



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat deputy blasts intifada

The Palestinian intifada is a mistake and must stop, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's top deputy was quoted as saying.

Mahmoud Abbas made the comments last month in the Gaza Strip during a closed-door meeting with dozens of members of Arafat's Fatah movement.

A transcript of the session was obtained Wednesday from Abbas' office by The Associated Press news service.

"What happened in these two years, as we see it now, is a complete destruction of everything we built," Abbas was quoted as saying.

"The reason for this is that many people diverted the uprising from its natural path" of popular protest and instead "embarked on a path we can't handle," which included the use of "mortars, grenades and shooting from houses and populated areas."

Would-be bomber killed in blast

A Palestinian suicide car-bomber was killed in a Gaza Strip blast Wednesday that caused no other injuries.

The explosion occurred as the terrorist was driving toward an Israeli army outpost in northern Gaza.

Slain U.N. official left message

Israel says it has a taped phone message backing up its account of how a British UNRWA official was killed last Friday in the Jenin refugee camp.

In the taped message, recorded minutes before his death, Iain Hook told an Israeli officer that armed Palestinian gangs had broken into the UNRWA compound.

Israeli soldiers, mistakenly thinking Hook was holding a pistol, shot him dead soon after he left the phone message.

Israel later said the soldiers were returning fire from Palestinian gunmen who opened fire from the compound.

U.N. officials denied there were any Palestinians in the compound.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Nov. 29.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israeli parties staking out ground with elections two months away

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — There usually is a defining moment in an Israeli election campaign: a major blunder by one of the candidates, a breakthrough slogan, an unexpected alliance, a gory terror attack or a challenge that turns an aspiring candidate into a national leader.

Voters are still waiting for that defining moment in this year's campaign.

With the right-wing/religious bloc under the Likud Party maintaining a strong lead in the polls for the Jan. 28 elections, parties are struggling to define themselves and strike pre-election alliances.

And with the return to Israel's old voting system, the popularity of the party has re-emerged as the critical factor in deciding the outcome of the next election.

Voters will cast just one ballot for a party, and the head of the winning party will form a government.

In the last two full national elections, Israelis cast two votes, one for a party and the other for prime minister.

That created a plethora of smaller parties, and also led to unstable governing coalitions.

The latest polls show the right-religious bloc winning about 65 of the Knesset's 120 seats to the left-center's 55.

A swing of just five seats to the left-center parties could turn the election results around.

But that's easier said than done. To keep its lead, the Likud probably will focus on the center of the political spectrum, claiming that it has the will to fight Palestinian terrorism for as long as it takes, and the flexibility to make peace when the fighting stops.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's stated support for President Bush's two-state vision will help give the message credibility.

Indeed, common wisdom holds that Likud could make peace more easily than Labor.

Likud would have Labor's support for any peace agreement it strikes, while the reverse is far more questionable.

Still, Labor's chances seem to have improved significantly with the choice last week of Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna as party leader. One poll, taken immediately after Mitzna's victory in the Labor primary, showed Labor winning as many as four additional seats.

The ex-general has impressed people with his straight talk and clear policies, his courage in expressing a readiness to negotiate with any Palestinian leader — including Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, whom Sharon has shunned because of his ties to terrorism — and his determination to take Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The election could boil down to a choice between the Likud's prescription for more force until a new Palestinian leadership emerges that can strike a peace deal and Mitzna's promise of separation from the Palestinians within a year, with or without a peace agreement.

Mitzna has been projecting a new self-confidence since the Labor primary. Asked about former Prime Minister Ehud Barak's advice that he repudiate his comments about

MIDEAST FOCUS

Terrorist deaths blamed on Israel

Palestinian terror groups vowed to avenge the deaths of two senior terrorists in an explosion Tuesday, even after they backed off claims that Israel was responsible. The two militia leaders were killed late Tuesday in the Jenin refugee camp. Ala Sabbagh of Fatah's Al-Aksa Brigade and Imad Nasharti of Hamas were meeting in a house under construction when there was a loud explosion.

Palestinian sources initially said the two were killed by an Israeli missile fired from a helicopter, but later backed away from that claim. Israeli army officials said they were not behind the incident. At funerals for the two, terrorist leaders vowed vengeance, promising to target Israeli cities.

U.N. officials lodge complaint

U.N. officials lodged a protest against Israel, charging that soldiers held an Israeli U.N. staffer at gunpoint while her house was searched and her husband arrested. The U.N. Relief and Works Agency said Allegra Pacheco and her husband were mistreated by Israeli forces in Bethlehem last Friday, Reuters reported Wednesday.

Israel plans nuclear plant

Israel is planning to build a nuclear power plant, according to the nation's Infrastructure Ministry. A ministry spokesman said the Negev plant, slated for completion by 2020, will be used exclusively for civilian purposes. Israeli environmental groups vowed to fight the plan.

Katsav, pope to meet

Israeli President Moshe Katsav is slated to meet with the pope next month. The session would end a two-year Vatican freeze on meetings with senior Israeli officials. Vatican-Israeli relations have been tense during the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



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negotiating with Arafat — because the Palestinian leader is “no longer relevant” — Mitzna snapped, “Ehud is no longer relevant.”

Mitzna's dovish views may draw votes away from parties to Labor's left, such as Meretz.

However, Meretz head Yossi Sarid drew first blood when he forged an alliance with Roman Bronfman, head of the small Russian immigrant Democratic Choice Party, offering him the fifth spot on Meretz's Knesset slate.

Bronfman, who also lives in Haifa, always was close to Mitzna and Labor. His decision to ally himself with Sarid means that Meretz probably will get most of the small left-wing Russian immigrant vote.

Labor, on the other hand, antagonized its immigrant activists by reserving for them the 22nd spot on the party's Knesset list.

Given its showing in the polls, it's not clear that Labor even will win 22 seats in the election.

Russian and Arab votes were crucial in the last two elections: In 1999, their support helped bring Barak to power, and their disillusion in 2001 helped unseat him.

As for the Arabs, there is a strong movement afoot to boycott the elections altogether — as they did in the February 2001 contest for prime minister — to protest alleged discrimination in Israel.

That could further weaken the left-wing bloc, making Mitzna's task even more difficult.

The return to the old system is expected to benefit the larger parties.

In response, some of the smaller parties have tried to unite into larger blocs, without much success.

Natan Sharansky's immigrant list, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, and Avigdor Lieberman's mostly immigrant Israel Our Home Party held talks about a union, but made no progress.

Instead, Lieberman formalized an existing alliance between Israel Our Home and the far-right parties Moledet and Tekuma.

National Religious Party leader Efraim Eitam's attempt to bring the NRP into this alliance sparked a rebellion in the party, and Eitam was forced to backtrack. To make amends and paint the NRP as more moderate — on religious issues if not on nationalist ones — Eitam guaranteed the fifth slot on the NRP list for a woman.

That helps differentiate NRP from its fervently Orthodox rivals such as Shas, which for religious reasons has no female candidates. But Shas accused the NRP of ethnic discrimination when internal party voting left Sephardi candidates low on the NRP's Knesset list.

Shas seems most likely to suffer from the change in the electoral system, with many of its secular Sephardi supporters returning to the Likud.

Polls show Shas falling from as many as 17 seats in the current Knesset to as few as eight or nine.

Shas has not been helped by a perceived split in party ranks: Supporters of former leader Aryeh Deri, recently released from jail after serving a sentence for bribery, have threatened to bolt and form a rival party.

The secular Shinui Party, which runs on an anti-religious ticket — it is opposed to budgets that favor the fervently Orthodox, for example — looks to be a big winner. Polls show Shinui winning as many as 12 seats, replacing Shas as the largest party in the Knesset after Labor and Likud.

But Shinui will be challenged by a new party called A Different Israel that takes similar positions.

It also will be hurt by pressure from Likud and Labor as they vie for the hundreds of thousands of “floating” voters in the center, who ultimately are expected to decide the election.

Likud may play to some centrist voters by softening its position toward the Palestinians.

Mitzna, according to some pundits, paradoxically would do better by sticking to his clear left-wing positions, trying to swing centrist voters with forceful and credible leadership.

Whether that will be enough to erase Likud's lead in the polls will become clear only on Jan. 29, the day after voters go to the polls. □

Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.

JEWISH WORLD

Schroeder: 'Moral duty' to help

Germany will provide Israel with Patriot missiles for defense against Iraq, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said.

Citing Germany's "moral duty" to protect Israel, Schroeder told the weekly *Die Zeit* newspaper that the "security of the State of Israel and its citizens is extraordinarily important to us."

In Jerusalem, Israeli Defense Ministry officials said they asked Germany for Patriot missiles more than a year ago and renewed the request during talks with their German counterparts last week.

Europe blasted for Hamas stance

A U.S. official criticized European nations for refusing to label Hamas a terrorist group.

David Aufhauser, chairman of the U.S. inter-agency task force on terrorist financing, said European countries are wrong to make a distinction between Hamas' armed and charitable wings.

Noting that while Europe had designated the armed wing a terrorist entity, he said this week that failing to take similar action against the charitable wing "assumes the right hand of the same person can abdicate responsibility for the conduct of the left hand. The idea that there's a firewall between the two defies common sense."

Toronto federation gets gift

The UJA Federation of Greater Toronto received what it describes as its largest gift ever.

Barry and Honey Sherman of Toronto gave the city's federation nearly \$32 million in the form of an endowment.

Barry Sherman is the founder of Apotex Inc., a manufacturer of generic prescription drugs. The Shermans' gift will be applied to a federation project called Jewish Toronto Tomorrow, which attempts to raise funds of the Jewish community's future needs.

Lawsuit threatened over poem

An Israeli attorney is threatening a lawsuit unless the State of New Jersey fires poet laureate Amiri Baraka, who wrote a poem insinuating that Israel knew in advance of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, who says she will sue both Baraka and the state of New Jersey, represents five Israelis who were detained by U.S. officials for visa violations following Sept. 11.

New Jersey Gov. James McGreevey has asked Baraka to resign, but says he does not have the power to fire him. Baraka has refused to apologize for the poem, which included the lines, "Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed/Who told 4,000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers/To stay home that day/Why did Sharon stay away?"

Reward program for Nazi criminals to launch ads in Latvia and Estonia

By Adam B. Ellick

NEW YORK (JTA) — A reward for information on Nazi war criminals has led the Lithuanian government to investigate possible war crimes in two of the country's villages.

In July, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Miami-based Targum Shlishi Foundation launched Operation Last Chance, a program offering a \$10,000 reward for information that leads to the conviction and punishment of Nazi war criminals.

Ludvikas Sabutis, deputy to the senior prosecutor of Lithuania's Special Investigations Service, received a phone call last month from an unnamed Lithuanian who provided the names of those suspected to be involved in the 1942 killings of at least 20 Jews in the southern Lithuanian village of Seirijai.

Preliminary information suggests German soldiers killed Jews with assistance from local Lithuanian residents.

Lithuanian prosecutors said one of the suspects was charged with war crimes during the Soviet era and later died in Siberia, while a second immigrated to the United States, where he possibly died.

The prosecutor also said an investigation into the massacre of Jews in Gruzdziai, located in northern Lithuania, has been reopened.

Nazi-hunter Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israeli office, says the program has turned up the names of 47 war crimes suspects in Lithuania, three Estonians and one Latvian.

Ninety-four percent of Jews in Lithuania and Latvia died during World War II.

Historians say the number of Jewish deaths would have been far lower had ordinary citizens not participated in the killings.

None of the people who provided leads have asked for a reward, said Simonas Alperavicius, the head of the Lithuanian Jewish community, who has fielded the phone calls from informants.

Zuroff expects the flow of leads to continue. Last week he ran ads in Lithuania's largest dailies.

"Jews of Lithuania did not disappear! They were mercilessly massacred in Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai and over 100 other places of mass murder," read the text of the large black-and-white ad, featuring a photograph of Nazis beating some Jews to death with clubs.

Similar ads are slated to run in Latvia next week to coincide with the anniversary of the mass murder of 30,000 Riga Jews at Rumbula, and in Estonia before the end of the year.

Zuroff said those ads are particularly important since fewer leads have emerged from those nations.

"The most important thing at this point, while Nazi war criminals can still be brought to justice, is to give these cases the absolute priority that they deserve. Only in this manner will any measure of justice ever be achieved," Zuroff said.

Lithuanian Special Prosecutor Rimvydas Valentukevicius last month told Zuroff in Vilnius that approximately 20 percent of 97 suspected Lithuanian Nazi collaborators named by the center have already been confirmed alive and living abroad.

Operation Last Chance was developed under the principal that the Baltic nations have been procrastinating in their administration of justice to Nazi criminals. In Lithuania, the accusation is backed by the fact that since regaining independence in 1991, the nation of 3.5 million vowed to try those who participated in the massacre of Jews.

Several men in their 80s and 90s were charged — but only one was ever convicted. No suspects spent any time in prison.

In Latvia and Estonia, not a single Nazi war criminal has been convicted since those nations regained independence in 1991.

Prosecutors argue that some 60 years after the Holocaust, it is nearly impossible to gather credible witnesses and evidence. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jews, Christians join in calling for smaller cars and less pollution

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Jerome Epstein owns a Buick, but he's going automobile shopping this week.

"What I'm looking for is a small car," Epstein says.

As he wanders the wilderness of car dealerships, Epstein might wonder, what would Moses drive?

Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational umbrella group, is among Jewish and Christian leaders and organizations aiming to steer the United States away from its dependence on foreign oil and put the brakes on Americans' penchant for gas-guzzling Sport Utility Vehicles.

Officially called the Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign, the effort by four dozen leaders and groups has won major media coverage, thanks largely to the evangelical Christian motto, "What would Jesus drive?"

On the Jewish side, fueling the push are the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, together with leading rabbis and organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, Hadassah, the Jewish Council of Public Affairs, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

On Nov. 20, campaign members delivered petitions to the heads of the Big Three automakers in Detroit, urging tighter fuel economy standards in new cars as a "moral imperative" that would heighten national security and reduce pollution from fossil fuels.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center, told the CEOs of DaimlerChrysler, Ford and General Motors that nearly all the cars Detroit is producing "are poisoning the air, warming the air, punishing the poor, weakening America's security by dependency on foreign oil, jeopardizing the future of our children" and "just plain violating the covenant with our Creator."

Coalition members maintain that there's a direct connection among SUVs, national security and global warming.

Mark Jacobs, executive director of the Jewish environmental group COEJL, says 52 percent of U.S. oil is imported from places such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

That means "U.S. foreign policy is significantly shaped by Saudi oil and some of the same nations that support terrorism," Jacobs says. "The quickest way to increase our security is to lessen our reliance on foreign oil."

The New York Times reported Tuesday that the United States, which has only 3 percent of world oil reserves, remains reliant on Saudi reserves more than a decade after the Persian Gulf War sparked calls to diversify oil imports.

U.S. oil consumption also is rising as cars get bigger, while fuel economy standards are stagnating, the coalition says.

In 2001, Americans bought more SUVs, light trucks and minivans than cars. It's no accident that the United States belches out one-quarter of the Earth's ozone-depleting greenhouse gases from fossil fuel and other industrial emissions, the group says.

Consumer demand for bigger cars has climbed since automakers began skirting tougher fuel-economy standards for smaller cars by building SUVs, which come under the light-truck

category, in the 1980s. SUVs and other outsized vehicles consume 40 percent of all gas pumped in the United States daily. Their fuel economy is mandated at only 20.7 miles per gallon, far below the 27.5 mpg standard that small cars must meet.

Detroit long has had the technology to produce more efficient engines and even to mass-produce cleaner models such as hybrids, which only now are hitting showroom floors in significant numbers, the coalition maintains.

For some time, Jacobs has been warning that Jews are part of the affluent segments of society that use gas-hogging SUVs.

In a recent edition of Reform Judaism magazine, he wrote that "many synagogue parking lots look like veritable showrooms" of SUVs.

He adds, "There's no disproportionate Jewish love for SUVs, but the Jewish community is largely affluent and SUVs are very popular in those societies."

Yet Jacobs and Sharon Bloome, national board chair of COEJL, insist they're not urging people to boycott car companies or even trade in their Lincoln Navigators for Honda Civics.

Instead, "we are trying to initiate a new conversation about cars that takes into account the moral choices car makers make when choosing to produce vehicles, and the choices people make when purchasing them," Jacobs says.

In a piece she wrote for COEJL's Web site, Bloome noted the "miracle of oil" in the Chanukah story as a chilling reminder of a time when oil was "a coveted resource."

Today's SUVs "are really a fashion statement," she said, since they're designed as off-road "nature" vehicles but few people use them that way. In addition to raising people's consciousness of the environmental impact of what they drive, Jews should make "their own personal accountability" about their automotive habits. Bloome says.

In recent years, the interfaith coalition has spent much of its budget — hundreds of thousands of dollars — lobbying Congress to enact stricter clean-air laws. But oil industry contributions to Congressional campaigns have made the group change tactics, Jacobs says.

By directly petitioning corporate leaders in the automotive industry, "we've broken new ground in the way Jewish organizations are engaging the community on this," Jacobs says.

One of the petition's supporters, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, lauds the SUV campaign. But only new laws — such as new fuel taxes and tougher fuel-consumption regulations — will succeed in changing things, he says.

Yet for Epstein, even the small act of finding a more ecological car really matters.

Otherwise, "We will leave the world in far worse shape than we have it today," he says. "Our children and descendants will be left in a terrible state." □

Harassment common in Israel

JERUSALEM (JTA) — One in every six women in Israel has been sexually harassed on the street, according to an official who deals with the status of women in Israel.

Ronit Lev-Ari told Israel Radio on Wednesday that the harassment includes attempts to touch women, obscene proposals, prolonged staring and efforts by men to press their bodies against women. □