



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### U.S. says it won't interfere in vote

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said the Bush administration will not take sides in Tuesday's Israeli elections for prime minister.

"We will not make a judgment," Powell said Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

"We believe it's up to the Israeli people to decide who their prime minister will be, and as you've noticed so far in the Bush administration, we have elected not to show a preference."

### Barak apologizes to Israeli Arabs

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak apologized for the deaths of 13 Israeli Arabs during violent confrontations with police last October.

"In my name and in the name of the government, I express sorrow over the death of Arab citizens," the premier said Sunday.

"As prime minister, I hold general responsibility for everything that happens in the country during my term, and also for these incidents."

Barak's comments were widely viewed as an appeal for Israeli Arab votes in Tuesday's election. [Page 3]

### UJC won't replace top exec

The umbrella organization for North American federations will not replace its chief operating officer, who departed recently after weeks of protracted negotiations.

The United Jewish Communities is instead reorganizing its executive staff and dividing up Louise Stoll's responsibilities, said Stephen Solender, the group's president and CEO.

In addition, the UJC will hire an executive-level professional to handle human resources development and recently hired an executive to run its Israel and overseas department.

### Sharon denies deal with rabbis

Likud leader Ariel Sharon denied that he had cut a deal in exchange for Sunday's declaration of support from the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc.

Despite his denial, sources in Likud were quoted Sunday as saying that if elected, Sharon would extend an order granting army draft deferrals to yeshiva students. [Page 3]

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Advocates for Iranian Jews worried about Bush's Iran policy

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — As the Bush administration settles in, several signs suggest it will pursue a policy toward Iran that resembles U.S. policy toward China, in which commercial interests outweigh human rights concerns.

This could deal a blow to U.S. Jews lobbying on behalf of 10 Iranian Jews imprisoned — wrongly, it is widely believed — for spying for Israel.

It also doesn't bode well for the other 25,000 Jews remaining in Iran. A trickle continues to emigrate each year, discouraged by the treatment of Jews in Iran's Islamic republic and by the prospects of future reform.

Indeed, the Clinton administration made initial overtures to Iran last spring — lifting a ban on the import of pistachios, carpets and caviar — and voiced its support for the country's fledgling reform movement.

Yet Tehran appears to be repaying the gesture by turning even more hard-line: A fresh crackdown on critics of the regime has landed a number of students, journalists and dissident clerics in jail.

It's unclear if this signals a death knell for reform efforts, or if it could spark a violent backlash from opponents of the regime.

Despite the crackdown, recent U.S. news reports say Washington is weighing the possibility of lifting or downscaling sanctions against Iran.

American companies are banned from doing business in Iran because of its place on the State Department's annual list of sponsors of terrorism. In addition, a 1996 law calls for punitive trade measures against foreign companies and countries that invest in Iran's energy sector.

One common argument against sanctions is that they are ineffective against Iran but harm American business. While American oil and energy concerns can't invest in Iran, competitors — from France and Russia, for example — conduct business there freely.

In his mid-January confirmation hearings, Secretary of State Colin Powell said relations with Iran would be reassessed.

"We have important differences on matters of policy," Powell said, "but these differences need not preclude greater interaction, whether in more normal commerce or increased dialogue."

At the same time, the State Department is said to have put out feelers to various special interests — including Jewish advocates for the "Iran 10" — to gauge their reaction if sanctions are ended.

"They say the carrot-and-stick approach hasn't worked with Iran, so why deny American business in the process?" said Pooya Dayanim, spokesman for the Los Angeles-based Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations. Dayanim is one of those the State Department contacted. "They believe that once there's more interaction, with businessmen going back and forth, it could ease the tension between the two countries and the fate of Iranian Jews," he said.

A State Department official declined to respond.

Another leading advocate for the jailed Jews confirmed that the idea of engaging Iran is being circulated.

"I don't know who's been contacted, but the idea has been floated, indirectly," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Not all agree that the sanctions regime has been ineffective. While economic

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Campaigns hit Russian airwaves

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and opposition leader Ariel Sharon took their campaigns to the Moscow airwaves on Saturday, hoping to win over Russian voters at home.

Major Russian stations are broadcast by cable and satellite to Israel, and appearing on Russian television provides a way for Israeli politicians to reach the roughly 1 million immigrants from the former Soviet Union who now live in Israel.

### Barak vows refugee compromise

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said that if re-elected he would seek a compromise on the issue of Palestinian refugees.

He made the comment during an interview Saturday with Abu Dhabi television, which for the first time sent a team of journalists to the Jewish state. Barak also told the reporters from the Persian Gulf emirate that his re-election would improve chances for regional peace and stability.

### Mufti bans Israeli Arab vote

Muslims are banned by religious law from participating in Israel's election, the highest Islamic official in Jerusalem said.

The mufti of Jerusalem, Ikrima Sabri, was quoted by an Egyptian newspaper as saying that casting a ballot for a Jewish candidate represents an expression of faith in a Jew, which is banned by Islam.

### Prisoner swap report denied

German-mediated contacts for a possible prisoner swap between Israel and Hezbollah are at a critical phase, a Lebanese newspaper reported.

The paper quoted Hezbollah sources as saying a deal could be closed before Tuesday's Israeli election. Sources in Israel dismissed the report as psychological pressure, saying there had been no progress in the negotiations.



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sanctions indeed have failed in some world trouble spots, "it is clear that sanctions against Iran have worked," said Sam Kermanian, secretary-general of the American Iranian Jewish Federation of Los Angeles.

"At least some reform is attributable to the fact that at some point, some Iranians realized that the government cannot stay hostile to the world and pursue violent policies, and at the same time expect the rest of the world to fall in line and extend them credit and investments," he said.

"Lifting sanctions now would be seen as support for the hard-liners," Kermanian added.

In any case, prospects for a reprieve for the Iran 10 have dimmed. They were sentenced in September to terms ranging from two to nine years, allegedly for spying for Israel.

Their court appeal appears to have been rejected last month, though there has not yet been any official confirmation.

Advocates say the Iran 10 have been made into scapegoats to divert Iranians' attention away from pressing social and political concerns toward a fabricated threat.

The families of the Iran 10 have indicated that their jailed relatives have given up hope of receiving justice through the courts and are ready to accept their fate, Dayanim said.

Their last chance may be an appeal for clemency to Iran's Supreme Ruler, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"They say, 'When the Supreme Ruler decides to let us free, that's when we'll be free,'" Dayanim said.

In the meantime, Jews continue to emigrate from Iran at the rate of 300 to 400 a year, gradually bringing to a close the 2,700-year Jewish presence there.

Emigration reached its peak in the mid-1980s, when as many as 4,000 Jews left each year.

A recent batch of immigrants — leaving legally through Vienna, which generally is a temporary stop en route to the United States — included the family of one of the Iran 10.

Dayanim and his colleagues were disturbed to learn that relatives of a second prisoner recently were forced off a plane headed to Vienna, and their passports were confiscated.

Several observers suggested it is still too early to speculate on Bush administration policy toward Iran, and said it is understandable that a new administration would review its predecessor's policies.

However, big business presumably will find a sympathetic ear in the White House. Both President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney are former oil executives, and Cheney, as head of oil services giant Halliburton, lobbied the Clinton administration to lift sanctions on Iran.

Iran is reported to be OPEC's second largest producer of oil after Saudi Arabia, generating some 3.7 million barrels per day.

On the other hand, observers say, a split Congress may find it difficult to ignore Iran's nuclearization program, its production of biological and chemical weapons and its sponsorship of terrorism.

The Conference of Presidents has several meetings scheduled with administration officials in coming weeks.

Iran "will certainly be on our agenda," Hoenlein said, "and I assume it will be on theirs."

The mantra of "trying to strengthen the hand of moderates — this is a fiction," Hoenlein said. "There are many conclusive signs that indicate no moderation."

Rather, revolution may be on the horizon.

"The facade of" Iranian President Mohammed "Khatami as a reformer has fallen off," Dayanim said.

"The students, as the heart of the reformist movement, are becoming more militant and openly critical of the system under which they live," he said.

"Fifty thousand students recently wrote to the government, saying, 'Change, or else.'"

Lifting the U.S. sanctions, Dayanim added, would be "a monumental mistake. If they hold back a year or two, I think the government" in Iran "will change."

What's not clear is how many Iranian Jews will be around to see it. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Barak mounts final push against huge Sharon lead

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and opposition leader Ariel Sharon are making a final campaign push as the nation heads to the polls Tuesday to vote for prime minister.

After a Sabbath break in campaigning, the pressure is primarily on Barak, who trails Sharon by as much as 20 points in weekend opinion polls.

Disappointed with both candidates, many Israelis say they will leave their ballots blank or stay away from the voting booths altogether.

On Sunday, Barak took a step widely viewed as an attempt to woo one of the groups threatening to boycott the election — the Israeli Arab community.

At the weekly Cabinet meeting, Barak apologized for the deaths of 13 Israeli Arabs during riots and violent confrontations with police last October.

"In my name and in the name of the government, I express sorrow over the death of Arab citizens," said Barak, who needs Israeli Arab support to have any chance of winning Tuesday's election.

"As prime minister, I hold general responsibility for everything that happens in the country during my term, and also for these incidents."

Meanwhile, Sharon on Sunday secured the support of a key group, fervently Orthodox Jews of Ashkenazi descent.

Sharon denied speculation that he had cut a deal in exchange for the declaration of support from the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc.

Despite his denial, sources in Likud were quoted Sunday as saying that Sharon, if elected, would extend an order granting army draft deferrals to yeshiva students.

UTJ leaders also were quoted in the Jerusalem Post discussing how they might benefit from Sharon's anticipated victory.

In another development, former Cabinet minister Roni Milo, an ex-Likudnik who now is a member of the Center Party, announced his backing for Sharon over the weekend.

Milo said he had spoken with Sharon and was convinced of his intention to form a national unity government if elected.

Milo pulled out of the government several weeks ago to protest Barak's purported willingness to make concessions on Jerusalem during the negotiations with the Palestinians.

Palestinian officials, meanwhile, offered different assessments on the Israeli election.

Palestinian official Nabil Sha'ath said the Palestinian Authority would negotiate with the winner of the Israeli election, whoever it is.

But Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said a Sharon victory would serve extremists on both sides.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction said it plans to step up its violence against Israel, regardless of the election outcome.

"Fatah will pursue its national struggle against occupation," Marwan Barghouti, who heads Fatah operations in the West Bank, said Saturday.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there were scattered clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinians over the weekend. Three Palestinians were wounded by Israeli troops during riots in Hebron on Saturday.

Following West Bank shooting attacks in which two Israelis were killed last week, the Israel Defense Force reimposed a blockade of Palestinian towns and cities, with the exception of Kalkilya and Jericho. The IDF also imposed a ban on Palestinian drivers traveling alone in private vehicles. □

### Israel accused of border violation

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A U.N. official accused Israel this week of violating its border with Lebanon when it built a fence in a village that straddles the border.

According to reports, Israel subsequently ceased building the fence in Ghajar. □

### Israel info campaign planned

North America's largest Jewish organizations are teaming up with the Israeli government to launch an information campaign to educate American Jews and non-Jews about Israeli issues, according to the executive vice president of the federation umbrella organization.

Stephen Solender of the United Jewish Communities said the initiative is responding, in part, to focus group research showing that large numbers of American Jews do not remember what Israel offered the Palestinians at the Camp David summit last summer or that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat was once considered a terrorist.

### Protests greet Fla. theme park

Jews in Florida are protesting a new religious theme park that they say promotes Christian messianism.

The Holy Land Experience in Orlando contains a show that depicts the rituals and Hebrew prayers on Yom Kippur, but concludes with a Nativity scene projected above the audience. A group led by a Baptist minister who was born a Jew operates the park.

### Suriname shul becomes Net cafe

The Jewish community in the South American nation of Suriname is allowing one of the oldest synagogues in the Western hemisphere to be used as an Internet cafe.

"We had to do this to save the synagogue," which is plagued by high maintenance costs and low attendance, Jewish community leader Dennis Kopinsky told The Associated Press. Kopinsky said the Sedekwe Shalom congregation has only about 60 members, and they now worship at the other synagogue in Paramaribo, Suriname's capital.

### Solidarity days planned in Minn.

Synagogues and Jewish community agencies throughout Minnesota will hold an "Israel Solidarity Shabbat" on different weekends throughout February and March.

"The crisis in Israel is far from over and Israel still needs the support of the Jewish community," said Susan Shapiro, president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

### Shoah survivor dies in accident

An 83-year old Holocaust survivor was killed on Feb. 1 while riding a century-old cable car in downtown Los Angeles.

Leon Praport died after suffering severe head and chest injuries when the funicular he was riding apparently slipped its cable and plummeted downhill, smashing into a second car.

## Women rabbis celebrate sixteen years of Conservative ordination

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Streaming down the hallway from the Jewish Theological Seminary cafeteria on a Sunday evening in late January came an unusual sound: some 100 female voices, undisturbed by tenor or bass, joyously singing the blessing after meals.

Not only did all the voices belong to women, but almost all belonged to rabbis or rabbinical students.

It was a significant moment in a Conservative movement where women make up less than 10 percent of the rabbinical pool, and where the decision to ordain women 16 years ago came only after long and divisive debate.

Gathered from around the United States and Israel, the rabbis were celebrating their growing numbers — now more than 120 — and the influence they believe they are having on the movement.

"You have to know that your presence has transformed the Jewish world," Francine Klagsbrun said in a keynote address. Klagsbrun, a writer, was one of the members of the 1985 commission that recommended female ordination.

The two-day conference, which was for women only and was mostly closed to the media, combined study of Jewish texts, workshops on "nurturing ourselves" as individuals and spiritual leaders, and dancing to the music of Mikveh, a female klezmer band.

In the hallways, participants talked of their victories and ongoing challenges and swapped news about their children.

One of the highest remaining barriers they face is the Conservative movement's refusal to recognize women as witnesses in marriage, conversion or divorce.

That issue, which was not on the conference agenda but was discussed in the halls, is currently under discussion by the movement's law committee. It appears to be widely flouted by women rabbis. Several women at the conference said they already serve as witnesses, which they say does not pose a problem for their communities.

Others said they hope the law committee will rule in their favor.

"I only give positive quotes, but as a member of the Rabbinical Assembly and someone serving in a synagogue, I look forward to the time when all Conservative institutions recognize women's testimony as being credible and equal to that of our male counterparts," said Rabbi Andrea Merow of Temple Sholom in Philadelphia.

The witness question was one of several raised informally in signs posted on a pillar in the lobby, with answers scrawled in crayon. Most respondents wrote that they do serve as witnesses but make sure to inform their congregants of the "implications" — the fact that some people may not recognize a ceremony with female witnesses as valid.

Among the other questions on the pillar: "Does your spouse play a rebbetzin" — using the word for a rabbi's wife — "role in your professional life?" (answers ranged from "Heck no," to "They sent me home so he could build the sukkah"); "What stereotypes have you encountered?" ("Young, cute, sexy;" "The best part of having you for a rabbi is I get to kiss you"); "Why/why not do you wear a yarmulka and tefillin?"

The witness issue is one of many challenges the rabbis face.

Many congregations remain apprehensive about hiring women rabbis, and balancing a perpetually on-call career with family life is difficult.

Rabbi Avis Miller, of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, said women rabbis may ultimately persuade synagogues to treat them like doctors who have practices.

Instead of expecting each rabbi to be available around the clock, she said, synagogues with more than one rabbi may simply ensure that one rabbi is on call at any time, freeing others to spend time with their families.

"When that happens, it will be because both men and women want this, but it will be at the impetus of women," Miller said.

Those rabbis around long enough to remember the last conference commemorating Conservative women rabbis — in 1995 — said the mood has changed markedly in just six years.

"I can't believe how far we've come since then," said Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin, of Am Yisrael Conservative Congregation in suburban Chicago.

At that 10th anniversary of female ordination, Newman Kamin said, the debate over whether or not to ordain women was revisited and "you had speakers who spoke out against the ordination of women."

"Six years later, we have no one to apologize to, no one's poor sport story we have to listen to," Newman Kamin said. "This is a real celebration. This is wonderful."

Indeed, the mood of the conference was overwhelmingly festive.

At one point in that Sunday night's dancing, the group lifted two JTS professors — Anne Lapidus Lerner and Judith Hauptman — on chairs, and one young rabbi could be heard whispering to a friend, "Those are the two women who should have been rabbis."

Lerner and Hauptman, who launched their careers in academia long before the movement began ordaining women, are widely viewed as mentors for women rabbinical students at JTS.

Heather Altman, who was ordained in 2000 and is assistant rabbi of Bet Torah in Mount Kisco, N.Y., described the conference as "incredible."

"When I walked in this morning it was a powerful feeling of being in a room of women rabbis," Altman said. "One of the things that shocked me when I first came here as a student was what a male space the seminary is."

While this group has penetrated the largely male rabbinate, the fact that the conference coincided with the Super Bowl indicates that there remains at least one male-dominated sphere these participants will not venture into any time soon.

That did not go unnoticed.

"When there's a national women's football league, we promise not to have our conference at the same time," said Rabbi Francine Roston, one of the conference organizers, as she introduced the keynote speaker. □

## Katherine Harris: I'm like Esther

NEW YORK (JTA) — Florida's secretary of state considers the biblical Queen Esther one of her role models, according to The Washington Post.

The newspaper reported that during the presidential vote-counting controversy this winter, Katherine Harris repeatedly told her staff that, like Esther, she was endangering herself and her reputation for a good cause. □