



# Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Powell: U.S. can't make peace**

U.S. Secretary of State-designate Colin Powell said on Wednesday that the incoming Bush administration would seek peace in the Middle East based on Israeli security and Palestinian aspirations.

But he added during his confirmation hearing Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that U.S. efforts would be based on a "hard-headed recognition that the parties themselves must make the peace." [Page 3]

### **Austria to pay \$210 million**

The United States, Austria and Jewish groups signed an agreement under which Austria would pay \$210 million to Holocaust survivors.

The pact signed Wednesday in Washington covers insurance claims and property restitution.

### **Ross: Palestinians will be sorry**

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross said the Palestinians would regret not seizing the opportunity to conclude a peace deal with the Barak and Clinton administrations, much as they regret rejecting the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan.

Ross, the Clinton administration's point man for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, made the comment in his final appearance before the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations before he and President Clinton leave their jobs on Jan. 20.

### **Israel: Pre-election deal unlikely**

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's spokesman all but ruled out the possibility of an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord before Israel holds elections for prime minister on Feb. 6. Also Wednesday, Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat met in Cairo in an effort to reduce the violence. [Page 2]

### **Iraq marks war's start with threat**

On the 10th anniversary of the start of the Gulf War, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein reportedly threatened to bomb Israel every day for six months to help the Palestinian cause.

He was quoted as making the remarks during a meeting with PLO official Farouk Kaddoumi.

In a televised speech marking the anniversary, Hussein called for the annihilation of Israel.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### **After convincing the skeptics, Birthright faces new challenges**

By Julie Wiener

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Birthright Israel, the splashy and ambitious international partnership to bring young people on identity-strengthening Israel trips, has had to prove itself quite a few times.

When Birthright was first announced, many Jewish leaders suggested the money pledged to the program could be better spent on things like day schools, questioned the value of a 10-day trip to Israel and wondered whether participants would take seriously something that was free.

However, as the first wave of participants returned last winter gushing about their "life-changing" experiences, and a Brandeis University study found a powerful short-term impact on Jewish identity, Birthright's skeptics were largely won over.

Jewish federations, the Israeli government and 14 individual donors pledged large sums of money, bringing the program's total five-year budget to almost \$210 million.

Still, with a host of new challenges on the horizon, Birthright — known as Taglit, or "Discovery," in Hebrew — will have a lot more to prove.

The following issues will be closely watched in coming months and years:

- Future financial viability. Philanthropists Michael Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman, Birthright's founders, announced recently that they will end their support for the project in five years, expecting that new donors and institutions will step in. Funding from Birthright's other major partners — Jewish federations and the Israeli government — is by no means guaranteed indefinitely.

- How many trip providers should be used, and to what extent Birthright should offer a consistent experience regardless of provider. Last year, 10 programs provided trips under Birthright auspices. This winter, 30 programs are running trips, and their policies and goals vary. Birthright leaders say they are closely monitoring for "quality control" and are using the current batch of trips to test which programs to use in the long term.

- Follow-up engagement. Birthright and the federation system began providing grants for post-trip programs this year. Several trip providers, like Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, have invested considerable personnel to stay in contact with alumni and encourage them to continue the "Jewish journeys" spurred by Birthright. It remains to be seen whether alumni will receive as much attention as Birthright grows.

- The trip's long-term impact. With Birthright still in its infancy, all pronouncements about its long-term effects on Jewish life are speculation. However, Birthright plans to continue commissioning detailed studies from Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Jewish Studies, and is exploring the possibility of studies that compare Birthright participants to other young Jews.

While many people believe Hillel and Birthright Israel are synonymous, Hillel — the network of Jewish student organizations — is simply the largest of the 30 trip providers.

The providers include both nonprofit and for-profit, Israeli and North American, secular and Orthodox groups. Their policies and approaches vary widely, from Aish HaTorah, an Orthodox outreach group, to the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

Although all providers must adhere to certain guidelines, particularly about

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Palestinian TV official killed

The director of Palestinian Television was killed in a restaurant in the Gaza Strip when three masked men walked up to his table and shot him repeatedly in the head and chest.

### Katsav may ask Russia for tank

Israeli President Moshe Katsav is considering whether to ask Russia to return an Israeli tank that was captured during the 1982 war in Lebanon, according to the Jerusalem Post.

The tank, displayed in a Russian museum, is believed to have been manned by three Israeli MIAs, Zechariah Baumel, Yehuda Katz and Zvi Feldman. Katsav announced Wednesday that he is planning to visit Russia, Ukraine and Georgia next week to discuss the situation in the Middle East with leaders there.

### Israel to create AIDS task force

Israel is setting up a task force to help combat AIDS and malaria in Africa.

During a meeting Wednesday with the ambassadors of African countries, the director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Alon Liel, said the spread of the disease in Africa is a "global nightmare."

### Histadrut postpones strike

Israeli public sector workers agreed to delay for several days a strike they had threatened to start Wednesday. A strike could have shut down airports, ports, railways and other government-owned facilities.

### Labor Party apologizes for ad

Israel's Labor Party apologized after the family of a soldier complained about a televised campaign commercial that showed the soldier joyously taking part in last May's troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The family of Sharon Shatubi said they complained because he later died during clashes with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.



## Daily News Bulletin

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security, providers have differing alcohol policies, rules and tones. In the past week, while participants in a Jewish Community Centers Association trip watched the raunchy teen comedy movie "American Pie" on the bus ride home from the Dead Sea, male and female participants on Mayanot — the Lubavitch program — were forbidden from dancing together at group events.

With Israel and the Palestinian territories rocked by violence this winter, many wondered whether Birthright would be able to operate.

In the end, despite thousands of dropouts, mostly from the United States, Birthright is bringing more young people than last year: between 8,000 and 9,000, of whom 6,000 are American.

This year's participants have been guinea pigs to some extent, and officials with Birthright Israel say they have brought in outside evaluators — the Cohen center and Israeli researchers — to determine which providers to keep in the future and which to toss out.

"Based on the evaluations, next year we'll weed out the worst ones," says Gideon Mark, Birthright's director of marketing and development.

Providers, who are uncertain about their future with Birthright, have been doing a fair amount of carping.

The North American groups — particularly Hillel and Chabad, which have a presence on most major university campuses — are asking whether the Israeli providers can offer meaningful follow-up.

In the process, questions are being raised about Birthright's basic goal: Is it to promote a love of Israel, a commitment to Jewish observance or something else? How much of the trip should be structured and educational, and how much allowed for personal reflection and relaxation?

At the same time, as many providers report staff and overhead expenses beyond the funds allocated by Birthright, groups like Hillel are wondering whether it makes sense to continue in the Birthright business or instead seek to position themselves as follow-up providers.

The Hillel trips are credited with building a sense of community and forging relationships between Hillel staff and students that later are developed on campus. But they also drain resources from Hillel's other work.

"I want to make sure I'm not leading my movement down a siren's path to something that seems right, but in the long term isn't right," Richard Joel, Hillel's president, said in a recent interview with JTA.

Although Hillel has no plans to drop its involvement in Birthright, Joel said he wants to evaluate the issue more closely.

"We have limited resources and are spreading them very thin by devoting so much to Birthright," he said. "I need something more than my own kishkes telling me there's a quantum added value by our institution being involved as the primary organizing force." □

(JTA staff writer Julie Wiener's recent trip to Israel was sponsored by Birthright Israel.)

## Ben-Ami, Arafat meet in Cairo

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat held talks in Cairo this week in the latest effort to put an end to nearly four months of violence.

The previously unscheduled meeting Wednesday night came hours after masked gunmen killed a close Arafat associate who headed the official Palestinian television station.

Wednesday's session was arranged during a meeting earlier in the day between Ben-Ami and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, Israeli officials said.

Israel and the Palestinians have been looking for ways to reduce the violence in the territories and narrow gaps in their positions on a U.S. peace proposal.

Ben-Ami told reporters in Cairo the talks with Arafat would aim to do just that.

For all their differences, Israeli and Palestinian officials agree that they probably will not achieve any breakthroughs before Israeli elections next month. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### British city repeals ban on Jews

The British city of Leicester formally renounced an almost 800-year-old ban on Jews.

In 1231, the Earl of Leicester barred Jews from taking up residence in the city and forced landlords to pledge to keep them out. Wednesday's action by the Leicester City Council came before the nation marks Holocaust Memorial Day on Saturday.

### French rabbi weighs in on Papon

France's chief rabbi said it would be easier to discuss early release for convicted Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon if he had voiced regrets for his wartime acts.

Rabbi Joseph Sitruk's comments were the latest in a growing debate over whether to keep the 90-year-old Papon in jail despite his age. "The question is not an immoral one, but it is being asked too soon," Sitruk told the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*.

Papon is serving a 10-year sentence after he was found guilty of helping deport some 1,500 Jews to Nazi death camps during World War II.

### Russian cleric lauds racist paper

The patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church congratulated the editorial staff of *Russkie Vestnik*, a Russian Orthodox newspaper known to be openly anti-Semitic, on the 10th anniversary of its publication.

Patriarch Alexey II thanked the newspaper, which has published articles about the Jewish "fifth column" and "the fascism of the Jewish bourgeoisie" in Russia, for upholding traditional Russian values.

### French cemetery vandalized

Vandals damaged dozens of tombs in a historic Jewish cemetery in eastern France. Regional police said Wednesday that 37 gravestones were damaged at the 18th-century cemetery in Sarre-Union.

### Britain may deport alleged Nazis

Britain is investigating the possibility of stripping suspected Nazi war criminals of their citizenship.

The move follows a recent TV documentary which alleged that thousands of former SS members may have been allowed into Britain after World War II. Stripping suspects of their citizenship, as the United States and Canada do, would make it easier to deport them to face trial in their country of origin.

### Ads yanked off Hezbollah site

Microsoft and Amazon.com removed company ads off a Hezbollah Web site. The companies said the ads had been posted without their consent.

The two high-tech companies took action after the ads were discovered by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center.

## Powell: Support for Israel solid, but Arab needs are also important

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Characterizing the situation in the Middle East as "uppermost in our mind," Colin Powell told the U.S. Senate committee considering his nomination for secretary of state that he would work for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Appearing before the Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday, Powell, a retired U.S. general, praised President Clinton's work toward a peace agreement and indicated that President-elect George W. Bush would continue the effort.

"We will do our part to keep the peace process moving forward," he said.

The new administration's first step will be to ask Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to rein in the violence that has raged in the Middle East since late September.

After that, the administration will prepare its diplomatic strategy while waiting for the results of Israel's Feb. 6 election, Powell said.

Bush's foreign policy team is expected to take a very different approach to the peace process than the current administration, which took a strongly proactive role in nudging Israel and the Palestinians toward an agreement.

Powell, who served as national security adviser in the Reagan administration and then as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War in 1991, noted that Israel and the Palestinians themselves need to take the initiative on the peace front, and not rely on the United States to push an agreement forward.

"We seek a lasting peace, as have all previous administrations, based on unshakable support for the security of Israel, the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, our friendships in the Arab world and a hard-headed recognition that the parties themselves must make the peace," Powell said.

Bush has said he supports the peace process but does not want the United States to interfere in domestic Israeli policy. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has said he is certain Bush will play an important role for peace.

Powell indicated he would look beyond the Israeli-Palestinian peace process to possible future agreements between Israel and other countries.

"We are ready to work with all the parties in the region to achieve a comprehensive solution.

"Peace for Israel means peace with all of her neighbors, Syria included, where we need to build on the opportunity created by Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon," he told the committee.

Powell's views on Israel are largely unknown, but Israeli columnists already are lamenting his approach to the region and the expectation that the Bush administration will make the Middle East less of a foreign policy priority.

When he accepted the nomination, Powell said the Bush administration would "remain very much engaged" in the Middle East.

The issue would continue to be "a major priority" for the State Department, he said, yet he hinted at a new role for the U.S. administration.

The policy "will be based on the principle that we must always ensure that Israel lives in freedom, and in security and peace," Powell said last month.

"But at the same time, we have to do everything we can to deal with the aspirations of the Palestinians and other nations in the region."

During Wednesday's hearing, Powell also noted the "tragic case" of Iraq, saying the Persian Gulf nation must prove to the United States that it does not have weapons of mass destruction.

Powell pledged to reinvigorate sanctions against Iraq, claiming that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's weapons development program, not sanctions, is responsible for his people's suffering.

Powell also promised to look at issues of religious freedom worldwide.

He also said he would consider maintaining the State Department's office on Holocaust assets. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Half a century later, refugee issue casts pall over peace negotiations***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After sitting on the back burner for 52 years, the issue of Palestinian refugees has come to a boil.

Gone are the days when compromise proposals — including reparations or limited family reunification programs — seemed to offer a way around the issue.

Since the start of the peace process, Israeli officials dismissed maximalist Palestinian statements on the “right of return” as rhetoric to placate the masses, hinting that negotiators took a more conciliatory tone in private meetings.

But as on other issues — Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, the 1967 borders — it appears that the extreme statements the Palestinians have made all along demanding the right of return accurately reflect their position.

Palestinian officials now say there will be no peace accord unless Israel agrees to allow refugees and their descendants — potentially some 5 million people, according to Palestinian estimates — to return to the homes they abandoned in Israel during the 1948 War of Independence. Even the most dovish Israelis reject this, saying it basically spells the end of the Jewish state. Anyone who calls for the right of return, they say, essentially has not accepted Israel’s right to exist, which supposedly was the underpinning for the peace process.

Given the standoff on the issue, an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord seems unlikely unless one side changes its position radically.

For years, the demand for the right of return was obscured by what appeared to be the Palestinians’ main goal — achieving international acceptance for an independent Palestinian state. This, it was believed, would finally fulfill the 1947 U.N. partition plan’s vision of “two states for two peoples.”

Since the Oslo peace process began in 1993, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has spoken of resettling refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, not in Haifa, Jaffa, Beersheba and other places in Israel proper. The Oslo formula deferred the refugee issue and other difficult problems to final-status negotiations, believing that the two sides would have established enough trust by then to solve them amicably.

In 1995, Yossi Beilin, an architect of the Oslo accords, reached an understanding about the refugees with Arafat deputy Mahmoud Abbas, better known as Abu Mazen.

Under their informal understanding, the refugees would be allowed in unlimited numbers into areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority, but not into Israel.

For years, Israel has talked of accepting limited numbers of refugees — perhaps as many as 100,000 — in the framework of a family reunification program. In addition, as many as 150,000 Palestinians are believed to have settled in Israel since the start of the peace process, illegally overstaying their work permits or marrying Israeli Arabs.

Beilin and Abbas also agreed that a newly created state of Palestine would be entitled to grant a passport to every Palestinian, even those living abroad, remedying the Palestinian refugees’ stateless status.

In essence, the two found a way to pay lip service to the principle of the right of return without actually implementing it.

Abbas quickly disavowed the “Beilin-Abu Mazen Agreement,” however, and Palestinian officials now say the understanding has no bearing on the refugee issue.

At the least, Palestinian officials say, Israel should recognize the Palestinians’ right to return to their former homes, with the expectation that many refugees may decide that returning is impractical. Given the Palestinians’ insistence on maximalist positions, however, Israelis increasingly are wary of a wink-and-a-nod understanding on such an existential problems.

At issue, Israeli commentators say, is whether there will indeed be two states for two people, or whether the Palestinians will insist on one-and-a-half states for themselves.

For his part, Prime Minister Ehud Barak has acknowledged the pain and suffering of Palestinian refugees — the boldest statement yet on the subject by an Israeli prime minister — but said recently that if the Arab world had not tried to destroy Israel when it was first founded, the refugee problem would not have been created.

Justifying his stance, Arafat recently said angry refugees would assassinate him if he compromised.

Most Israeli Arabs support the Palestinian position.

“Of course, we demand that the refugees be allowed to return,” said Taher Najib, 25, an actor and resident of the Israeli Arab town of Umm el-Fahm. “Why should a new immigrant from Russia become a citizen of Israel, and my aunt in a refugee camp in Lebanon is deprived of the same right?” he asked.

After the 1948 war, those Palestinians who remained in Israel were thankful that they could stay in what they call their homeland. Their children focused on their status in the Jewish state, demanding equal rights.

But now, the third generation of Israeli Arabs is demanding the full implementation of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194, which stated in 1948 that Palestinian refugees should have the right of return or be given compensation.

Moreover, many Israeli Arabs demand their own right to return to homes they fled in 1948, often in villages that no longer exist. Many Israeli Arabs continue to depict themselves as “displaced persons” half a century after Israel’s founding, though their new homes are often less than a mile from their former homes.

Any agreement on refugees with the Palestinian Authority will not resolve Israeli Arab grievances, they now insist.

Israeli Arab legislator Ahmed Tibi, a former Arafat adviser, believes that while the refugee issue should be left for negotiations, Israel should at least “accept its moral and legal obligation to accept responsibility for creating the refugee problem.”

A project of Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals under the auspices of Harvard University failed to find common ground on the issue. While the Israeli intellectuals were willing to accept that Israel had a practical, but not moral, responsibility for creating the refugee problem, discussions broke down when the Palestinian side refused to accept any measure of responsibility for the situation.

Palestinian writer Salem Jubran told JTA this week that most Palestinian officials “don’t want to admit that the right of return cannot be implemented.”

“They will pay lip service to the idea, but they realize that no government in Israel will survive” if it accepts the right of return for the millions of refugees. □