



# Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### National Union to join government

Israel's far-right National Union Party agreed to join Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's new government.

On Tuesday, the party reached agreement with Likud that the issue of Palestinian statehood would be brought before the Cabinet for debate "if and when" the question becomes relevant, according to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*.

According to the agreement, National Union leader Avigdor Lieberman is slated to receive the Transportation Ministry portfolio. The party is expected to take control of a second ministry, either Absorption or Tourism, according to the *Jerusalem Post*.

### JCPA rejects settlement language

Jewish leaders removed language from a resolution that would have addressed Israeli settlements.

Meeting Monday night in Baltimore at the plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, delegates voted to remove sections of the proposed resolution that endorsed a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and said Israeli settlement policy should "reflect the long-term goal of achieving peace."

The revised resolution passed the plenum, as did resolutions calling for continued dialogue with evangelical Christians, expressing support for using Holocaust restitution funds for the benefit of survivors and praising the Bush administration for its war on terrorism.

### Group plans large allocation

A group involved in Holocaust-era restitution efforts plans to distribute \$132 million over the next 10 years to elderly Holocaust survivors.

The International Commission on Holocaust-Era Insurance Claims announced the plan Monday after reaching an agreement last October with the German government and industry for the benefit of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.

ICHEIC decided that the funds will be distributed to social service agencies that assist needy survivors.

Of the \$15 million being allocated this year worldwide, \$6 million will be disbursed for services in Israel and \$2.4 million in the United States. ICHEIC asked the Claims Conference to implement the initial distribution.

## Jewish umbrella groups defeats resolution on Jewish settlements

By Matthew E. Berger

BALTIMORE (JTA) — An effort to put the organized Jewish community on record about Israel's settlement policy and support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict failed this week in favor of a general statement of support for the Jewish state.

Despite attempts to develop compromise language on the two controversial issues, delegates to the annual plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs passed a resolution that expressed solidarity with Israel, appreciation for Washington's commitment to Israel's security and called for new Palestinian leadership that "accepts the legitimacy of Israel as the Jewish state."

The resolution was adopted here late Monday night after hours of debate that focused little on the merits of Israel's settlement policy and future Israeli-Palestinian political concessions.

Instead, the plenum debate, which stretched over four hours and brought together 350 delegates from Jewish Community Relations Councils around the country and national Jewish organizations, centered on whether it is right for the American Jewish community to weigh in on Israeli policy at a time when Israel is engaged in a war against Palestinian terrorism.

The answer appeared to be a resounding no.

"I would take out any statement that is critical of the democratically elected government of Israel," Leonard Cole of Bergen County, N.J., a former JCPA chair, said during the debate, reflecting the predominant view expressed at the plenum.

The delegates to the JCPA, which is considered the organized community's main policy organization, battled over several other topics as well, ultimately adopting resolutions that:

- call for continued dialogue with evangelical Christians;
- express support for Holocaust restitution funds to be used solely for the benefit of survivors; and
- praise the Bush administration for its war on terrorism.

But the Israel resolution clearly dominated the debate.

Up for discussion when the debate began was compromise language to sections of the Israel resolution that focused on settlements and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational arm of the Reform movement, submitted a resolution weeks ago that said Israel's policy of settlement expansion "complicates" the chances for Middle East peace and called for a freeze on all settlement growth in the West Bank and Gaza.

Facing strong opposition from most of the organized Jewish community, Reform leaders agreed to compromise language before the debate began that said settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza "should reflect the long-term goal of achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians."

Moshe Fox, director of public affairs for the Embassy of Israel in Washington, began the session with a fiery call to members to consider whether a resolution critical of Israel's policies was the best message the American Jewish community could send to the families of Israelis killed from Palestinian violence.

But after the debate, members, in a vote of 361-287, also rejected the compromise language.

"This is very toned down, but it is still the case that this paragraph implies

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Meridor spearheads contacts

Israeli Cabinet minister Dan Meridor reportedly is involved in international contacts seeking a truce in the Gaza Strip. U.S., European and Egyptian officials are among those involved in the effort, Army Radio reported.

According to the report, the plan is the latest version of the "Gaza First" proposal, under which Israel would withdraw its forces and ease restrictions on Palestinian civilians if Palestinian security services halt terror attacks. The contacts come after the Israeli army stepped up operations in Gaza to stop Palestinians from firing rockets at Israeli towns.

### Israel to transfer funds

Israel is to release funds confiscated from the Palestinian Authority to provide for humanitarian aid to the Palestinians.

Israeli officials had confiscated some \$250,000, charging it was being used to support terrorism and corruption in the Palestinian Authority, Israel Radio reported. According to the report, it included gold and jewelry taken from the Palestinian Authority police chief in Ramallah, money confiscated at P.A. intelligence headquarters in Gaza and Hamas funds. Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz proposed that the money be transferred to an international organization to purchase humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, Israel Radio reported.

### Israeli goes on trial in Canada

Testimony began Monday in the trial of an Israeli accused of killing a teen-ager in Canada.

Daniel Weiz, 23, is accused along with two other men of second-degree murder in the 1999 death of Matti Baranovski, 15, in a Toronto park. Weiz, who returned to Israel a week after the crime, was extradited back to Canada in October 2000. The trial is expected to last several months.

something very harmful," said Richard Stone, senior vice president of the Orthodox Union.

He was joined in opposition by Richard Foltin, legislative director of the American Jewish Committee, who said it would be inappropriate to chastise Israeli policy at a time of terrorism. But Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, disagreed.

"It is our role to raise our voices and say what we think," said Pelavin, who represented the Reform movement at the debate. "We're not reporters, we're activists, and that's what we came here to do."

JCPA members also shot down language, in a vote of 340-308, that would have embraced President Bush's call last June for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead, the language adopted only mentions the speech as statement of fact. In the end, Reform leaders tried to table the remaining Israel resolution, maintaining that it did not say anything new.

But members overwhelmingly supported the remaining text, stressing the importance of showing solidarity with the Jewish state in the midst of the intifada.

Reform leaders said they never expected the settlement language to pass, and were heartened by the debate that their resolution had fostered.

Pelavin said many people he spoke with over the week agreed with the call to re-evaluate settlement policy, but did not think it appropriate to vote for the resolution's language.

He expressed hope that the debate opened the door for future conversations.

Hannah Rosenthal, JCPA's executive director, indicated she thought it would.

Praising the debate as engaging and civilized, she said, "I think it will continue to be a subject that people look forward to come to the plenum to debate."

Meanwhile, in another passionate exchange, delegates debated the proper use of unclaimed Holocaust restitution funds.

The majority of those speaking out expressed their belief that all Holocaust restitution funds should go to the health and welfare of survivors.

"Justice for those who suffered earlier in their life, that's what it's all about," said Joe Sachs, a delegate from Miami's Jewish community and the executive director of Holocaust Survivors Foundation USA. "We are not asking for charity."

The resolution affirms that a growing number of Holocaust survivors are lacking food and medical care, and that all restitution funds are needed to combat this problem.

The resolution, which was overwhelmingly passed, in essence goes against the position of the Claims Conference, which disburses unclaimed funds from the sale of Jewish property in the former East Germany by giving 80 percent to survivors and 20 percent to Holocaust education and other projects.

Supporting that position, David Mallach, assistant executive vice president of the United Jewish Federation of MetroWest, N.J., said: "The role of these funds in giving a name, Yad Vashem, to memories who could be lost is vitally important and shouldn't be compared and contrasted to the needs of survivors."

On the resolution supporting Bush's war on terrorism, delegates defeated proposed language that would have said the Jewish community "deplores the compromise of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties being carried out in the name of the war on terrorism."

"It would be a mistake if any major message that this organization sends out is to condemn our government," said Lee Adlerstein, also of MetroWest. "The government needs encouragement and control under the Constitution of the United States."

In a compromise, the affirmed resolution supports those actions against terrorism taken by the Bush administration's that "do not endanger constitutional rights" and expresses the belief that principles of fairness and due process are important safeguards to the battle.

On another front, delegates voted to support increasing dialogue with the evangelical Christian community. Evangelicals have shown increasing interest in working with Jewish leaders on their shared support for Israel, although Jews have been reluctant because of divergent domestic policy views and concerns about proselytizing.

"It's important because of their numbers, their influence politically and if we don't get to know who they are in the community, it will be hard to dialogue," said Michelle Kohn, of the Palm Beach County, Fla., delegation, which introduced the bill. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Cantor charged in rape

A Boston-area cantor charged with raping a mentally retarded woman was barred from his synagogue. Robert Shapiro was suspended from his duties as cantor at Temple Beth Am in Randolph, Mass., and prevented from officiating at services or from entering the synagogue, the Patriot Ledger of Quincy, Mass., reported.

Shapiro, 69, pleaded not guilty last week to three counts of rape and four counts of indecent assault and battery. The alleged attacks occurred over the past year at a nursing home where the woman lives and at the synagogue, the newspaper said.

### Tax exemption sought for troops

U.S. lawmakers are expected to introduce a bill this week that would extend tax-exempt status and other benefits to U.S. troops serving in Israel. Currently, salaries of troops in Israel are not tax exempt because it is classified as a military exercise, not preparation for a conflict.

Rep. William Janklow (R-S.D.), who just returned from Israel, said political reasons have prevented troops in Israel from being exempted. Janklow's bill would make all troops serving as part of Operation Enduring Freedom eligible for tax-exemption benefits, placing troops in Israel on par with their peers in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

### Divorces in Britain addressed

A bill designed to help Jewish women whose husbands will not grant them a religious divorce became law Monday in England and Wales. The new law grants courts the right to refuse to grant civil divorces to men who will not give their wives a religious divorce.

### Israeli musicians win prize

Two Israeli string quartets took first and second place at an international music competition in Austria.

The Ariel Quartet and Raviv Quartet took the honors at a Schubert competition in Graz, Austria, Israel Radio reported.

### Grammy winner had Jewish start

Norah Jones, who won five Grammys at Sunday's music awards ceremony, had her start at a Jewish community center in Manhattan. Jones performed at Makor some two dozen times, according to Brice Rosenbloom, director of Makor's music programming.

"Makor was, at one time, the biggest place she was performing," Rosenbloom said. Makor was where Blue Note Records saw Jones perform before signing her.

It was also where her father, Ravi Shankar, a popular Indian musician, first saw her perform.

## Jewish Agency restores funding for religious streams

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — The push for Jewish pluralism in Israel took one step forward and one step back this week.

In the wake of protests by the liberal religious movements, the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel voted Tuesday to restore a total of \$305,000 for the Conservative and Reform movements in Israel that the agency's Budget and Finance Committee had cut last November.

Yet that came a day after the emerging Likud-led government coalition — which includes the secular-rights Shinui Party and the National Religious Party — signaled it would not make major changes on key domestic issues such as allowing civil marriages or public transportation on the Sabbath.

Still, Conservative and Reform leaders hailed the Jewish Agency's decision to restore to its worldwide \$320 million budget for fiscal 2003-2004 about 18 percent of the \$4.26 million the liberal streams split in allocations.

The agency's leadership also pledged to help federations in North America, via the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella system, raise an additional \$197,000 over the next year for the liberal movements' educational and religious activities in Israel. That goes beyond what the agency's Finance Committee sought last November.

The budget moves follow months of protests by North American liberal religious leaders to revive the so-called "affirmative action" funding of their Israeli programs. For nearly two decades, the Jewish Agency has allocated about \$5 million for Israeli religious institutions, with the liberal movements getting 40 percent each and the Orthodox 20 percent.

That formula was designed to make up for the refusal of the Israeli religious establishment, which is dominated by the Orthodox, to aid liberal religious programs.

Funding of the liberal movements "is a very serious thing to tamper with," Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Reform movement's ARZA/World Union, said in a phone interview from Israel on Tuesday.

That money "is the glue that solidifies the unity of American Jewry in its relationship to the federations and its relationship with the state of Israel."

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational arm, said the agency realizes "the importance the streams play in North America and of pluralism in Israel."

Stephen Hoffman, UJC's chief executive officer and president, promised the liberal leaders in a February meeting to ensure that the agency would "revisit" the affirmative action funding — and "this is the revisiting," said the Jewish Agency's spokesman in Jerusalem, Yehuda Weinraub.

Hoffman agreed, calling the vote to return the \$305,000 to the liberal movements a "satisfactory" solution, while praising the pledge to find the remainder of the money through fund raising.

"It's a compromise to advocate on behalf of the streams to make it up," he said.

Not everyone greeted the agency decision warmly.

Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for the fervently Orthodox movement's Agudath Israel of America, maintained that support for the liberal streams "weakens us as a people."

"From our perspective, the impact of American-style Jewish religious pluralism in Israel is not, in the end, going to be a healthy thing for the Jewish state," Shafran said.

The American Jewish experience has been marked by intermarriage and assimilation, he said, "and we feel this is due in large part to the lowering in standards that seems to be part and parcel of the Reform and Conservative movements here."

Even as the Jewish Agency boosted the liberal movements in Israel, the nascent, Likud-led governing coalition seemed unlikely to make any radical changes on the pluralism front.

On Monday, the coalition said it would at some point change the law exempting yeshiva students from serving in the army, but wouldn't change the Orthodox ban on civil marriages or on public transport on the Sabbath. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**For Shinui, price of entering government may be its ideals**

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Since the start of Israel's election campaign last October, the flamboyant leader of the secular-rights Shinui Party had been promising a secular revolution in Israel.

This week Yosef "Tommy" Lapid seemed to have a golden opportunity to fulfill his promises when Shinui — which became Israel's third largest party after the Jan. 28 elections — agreed to join Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's new Likud-led government.

But the initial signs for a radical shift in secular-religious relations were not auspicious: Shinui, which has 15 Knesset seats, backed off much of its agenda when it compromised with the National Religious Party on the guidelines of the prospective government.

Moreover, political analysts are questioning just how much a government based on Likud, Shinui, the NRP and the hawkish National Union bloc — but without the Labor Party — will be able to move toward peace with the Palestinians.

The National Union, which is staunchly opposed to the Palestinian state Sharon says he supports under certain conditions, tentatively agreed Tuesday to join the government. The inclusion of the seven-member bloc would give Sharon a 68-seat coalition and a bit of breathing room in the 120-member Knesset.

Sharon was expected to present his government to the Knesset on Thursday.

Before Shinui and the NRP signed initial coalition agreements with the Likud on Monday, they worked out a deal on secular-religious affairs. First they agreed to annul the "Tal Law," which allows for blanket exemptions from military service for yeshiva students and enables fervently Orthodox men to join the Israeli work force without having to serve first in the army.

On the face of it, canceling the Tal Law seems like a major step forward in the campaign for equality between secular and fervently Orthodox Israelis. But the Shinui-NRP agreement gives no indication of what will replace the Tal Law, stipulating only that a committee will propose new legislation within a year.

It is therefore not at all clear that Shinui made any gains at all on one of its main election promises: equal army or national service for all.

Nor did Shinui achieve dramatic breakthroughs on two other key election promises: civil marriage and public transport on the Sabbath. The Shinui-NRP deal does provide a civil marriage option for an estimated 250,000 people barred from marrying by the Chief Rabbinate — for example, when one of the partners is not halachically Jewish or when a descendant of a priestly caste seeks to marry a divorcee.

But offering a civil marriage option for all Israelis is not part of the deal. Nor is there any progress on public transportation on the Sabbath: Where such services exist, they will continue; where they don't, nothing will be done to introduce them.

Perhaps most importantly, the Shinui-NRP deal leaves the Orthodox monopoly on Jewish religious affairs in Israel intact. There is no recognition of the Conservative or Reform streams nor any upgrading of their secondary status in Israel.

Indeed, except on civil marriage and Sabbath transport, Shinui agreed to back the status quo on religious affairs.

Acknowledging that Shinui legislators no longer could support a private member's bill on civil marriage that they had proposed jointly with a Labor legislator, Shinui's Yehudit Naot declared Monday, "There are things you just can't do when you're in government."

A few days before he signed the coalition deal, Lapid insisted that "whether we end up in the government or not, I see in our agreement with the NRP a new chapter in the relations between secular and moderate religious people in Israel."

However, few political analysts would agree.

"Where's the change?" the left-leaning secular daily Ha'aretz asked in a scathing editorial Monday, playing on the Hebrew meaning of Shinui's name.

The Shinui-NRP deal "raises concern that in their eagerness to join the government, Shinui's leaders have given up some of the most significant of their principles: freedom of religion and freedom from religion," Ha'aretz argued.

"If Shinui turns into another ruling party with no agenda," the paper warned, "its fate will be the same as the centrist parties that preceded it" — all of which quickly disintegrated.

The presence of the NRP and National Union in the coalition raises a second question: Will the new government, with its right-wing bias, be able to move toward peace with the Palestinians?

NRP leaders insist they will not accept Palestinian statehood in any shape or form, even though that is the declared aim of the "road map" toward peace being prepared by the diplomatic "Quartet" of the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia. Sharon has publicly accepted the gist of the road map, though Israel is suggesting certain changes that will make the Palestinians' responsibilities more explicit.

To appease the NRP, Sharon promised that government guidelines would include not a commitment to a Palestinian state but a reference to a speech Sharon delivered last December, when he outlined his vision of phased, performance-based progress to Palestinian statehood.

"Only once a specific phase has been implemented," Sharon said then, "will progress to the next phase be possible."

But what happens if there is genuine progress? Would the NRP stay in the coalition or pull out, forcing Sharon to form a new government, possibly with Labor?

The same uncertainty surrounds the durability of Sharon's pact with National Union, which is considered far more hawkish than the NRP. National Union leader Avigdor Lieberman had refused to accept any mention of a Palestinian state in the government guidelines. But he agreed with Likud negotiators Tuesday that the issue of Palestinian statehood would be brought before the Cabinet "if and when it becomes relevant."

The big question pundits are asking is whether the phased style Sharon favors in peacemaking applies to his coalition building.

When Sharon wants to move on the Palestinian track, Labor will again be invited to join the government on the basis of an agreed peace program.

Then again, this narrow coalition, with all its limitations, could be all Sharon really wants. Even with Labor consigned to the opposition, Sharon knows it would support any peace efforts he chooses to make — just the way Labor supported former Prime Minister Menachem Begin's peacemaking with Egypt from the opposition. □

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