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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon calls for early elections

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called for early elections Tuesday after failing to form a new government. Sharon met with President Moshe Katsav and asked that the Knesset be dissolved and elections held within 90 days.

Sharon's decision came after he was unable to accept the demands set by the right-wing National Union-Israel Our Home bloc as conditions for joining the government.

Announcing new elections, Sharon said he refused to bow to "political extortion" while courting partners for a new coalition. [Pages 3, 4]

Netanyahu accepts Sharon offer

Benjamin Netanyahu accepted Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's offer to serve as foreign minister until early elections are held in February. Netanyahu's announcement came hours after Sharon dissolved the Knesset and called for early elections.

Netanyahu is expected to be sworn in as foreign minister Wednesday, according to Israel Radio. In recent talks with Sharon, Netanyahu had set early elections as a condition for joining the government. Though Sharon previously rejected the conditions set by Netanyahu, the prime minister told a news conference Tuesday he would welcome Netanyahu into his Cabinet. [Pages 3, 4]

8 nabbed for shul attack

French officials arrested eight suspects in connection with a synagogue attack earlier this year in Tunisia. The suspects were arrested near Lyon in southern France and are being questioned by agents from France's counterintelligence service, according to French authorities.

Nineteen people, including 14 German tourists, were killed in April after a gas truck exploded when it rammed a wall protecting the Ghriba Synagogue on the Tunisian island of Jerba. In June, a spokesman for Al-Qaida said the terror network was responsible for the attack.

One of the arrested this week was identified as Walid Naouar, the brother of the man believed to have been driving the truck.

Naouar's parents and three people close to the family were among the others detained, a French official said.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Influential coalition wants to end taboo against promoting inmarriage

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rena Mello grew up Catholic, but she and her Jewish husband, Eric Lippman, are raising their son and daughter as Jews.

Before marrying, the Cambridge, Mass., pair joined an interfaith couples group at an area Reform synagogue and attended High Holiday services at Harvard's Hillel.

Today they send their 3-year-old son, Evan, to a local Jewish Community Center preschool, celebrate only the Jewish holidays and light Shabbat candles on Friday nights.

Though the 33-year-old Mello is committed to living a Jewish life, she isn't considering conversion.

"I don't feel Judaism has become enough part of my identity — yet," she says.

But for a new loosely knit group of influential Jewish lay leaders, rabbis and academics, Mello would be among the prime — and highly controversial — targets of a campaign to stem the intermarriage tide engulfing American Jewry.

The group aims to:

- advocate Jewish endogamy, or inmarriage;
- urge non-Jewish partners of interfaith couples to convert to Judaism; and
- ensure interfaith couples raise their children in "unambiguously Jewish" homes.

"Just as we want to welcome those who want to be Jewishly involved but are married to non-Jews, we must also send out a parallel message that Jews should marry Jews," says Steven M. Cohen, a professor at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who is affiliated with the effort.

That dual message may not sound revolutionary. At one time Jewish parents and communal leaders expected young Jews to marry within the faith, or urged conversion if Jews married non-Jews.

But those taboos eroded among all but the Orthodox in the past few decades as intermarriage rates soared, those behind this effort contend.

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey found that more than 50 percent of Jews who had married in the five previous years had married out.

Now, the much-anticipated NJPS 2001-2002 is widely expected to reveal little change when the new data is revealed later this month in Philadelphia at the General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities.

This growing acceptance of interfaith unions was born out of American Jewry's increasing assimilation into mainstream society, and by a desire not to alienate the intermarried or their families, group members say.

"Almost every American Jewish family has been touched either directly or indirectly by intermarriage, so the tendency to not offend" interfaith couples and their families is "extra strong," says Robert Lappin, a developer and former president of the Jewish Federation of the North Shore of Boston.

That reluctance is "coupled with the unfortunate truth that many Jews consider encouragement" of inmarriage bigoted, Lappin says.

Indeed, an American Jewish Committee survey released in November 2001 found that half of the American Jews polled called it "racist" to oppose intermarriage, while 78 percent backed rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings.

Under Lappin's presidency, the North Shore federation became one of the few in the United States to back a strong inmarriage stance while devoting resources to Jewish education and outreach. Four years ago, the federation approved a resolution urging

MIDEAST FOCUS

2 Palestinians killed in clash

Two Palestinian gunmen were killed and 15 others injured during a dash with Israeli soldiers Tuesday in the Gaza Strip. The army said the soldiers came under machine gun and anti-tank fire at a military checkpoint near Rafah in southern Gaza.

4 terror cell members plead guilty

Four members of a Jerusalem-based Hamas terrorist cell pleaded guilty to multiple murder charges.

The four were convicted Tuesday by a Jerusalem court on charges they were behind a series of three deadly attacks over the last six months that killed 35 Israelis and wounded hundreds of others.

Among the attacks was the July 31 bombing at Hebrew University in which nine people were killed and more than 80 wounded.

Prosecutors are asking that the defendants be sentenced to between nine and 35 life terms in prison.

2 immigrants died in attack

Two Argentine immigrants to Israel were killed in Monday's suicide bombing in Kfar Saba. The two were killed and more than 30 others injured when the suicide bomber set off his explosives at an electronics store in a shopping mall.

One of those killed was a 51-year-old security guard who prevented the terrorist from entering the mall.

He immigrated to Israel less than a year ago, Israel Radio reported.

The other was a 15-year-old student who lived at an absorption center in Ra'anana.

Nineteen of the wounded remained hospitalized Tuesday, one in serious condition. Islamic Jihad, which claimed responsibility for the attack, identified the bomber as a resident of the Balata refugee camp near Nablus.

Jewish parents to encourage their children to "marry Jewish," while also supporting interfaith couples' efforts to raise Jewish children and "encouraging non-Jewish spouses to convert."

Steven Bayme, national director of contemporary Jewish life for the American Jewish Committee, who says he "sympathizes" with the new group's goals, says he fears that "the Jewish community is rapidly approaching a point of communal neutrality towards mixed marriage rather than its historical stance of promoting inmarriage."

This indifference has also reshaped the agenda for rabbis in the more liberal movements, where intermarriage runs deep, and for lay leaders in Jewish organizations, group members say. Rabbis in the Conservative and Reform movements, which claim the majority of affiliated Jews, say they have found it impossible to publicly urge inmarriage or conversion without suffering a congregational backlash.

"Rabbis are not free, communal leaders are not completely free, to say what we think about everything," says Rabbi Avis Miller, of Adas Israel Congregation, a Conservative congregation in Washington, and a group member.

Now this coalition hopes to remove the barriers to inmarriage by placing these issues atop the national communal agenda.

"There are people who share these concerns, but they usually say it privately," says Shoshana Cardin, the former chairwoman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, who is leading the coalition.

"I would like to remove that sense of rebuke."

Cardin, the Baltimore-based honorary vice president of the AJCommittee, and chair of JTA's board of directors, has organized several meetings with about 20 activists to advance the initiative.

The coalition, which also includes Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and Reform Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin of the Community Synagogue in Port Washington, N.Y., hopes to compile educational materials and programs promoting its goals, she says, and is seeking funding for such efforts.

Already Lappin has agreed to add \$100,000 in matching funds over the next two years. These calls for cultural change toward inmarriage and conversion first grew out of a private conference many of the group's members held at the AJCommittee's New York offices in March 2001.

That session produced a call for Jewish leaders to renew support for inmarriage, conversion of non-Jewish members of interfaith couples and clearly Jewish homes, says Lynn Korda-Kroll, chairwoman of the AJCommittee's commission on contemporary Jewish life, who organized the event and is involved in the new group.

While many of those at the meeting say the group's initial statement virtually mirrored the AJCommittee's platform, the organization did not sign on.

"This particular initiative is not the right fit at this time," says David Harris, AJCommittee's executive director.

Mimi Alperin, a member of the AJCommittee's executive committee who is involved in the new group, remains critical of the organization's hesitancy.

The executive committee "didn't want to be front and center on this issue," she says.

That reluctance is shaped partly because many members of Jewish organizations are "personally involved" with intermarriage, she says.

"It's like policy by anecdote," she says. "Someone would say that their daughter-in-law isn't Jewish, but she's raising her kids Jewish, so everything is hunky-dory."

Alperin said the AJCommittee first approached the issue by looking at a study conducted by Sylvia Barack Fishman, an associate professor of contemporary Jewish life at Brandeis University.

The study, titled "Jewish and Something Else: A Study of Mixed-Marriage Families," surveyed 254 couples nationwide, two thirds of whom were in mixed marriages.

Of those couples, 63 percent maintained they were raising their children as Jews.

But Barack Fishman, who is writing a book about the study, contends these couples were doing little that was Jewish and were following some Christian traditions.

Meanwhile, for more than a decade, the Reform and Conservative movements have led outreach efforts for interfaith couples, often in the shape of introduction to Judaism classes and support groups. □



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JEWISH WORLD

JDL leader declared brain dead

A jailed leader of the Jewish Defense League was declared brain dead after making what police described as a suicide attempt.

Authorities said Irv Rubin, 57, used a razor to slit his neck and then fell or jumped from a prison balcony on Monday as he and other inmates lined up for breakfast.

The incident occurred hours before he was scheduled to appear in court for a hearing in his case. Rubin was arrested in December 2001 for conspiring to bomb a mosque and an Arab American representative's office in Los Angeles.

The JDL and Rubin's family questioned whether Rubin's wounds were self-inflicted and called for a full investigation.

U.S. warns firms about boycott

The U.S. Commerce Department warned American companies not to support a renewed Arab boycott of Israel.

In a statement issued Monday, the department said it is "strongly opposed to restrictive trade practices or boycotts targeted at Israel."

The 1951 Arab boycott has not been active for almost a decade, following the start of the Oslo peace process.

Last week, however, 18 members of the Arab League pledged to reactivate the ban.

JCC confab in Russia

A JCC conference is being held this week near Moscow.

The event, organized by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, is bringing together Jewish professionals from around the world to discuss how JCCs can enrich Jewish life in the former Soviet Union.

Barenboim honored in Germany

Pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim was honored with a tolerance prize by a school in southern Germany.

The Protestant Academy of Tutzing in the German state of Bavaria honored Barenboim on Sunday for his efforts at reconciliation between Israelis and Arabs.

In 1999, Barenboim cofounded a youth orchestra for Arabs and Israelis in the eastern German city of Weimar. In September, Barenboim sparked controversy in Israel when he performed in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

At Sunday's ceremony, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer presented the prize worth nearly \$10,000, calling Barenboim "a tireless wanderer between two worlds, and a fighter for humanity."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli parties racing the clock as countdown to elections begins

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's decision to call early elections, Israel's political parties entered a race against the clock to organize for a lightning campaign.

Elections are due to be held within 90 days — Jan. 28 was mentioned as a possible date — leaving parties less than three months to organize, hold internal elections to choose their leaders and submit their Knesset lists within 45 days of the national election.

Labor Party leadership primaries already are scheduled for Nov. 19. Sharon's Likud Party is expected to hold its own vote shortly thereafter.

Unlike the last three national elections, voting for the 16th Knesset will be for political parties only, without a separate ballot for prime minister. After the election, President Moshe Katsav will give one Knesset member — usually the leader of the party winning the most seats — the chance to form a government.

Following Sharon's election in 2001, the Knesset voted to change the system of direct elections for prime minister, restoring the one-vote parliamentary system that had operated until 1996. Advocates hoped the reform would lead to more stability, as the direct election system had strengthened the political influence of smaller, special-interest parties at the expense of the larger parties. Indeed, none of the three prime ministers elected under the direct election system — Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak and Sharon — managed to serve a full term.

Both Likud and Labor hope their Knesset representation will be significantly boosted by the return to the old system. Both parties lost seats when citizens could cast separate votes for prime minister and Knesset representation.

Following Sharon's declaration of early elections, Netanyahu announced he would agree to serve as foreign minister in the outgoing government. Netanyahu, who plans to challenge Sharon in the Likud leadership primaries, had conditioned his acceptance on the holding of early elections. Sharon had rejected the demand earlier this week. At his news conference Tuesday, however, he said his offer to Netanyahu still stood, provided Netanyahu didn't present any new conditions.

Netanyahu was to be sworn in as foreign minister on Wednesday, formally marking his political comeback three and a half years after he was tossed out of the prime minister's office in a landslide in May 1999 elections.

Netanyahu appealed to Sharon to work together and engage in a fair campaign for party leadership, declaring that "together we will move toward a big victory for the Likud and for the country."

The two were due to meet Wednesday to seek a date for Likud primaries.

Sharon reportedly favors holding the primaries as soon as possible, while Netanyahu wants at least a month to organize and get his message out, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported. According to the paper, a runoff in the Likud is not out of the question, as far-right activist Moshe Feiglin, who previously headed the Zo Artzeinu, or This Is Our Land, movement, also may throw his hat into the ring.

Meanwhile, at a conference at Labor Party headquarters, party chairman Benjamin Ben-Eliezer declared that if Labor wins, it will alter national priorities so that settlements do not receive special benefits at the expense of other sectors.

Responding to Sharon's accusation that Labor's "political caprice" was to blame for the fall of the national unity government last week, Ben-Eliezer retorted that Sharon alone bore responsibility for the collapse.

"Last week's dispute was about preference for development towns," and for "pensioners, students and young people and settlements," Ben-Eliezer said.

He also said that Sharon had no accomplishments after 20 months in power — although, until last week, Ben-Eliezer was his right-hand man during that entire period.

Ben-Eliezer is being challenged for Labor Party leadership by two more dovish candidates, Knesset member Haim Ramon and Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna. Polls show him trailing both challengers. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Early elections hold promise and peril for Israel's Sharon*By Leslie Susser*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Early elections may not have been Ariel Sharon's first choice, but his decision to go to the polls as soon as possible enables the savvy Israeli prime minister to make a number of political and diplomatic gains.

By calling the shots, Sharon comes across as a powerful leader still setting the national agenda. By calling elections for late January or early February, he makes it difficult for the Labor Party, which left his government only last week, to establish itself as a credible opposition force.

In addition, by rejecting the idea of a narrow government with the far-right National Union-Israel Our Home bloc, Sharon avoids a potential showdown with Washington and retains the consensual, middle-of-the-road image that has made him so popular in Israel.

The Sharon government's last order of business will be to pass, as soon as possible and without amendments, the 2003 budget over which Labor ostensibly left the coalition last week.

All other major policy issues likely will be on hold until after the elections.

In the run-up to an expected American attack on Iraq, Sharon is unlikely to undertake any military moves against the Palestinians that might upset Washington.

For the same reason, he is unlikely to move on the American "road map" for peace with the Palestinians, arguing that such major policy issues should be left to the post-election government.

What the early election gambit fails to do is catch Sharon's rival for Likud Party leadership, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, unprepared. In fact, Sharon's announcement Tuesday that he would go to elections within 90 days followed a weekend of dramatic maneuvering between Sharon and Netanyahu, two political masters.

Sharon had hoped to trap Netanyahu by offering him the Foreign Ministry: Either he would accept and tie his fate to Sharon's government, or he would refuse and appear more interested in his own political destiny than in the national welfare.

The move seemed to backfire, however, when Netanyahu outflanked Sharon by accepting the post — on the condition that Sharon move for early elections.

On Monday, the prime minister rejected the condition, calling it "irresponsible."

The very next day, however, Sharon notified President Moshe Katsav of his intention to go to elections — making the decision his own, rather than the product of pressure from Netanyahu.

For good measure, Sharon blamed the decision on political blackmail by the far-right parties, displaying the centrist tack he will take in his re-election campaign against challengers he will portray as too extreme from both the right and the left.

Netanyahu then accepted the Foreign Ministry offer, arguing that Sharon had met his main condition.

For Netanyahu, too, it's not a bad development. As foreign minister, he would approach the election for party leader — which will be held before the national elections — from the best possible position, political analyst Sima Kadmon wrote in the Israeli daily paper *Yediot Achronot*: holding a "senior, made-to-measure post, with the backing of the government of Israel to go round the world

expressing his views, after having successfully fixed an agreed date for the end of Sharon's current tenure."

Netanyahu has been working intensely on his political comeback since leaving politics after his landslide loss to Ehud Barak in May 1999. In the recent Likud membership drive, which brought in a total of 305,000 members, he seemed to have the edge over Sharon. Polls of Likud members, who will elect the party's leader and candidate for prime minister, give Netanyahu a slight lead.

Sharon had hoped to keep his government going, one way or another, for a few months longer. Displaying steady leadership during a time of crisis, such as the expected American attack on Iraq, would allow him to open a sizeable lead over Netanyahu, Sharon believed.

But Sharon soon realized the scenario wasn't possible, at least on his own terms.

Trying to cobble together a new government after Labor's defection last week, the prime minister found himself caught in a tangle of political and diplomatic contradictions: If he moved to the right, he ran the risk of confrontation with Washington. But unless he moved to the right, his chances of forming a stable coalition were slim.

His determination to avoid antagonizing Washington made it almost impossible for Sharon to satisfy the demands of potential right-wing coalition partners. Early on in the government crisis, Sharon assured the Bush administration that he would not change the government guidelines worked out with the Labor Party in March 2001 or retract his support for the Bush vision of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

But that is precisely what the National Union-Israel Our Home faction was demanding. And there was another, even more difficult hurdle to an agreement: The leader of National Union-Israel Our Home, Avigdor Lieberman, insisted that Sharon promise to set up another narrow right-wing government after the next elections.

Sharon's answer was swift. Rejecting Lieberman's condition, he said he preferred another national unity government with Labor after elections. That was the signal for early elections.

In the government's remaining 90 days, Netanyahu and the new defense minister, the former army chief of staff, Shaul Mofaz, might try to coerce Sharon into expelling Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, a move all three ostensibly favor.

As America prepares an anticipated attack on Iraq, however, Sharon is unlikely to do anything to antagonize Washington or inflame the Arab world. The Americans' road map is also likely to be left for the next government.

The composition of the next government is therefore crucial. Will it be led by the Likud — and if so, by Sharon or by Netanyahu? Or will it be led by Labor — and if so, by the current, centrist party leader, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, or by more left-wing politicians such as Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna or Knesset member Haim Ramon?

Leadership primaries are due in Labor on Nov. 19. Likud primaries probably will be held soon afterward. Recent polls show Likud likely to rise from its current 19 Knesset seats to almost 30, while Labor would fall from 24 to around 20.

However, those polls were taken when Labor was still in the Likud-led government, with no undisputed leader and no clear political identity of its own. Under a leader with a clear mandate, Labor's support could rise. □

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)