



Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hillel head up for Y.U. presidency

Yeshiva University officials are expected to approve hiring Hillel President Richard Joel as the school's next president. The Y.U. Board of Trustees, its executive committee and the board of Yeshiva's seminary are scheduled to vote late Thursday, according to university spokeswoman Hedy Shulman.

Joel, 52, is the sole candidate to replace outgoing president Norman Lamm, Shulman said.

Car owner talks to Kenyan police

Kenyan police said they questioned the former owner of the car used in the Nov. 28 suicide bombing of a hotel near Mombasa.

The man told investigators he sold the car to two men of "Arab origin" two weeks before the attack, Kenya's top investigator said Wednesday.

U.N. OKs 6 anti-Israel resolutions

The U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly approved six resolutions criticizing Israeli policies. Though such resolutions are passed annually, most noteworthy was the U.S. vote against a resolution condemning the Israeli law that declares Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital.

For the past two years, the United States has abstained on the resolution, but this year, U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte said the resolution prejudices key issues that must be resolved in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Nasser Al-Kidwa, the Palestinian U.N. observer, called the U.S. rejection of the Jerusalem resolution "a slap in the face" to all Arabs, Muslims and Christians.

Bush meets with Jewish leaders

President Bush told U.S. Jewish leaders that he stands behind the principles of his landmark June speech on the Middle East.

Meeting with a dozen rabbis and communal leaders at the White House for a Chanukah celebration Wednesday, Bush said he remains committed to the eventual creation of a Palestinian state, but under different leaders. Bush "spoke eloquently of his unwavering commitment to addressing the threat of terrorism, the threat of Iraq's weapons and the threat of terror against Israel," one participant said. Bush also spoke about religious persecution around the world and the need to boost Israel's economy.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Birthright Israel perseveres despite fears, funding problems

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Josh Neman has been wrestling for three years over whether to take advantage of Birthright Israel's free trips to the Jewish state.

Now after canceling out at the last minute last year, the 25-year old doctoral student in neurobiology at UCLA is taking the plunge.

"I've come to the decision that if God forbid anything's going to happen, I won't cancel this time," said Neman, who is scheduled to depart with a UCLA Hillel group in late December.

"It's a chance you have to take, but it's worth the chance."

All Israel experience programs that foster a link between young American Jews and the Jewish state have been flagging since the Palestinian intifada began more than two years ago.

Birthright Israel, which offers a free trip to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds, is drawing more participants than most Israel programs.

Still, the numbers are significantly lower than originally projected when the program was launched in late 1999 — and peace still seemed a possibility.

In addition, the program is grappling with funding issues.

The projected cost of the five-year program — which enters its fourth year in January — was \$210 million, split evenly among the Israeli government, world Jewish communities and several major philanthropists.

Unlike the philanthropists and the Israelis, however, the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of the North American federation system, has not fully paid its portion.

Now the UJC is considering a resolution that would commit it to paying \$39 million to the program — down from what it was originally slated to pay.

The impetus behind Birthright was the realization that 80 percent of American Jews had never been to Israel. By that reckoning, more than 200,000 18- to 26-year-olds would have been eligible for Birthright trips.

Backers initially anticipated that Birthright would bring 90,000 young adults to Israel within five years, but expectations have now been slashed to 50,000.

So far, more than 33,000 young Jews have participated. An average of 70 percent of the participants during the first three years have come from North America.

The program was launched in December 1999 and publicized on college campuses and Jewish newspapers.

"It became a new, exciting, innovative idea in a time of peace," said Marlene Post, chairwoman of Birthright Israel USA. "People would say to you, 'Wow, we're going to get a gift to go to Israel, it's free. No strings attached.'"

But enrollment has fallen since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000, despite measures to ensure security on the program.

Free time to roam the streets has been eliminated. Birthright also puts a cell phone on each bus and buses are part of a global positioning system, so groups can be tracked at all times.

Applications for trips this winter are at a record low.

More than 6,000 young adults, half of them from North America, have applied for this year's winter trips.

That number is slightly down from last year.

In 2000, the program's first year, nearly 9,500 young adults toured Israel on

MIDEAST FOCUS

Soccer attack foiled

An Al-Qaida attack against Israel's national soccer team in Malta last October reportedly was foiled at the last minute.

The planned attack on a European championship qualifier game in Malta was thwarted with the arrest, a day before the match, of a Tunisian man suspected of Al-Qaida links, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported Wednesday.

The paper cited Rome security officials as saying four other Tunisians suspected of belonging to the cell were detained in Italy.

Israel deports Arab American

Israel deported an Arab American suspected of transferring funds to Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. According to details released Wednesday by Israeli officials, Khaled Nazem Diyab was held for questioning when he entered Israel last month.

Diyab recently resided in Qatar and before that in Afghanistan, where he was in close contact with groups that supported the Taliban, the officials said. He also allegedly has links to Hamas.

Palestinian killed in Gaza strike

A wanted Palestinian was killed when Israeli helicopters fired missiles at a Palestinian security building in Gaza City.

Israel's army issued a statement alleging that the Palestinian was involved in three bombings of Israeli tanks that killed a total of seven soldiers.

Liaison offices closed

Israel's army closed down the Israeli-Palestinian liaison offices in Ramallah and Jenin.

The army said the offices were closed because there is no coordination between the sides and because of the security risk they pose, with Palestinian police there accused of involvement in terrorism.

Birthright programs. The following year, the number rose to 13,364.

While overall numbers of participants haven't fallen much — almost 12,000 young adults are expected to go on Birthright this year through next spring — the proportion of North Americans has dropped from 86 percent in the program's first year to roughly 50 percent in its third year.

At the same time, increasing numbers of participants are coming from Argentina, France and the former Soviet Union.

Birthright officials speculate the increased numbers from these places stem from the more-threatening personal and economic situations in those regions.

The entire cost of the program — \$1,600 per person — is subsidized.

Decreased attendance means Birthright's total cost will be less than the projected \$210 million, but officials can't yet say by how much.

Initially, UJC planned to pay \$52.5 million of the contribution from world Jewish communities. That included some \$6 million from one of UJC's overseas partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The remaining \$17.5 million was to come from Keren Hayesod, which raises money from other Jewish communities around the world.

Now, however, UJC says it wants to pay \$39 million.

So far it has paid "in the neighborhood of \$9 million," according to UJC President Stephen Hoffman, out of the \$17 million it owes so far — the amount was supposed to increase incrementally each year, rather than be divided equally over five years.

Hoffman said the \$52.5 million total would have included Birthright programs for high school students and others that never materialized.

As for the shortfall, Hoffman said it has to do with tight budgets at local federations.

"At the end of the day, I believe the single largest challenge in compliance has been the available dollars that communities have to work with," he said.

But Hoffman said the few federations that haven't paid up are the exception, not the rule.

At the UJC's annual General Assembly last month in Philadelphia, the organization's Board of Trustees voted to consider a resolution to pay its \$39 million pledge to Birthright Israel. A vote on the resolution is expected in about a month.

Yet funding remains a problem.

"A major problem has been in fund raising for this program," stated a June 10 memo from UJC to its board of trustees. "Federations have been very reluctant to cooperate" and "give us access to their donors, to work with us, or to raise the funds themselves."

According to some federation leaders, the resistance stems from their lack of influence in the program's policies.

Some communities, like Chicago, have not approved the entire amount requested because of concerns they hope to negotiate into the pending resolution.

Such sticking points relate to whether participants should be asked to pay some amount toward the trip, and whether federation's role should be more publicized. They also are worried about the transparency of the program's budget and ways to ensure the program's viability.

The resolution before UJC's board of trustees would increase federations' payments to the program by 33 percent, based on each community's population and campaign dollars.

The UJC resolution also is asking the Jewish Agency for Israel to more than double its portion of UJC's share.

Birthright officials say they approve of UJC's efforts.

The extent of discussions at the recent General Assembly "made us understand that there was a real, deep interest, and more than an interest, an action to make certain the UJC was a partner in the Birthright experience," Post said.

Whether the program will continue beyond five years is not yet known.

Jeffrey Solomon, president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman philanthropies, one of the major philanthropies supporting Birthright, said, "We will be going back to the philanthropists to talk about future commitments, but nobody yet knows what the result of that will be. Everybody who knows this program is committed to it," he said.

"It's really been so successful beyond the founders' dreams. The commitment to it is deep and abiding." □



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JEWISH WORLD

School settles charges

A Minnesota-based university agreed to pay nearly \$1 million over the next five years to settle allegations of anti-Semitism.

Three faculty members who sued St. Cloud State University a year ago will receive a total of nearly \$315,000, while other faculty members who filed discrimination complaints will share \$50,000, according to The Associated Press.

The lawsuit alleged department administrators attempted to get students to avoid classes taught by Jewish professors and that Jewish faculty members were paid less, denied promotions and not given full credit for their teaching experience.

Under the proposed settlement, which still requires approval from a federal judge, the university also agreed to create a Jewish studies center, according to the report.

Lawsuit filed against Arafat

A lawsuit reportedly was filed in Brussels against Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, charging him with involvement in terror attacks against Israelis. The lawsuit filed Monday includes reports, documents and testimony intended to prove Arafat's role in financing and orchestrating acts of terror, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The lawsuit was brought under a 1993 law on "universal jurisdiction," which enables Belgian courts to judge atrocities committed elsewhere, regardless of whether or not they involved Belgians.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was sued in Belgium by Palestinians and Lebanese who accused him of responsibility for the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon, which was carried out by Lebanese Christian militias allied with Israel.

The courts in Belgium dismissed the case against Sharon earlier this year.

Sao Paulo Jews get new leader

Some 150 Jewish delegates gathered in Sao Paulo to elect a new president of the state's Jewish Federation.

The man chosen Tuesday, Jayme Blay, is a former president of Brazil's largest shul, the 1,800-family Congregacao Israelita Paulista.

Blay, a 62-year-old engineer, told JTA that security for the local Jewish community will be among his top concerns. The recent suicide bombing in Kenya made it clear that "we are in the middle of a conflict that has no borders," he said.

There are some 60,000 Jews in Sao Paulo state, making it the largest community among Brazil's 120,000 Jews.

The federation is an umbrella organization representing 54 Jewish institutions.

Jewish Agency institute struggles with bleak demographic projection

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Confronted with statistics indicating that world Jewry is shrinking, officials here are unsure how to respond.

"We have no blueprint of what to do," the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Sallai Meridor, said at an emergency session of the Jewish Agency's Institute for Jewish People Policy Planning. "We need policies that will carry out a strategy."

According to the institute's statistics, world Jewry is losing an average of 50,000 Jews per year — or 150 Jews every day.

There are now some 12.9 million Jews in the world, according to the institute's statistics, down from earlier estimates that put the total at 13.2 million.

According to the institute, which convened the three-day emergency session this week to address what it called the "demographic crisis" of world Jewry, the number of American Jews dropped by 300,000 in the last decade to 5.2 million, according to the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01. Other major Jewish communities around the world also declined.

Only Israel's Jewish community is growing, the institute said.

Meridor called the declines "appalling," saying the figures represented "a point of no return."

France, for example, has seen its Jewish community decline to 500,000 from 535,000 in 1980.

In the former Soviet Union, the total has plummeted to 437,000 from 1.45 million — though much of that is due to the fact that 1 million Jews left the former Soviet Union for Israel in the past decade.

The figures may not be universally accepted, however. For example, other estimates of the number of Jews in the former Soviet Union run as high as 3 million.

Just the same, Jewish demographer Sergio Della Pergola was troubled by the institute's figures.

There were 8,000 deaths of elderly Jews in Russia last year and just 600 births, Della Pergola said, reflecting "the end of a long process of assimilation and aging."

The bleak demographic picture makes it necessary to strategize and plan for the future of the Jewish people, institute officials said.

Serving as the institute's co-chairman is Dennis Ross, former Clinton administration envoy to the Middle East and now director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Ross has called for "mapping" and identifying different populations to find what creates a sense of Jewish identity.

"How do you make being Jewish attractive?" he asked. "We have to do a survey and see what programs work and which didn't."

Jewish day schools, camps and Israel trips create bonds and immerse children in an intense Jewish experience, Ross said. But the cost of day schooling is prohibitive, he noted.

Meridor said that the cost of day school is one of several issues that deter Jews from remaining involved and active in the community: A family with three children in day schools, for example, could pay close to \$60,000 each year for tuition.

That can have two effects, Meridor said: Jews who are less affiliated may decide not to pay those kinds of prices, and affiliated Jews who want to send their children to day school may decide to have fewer children.

Yet Ross noted that Jewish day schools in America are experiencing a growth spurt that is "nothing short of phenomenal."

Still, he added, "it has to be more accessible to more people."

Funded with \$1 million annually from the Jewish Agency and Jewish philanthropists, the institute was founded in May to create position papers that identify problems facing world Jewry and make recommendations to solve them.

The institute's board of directors and its partners — the Jewish Agency and the United Jewish Communities umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations — then will try to put any plans into effect. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israelis wary after Kenya attacks, but they still have that travel bug*By Jessica Steinberg*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Last Sunday afternoon, Guy Behat swung his heavy knapsack onto his back, kissed his mother and father goodbye, and prepared to board a plane to Bombay.

Behat, 22, had been planning his post-army trip to India, Thailand and Australia for the last two years. Nothing, not a terrorist attack in Kenya nor his mother's tears and his father's concerns, was going to stop him.

Not even the fact that his sister, Vered, was wounded during a terrorist attack on Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall last year. If anything, his sister's experience made Behat less susceptible to his parents' protests.

"The chances are much higher that something would happen to me here in Israel, and not in Bombay or Bangkok," Behat said. "Yeah, I know these places seem kind of risky. But can you honestly tell me that they're riskier than Jerusalem?"

Dozens of young Israelis with worn jeans, rubber-soled sandals and hefty knapsacks were lingering over their airport goodbyes to mothers and fathers, boyfriends and girlfriends, brothers and sisters.

They promised to call and to be careful. But despite the travel advisories for some of their destinations, they all left for what has become a traditional, post-army service world tour that can last anywhere from two months to two years.

"I tried to explain to him my suspicions and fears, but it didn't help," said Behat's father, Nissim. "He just stood his ground."

Last year, 91,543 Israeli tourists traveled to Thailand, and 100,000 are expected to reach its exotic shores this year.

El Al flies to Bangkok from Tel Aviv five times a week. So far, neither El Al nor Arkia Airlines, another Israeli airline that specializes in charter flights abroad, have had any cancellations for Bangkok or Bombay.

The younger Israelis who travel to those destinations are less influenced by politics and less sensitive to dangers, said Israel Oleinik, director of Shiluv, a marketing consultancy.

"They will still head out to Thailand and South America and India for their great adventure," Oleinik said. "It's the middle range, the Israelis in their 30s and 40s, who will think twice about where to travel."

At the end of last week, after three Israelis were killed in a suicide bombing at a beachside hotel near Mombasa, Kenya, a Thai army general warned of Muslim extremists in Thailand.

As the Thai army attempted to assuage fears, saying Thailand wouldn't become a second Bali — a reference to the recent bombing of a Bali nightclub that killed more than 180 people — Israel's Foreign Ministry issued a general warning about terrorists' intentions to attack Israelis abroad.

While the number of Israelis vacationing abroad is down 15 percent, around 3.5 million Israelis went abroad in 2002, according to the Israel Tourist and Travel Agents Association.

At least half traveled to more traditional destinations, such as cities in Western Europe and the United States. Some 70 percent traveled by regular airlines, while the rest chose charter flights.

Individual Israelis may decide against traveling to certain

destinations, said Nahum Kara, managing director of Natour, a wholesale travel agent that specializes in arranging and marketing organized tours. They may opt for arranging their own trip, rather than traveling in a group with other Israelis.

At the same time, Israelis will keep on traveling abroad, even to less secure destinations, several tourism experts said.

"When the U.S. State Department puts out a warning, Americans pay attention," Kara said. "When Israel's Foreign Ministry puts out an advisory, Israelis weigh it, but they're more reasonable."

In other words, they know it may not be safer to spend a couple of days in the seaside city of Netanya, the site of several gruesome terrorist attacks, than it would be to lay on the beach in Phuket, Thailand, or Antalya, Turkey.

"Israelis go on vacation to relax, to take a break from the news and the reality of life here," said Yossi Patael, director of the travel agents association. "The kind of thing that happened in Mombasa will affect them, but it won't change their minds about traveling."

Israelis have always been adventurous and frequent travelers, as Israel's small size and aggressive lifestyle lead many to seek to escape to less crowded shores.

In the last decade, as per capita income rose to more than \$17,000, many travel agencies and charter companies organized weekend and midweek jaunts to the Czech Republic, Turkey and Greece, charging \$200 per person for flights and stays at four-star hotels. These days they may choose London over Vietnam, or Barcelona rather than Bombay.

In places like Barcelona and Paris, Israeli travel agencies can spread a planeload of Israelis among 10 hotels, rather than in one, easily targeted location, said Boaz Waxman, managing director of Ophir Tours, one of Israel's largest tourism companies.

At Issta, a travel agent targeting the student and post-army crowd, Ronen Carasso, a company vice president, predicted that Israeli travel to Mombasa would fall after the Nov. 28 attacks.

But no matter what, Israelis will travel. Simply put, a desire to escape the realities of home outweighs the risks of travel abroad.

"Why wouldn't I travel?" said Gaby Arbib, an economic analyst who recently traveled to Amsterdam with his wife and two children. "We're used to anything from living here — and besides, what's the alternative?"

"If I stay here and don't go abroad for vacations because of security fears, there's no guarantee that I can't get hurt here," Arbib pointed out. "If anything, my chances of getting caught in a terrorist attack are less if I'm out of Israel." □

Germany debates tanks for Israel

BERLIN (JTA) — German officials are debating whether to provide Israel with tanks.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder reaffirmed on Wednesday his earlier decision to provide two Patriot missile systems, citing support for Israel's right to defend itself in the event of an Iraqi attack.

But no decision has been made on whether Israel will get any of the Fuchs transport tanks it requested, partly because of concern that the tanks could be used for offensive purposes. Green Party leaders oppose providing Israel with military equipment that can be used to tear down Palestinian buildings. German military regulations forbid delivery of tanks to war zones. □