regrets Holocaust-denying thesis

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — A New Zealand university has apologized to the Jewish community for awarding a master's degree to a student whose thesis denies the Holocaust.

The 1993 thesis is cited regularly by neo-Nazis and other Holocaust deniers as evidence that they have academic support for their positions.

Earlier this year, Joel Hayward, who is now a senior lecturer in defense and strategic studies at Massey University, apologized to the Jewish community, saying that he now disagrees strongly with his paper.

Canterbury University gave Hayward a degree with honors for "The Fate of Jews in German Hands," but after a study has concluded that it had a "perverse and unjustified conclusion."

University vice chancellor Daryl Le Grew apologized to the Jewish community, but said the university has no power to revoke the degree.

The president of the New Zealand Jewish Council, David Zwartz, said the council is "deeply concerned that after all that has happened the Jewish community is left with a Holocaust denial thesis."

But, Zwartz added, "The strength and sincerity of the university's apology to the New Zealand and international Jewish community is unquestioned." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Bush's man Fleischer sees his task rooted in Jewish ethics***By Matthew E. Berger*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It's rare that the spokesman for a presidential campaign defends one of his opponents, but Ari Fleischer did just that this summer.

Days after being named vice presidential nominee for the Democratic Party, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) was maligned with an anti-Semitic comment by a local leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Republican candidate George W. Bush's camp could have said nothing or released a brief statement. But Fleischer, as a fellow Jew, felt he needed to speak out.

And he did, condemning the words of the president of the Dallas chapter of the NAACP, Lee Alcorn, as "foolish utterances."

But don't misunderstand Fleischer.

He is a very political person, and his religion rarely gets the best of his partisanship.

"I believe deeply in my religion and I believe in the principles of my party," said Fleischer, 40. "I don't commingle the two."

The son of New York Democrats, Fleischer has spent two decades on Capitol Hill as a Republican party spokesman, and will reach the pinnacle of his profession later this month when he stands in front of the lectern as White House press secretary.

A "relatively observant, basically Reform" Jew, Fleischer's conception of his role in government is shaped by the ethics of Judaism.

"The Jewish religion teaches people to be responsible, to be open-minded and to care about others," he said in a phone interview with JTA. "And I hope that people see that in me as I do my job."

Jews were heavily represented in the Clinton Cabinet and White House, but Fleischer will be one of the few Jewish faces in a Bush administration that received little support from Jews at the polls. Less than 20 percent of the Jewish vote went to Bush.

Other Jews in the Bush White House will be Josh Bolten, Bush's designated deputy chief of staff for policy, and, perhaps, Stephen Goldsmith, the former Indianapolis mayor and Bush adviser who is expected to be tapped for a position soon.

Many in the Jewish community also have been critical of some of Bush's policies, especially on school vouchers and charitable choice. Some are opposing Cabinet appointments, especially the attorney general-designate, former Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft.

But Fleischer isn't ruffled by his minority status, having grown accustomed to fending off the Jewish Democratic majority in his own home.

Though their son was in the upper echelons of the Bush campaign, Fleischer's parents still voted for Vice President Al Gore.

"My mother called me to concede only after Al Gore called George W. Bush to concede," Fleischer said.

Although they were in opposing camps, Fleischer was happy when Lieberman became the first Jew picked for a national ticket.

"It really gave me great joy when Lieberman was announced," he said. "As a Jew, it gave me a sense of great pride. It reflected on the strength of the country."

Fleischer's rebellion against his political upbringing began at Middlebury College in Vermont in the late 1970s, when he realized that he agreed more with the policies of Ronald Reagan than those of Jimmy Carter.

After graduating, he took a job as spokesman for a New York Republican running for Congress, and then moved to Washington with a new party identity.

Despite their opposing views, Fleischer calls his parents his "secret weapon," who have taught him how Democrats think and feel on the issues.

"It teaches you respect," he said. "You can have political differences and still love them."

Fleischer even claims to respect the White House press corps, the aggressive pack of reporters with whom he'll face each day.

He already knows their business from his time as a spokesman for former Sen. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) and the House Ways and Means Committee.

One reporter who covered Fleischer with the Ways and Means Committee, and who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Fleischer deals better with politics than policy, and has trouble making the switch.

"I think that he never learned when it is time to get out of the partisan campaign mode and get into the business of supplying reporters necessary factual information," the reporter said. "I think he sees the press as a group to manipulate."

But Fleischer says he relishes his job because he plays a role, albeit minor, in implementing policy, he said, adding that he clearly understands that he has to serve two masters — the president and the media.

"You can't do this job if you don't believe in the mission of the press," he said.

Fleischer's current schedule includes a morning news conference call, an early afternoon news conference and a late afternoon "pen-and-pad" session. Then there are the dozens of individual requests he responds to each day, from reporters at small newspapers to Mike Wallace of "60 Minutes."

Even in his serious conversations with the media, Fleischer manages to keep things jovial. At a news conference Tuesday, he offered one female reporter the chance to go head to head with Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, a former Navy Seal and professional wrestler.

In a conference call, he allowed a reporter who graduated from his alma mater to ask two questions.

And then there is his trademark, ear-to-ear smile.

"I would like to thank whoever sent me 'The Idiot's Guide to Verbal Self-Defense,'" Fleischer, smiling broadly, said in front of reporters Wednesday.

Fleischer already has picked the chapter that will give him the edge with the press: "Using Your Facial Muscles to Gain the Advantage." □

German shuttles through Mideast

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The head of Germany's intelligence service held secret talks in Syria, Lebanon and Israel this week on the fate of four Israelis being held hostage by Hezbollah.

Israeli media reported that the German official briefed Israeli officials following a secret shuttle mission in Damascus and Beirut as part of efforts to mediate a prisoner swap. □