



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

3 Israeli soldiers killed in ambush

Three Israeli soldiers were killed Thursday in a roadside ambush by Palestinian gunmen near Hebron.

The three men died of their wounds after ambulance workers arrived on the scene.

Israeli soldiers were searching for the gunmen, who were believed to have fled to a nearby Palestinian village.

Wife of PFLP head nabbed

Israeli security officials confirmed that they had arrested the wife of the head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Ablah Sa'adat, who was reported missing Wednesday, was on her way from the West Bank to Jordan to fly to Brazil for a conference, according to family.

Her husband, Ahmad Sa'adat, is in a Palestinian jail in Jericho supervised by U.S. and European officials as part of a deal under which Israel lifted its siege of Yasser Arafat's Ramallah compound last year.

Religious groups may get aid

President Bush is advocating a new policy that would allow religious groups in the United States to receive federal aid for building social services centers.

The proposal, being considered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, would increase federal funding to faith-based programs, an issue that many Jewish groups oppose for fear that it blurs the line between church and state.

If approved, the federal housing aid would be given to construction of religious groups' social program facilities, on the condition that they be separated from religious activities by time or location and that participation in religious activities be voluntary.

Labor's decline continues

Israel's Labor Party fell further in opinion polls published Thursday.

Surveys published in the country's three largest newspapers five days before the general elections predicted Labor winning 18 to 19 seats in the 120-member Knesset, down from the 25 it currently holds.

The new figures raised the possibility that Labor might even be in danger of placing third, behind the secular-rights Shinui Party.

ISRAEL VOTES 2003

Days before election, Israelis still turned off by choices and scandals

By Matthew Gutman

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Campaign activity is peaking days before Israel's Jan. 28 election, but voters still are showing a marked lack of interest.

During the February 2001 prime ministerial elections, fights broke out at major intersections between party activists vying for better position to hand out fliers or posting banners. Bumper stickers were slapped on anything with a smooth surface.

This year, in contrast, voters seem strangely apathetic. There are the usual advertisements on city buses for the parties and their leaders, Prime Minister Sharon Ariel Sharon of the Likud and Amram Mitzna of Labor.

But more conspicuous — and more symbolic — are the Patriot anti-missile batteries set up in plain view in North Tel Aviv and Haifa, among other locations, reflecting the unsettled state of affairs in the region.

The public's slow political pulse is mirrored in the lethargy at the Labor Party's Hatikva neighborhood headquarters. One consultant close to Labor said that there seems to be none of the usual pre-election electricity this year, with campaign activists and public relations people coming to and from work pretty much when they feel like it.

Labor also is engaged in its pre-election backstabbing ritual. Benjamin Ben-Eliezer's recent calls for Mitzna to step aside, to let former Prime Minister Shimon Peres run as the head of Labor, came after polls showed that Peres would attract more voters.

Labor insiders now hint that the polls may have been commissioned by Peres himself.

"Who else would be interested in those polls?" they ask.

According to the consultant, Peres' eternal role as the candidate who has never won an election will not help Labor. And the wilting morale shown by the pre-election putsch attempt mirrors Labor's projected drop from 26 seats in the current Knesset to 19 in the next one, according to polls.

It's apparent that Labor infighting only repels voters. But "politics is neither rational nor very often about the betterment of the party. Feelings and personal interests seep deep into the party dynamics," said Asher Cohen, a Bar-Ilan University expert on Israel's political parties.

"The virtual hand-to-hand combat we see in Labor this week will be nothing compared to the all-out war" between the party's hawkish and dovish elements "when Sharon invites Labor into the government," Cohen predicted.

"Should this in-fighting continue over the next week, they could do themselves some serious damage," he said. "I would not be too surprised if Shinui," a centrist, secular party, "overtook Labor as the second largest party."

But Labor is not alone in its strange behavior: Even the Likud's once-passionate activists and voters seem to be dozing.

As Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert tried to rouse grass-roots Likud activists from across the country at a Jan. 16 rally, one man heckled from the audience, "The street is asleep!"

A few minutes later, Sharon lumbered to the podium.

"If the street is asleep, wake it up!" he thundered. "That's your job!"

Yet the worst may be over for the Likud. After several weeks of scandal, the party has stopped its slide. Recent polls show that Likud seems assured of at least 33 Knesset

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel: Arafat knew of terror link

Yasser Arafat was aware that money given to Palestinian charities was being funneled to terrorist groups, according to documents Israeli soldiers found in the Gaza Strip.

The documents included reports sent to Arafat about the activities of the Charity Coalition, an umbrella organization of Islamic charity funds that solicits contributions from Arabic countries and the West. In some of these documents, Arafat was informed of meetings held in Yemen between senior coalition members and Hamas terrorists, and of how funds were transferred from the coalition to Hamas, according to the Israel Defense Force.

British envoy prompts Israeli ire

Israeli officials are angry about a meeting an envoy for British Prime Minister Tony Blair is having Thursday with Palestinian officials. Israeli officials criticized Britain for failing to coordinate Lord Levy's visit with Israel or arrange meetings with Israeli leaders, Army Radio reported.

In response, British leaders said Levy, who arrived Thursday morning, is meeting only with Palestinians because the purpose of his visit is to discuss reforming the Palestinian Authority.

Israel third largest arms exporter

Israel was reportedly the third largest arms exporter last year, behind the United States and Russia. The Israeli business publication *Globes*, quoting a report in the journal *Defense News*, said Israeli arms exports reached \$3.7 billion in 2002.

The report cited Israeli sources as saying the total included a \$668 million deal to upgrade the Turkish army's tanks.

Other major deals were made with India and countries in Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, the report said.

seats. That's fewer than originally expected, but a full 75 percent above its showing in the last Knesset elections in 1999, when Likud won just 19 seats.

The turning point may have been Central Election Committee Chairman Mishael Cheshin's recent decision to black out a news conference Sharon had called to respond to scandal allegations. Cheshin argued that Sharon had veered too much into election propaganda.

"I tell you," said Avigdor, a grass-roots Likud leader from Rosh Pina, that "was the best thing that could have happened to the party."

Since then, he added, holding his paunch as he chuckled, "people have been begging me for something to do" to help the party. "Before, I had to push, beg and bribe."

Either way, Likud is leaving nothing to chance.

The party is so concerned about voter apathy that it's saving "over 30 percent" of its campaign budget for a get-out-the-vote push on Election Day, planning to flood the country with advertisements and bus voters to the polls, Communications Minister Reuven Rivlin told JTA.

"We don't even care who we bus, but just that the voters show up," he said.

Even the indictment Tuesday of three Likud activists, for alleged bribery during the party's December primaries, won't really hurt the party, Rivlin predicted.

"Like the other allegations, this too shall pass," he said. "Eventually voters know they are not voting for specific activists but for the party."

Morale was not nearly so high at the normally bustling Shuk Hacarmel market in Tel Aviv, where hail stones clanged off the metal stalls Tuesday.

Many of the vendors profess allegiance to Likud, but they're not enthusiastic about this year's vote.

"Do we have a choice?" said Benni, 48, an immigrant from the former Soviet republic of Georgia. "We go, we vote — and I'm sure that we'll have to do it again next year."

Vendors and shoppers directed much of their anger at Ben-Eliezer, the former Labor chairman who used a budget crisis to pull the party out of the unity government in early November, forcing early elections.

"We need unity right now," Benni said. "Back in Georgia we would have had his head on a plate for pulling that political stunt of leaving the government."

Nissim, 25, who staffs a vegetable stand a few yards away from Benni, was ready for the polls — although, he said, "none of the candidates is worth the vote. They are all corrupt, just trying to cover their asses while making some money."

Dori Shadmon, president of the Teleseker polling company, said voters aren't really apathetic.

They're not interested in the campaigns, he admitted, but he thinks they are interested in the actual voting.

"Our polls show that over 80 percent of Israelis say they intend to vote, with another 10 percent sitting on the fence," he said.

The number of committed voters is about average for election periods, he said, but the number of undecided voters — more than 20 percent — is unusual.

"What people want more than anything right now is a stable government representing as many parties as possible, which will give them both financial and military security," said Shadmon, who added that he believes many undecided voters are angry that Labor forced early elections.

Shadmon marveled that the corruption allegations in the Likud primaries and a loan scandal involving Sharon and his sons hadn't caused the party too much damage.

"There is also a great amount of anger directed at the media for smashing the people's idols," he said. "This is especially true during a time of war, when people feel they must rally round the flag of their leadership."

On top of the campaigns and the scandals, weather is a wild card in the election, Cohen said.

Knesset elections haven't been held in the winter since 1973, when rainstorms sent voter turnout plummeting from the usual 90 percent to about 60 percent, which is low for Israel.

"Snow in Jerusalem and the Galilee, hail in Tel Aviv, floods — these things could change everything," Cohen said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Services to honor Daniel Pearl

Interfaith memorial services are being planned in four cities, including Jerusalem, to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the murder of journalist Daniel Pearl. The events sponsored by the Daniel Pearl Foundation will also take place between Feb. 20-Feb. 24 in Los Angeles, Toronto and New York.

Pearl, a reporter for The Wall Street Journal, was kidnapped Jan. 23, 2002, by Islamic terrorists who killed him a month later. In addition to the memorial services, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is launching a month of events honoring Pearl by calling on people to send a message of support to the Pearl family at the center's site, www.wiesenthal.com.

Shoah denier refused visa

Holocaust denier David Irving was refused a visa to Australia for a third time.

In his decision that Irving was not fit to receive a visa, Australian Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock cited a German court decision finding Irving, 62, guilty of defaming the dead. There is no appeal available on Ruddock's decision. Irving was also refused visas in 1994 and 1996.

No Jewish P.M. in Holland

The mayor of Amsterdam plans to retain his post after he lost a bid to become Holland's first Jewish prime minister. Job Cohen's Labor Party came in second in Wednesday's national elections, with 42 of the 150 seats in Parliament. The Christian Democrats won 44 seats, ensuring that Jan Peter Balkenende will remain prime minister for a second term.

The biggest loser in Wednesday's polls was the anti-immigrant Pim Fortuyn's List, named for the popular right-wing politician murdered last year just days before elections. The List won eight seats Wednesday, down from 26. The makeup of the new government is uncertain. Observers say it could take months before a new government is formed.

Lieberman yarmulke debuts

A Web site is selling yarmulkes with a logo for Sen. Joseph Lieberman's presidential campaign.

The site, www.joebeanie.com, sells the kipa's for \$12.95 plus \$4.95 for shipping and handling. The site, which is unaffiliated with the campaign, was featured Tuesday on CNN's "Inside Politics."

Actress Nell Carter dies at 54

Tony-Award winning actress Nell Carter died Thursday at the age of 54.

Carter, who won her Tony in 1978 for her role in "Ain't Misbehavin'," converted to Judaism after she married an Orthodox Jewish man. She remained Jewish after the couple divorced.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

American Jewish officials seek solutions for Argentine community

By Florencia Arbiser

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — When the weather gets hot and sticky in Argentina, locals take refuge in malls, shops or just about any place with air conditioning.

But on a recent day that was one of the hottest days of the year at a humid 95 degrees, a group of U.S. Jewish officials pressed ahead with their mission to get a firsthand glimpse of Jewish social service projects.

The small delegation visited summer camps, welfare and job centers, and met with social workers and beneficiaries of programs sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The group included Steven Schwager, the JDC's executive vice president, and federation representatives from Cleveland and New Jersey.

The group came to see how a \$15.5 million budget, nearly double last year's amount, will be invested to help Argentina's 200,000-strong Jewish community through the country's economic crisis.

The money mainly will go for education and welfare, but some will be spent on housing, mergers of Jewish institutions and community-wide holiday celebrations.

A computer program developed by JDC helps track each of the 34,000 Argentine Jews who have received help from the American Jewish community.

That should ensure that "there is no duplication of services," said Max Kleinman, executive vice president of the federation in MetroWest, N.J., and a member of the delegation.

Kleinman was struck by the pride of the mainly middle-class community, including four social workers the group met.

"In addition to the work they do, they support their own extended families," where relatives have lost jobs, Kleinman said.

American Jews know that, but for a few twists of fate, they could be in the same predicament. Most Argentine Jews are descended from European immigrants; often, one member of a family went to the United States, one to South America.

"Some boats turned left, some boats turned right," Schwager said.

Arieh Abir, the Jewish Agency for Israel's Latin America director, announced that the agency will continue providing special benefits for Argentine Jews who make aliyah in 2003.

Some 6,500 Argentine Jews moved to Israel last year. The numbers are expected to hold steady in 2003, said Abir, who made aliyah from Argentina 40 years ago.

The immigrants currently receive some \$10,000 per family to ease their absorption, along with an extra budget for housing. At the end of February, additional aid — such as help with school fees and for finding jobs — will be discussed, Abir said.

One JDC focus this year will be consolidating Argentine Jewish institutions and strengthening surviving ones, Schwager said.

Education is also a concern.

After December 2001, when the Argentine economy collapsed, Jewish education was taken care of by a coalition that included the AMIA Jewish Community Center, JDC and the Jewish Agency. Keren Hayesod, the World Jewish Congress and Edgar Bronfman give their support through these institutions.

"We need to think centralizing," Batia Nemirovsky, general director of AMIA's Central Council of Jewish Education in Argentina, told JTA.

According to Nemirovsky, three Jewish schools closed during 2002, and overall the Jewish school system lost 8 percent of enrollment. Still, almost 17,000 kids remain in Argentine Jewish schools.

Of those, "almost 50 percent have some kind of scholarship," Nemirovsky said.

The coalition is helping schools to stay open, she noted, but "the funds aren't endless."

Schwager said that the groups were "continuing to put band-aids on the problems," but he noted, "we need to find the right balance between helping and making independent institutions." □

ISRAEL VOTES 2003

A guide to the 15 Israeli parties expected to be in the new Knesset

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly 30 political parties are vying in Israel's Jan. 28 general elections.

According to the latest polls, about 15 parties stand a chance of getting at least 1.5 percent of the vote, the threshold for getting at least one of the Knesset's 120 seats.

Following is a guide to the leading parties in the race:

Likud: The odds-on favorite, with a projected 32 seats in the next Knesset, according to weekend polls. In 1999, when party leader Benjamin Netanyahu lost the premiership to Ehud Barak, Likud won 19 seats in the Knesset, considered a major defeat at the time.

Now, under the leadership of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the party consistently has led in the polls, despite recent allegations of corruption against party officials and members of Sharon's own family.

Traditionally, the party has opposed any territorial concessions to the Palestinians and has also balked at supporting the eventual creation of a Palestinian state.

As prime minister, however, Sharon has agreed to make "painful concessions," but only after the Palestinians completely renounce terrorism. Sharon backs the creation of a national unity government with the Labor Party.

Labor: Labor has the largest number of seats — 25 — in the current Knesset. But, according to the latest polls, the party will get only 19 seats in the next Knesset — a devastating blow for the party that led Israel for the first 30 years of the country's existence.

With much of the Israeli electorate turning rightward, party leader Amram Mitzna's stances have appeared too dovish to rally greater support, according to the polls.

Mitzna has called for building a fence to separate Israel from the West Bank, a project already begun by the Sharon government, but which has not moved as swiftly as some would like. Mitzna also calls for abandoning Jewish settlements, those in the Gaza Strip first.

He also has expressed willingness to negotiate with whomever the Palestinians choose as a leader, including Yasser Arafat. Last week, Mitzna declared that he would not join a national unity government with Likud, but he faces strong opposition on this issue from other members of his party.

Shas: With 17 seats in the current Knesset, this fervently Orthodox-Sephardi party may soon lose its place as parliament's third largest party. Polls show Shas losing votes to Likud, and according to the latest polls, it will win only 10 Knesset seats this time around.

Along with seeking support for Orthodox causes, the party seeks generous state funding for poorer Israelis.

A member of past coalitions led by Labor and Likud, Shas adopted a hawkish stance toward the Palestinians after the intifada began in September 2000.

Shinui: This dovish and secular party is the Cinderella story of the current election campaign. Under the leadership of former journalist Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, the party is expected to leap from six to 15 Knesset seats, making it the third strongest political force in the next Knesset.

Lapid's main agenda is anti-clerical. He calls for the creation of a secular national government, with no religious parties in power. He is considered liberal on economic issues, and center-right on the Palestinian issue.

Meretz: When Yossi Beilin, the architect of the Oslo accords and one of Israel's leading doves, recently left Labor to join Meretz, this leftist party hoped the move would boost its chances in the elections. However, recent polls show it will lose three of its 10 Knesset seats.

Under the leadership of Yossi Sarid, the party calls for Jerusalem to become the shared capital of both Israel and an eventual Palestinian state. It also calls for the disbanding of almost all settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

National Union-Israel Our Home: Led by a former director of the Prime Minister's Office, Avigdor Lieberman, this hawkish bloc stands to grow from seven Knesset seats to nine, primarily because of its clear stance against any concessions to the Palestinians.

The National Religious Party: This pro-settler party is expected to retain its current five seats in the next Knesset. Considered the main political force behind the settlement movement, the party opposes any territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

United Torah Judaism: This fervently Orthodox bloc, which includes the Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah parties, is expected to retain its current five Knesset seats. The party opposes drafting yeshiva students and strongly objects to any changes in Shabbat laws. It has been flexible on the Palestinian issue, but in recent years adopted a more hawkish stance.

Yisrael Ba'Aliyah: This immigrant-rights party, which held four seats in the outgoing Knesset, will have to settle for three in the next, according to polls. Apart from fighting for the rights of new immigrants, the party adopts a hawkish stand on the Palestinian issue.

One Nation: This workers-rights party seeks to close the economic gap between the haves and have-nots. It currently has two Knesset seats, and polls say it will have three in the next parliament.

Green Leaf: This party advocates legalizing marijuana. Polls say it will make its debut in the Knesset with one seat.

Herut: This nationalist party is expected to retain its sole Knesset seat after the elections. Led by veteran legislator Michael Kleiner, formerly of Likud, Herut also features the candidacy of Baruch Marzel, a former member of the outlawed Kach movement. The party is courting the fervently Orthodox community — a move that prompted members of the Ashkenazi community to urge its community not to vote for any "nonreligious" party.

Hadash-Ta'al: This the latest coalition in the Israeli Arab sector, combining Hadash, under the leadership of Mohammad Barakeh, with Ahmed Tibi's Ta'al movement. The two parties have four Knesset members in the outgoing Knesset; the polls anticipate three in the next.

United Arab List: This is a coalition of the Islamic Movement and the Arab Democratic Party, strongly influenced by moderate Islamists. It is expected to lose one of its current five Knesset seats.

Balad: This is a nationalist, pan-Arabist movement, chaired by Azmi Beshara, who calls for turning Israel into a country of "all its citizens" — that is, for it no longer to be a specifically Jewish state. Beshara is currently the only member of the party serving in the Knesset, but Balad is projected to win two additional seats. □