



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu ousted from post

Israel's new foreign minister is expected to be Silvan Shalom, ousting Benjamin Netanyahu from his current position.

Earlier Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon offered Netanyahu the Finance Ministry, a position previously held by Shalom.

Netanyahu is considering whether he will accept the post. [Page 3]

Israel arrests 8 Palestinians

Israeli soldiers arrested eight Palestinians in the West Bank as a security alert for terrorist attacks remained in effect.

Arrests were made Wednesday in the areas of Bethlehem, Jenin and Tulkarm. Palestinians said a 13-year-old was killed in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday when he was caught in gunfire exchanges between Israeli troops and armed Palestinians.

Bush to Sharon: Happy Birthday

President Bush told Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that a successful Iraq war would lead to progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Bush called Sharon on Wednesday on the occasion of his 75th birthday, and congratulated him on his election victory last month.

The two discussed Israel's support for the "road map" toward Middle East peace and plans for a U.S. aid package for Israel.

Belgian official writes to Israel

Belgium's foreign minister wrote an open letter to Israel, expressing regret over the deterioration in relations between the two countries over a Belgian court decision enabling the prosecution of Israelis involved in the 1982 Lebanon War.

In a letter addressed to "my Israeli friends" that was published in Israeli and Belgian newspapers, Louis Michel said a Belgian law that grants judges universal jurisdiction for war crimes is not specifically aimed against Israel.

Earlier this month, Israel recalled its ambassador over the court ruling, which would authorize the Belgian court system to try Ariel Sharon in connection with the 1982 killing of Palestinians by Christian Phalangists in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps after Sharon steps down as prime minister.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

After decision on Falash Mura, question of funding is central

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel's decision to allow the remaining Ethiopians who claim Jewish ancestry to immigrate to Israel ends an emotional era of debate and politicking in the Jewish community.

It also begins a new one.

The battle has now moved to the funding for the immigration and absorption of some 18,000 Falash Mura, which Israel's minister of absorption, Yuli Edelstein, said will cost some \$400 million. At issue is how quickly the immigration will occur, whether strategic services will be provided in Ethiopia or in Israel and to what extent North American Jewry will shoulder the cost.

An inter-ministerial committee, headed by outgoing Interior Minister Eli Yishai of the Shas Party, has been formed to determine those answers — but it is already clear that Israel will be looking to North American Jewry to foot a large part of the bill.

The decision comes as the Jewish federation system in North America struggles to fund a host of priorities, during an economic downturn in North America, that range from aiding impoverished Argentine Jews to emergency services in Israel to funding local needs.

Advocates for the Falash Mura call Israel's decision a long-awaited victory, but others are concerned about how to fund the project.

The Falash Mura are descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity as much as a century ago under societal pressure. Many of them have begun to practice an Orthodox brand of Judaism while waiting for permission to move to Israel. The protracted dispute over their eligibility for aliyah began in 1990, when many Falash Mura accompanied Ethiopian Jews to Addis Ababa in hopes of immigrating to Israel.

While the Ethiopian Jews were accepted, the Falash Mura were turned away because they weren't eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return, which grants automatic citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent.

Skeptics argued that the Falash Mura essentially were economic refugees and should be rejected. Allowing the Falash Mura to immigrate, they said, would encourage abuse by other Ethiopians not entitled to Israeli citizenship.

Supporters said world Jewry's inaction was a way to skirt the expense of absorbing Third World immigrants. Some accused their opponents of racism, claiming that non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union were treated more leniently.

In the meantime, many Falash Mura — who left their homes in the countryside and moved to refugee camps in Addis Ababa and Gondar hoping to emigrate quickly — fell prey to disease and starvation.

Their straits caused some advocates to argue that even if the Falash Mura wouldn't otherwise be eligible to move to Israel, they should be allowed to emigrate to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

Due to pressure from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, the Israeli Cabinet voted Feb. 16 to make eligible for immigration all who can show some maternal Jewish link.

Up to this point, about 18,500 Falash Mura have made aliyah during the past decade, with approval on a case-by-case basis. One source claimed that the political grandstanding around Israel's recent decision to allow Falash Mura immigration masks the fact that it merely confirms longstanding policy.

Others disagreed. The policy "represents a major step forward," said Barbara Riba-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli soldiers sue filmmaker

Five Israeli reserve soldiers who took part in the army incursion into the Jenin refugee camp last year sued the Arab director of a film on the controversial operation.

The plaintiffs who filed the \$500,000 libel suit on Wednesday said the film, "Jenin, Jenin," slanders the soldiers who fought there and is falsely presented as a documentary.

The lawsuit was also filed against the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem Cinemateques, which privately screened the film despite a ban on commercial screening.

The director of the film, Mohammed Bakri, said the film is "one large truth," but not the Israelis' truth.

Bombs found in Gaza, West Bank

Israeli troops discovered a bomb near a Gaza Strip settlement.

They were working to defuse the bomb, found on Wednesday.

In the West Bank, troops safely destroyed two bombs and fertilizer used to make explosives that were discovered in a village near the settlement of Sha'are Tikvah.

Shin Bet chief nixes Belgium trip

The head of Israel's Shin Bet security service recently canceled a trip to Belgium out of concern that the country's authorities might try to arrest him for his involvement in Israel's anti-terrorism campaign.

Defense officials confirmed Tuesday a report on Israel's Channel 10 that Avi Dichter had canceled plans to deliver a lecture on international terrorism at a conference because he might be arrested under a Belgian law allowing war crimes proceedings, even if they did not occur in Belgium.

Dichter canceled his trip after Foreign Ministry and military experts were unable to answer whether he might be arrested, the report said.



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kove, executive director of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry.

"It is a statement of positive attitude toward the aliyah, coming as it does from the Cabinet," she said.

One source warned that if a member of the staunchly secular Shinui Party is appointed interior minister in the next government, as now seems almost certain, he might curtail Shas' efforts because of the antagonism between the two parties. The head of the Interior Ministry leads the inter-ministerial committee on the Falash Mura.

But others dismissed that possibility.

"Shas has pursued the issue because in their view, which accords with the views of rabbinic authorities from all streams of Judaism, including Ethiopian spiritual leaders, the Falash Mura are Jews, and we have a religious obligation to help them," said Joseph Feit, past president of the North American Conference, known as NACOEJ.

The government resolution requests increased humanitarian aid for Falash Mura in Ethiopia.

Such aid currently comes from the North American Conference — which feeds 10,000 meals a day to 7,000 children and pregnant and nursing women, and educates 4,500 children — and the Jewish federation system's overseas partner, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which runs health clinics providing nutritional supplements.

The resolution also calls for talks with NACOEJ, JDC and the Jewish Agency for Israel, another overseas partner of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations.

The Jewish Agency runs immigration and absorption programs for the Falash Mura in Israel.

Yishai hinted at the financial burden for North American Jewry in a Feb. 3 letter to NACOEJ.

Asking the group to discuss the upcoming aliyah with the JDC and UJC, Yishai wrote, "I recommend to all of you that this project should be viewed as urgent, justifying the expenditure of financial resources."

The UJC will abide by Israeli policy, but the request is a tough one, activists say.

"We've got a big problem here," said Karen Shapira, former chair of UJC's Israel and Overseas Pillar. The federation system already is "really stretched" to meet the panoply of Jewish needs, she said.

UJC not only is running its annual campaign but, because of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence, is continuing its Israel Emergency Campaign for a second year.

Ironically, the emergency campaign trumped another Ethiopian-related effort: Before the outbreak of the intifada in September 2000, the UJC had promised a 10-year, \$600 million National Ethiopian Project to ease the integration of Ethiopians already in Israel. The project has been scaled back to just \$10 million, according to Shapira.

"I can't imagine we'll just have another campaign," Shapira said. Instead, she said, funds might be solicited from foundations or the U.S. government.

For its part, NACOEJ already complains that it lacks funds. But the group will solicit activists, federations and foundations "with redoubled energy," Ribakove says.

But federations face a major challenge in soliciting American Jewish donors.

The faltering U.S. economy and an anticipated war against Iraq are causing donors to take a wait-and-see attitude in general, said Robert Schroyer, vice chair of the UJC and chair of its Israel Emergency Campaign.

"The economy here is going to be a difficult problem to cope with," Schroyer said.

But, he added, "I think the American Jewish community responds to the needs in Israel and the needs locally — so as we have more needs, we do find people that are willing to step forward, even despite the economy, and make sizable commitments."

Arieh Azoulay, chair of the Jewish Agency's immigration and absorption committee, said the Jewish people are "always ready to participate" in government decisions that affect Israeli demographics.

But Jewish Agency and JDC officials said they are awaiting clarification from Israel.

"Once there is a new Cabinet formed in Israel and a Minister of Interior is appointed, we shall reach out to ask for interpretation and more details of this decision," said Steven Schwager, JDC's executive vice president. □

JEWISH WORLD

Animals, Shoah victims compared

The Anti-Defamation League criticized an animal rights group for comparing the treatment of animals to the treatment of Jews during the Holocaust.

In a statement, the ADL called the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' "Holocaust on Your Plate" campaign "outrageous" and "offensive."

The ADL added: "Abusive treatment of animals should be opposed, but cannot and must not be compared to the Holocaust."

Poll: Palestinians not ready

More than two-thirds of Americans believe that the Palestinian Authority is not ready for statehood, according to a recent poll.

Seventy-one percent of respondents in a poll of 1,000 Americans, conducted earlier this month for the Zionist Organization of America, said the Palestinian Authority has not fulfilled President Bush's preconditions for statehood.

These preconditions include halting terror attacks and respecting human rights. Fifty-one percent believe a Palestinian state would be a terrorist state, and 61 percent believe its goal would be to destroy Israel.

The poll has a margin of error of 3.1 percent.

In another poll, conducted among more than 1,000 respondents by Zogby International, Israel made the most favorable impression of six Middle East countries. Israel received a 59 percent favorable response rate in the poll.

Anti-racism plan for France

French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin announced a plan to combat the growing wave of anti-Semitism in schools.

Raffarin told the French Cabinet last week that he had instructed Education Minister Luc Ferry to convene teachers' and parents' representatives within the next few days to discuss the new measures.

The measures include information campaigns as well as sanctions against any schools deemed non-compliant with government regulations.

"We must demand that school directors apply the firmest criteria to avoid the importation of the Middle East conflict into French classrooms," Ferry said.

More security at Prague sites

Czech police began patrolling key Jewish sites in Prague as part of wide-ranging security measures before a possible U.S.-led war against Iraq.

The Czech Federation of Jewish Communities welcomed the move, saying it has long called for a more visible police presence at tourist locations and Jewish administrative buildings. "The security measures are unfortunate but necessary," said the federation's executive director, Tomas Kraus.

Sharon pulls some surprises with choice of Cabinet ministers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had some surprises up his sleeve as he dispensed Cabinet posts among members of his Likud Party this week.

Likud members, already unhappy over what they viewed as Sharon's decision to give away choice ministry portfolios to other coalition partners, were further surprised by the Cabinet reshuffle that emerged.

In the most prominent move, Sharon offered the Foreign Ministry in the new Israeli government to Finance Minister Silvan Shalom, ousting Benjamin Netanyahu from his current position.

Earlier Wednesday, Sharon had offered the Finance Ministry to Netanyahu, who turned it down. But following consultations with close advisers, and a proposal from Sharon that sweetened the deal, Netanyahu was still considering the finance portfolio late Wednesday.

According to Israel Radio, in addition to the Cabinet appointment, Netanyahu would be a member of the Security Cabinet. He also wants to serve as acting prime minister in Sharon's absence.

Shalom's appointment as foreign minister surprised some observers, given his relative inexperience in diplomacy.

Shalom, 45, was born in Tunisia and immigrated to Israel in 1959.

A Knesset member since 1992, he previously served as science minister and deputy defense minister in the government of then-Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The possible portfolio switch between Netanyahu and Shalom came against the backdrop of tension between Sharon and Shalom this week, over reports that the prime minister preferred to give the finance portfolio to his close associate and the former Jerusalem mayor, Ehud Olmert.

Instead, Olmert is expected to become minister of industry and trade.

In another appointment, Tzachi Hanegbi won a speculated toss-up among Cabinet ministers Dan Naveh and Tzipi Livni for public security minister. Education Minister Limor Livnat was to remain in her position, as was Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, who was promised the post by Sharon before the Jan. 28 elections.

As Sharon met with the Likud ministers throughout the day Wednesday, representatives from the Likud, Shinui, National Religious Party and National Union presented their signed draft coalition agreements to the Knesset secretary.

Sharon was expected to present the ministers in his new government to the Knesset on Thursday, except for those from the NRP.

The NRP Central Committee is to convene Sunday for a vote to determine which of its legislators will head the welfare and housing ministries.

Sharon's four-party coalition will command a 68-seat majority in the 120-member Knesset. The hard-line makeup of the new government has raised questions over prospects for any future progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track. Both the NRP and National Union included their objections to a Palestinian state in their coalition agreements. But Olmert said Wednesday that he hoped additional parties would later join the government.

For his part, Shinui Knesset member Avraham Poraz said the unifying element of the parties comprising the new coalition is their sense of "economic responsibility."

Meanwhile, in the opposition, Labor Party leader Amram Mitzna denied a media report that he was considering not running for a second term in the face of stiff opposition from party colleagues. Labor's devastating defeat in the Jan. 28 general election and Mitzna's recent decision to halt all coalition contacts with the Likud prompted open and bitter criticism in the party this week.

Other Cabinet appointments include Yisrael Katz of Likud, agriculture minister; Shinui members Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, justice minister; Avraham Poraz, interior minister; Yosef Paritsky, infrastructures minister; Yehudit Naot, environmental affairs minister; and Mordechai Zandberg, science and technology minister; National Union members Avigdor Lieberman, transport minister, and Benny Elon, tourism minister; and ministers without portfolio, Natan Sharansky, Dan Meridor and Gideon Ezra. □

Jews in France, Germany split on need for U.S. action in Iraq

By Philip Carmel

PARIS (JTA) — While opposition to a U.S.-led war on Iraq is widespread in France and Germany, Jewish leaders in the two countries have bucked the trend by coming out in favor of an attack.

Among the Jewish rank-and-file, however, support is less clear.

Indeed, some Jews in the two countries that have been leading opposition to a war fear that a U.S. attack could lead to an anti-Semitic backlash.

In France, it's increasingly rare to find voices from any side of the political spectrum supporting an attack on Iraq.

So when the president of CRIF, the umbrella organization for secular Jewish institutions in France, told guests at the group's recent annual dinner that France should play an active role in bringing down Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, some felt he had placed the community in a difficult position.

Public opposition to the war currently runs at around 90 percent in France, according to recent polls.

Just the same, CRIF President Roger Cukierman told dinner guests — who included French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin — that the French government should “lead a victorious battle against fanaticism.”

“Those who fear that fighting terrorism places our freedoms in jeopardy are missing the mark, as Daladier and Chamberlain once did,” Cukierman said, referring to the policy of appeasement pursued by the French and British governments toward Nazi Germany before World War II.

Cukierman's pro-war viewpoint was echoed in an editorial appearing in the French Jewish weekly *Actualite Juive*.

Editor Serge Benattar said in the editorial that while he feared for the war's effects on Israel, it was vital to get rid of Saddam, who has been “the only Arab leader to have succeeded in firing missiles on Tel Aviv.”

Moreover, if the Iraqi leader is not disarmed at the earliest opportunity, “Jerusalem would probably be his next target,” Benattar wrote.

He was therefore in support of military action, “though I dislike it and I fear it, but I deny the right of anyone to brand me a warmonger.”

Within the same paper, however, there were other articles opposing military action.

Among France's 500,000 Jews, meanwhile, the principal reaction is worry.

Anti-Semitic attacks, which soared early in 2002, have fallen sharply in recent months — but French Jews fear they'll increase again if the United States invades Iraq.

Given the anti-war atmosphere in France, the first targets of those opposed to the war may be those seen as supportive of the United States and Israel.

Standing just yards away from a huge anti-war poster above city hall in the Paris suburb of Montreuil, Michel Golstein told JTA he wasn't convinced that war was necessary — but that if it did come, it would be difficult for French Jews. “This war is going to be seen by all Muslims in France as a war against Arabs, and by others as a war for Israel,” Golstein said. “That makes me very scared of what might happen here if there's a war.”

In Germany, as in France, Jewish leaders have spoken out in favor of an attack on Iraq.

But their constituents, some 100,000 Jews, are not so sure.

The *Judische Allgemeine Zeitung*, Germany's main Jewish newspaper, conducted a poll of 30 Jews in several cities and found a 50-50 split between those for and against war. Among the general German population, 70 percent oppose war on Iraq.

Among Jews who spoke with JTA, most agreed that German Jewish leaders should speak their minds on any matter related to Jewish life in Germany and the security of Israel.

But some said they disagreed strongly with the pro-war position taken by Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, who recently equated the need for action against Iraq with Allied military steps against the Nazis.

“Jewish leaders should not mix too much into international politics, but concentrate on the needs of the communities,” said Rabbi Walter Rothschild of Berlin, who said he thought war might be the only answer in Iraq. But if Jewish communities feel threatened as a result of international tensions surrounding the war question, he added, “then this becomes a legitimate topic for comment and, if necessary, lobbying.”

Gudrun Wilhelmy, 52, of Berlin, who opposes war, supported the right and duty of leaders and others to express their views.

“I want to read the wide spectrum of opinions, to think about my own opinion,” she said.

Several people said they thought war was necessary, but feared it would fail.

“I don't believe that disarmament can be achieved in any other way than war,” said Sigmund Konigsberg, 42. “But I doubt that the U.S. army will be successful” because it has less international support today than during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Richard Chaim Schneider, 46, a Munich-based journalist, thought “the U.S. is right concerning the danger Saddam Hussein poses.” But, he added, “I'm afraid that the U.S. will not succeed with their goals of ‘bringing democracy’ to Iraq — if these are their real goals.”

Some said they were disturbed by what they saw as an anti-American, anti-Israel tone in recent peace demonstrations.

“In Berlin and other towns, we were able to see the banners: ‘Fight Imperialism — Fight Zionism.’ That can't be right,” said student Chaim Guski, 25.

Such sentiments are “a shocking new reality in Germany,” said Uriel Kashi, 27, president of the Federal Union of Jewish Students in Germany, who reluctantly supports a war to bring democracy to the Middle East.

Andreas Nachama, 51, a historian and former president of the Berlin Jewish Community, did not join in a recent peace demonstration because “it was primarily anti-American and not against violence of all kinds, or for disarmament.”

He criticized German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder for “using pacifism to sell a new German populism, in the form of a German national political identity.”

Jael Geis, a 55-year-old historian in Berlin, said she would “rather support those who try to use political means” instead of war to bring about change.

“To me, one conclusion from Judaism and from the Shoah is human rights first,” she said. “As the word implies, human rights are for everybody.” □

(JTA correspondent Toby Axelrod in Berlin contributed to this report.)