



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 92

Friday, May 17, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon: Appoint new P.A. gov't

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon urged the international community to appoint an interim Palestinian government. The government would be in office for a year and carry out sweeping reforms, Sharon's foreign policy adviser, Danny Ayalon, confirmed Thursday.

Sharon proposed that the new government be established even against the Palestinians' wishes, according to the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot*. "The free world must force this government on the Palestinians," the paper quoted him as saying.

P.A. lawmakers demand reform

A panel of Palestinian legislators demanded that new elections be held within a year. Thursday's demand came as part of a package of reforms to overhaul the Palestinian Authority.

The legislators also called on Arafat to appoint a new Cabinet within 45 days. The list of demands was drafted by a committee of eight legislators, and was to be presented to the full Parliament for approval in coming days, lawmaker Ziad Abu Amr told *The Associated Press*.

Marriage amendment debated

Orthodox Jewish groups in the United States support a constitutional amendment defining marriage as "the union of a man and a woman."

Agudath Israel of America said the Federal Marriage Amendment, introduced Wednesday in the U.S. House of Representatives, was needed because some courts have granted legal recognition to same-sex unions. The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism denounced the amendment, calling it a "stain on America's promise of equal rights to all."

France boycott opposed

A boycott of France is not the way to deal with rising anti-Semitic attacks there, the American Jewish Committee said.

Instead, the organization is "encouraging those with plans to travel to France to include visits to synagogues and other contacts with French Jews to demonstrate our support for them and their community, the largest Jewish population in Europe, and to use every other opportunity to show concern in a constructive manner."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Bush officials and Jewish leaders say Likud vote won't affect policy

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Likud Party vote against the establishment of a Palestinian state may have been a propaganda coup for the Palestinian Authority, but it is not likely to affect U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East.

"When the history of this conflict is written, the Likud vote is not going to show up," one Bush administration official said. He said the vote does not reflect the view of Israeli centrists, and the American government understands that.

Over the opposition of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Likud Party voted Sunday in favor of a resolution opposing the creation of any future Palestinian state. The resolution was spearheaded by Benjamin Netanyahu, the former prime minister, who is seeking to regain the party leadership.

The fight between the two leaders, and the party's adoption of the resolution, has painted Sharon as a centrist, administration officials say.

"It illustrates to what extent Sharon pays a domestic price when he makes concessions," a State Department official said. "It puts his views into context."

Amid concern in the Bush administration that Netanyahu will unseat Sharon before the next elections, some say the vote emphasizes the opportunity the Bush administration has to work toward peace before a more hard-line government takes power in Israel.

Sharon's Likud Party holds 19 seats in the Knesset and is the senior partner in the national unity government, but the party platform is not the political agenda of the Israeli government. Administration officials liken the struggle to internal battles within the Republican and Democratic parties of the United States that often do not reflect the views of the majority of the population.

Sean McCormack, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said the White House is working from Sharon's stated policies, which include support for a Palestinian state within certain parameters.

Sharon said after the Central Committee meeting that he would not be bound by the vote. But some say the episode heightens concerns that Sharon himself does not favor a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I look at it as a confirmation of the assumption that there is a certain lack of sincerity on the part of the Sharon government when it says it eventually wants to get to peace negotiations with the Palestinians," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

He says Israel's parliamentary system — in which the government can be brought down by a no-confidence vote in the Knesset — makes the vote more significant than an internal squabble within a U.S. political party, and might put Sharon under more pressure to concede to the party's Central Committee for fear of losing his leadership position to Netanyahu.

But other Jewish leaders say they believe the Bush administration will not read too much into the vote. And they believe public sentiment for Israel will not dampen because of the resolution either.

"There is a difference between party platforms and political outcomes, and Americans understand that," said Martin Raffel, associate executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Jewish leaders admit, however, that those who want to disparage Israel will find ammunition in the vote by the Likud. "There's no question that this vote, to the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian officer killed in raid

Israeli forces killed a suspected Palestinian terrorist and arrested some 20 others during raids Thursday in the West Bank.

The slain Palestinian, a member of the Palestinian Authority security forces, was killed in a raid in Ramallah.

Reports: Bomber went as woman

The suicide bomber who carried out the "Pass-over Massacre" was disguised as a woman, Israeli newspapers reported Thursday. Ha'aretz and Yediot Achronot based their reports on the testimony of Abbas Sayad, the Hamas commander in Tulkarm who was arrested last week by Israeli forces.

Along with admitting that he masterminded the attack, Sayad told interrogators that the bomber, Abdel Bassat Odeh, shaved his beard, put on makeup and a wig, and wore high-heels when carrying out the March 27 attack in a Netanya hotel.

Peace plan divides Labor

The leader of Israel's Labor Party came under fire for offering to divide Jerusalem and give up control of the Temple Mount in a future peace deal with the Palestinians.

Labor leader Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, who also serves as defense minister in the unity government, presented his peace plan at a conference of Labor officials on Wednesday. As part of the plan, he said he was willing to divide Jerusalem, with Israel giving up Arab neighborhoods in the city. He also said he was ready to drop Israel's claim of sovereignty over the Temple Mount.

Ben-Eliezer's rival for the party leadership, legislator Haim Ramon, said Thursday that the defense minister had made a "dramatic mistake" by presenting the plan in detail, arguing that it would force Israel to make further concessions.

unsophisticated eye, can look like a foreclosure by the Likud on the notion of a Palestinian state," one Jewish leader said.

Raffel said he believes emotions are raw in Israel, and that this vote emphasizes Israeli leaders' continuing frustration with the Palestinian Authority and its president, Yasser Arafat.

The Palestinian Authority immediately seized on the vote, saying it unmasked Israel's true intentions. Israel is not really fighting Palestinian terror, P.A. officials said, but instead is seeking to impose its domination on the Palestinians and subvert their wish for independence.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said the vote is not significant because the question of a Palestinian state is not immediately on the table.

Sharon said last week at the White House that the notion of a Palestinian state was "premature." Israel has said terrorism must end and security be enforced before it can begin talking about a Palestinian state.

"We don't have to make a decision right now, nor do they believe that never means never," Hoenlein said, referring to the Likud voters.

However, the White House has stressed the need for a Palestinian state as part of its vision for an end to the Mideast conflict.

"The president continues to believe that the best route to peace is through the creation of a state of Palestine that can live side by side in security with Israel," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Monday. "That's what the president believes, and that's what the president will continue to push for."

Jewish leaders say the American Jewish community needs to get the message out that the vote does not mean Israel is abandoning moves toward peace.

"We need to continually remind people that if the Palestinians behave responsibly, we are confident that the Israeli government will be interested in negotiations," one Jewish leader said.

For now, however, most believe that Israel is still winning the public relations war in the United States.

"A suicide bomber hurts the credibility of the Palestinians more than a Likud Party vote hurts the credibility of Israel," the Jewish leader said. □

It's a 'slam dunk' for rabbi: Zagreb Jews will get a mikvah

By Vlasta Kovac

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — The largely secular Jewish community here is about to get a mikvah.

The ritual bath is the brainchild of the country's chief — and only — rabbi, Kotel Da-Don, 33, who came to Zagreb three years ago.

Da-Don, the first rabbi in Croatia since 1947, plans to raise money abroad for the project, which may be completed as early as this fall.

Since Da-Don arrived, 20 people have approached him about converting to Judaism, and he has helped six convert.

"They all had to go abroad because there is no ritual bath here in Zagreb," he told JTA. "If there were one, then the Jewish court could sit here in Zagreb and convert whoever needs to" be converted.

In addition, he said, "There are at least 10 women in Zagreb whom I know about that would go to the mikvah every month if there were one here."

The mikvah is the latest evidence that Croatian Jews are moving toward a more traditional Judaism.

The Jewish identity of this generation stemmed from the Holocaust stories they were told. Now, for their grandchildren, Jewish life is becoming more present — and positive.

When Da-Don arrived in Zagreb, many in the 1,500-member community were wary of having an Orthodox rabbi in a community where few are Orthodox.

But the young rabbi, who was born and raised in Israel and received a master's degree in law in Hungary, has won some people over, in part by learning Croatian. □



Daily News Bulletin

Shoshana S. Cardin, *Chairman of the Board*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Finance and Administration Director*

Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

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.

© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Class would back Palestinians

Officials at the University of California at Berkeley are reviewing a class taught by a pro-Palestinian activist.

The move came after Snehal Shingavi, a fifth-year graduate student in English, included in the description for his undergraduate course a reference to "the brutal Israeli military occupation of Palestine" and charged that it has been "ongoing since 1948." It also contained a warning that "conservative thinkers are encouraged to seek other sections."

The description of the course, "The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance," also said there would be no debate about the right of Palestinians to fight for their own self-determination.

German party comes under fire

German Jewish leaders criticized a political party's decision to accept the membership of a politician who has made anti-Semitic statements. The Free Democratic Party is one of Germany's largest parties and stands a chance to share power in a coalition government after German national elections in September.

The party decided on Wednesday to welcome former Green Party member Jamal Karsli, who recently spoken about "justifiable fears" of an international "Zionist lobby."

NASA fears terror attack

A space shuttle that will carry an Israeli astronaut in July could become a target for a terror attack, NASA officials fear. Although American intelligence services have not received a specific warning, sources at the U.S. space agency told ABC-TV they are worried that the shuttle, whose crew will include Col. Ilan Ramon, could be targeted.

According to the television report, NASA is concerned terrorists may try to crash a small plane into the shuttle while it is still on the launching pad.

Torah returned to Russian Jews

A Torah scroll was returned to a Russian Jewish community. After receiving the Torah from authorities last week, Jews in the city of Perm dedicated it in the city's synagogue.

Comedian helps Israel fund

Money from a from a play running in New York will be donated to a fund for Israel. At the urging of Alan King, currently starring in the title role of "Mr. Goldwyn," \$25 from the sale of each ticket from the May 21-May 25 and May 28-June 1 performances will be donated to the United Jewish Communities' Israel Emergency Fund. The campaign was created as a response to help Israelis during the ongoing violence.

Reform group plans to publish new women's Torah commentary

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Amid a growing interest in Jewish women's studies, a Reform group is commissioning what will be the most comprehensive women's Torah commentary ever.

Announced days before Shavuot, the holiday celebrating the giving of the Torah, the book will be written entirely by women and is expected to take about five years to complete.

Edited by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, a professor of Bible at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, the Women of Reform Judaism-sponsored commentary will consist of contributions from a range of Jewish women scholars.

"We want to bring the women of the Torah from the shadows into the limelight, from their silences into speech, from the margins to which they have often been relegated to the center of the page," Eskenazi said in a recent speech describing the project.

A number of books have been published in the past decade addressing women in the Bible and offering women's perspectives on the Bible. However, the new book will be the first "classical" women's commentary, according to Eskenazi, meaning that it will cover individual Torah portions in their entirety.

Each portion will involve a number of different writers and will contain an overview, followed by the biblical text in Hebrew and English, a central commentary and additional voices.

Although under Reform auspices, the project will solicit submissions from women of all streams of Judaism.

Organizers say that while all the authors will be women and much of the focus will be on gender issues in the Bible, the book is intended to be used by men as well.

It is not intended to replace the Reform movement's Torah commentary, edited by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, but to serve as a supplement.

"Just like Adam really needed a companion in order to make his life complete, so Eve was created, we feel that to make the Torah speak to today's men and women you need a companion to Plaut's commentary," said Ellen Rosenberg, executive director of Women of Reform Judaism.

If the experience of previous women's Torah commentaries is any indicator, the book should sell well.

"The Women's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions," edited by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, is one of the top sellers of the Vermont-based Jewish Lights Publishing.

Stuart Matlins, the company's publisher, declined to offer specific sales numbers. But he said Goldstein's book, which came out two years ago, is "extremely popular, and not just among women."

Responding to a growing interest in Jewish women's issues, Jewish Lights recently created a separate category in its catalog specifically for women's interest books.

"The more women's commentaries, the better," said Goldstein, who is director of Kolot: The Adult Centre for Liberal Jewish Learning in Toronto and is working on a book with women's perspectives on the Haftarah.

Such books, Goldstein said, are particularly important for Bat Mitzvah girls, who "need a lot of role modeling." They also offer new perspectives on women's issues in the Bible, such as the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, she said.

Lori Lefkowitz, academic director of Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, said she welcomed the commentary, as well as other recent women's works on the Bible.

"What these new commentaries have shown us is that what women bring to the text is a different sensibility, a different set of experiences and different questions, even if they are not writing as women per se," Lefkowitz said.

"They twist the lens of the material so that we notice different things, we see other emphases, we recover lost traditions and we hear voices that have been quieter." □

ISRAEL'S ARAB MINORITY**Comptroller blasts government over its handling of the Bedouin***By Ori Nir*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's state comptroller has joined the harsh criticism that academics and civic activists have been voicing for years over government policy toward the country's Bedouin minority.

In a typical, understated tone but peppered with damning facts and figures, the comptroller's annual report, released recently, shows how the Bedouin community has grown in numbers and needs since the state was established — and how government after government put these needs on the back burner.

Today, after years of neglect, the Bedouin community in the Negev Desert suffers from a higher rate of poverty than the overall population, higher rates of crime, drugs and unemployment, worse health and education services, and appalling infrastructure.

"You neglect what is basically a loyal, quiet, nonpoliticized population, and it ends up exploding in your face. There is no way around it," says Thabet abu-Ras of Ben-Gurion University, an expert on the Bedouins.

It is a rather quiet explosion, with no big demonstrations or violent riots, just a silent but steady process of alienation. Bedouins now share, for the most part, the antagonistic, estranged approach that most Israeli Arabs have toward the Jewish state.

Once, most Bedouin voters supported Zionist parties, particularly Labor.

In 1992, 17 percent of Bedouin voters chose the Labor Party, but only 9 percent did so in the 1996 elections.

In recent elections, most Bedouin voted for Arab parties, mainly the one that includes Israel's radical Islamic movement.

Once, most young Bedouin men volunteered for military service. Today, only a handful of Negev Bedouin volunteer; unofficial accounts talk about a mere dozen in 2001.

Once, the Negev Bedouin were apolitical, almost unexposed to Arab nationalism. Today, they express opinions that often are more militant than their Arab brethren in the Galilee.

A poll taken among Israeli Arabs last year showed that the Bedouin community feels more estranged from the state than do Arab citizens in the north. Forty-two percent said they reject Israel's right to exist, compared with 16 percent in the non-Bedouin Arab sector.

The population of Bedouin in the Negev, which today numbers about 130,000, has grown more than 10-fold since 1948. Half of them live in seven townships that the state built between 1966 and 1990, and half live in a multitude of small villages, farms and tiny tent-and-shack communities, which are unplanned and unrecognized by the state.

Land ownership in the unrecognized communities is disputed. The Bedouins who live there and work some of the land claim ownership. A minority say they can prove their legal ownership with documents from the Ottoman and British governments that ruled Palestine before Israel's founding, while most claim a historical right of possession.

In 1976, the first Rabin government approved a set of terms and criteria to settle land disputes with the Bedouin, but most of the land still remains in dispute.

Since then, Bedouins have illegally invaded vast areas of state

land. The state demolishes some of their new, unlicensed buildings, and does not effectively enforce the law. When it does, it sometimes uses force, which further alienates the population.

In February, the Israel Land Authority hired seven light airplanes, which sprayed chemicals to destroy Bedouin crops on disputed land.

Bedouin leaders say they aren't opposed, in principle, to settling the disputes, but demand reasonable compensation for land they have occupied for generations.

The state comptroller's report criticizes the government — indeed, all governments since the mid-1970s — for not having tried to settle these disputes, and for not supplying reasonable infrastructure and services to the recognized townships.

Ya'akov Katz, director of the Bedouin Administration, the agency that executes government policy for the Bedouin community, said that the comptroller's description of previous governments' handling of Bedouin issues was precise.

"Unfortunately, not enough attention was given to their issues through the years," he said. However, Katz said he does expect to see a major breakthrough soon in regards to land settlements with the Bedouins.

The townships were intended to serve as magnets for the Bedouins, who for many generations have been gradually abandoning their nomadic way of life. Bedouins were expected to seize the opportunity to live in permanent homes, with running water and electricity, roads, a sewage system and comfortable community services such as schools and health clinics.

But the townships were built with minimal investment. Most homes are not connected to a sewage system and suffer from an unreliable water supply and damaged road system.

Infrastructure in all seven townships has been little improved since they were built, according to the report.

Without a reasonable infrastructure, no industry and hardly any land reserves for farming, these townships have become havens of unemployment, crime and drugs.

"How can you expect such sorry communities to attract anyone?" says Yosef Ben-David of Hebrew University, a veteran scholar of Bedouin society. "What is happening is an opposite process: People who moved into the townships are now returning to the farms, to the unrecognized villages."

This return to a traditional, semi-nomadic way of life is not only the result of governmental negligence. It also is a natural reaction of a society that has gone through a metamorphosis that proved faster and more dramatic than it could handle.

"This is a society that is used to slow changes," explains Alayan al-Kreinawi, director of the Center for the Study of Bedouin Society at Ben-Gurion University. "It does not have the tools to adjust to a globalized modern society, while trying to hold on to its religious and cultural tradition."

Experts say the inability of Bedouin parents to cope with the changes impacts their children, who make up the majority of the Bedouin population. The Bedouin sector is the youngest in Israeli society, with a natural annual growth rate of 5.5 percent, compared with 2.6 percent for the overall population.

About 54 percent of the Bedouin population is younger than 14, compared with 29 percent among the overall population.

Most Bedouin households number eight to 10 people, and they are much poorer than the overall population. They have a higher unemployment rate, and a higher number who earn less than the minimum wage. □