



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S.: Let Arafat go to Beirut

President Bush was pressing Israel to allow Yasser Arafat to attend this week's Arab League summit.

"The president believes it is time for Arab nations in the region to seize the moment" to discuss a Saudi proposal for Israeli-Palestinian peace, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

Israel said it would make a decision by Tuesday on whether to allow Arafat to travel to Beirut for the summit, which begins Wednesday.

Senators press Cheney on Arafat

More than 50 U.S. senators have sent a letter to President Bush suggesting that Vice President Dick Cheney should not meet with Yasser Arafat.

"Until Mr. Arafat and the Palestinian Authority demonstrate their commitment to end the violence we would urge that the vice president reconsider his offer to meet with Mr. Arafat," said the letter, signed by 52 senators. "And although we believe that it is critical that General Zinni remain in the region, we hope that he makes clear that the United States will not deal with those who do not live up to their commitments."

Cheney called off a meeting tentatively scheduled for this week because Arafat did not take steps to stop Palestinian terror.

Porn film won't be shot at Terezin

Czech officials have quashed plans to shoot scenes for a porn film at the former wartime transit camp of Terezin.

Officials banned the use of video cameras at Terezin after reports that a porn movie would be shot there.

"I did the only thing I could do," Jan Munk, director of a monument to Terezin's victims, said. Munk's move came after the Czech tabloid Super reported Saturday that the film, starring top Czech porn star Robert Rosenberg, is set at the end of World War II and will tell the story of how women at the camp were raped by Nazis.

Because of the Passover holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, March 29.

In rallies held across the country, U.S. Jews pledge support for Israel

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — "The solidarity of Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora is what makes us invincible," Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told thousands of Jews in a live simulcast as pro-Israel gatherings were held in more than 100 communities across North America on Sunday.

Eighteen months into the intifada, the Palestinians are carrying out daily terror attacks against Israel, the Jewish state faces pressure and denunciation in nearly every world forum and anti-Semitism has increased around the globe.

That leaves many Diaspora Jews not just eager to show their support for the Jewish state, but desperate for some inspiration themselves.

Sunday's "We Stand with Israel" gatherings, sponsored by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, aimed to do just that.

Speaking just a few days before Passover, Sharon described Israel's long struggle for deliverance from its enemies and offered hope for renewed freedom through Jewish unity.

"United, we can make Israel the center of Jewish life for generations to come," he said. "Israel is a peace-seeking nation," Sharon continued. "My government and I are committed to achieving a lasting, durable peace with security, but our neighbors must recognize our right to live peacefully in our homeland."

More strident attacks on the Palestinians came from New York's two Democratic U.S. senators, Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, who addressed the nearly 1,000 attendants at the main gathering in Manhattan, which was broadcast to the other communities. In nearby Queens, an outdoor rally drew some 2,000 people.

"I want to be very clear about this. The responsibility for the violence and the collapse of the Camp David and Taba discussions rests only with" Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, Clinton said, referring to peace efforts that came when her husband was president.

"He has failed as a leader, he has been unable and unwilling to reign in the forces of violence and terrorism, and he leaves a trail of violated vows and death along a path that could have and should have led to peace and life."

Clinton linked Israel's war on terror to America's, said America should not "dictate" to Israel how to act in self-defense, called on Europe to recognize the threat from the Palestinian Authority's alliance with Iran and said Arafat still could help end violence by condemning it forcefully in both English and Arabic.

"Jews and non-Jews alike understand that when we stand up for Israel, we're standing up for fundamental human rights, democracy and America," she concluded, to a standing ovation.

Clinton and Schumer were among 52 senators who wrote to President Bush last Friday asking that Vice President Dick Cheney not meet with Arafat until the Palestinian leader takes action against terrorism.

The live telecast linked the audience to Florida, where Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel took a hard line. The conflict is not about geography but history, he said.

The Palestinian goal, he said, is "to establish a Palestinian state, not like Israel, but instead of Israel."

Later, the simulcast switched to Jerusalem, where a CNN-style report moved between Moment Cafe — whose proprietor said he would reopen the popular haunt after a devastating recent terrorist attack — and the Hadassah hospital bedside of a

MIDEAST FOCUS

Army enters Gaza Strip

Three Palestinians were reportedly shot and killed while planting a bomb near a settlement in the Gaza Strip on Sunday night.

In a separate action, Israeli soldiers searched the Gaza Strip border on Sunday night. The Israel Defense Force searched for hidden tunnels used to smuggle military arms into the Gaza Strip.

During the incursion, Palestinians attacked the soldiers with a bomb, grenades and gunfire. The soldiers returned fire, killing one Palestinian and wounding three others, reported an IDF spokesman.

U.N. official blasts Israel

A U.N. official accused Israel of targeting its facilities in recent actions in the West Bank.

Peter Hansen said Israeli troops deliberately attacked U.N. installations and used other U.N. buildings as tank bases or temporary detention centers earlier this month. Hansen also said the United Nations would bill Israel for the damage it caused during the offensive.

Israel denied the charges and says its actions were aimed at attacking the infrastructure of Palestinian terrorism.

Parole for peace activist killer

The Israeli murderer of a peace activist is getting out of jail early.

An Israeli parole board is releasing Yona Avrushmi, who killed Emil Grunzweig in 1983 by hurling a hand grenade into a Peace Now rally. Avrushmi has served 18 years in prison.

He was originally sentenced to life in prison, but his sentence was commuted to 27 years by Israeli President Ezer Weizman in 1995.

Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg, who was wounded in the attack, welcomed the decision, saying Avrushmi has expressed regret for his actions.

victim of that attack. Maimon Amsellam, 29, was in too much pain to look directly into the camera from underneath his Chicago White Sox cap, but he told the cameras how his friend, Avi, hadn't been lucky enough to survive.

Cantor Dov Keren from Sutton Place synagogue in New York chanted a memorial prayer while the screen flashed the faces of Israeli terror victims.

They included Transportation Minister Rehavam Ze'evi — assassinated by Palestinian terrorists last October — and Shalhevet Pass, a 10-month-old baby shot by a Palestinian sniper in March 2001 while with her family in Hebron.

For the most part, the event met the crowd's expectations.

"I felt like there was a measure and a degree of unity that transcended" politics, and "that was refreshing, enlightening and a source of hope and inspiration," said Cheston Mizel, 27.

"I came because it gives voice to what I've been feeling," said Ryan Lifchitz, 28. The gathering "brings us all a step closer to true unification."

Yet the event lacked one important element, Lifchitz said — young people, both on stage and in the audience.

Still, most people felt moved by the rally.

"I think that everyone walked out of here far more inspired than they walked in. And that was the whole point of it," said Roberta Elliott, national public affairs director for Hadassah. "It worked."

Communities ranged in their responsiveness. While nearly 500 people came to an event in Atlanta, only about 50 gathered in Los Angeles.

Some 100 people attended an Israel advocacy workshop in Boston, 60 and 150 people attended two gatherings in Chicago, 300 joined in San Francisco, 170 met in St. Paul, Minn., and more than 400 assembled in Miami.

In the Washington area, some 500 people heard a call to action from leaders of the local Jewish community and Israel's ambassador to the United States at Temple Beth Ami in Rockville, Md.

In Milwaukee, federation president Allen Samson said that such events "allow us to learn from each other and from national figures about how to remain strong through this difficult period."

In Cherry Hill, N.J., a largely right-wing crowd of about 250 people turned out for the Jewish Community Relations Council's 27th Mideast Institute, which had been planned before the national solidarity event.

In Texas, some 200 people gathered at a rally in San Antonio to hear former Cabinet Secretary Henry Cisneros and U.S. Rep. Charles Gonzalez (D-Texas).

"We stand with Israel, defending the ground that is Israel today," said Cisneros, who added that he visited Israel last August and plans "to stand again in Israel" before the end of the year.

In the Texas state capital of Austin, close to 300 people gathered at the Dell Jewish Community Campus. Before the simulcast, the crowd did Israeli folk dances, donated funds to Magen David Adom and heard speeches from local spiritual leaders.

In Toronto, more than 2,000 people, including a spirited youth contingent, gathered outdoors in chilly weather to hear Yuli Edelstein, Israel's deputy minister of immigrant absorption, who had flown in from Israel for the day.

Many waved large Israeli flags and held placards supporting Israel and condemning terrorism. Even a little terrier named Samba sported an Israeli flag in its collar.

Shirley Marcel, who would otherwise have been home preparing for a seder and two Passover meals with her children and grandchildren, said it was "definitely more important" to be at the rally.

"I'll have one cake less," she said.

Nearly 200 people — more than twice the number who had registered in advance — turned out for Detroit's event.

"We may not agree on every Israeli action or policy, but this transcends whatever our particular issues might be," said Richard Carson of Farmington Hills, Mich.

"This is about Jews. We need to come together in support of Israel." □

(Material for this story was provided by the Washington Jewish Week, the Jewish Community Voice of Southern New Jersey, the Detroit Jewish News, the Canadian Jewish News, the Jewish Journal of San Antonio, the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle and the American Jewish World in Minneapolis.)



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JEWISH WORLD

Annan's harsh criticism outrages Israel and American Jewish groups

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish leaders are lamenting the fall from grace of a trusted friend.

First U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip "illegal."

Then Annan's office leaked a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon — printed in the March 19 New York Times — denouncing Israel's military actions against the Palestinians, while making only passing reference to the Palestinian terrorism that provoked the attacks. American Jewish leaders reacted with outrage.

Annan's actions "undermine his credibility and confidence in the U.N. Secretariat and further compromise the international body," the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said in a statement.

"We say this with great pain, as we respected the secretary-general and worked closely with him," the 52-member umbrella organization added. "We had much higher expectations of him."

Since Annan took office in 1997, Israel, the United States and American Jewish organizations had considered him a fair arbiter in the United Nations, where the huge Arab and Muslim bloc systematically uses its numbers to persecute Israel, they say.

The Arab states have refused to allow Israel into its natural Asian regional bloc at the United Nations, so Annan helped secure its temporary admission to the Western European and Others Group in May 2000, potentially opening the door for Israel finally to sit on important U.N. bodies.

Annan also was instrumental in confirming Israel's full withdrawal from Lebanon according to U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, rejecting Syrian and Lebanese demands that Israel also withdraw from the Shabaa Farms region of the Golan Heights.

"That's why this leak" is so "surprising" and "aggravating," an official at the Israel Mission to the United Nations said.

"I feel obliged to call your attention to disturbing patterns in the treatment of civilians and humanitarian relief workers by the Israeli Defense Forces," Annan wrote to Sharon, adding that the Israel Defense Force's methods have "come to resemble all-out conventional warfare."

While making no mention of Israeli victims of terror, Annan blasted the process by which "hundreds of innocent noncombatant civilians — men, women and children — have been injured or killed, and many buildings and homes have been damaged or destroyed."

Referring to a staff member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency who was killed when Israeli troops opened fire on an ambulance, Annan wrote, "I am especially dismayed by the IDF's failure to protect and respect ambulances and medical personnel."

He rejected as "unfounded" the "allegations by Israeli government spokespersons that ambulances have been used to smuggle Palestinian militants and weapons."

According to the Conference of Presidents, however, "There is ample documentation, including film footage that has been shown in the media, that more than substantiates this charge."

Annan's latest remarks may have damaged the chances for the United Nations to take a larger role in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a frequent Arab demand.

Unless Annan takes steps to discourage Palestinian terrorism and the incitement that produces it, "it would be far better if the secretary general remain silent and the U.N. stay out of the affairs of the region," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Israel responded to Annan's letter with a statement: "The tactic of using the media for selective criticism, so as to exert pressure on those combating terror rather than on the terrorists and those states supporting them, is at the least counterproductive."

For its part, the United States has no plans to respond to Annan's letter. One U.S. official called the letter "straightforward," and said there are "reasonable" concerns about the protection of civilians, particularly U.N. personnel, in armed conflict. □

P.A. pays \$7 million to U.S.

The Palestinian Authority has paid the United States \$7 million in taxes it assessed on U.S. foreign aid.

After requests from Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), the Palestinian Authority returned the money it had collected as taxes for goods and services purchased by the United States Agency for International Development, which distributed U.S. foreign aid to the West Bank and Gaza, and USAID's grantees and contractors.

The Palestinian Authority previously agreed to grant USAID a tax-free status, but had not paid back taxes collected.

Argentine leader lets rabbi down

A rabbi who met with Argentine President Eduardo Duhalde said Duhalde is not doing enough to arrest those responsible for two bomb attacks against Jewish interests in Buenos Aires.

In a meeting last week, Duhalde linked the perpetrators of the attacks on the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA Jewish community center with the Sept. 11 attacks against the United States, according to Marc Schneier, president of the North American Board of Rabbis. Given Argentina's limited resources, Duhalde told Schneier, it probably will be up to the United States to apprehend the terrorists.

Schneier was in Argentina with Rabbi Israel Singer of the World Jewish Congress to pair North American synagogues with their counterparts in Argentina to provide financial assistance.

Charges don't prevent Oscar

"A Beautiful Mind" overcame charges that it had ignored its main character's anti-Semitism, and won the Oscar for best picture.

The film's main character, mathematician John Nash, said his anti-Semitic ravings resulted from his battle with schizophrenia. The writer of the film, Akiva Goldsman, also won an Oscar.

Moscow to get new JCC

Ground was broken on a new Jewish community center in Moscow. At the Sunday event, the Federation of Jewish Communities also marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of the late Lubavitch rebbe, Menachem Schneerson.

JNF wins Israel Prize

The Jewish National Fund won an Israel Prize for Life Work. The award, which will be presented on April 17 in Jerusalem, is being given to the group on its 100th anniversary. The panel making the award noted the group's efforts in purchasing and reclaiming land, and its contributions to Israeli forests and agricultural development.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Birthright turns to follow-up to keep young adults engaged

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two years ago, Jackie Garonzik was one of the first students to participate in Birthright Israel, the free 10-day trip to Israel for Jewish young adults.

Garonzik, a pre-med student at Johns Hopkins University, came back feeling “a strong pull toward Judaism,” and in the first few months back at school she explored Jewish groups on campus and “would go to Shabbat dinner for a little bit.”

But before long, despite the reunions and the e-mail invitations to Jewish activities at her local Hillel, she recalls, “normal life infiltrated.”

Now on the cusp of graduation, Garonzik still considers the trip “one of the most amazing experiences of my life.”

But, with four busy and expensive years of medical school on the horizon, she doesn't expect to get back to Israel anytime soon. And she doesn't feel her commitment to Judaism has changed since she went on Birthright.

While plenty of Birthright alumni have gone on to be much more involved in Jewish life, Garonzik is hardly alone.

As a result, two years and 28,000 alumni after its launch, Birthright is starting to focus on improving its follow-up efforts.

A splashy and expensive program for Jews aged 18 to 26, Birthright is supported by philanthropists, federations and the State of Israel.

Birthright's backers had hoped the trips would spark lifetime commitments to Judaism and Israel among young Jews who had never before been to Israel on an organized trip.

But until now, the program — preoccupied with issues like recruitment and security, especially in the wake of the Palestinian intifada — has focused on little more than the trips themselves.

“There's no question that no matter what we tried to do in terms of follow-up, it fell short of what we needed to do,” said Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, executive vice president of Birthright's North American operations.

“The telling point of whether this extraordinary project has been worth it will be what the alumni do when they come back,” Zimmerman said. “We haven't been set up to do anything with that yet, though we have made some meager attempts.”

Until now, Birthright has funded a handful of pilot follow-up projects throughout North America, and many of the 20 groups that run its trips have also made efforts.

Now, Birthright is hoping to spearhead something larger and more systemic.

It recently hired Barry Chazan, an education professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to oversee follow-up programming.

Chazan will move to New York for two years, with the goal of bringing various organizations together and developing more coordinated efforts for Birthright alumni.

At the end of the two years, Chazan hopes to see hundreds of “terrific, diverse, local kinds of connections and links” for alumni, as well as a “national partnership of key agencies that deal with this age group that are working together.”

Speaking by phone from Jerusalem, Chazan also stressed the importance of engaging alumni themselves in the planning process.

Birthright is currently surveying trip providers and community organizers to find out what sorts of follow-up programming already exist for alumni, according to Simon Klarfeld, vice president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, one of Birthright's founding partners and a key player in the follow-up plans.

It hopes eventually to circulate a “best-practices” guide, he said.

In addition, it is exploring how different types of trips might more effectively engage participants in the long term, particularly participants who are not on campuses and easily reached.

Klarfeld said Birthright is “trying to find out who's out there already doing programming” for Jews in their 20s, then match them with alumni, “rather than Birthright becoming the programming arm for 20- and 30-somethings.”

Birthright is also exploring offering more “niche trips,” Klarfeld said, such as ones for law students or young lawyers, or for people interested in particular topics, like social justice, peace and coexistence or the environment.

Some Birthright alumni have gone on to greater Jewish involvement — whether returning to Israel for volunteer or study programs, becoming Jewish activists on campus or, in the case of some participants on programs sponsored by religious outreach groups and religious movements, becoming more religiously observant.

According to a new study commissioned by Birthright, alumni a year after the trip — particularly those who are college students — do tend to think and behave differently from peers who didn't travel to Israel.

For example, they are more likely to believe it is important to raise their children as Jews and to be involved in campus Jewish activities.

However, they are no more likely to participate in ritual activities, such as holiday observances. And they are still not overwhelmingly involved in Jewish activities — only 24 percent of the students report that they often participate in campus Jewish activities.

What happens after the one-year mark still remains to be studied.

The challenges to keeping Birthright alumni involved are significant — finding the human resources to offer personal attention to alumni, offering compelling programming that can compete with non-Jewish activities and interests and simply maintaining the correct contact information for a highly transient demographic group.

Israel trips are a “jump-start to Jewish life,” said Rabbi Shlomo Gestetner, executive director of Mayanot, a Lubavitch group that has run Birthright trips for 2,000 young people.

But “the bottom line is that it's 19, 20, 21 years of disengagement, then 10 days in Israel, then they go back to regular life and it's parties, boyfriends and a life not necessarily engaged in Judaism,” Gestetner said.

Chabad-Lubavitch houses throughout the country have run various programs for Birthright-Mayanot alumni, and the alumni receive regular e-mail newsletters. But Gestetner said the group lacks the manpower to keep up with everyone in as meaningful or personal manner as it would like.

“Ultimately it really boils down to people and that's a lot of work,” Gestetner said. “E-newsletters are great, chat rooms are great, but it is limited.” □