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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon finalizes Cabinet

Israeli Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accepted the Finance Ministry in the new government after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon promised him expanded responsibilities. On Thursday, before a special Knesset session where he presented his Cabinet and government guidelines, Sharon made a series of Cabinet appointments.

Sharon offered former Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert the Trade Ministry. Other appointments confirmed Thursday included Dan Naveh as health minister and Tzipi Livni as absorption minister. Uzi Landau and Meir Sheerit will both be ministers without portfolios in the new government.

During his speech to the Knesset, Sharon confirmed that the coalition guidelines do not require ministers to support Palestinian statehood. He added that Israel is ready for "painful compromises" to make peace, but would not concede on essential security matters.

UJC's Washington head leaving

Diana Aviv, the vice president for public policy at the United Jewish Communities and the group's chief Washington lobbyist, will leave her post in June.

Aviv, who heads the UJC's Washington office, will serve as president and CEO of Independent Sector, a coalition of foundations and nonprofit groups.

She told JTA she was leaving to take advantage of an opportunity to do some "transformative" work.

Aviv went to Washington in 1994 to head the Washington office of the Council of Jewish Federations, which later merged with the United Jewish Appeal to form the UJC. "We've broadened the agenda" of the Washington office, she said, noting that its focus 10 years ago was almost exclusively on refugee issues.

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Architect named to rebuild WTC

The architect who designed Berlin's Jewish museum was tapped Wednesday to create the glass towers and memorial that will rise from the ashes of the World Trade Center.

The design by Daniel Libeskind's firm calls for a subterranean memorial to the victims of Sept. 11 surrounded by towers.

It also calls for a 1,776-foot-tall spire that will stand taller than any building in the world.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Arafat says he wants prime minister, but likely candidates for post are coy

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian gunmen escalated in recent weeks, the front-runners for the proposed post of Palestinian Authority prime minister have competed to project a moderate appearance.

Mahmoud Abbas, the second in command to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, announced last weekend in Moscow that the Palestinian Authority would call for a suspension of all attacks against Israel for a year.

The statement was made on behalf of Palestinian Authority President Arafat, Abbas said, and was based on an Egyptian proposal promoted in Cairo during talks among the various Palestinian factions.

Many observers took Abbas' statement as an attempt to show moderation in the face of the growing radicalization of Palestinian Islamic movements and elements within Arafat's own Fatah Party.

If Arafat does agree to international pressure to appoint a prime minister, the other leading contender is Finance Minister Salam Fayed.

In recent months, Fayed has met regularly on financial matters with Israeli officials; most notably, Dov Weisglass, an aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

American and Israeli officials have nothing but praise for Fayed — so much so that Sharon's office leaked to the press that Fayed was Sharon's preferred negotiating partner.

That leak, of course, diminished Fayed's prospects of getting the job.

What triggered the speculation over the two men's political future was Arafat's recent announcement that he would meet the international community's demands for reform by appointing a prime minister.

It's not clear, however, whether the United States, Israel and other nations ministers would be satisfied.

The demand was intended to ensure that real power passes from Arafat to someone more inclined to end Palestinian terrorism and make peace with Israel, but after reaping credit for the bold announcement, Palestinian officials made clear — in Arabic — that the prime minister's powers would be severely limited and that he would be subordinate to Arafat.

In any case, both of the presumed candidates for prime minister announced last week that they had no interest in the job.

"I'm not a candidate for this position," Fayed told the Palestinian daily Al-Ayyam from London.

He was in Britain attending talks between Palestinians, Israelis and international donors.

"Anyhow," he added, "I would not be a candidate for any position that in any way runs contrary to the higher Palestinian interest and would weaken the authority of the elected president of the Palestinian people, Yasser Arafat."

In other words, Fayed seemed to be saying, he would consider the position, but not as part of a plan to neutralize Arafat.

Abu Mazen, as Abbas is known, made a similar statement in Doha, the capital of Qatar.

So far Arafat has not said who would get the job or even when the position would be created — perhaps because Arafat wants to make sure that the person holding the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Bush: War will lead to peace

A U.S.-led war in Iraq could lead to progress in Middle East peace by taking out a source of funding for terrorist groups, President Bush said.

"The passing of Saddam Hussein's regime will deprive terrorist networks of a wealthy patron that pays for terrorist training, and offers rewards to families of suicide bombers," Bush told the American Enterprise Institute in Washington on Wednesday.

"And other regimes will be given a clear warning that support for terror will not be tolerated."

Bush also said Palestinians would be in a better position to choose new leaders not compromised by terror groups.

Arafat calls on Saddam for help

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat asked Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein for continued help in fighting Israel.

"Any kind of support and assistance from you in these difficult times will enable us to continue our persistence and resistance," Arafat wrote in a letter earlier this month to Saddam, according to the Washington-based Middle East Media Research Institute. "Hand in hand," Iraq and the Palestinians will march to Jerusalem, Arafat added.

Arafat also wished Saddam well as a U.S.-led war against Iraq looms: "May Allah the Powerful protect Iraq from the great dangers and evils that loom over it."

Sharon, Mubarak to meet

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will meet next week. Israel's Channel One Television reported that the two will meet at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheik.

Following Israel's Jan. 28 election, Mubarak said he would invite Sharon to meet with him once the new Israeli government is formed.

position doesn't forget who the real boss is. The demand for a prime minister was first raised less than a year ago by some Palestinian influentials angered by the autocratic and corrupt nature of Arafat's rule.

Members of the central council of Fatah, Arafat's ruling party, suggested during the Israeli siege of Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah that he appoint Abbas as premier. The idea was raised as part of a continuous demand for reform, and as an elegant way to relieve the Israeli pressure on Arafat himself.

Still, rumor has it that Arafat was so furious when he read the document that he scribbled a remark on the paper: "The conspiracy continues."

The popular demand for reform still exists, but it's hardly likely Arafat will take the extra mile, for the simple reason that he understands the consequences: Even if Abbas were a yes-man, the appointment could set a precedent that could lead to Arafat's eventual irrelevancy.

Abbas, 68, was born in Safed.

He earned his bachelor's degree in law from Damascus University and his doctorate in history from Moscow's Oriental College.

Abbas fled to Syria after Israel's 1948 War of Independence, and in 1965 joined Fatah. He soon became a member of the group's central committee and devoted himself full time to political work.

He returned to the Palestinian areas in July 1995 as a result of the Oslo Accords with Israel.

Though Abbas was a key figure in the Oslo talks and a signatory to the 1993 Declaration of Principles that launched the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, he mouthed radical views after the collapse of the Camp David talks in 2000, ruling out any Israeli presence in the West Bank or Gaza Strip and insisting that millions of Palestinian refugees and their descendants be granted a "Right of Return" to their former homes in Israel.

The change in rhetoric was seen as a way for Abbas to revive his plummeting popularity among the Palestinian public. Public criticism of his luxurious Gaza residence and his affluent lifestyle continues, but Abbas has established himself as No. 2 in the Palestinian Authority, and it generally is assumed that if he wants the job of prime minister, he'll get it.

Fayed, on the other hand, is popular not only with the Americans and Israelis, but among his own people.

Fayed, 50, was born in a village near Tulkarm in the West Bank and moved with his family to Jordan as a child.

He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Beirut, and completed doctoral studies at the University of Texas.

He worked with the International Monetary Fund in Washington, which in 1995 sent him as its emissary to the Palestinian Authority.

In June 2002, under heavy American pressure on Arafat to reform his government, Fayed was appointed finance minister.

He began channeling most Palestinians funds into one tightly controlled budget, and has tried to put an end to the situation where Palestinian officials simply helped themselves to funds intended for public benefit.

Unlike Abbas, Fayed is known for his modest ways: He often uses public transportation, often faces the hardships of Israeli roadblocks like other Palestinians and is not surrounded by bodyguards.

Other figures mentioned as possible candidates for prime minister are Ahmed Karia, or Abu Ala, the speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council; Hani Hassan, the P.A.'s interior minister; and Nabil Sha'ath, the minister for planning and international cooperation.

Despite American and Israeli involvement, the final word on the issue still will be Arafat's.

He wants to convene the legislative council and the central council of the PLO to approve a candidate, and has issued a list of implausible demands that Israel must meet before he will appoint a prime minister.

The result is that the procedure will take time. So names come and go, but for the time being Arafat, confined to his Ramallah headquarters, deprived of a lot of his power, remains the only boss in Palestinian politics. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Rabbi gets navy nod

A rabbi was selected director of U.S. Navy Reserve chaplains. Reform Rabbi Harold Robinson, a captain in the Navy Reserve Chaplaincy, was selected Tuesday by the naval chaplaincy board as rear admiral of the U.S. Naval Chaplains Reserve Force.

Robinson is expected to assume the post within six months, when the current rear admiral retires, according to Rabbi David Lapp, director of the Jewish Welfare Board Jewish Chaplains Council. Robinson, rabbi of B'nai Zion Congregation in Shreveport, La., is the third rabbi in history to attain this rank in the navy, following Reform Rabbi Bertram Korn and Conservative Rabbi Aaron Landes.

Man sentenced for shul attack

A 22-year old man was sentenced to up to four years in a U.S. prison for his role in a failed Yom Kippur Eve synagogue bombing.

Mohammed Alfakih was sentenced Wednesday for throwing two Molotov cocktails at Congregation Adath Israel in the Bronx on Oct. 8, 2000. One of his co-defendants, Mazin Assi, was convicted of attempted arson and weapons possession. He faces up to 22 years in prison when he is sentenced next month.

London gets an eruv

London's first large-scale eruv becomes operational this Shabbat after 13 years of planning. The eruv provides a boundary that enables observant Jews to carry some items and push baby carriages within its perimeter on the Sabbath.

The boundary covers an 11-mile area that includes much of London's most heavily Jewish neighborhood.

Chirac gets Yad Vashem book

The chairman of Yad Vashem met in Paris with French President Jacques Chirac. During Wednesday's meeting at the Elysee Palace, Avner Shalev presented Chirac with a book detailing the names of French non-Jews who had risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

Containing the names of some 1,200 French citizens, the volume is part of the new "Encyclopedia of the Righteous of the Nations." Other volumes cover Holland, Poland and other nations around the world. In all, there are more than 19,000 names detailed in the encyclopedia, which includes letters, photographs, an index and a glossary.

Rabbinic scholar dies

Rabbi Yisrael Ya'acov Fisher, a prominent rabbinic scholar, died in Jerusalem on Thursday at 78. Fisher had served as president of the fervently Orthodox rabbinical courts.

Departure of chief lobbyist poses new challenge for UJC

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — The departure of its top Washington advocate could pose a new challenge for the federation system, which relies on the post to ensure billions of dollars for its programs.

Diana Aviv, the United Jewish Communities' vice president for public policy, will leave her position of nearly a decade in June to become president and CEO of Independent Sector, a prominent coalition of more than 700 philanthropic and public interest groups.

Aviv is widely regarded as a star lobbyist with broad connections to Washington power circles. Her move comes amid a flurry of personnel changes for the UJC, which continues to face criticism for having trouble assembling a vision.

"They're going to have some very big shoes to fill," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"She was regarded as one of the most knowledgeable experts in town on government funding of social services," Saperstein said, and was "a remarkable Jewish presence in much of the activity that happens in Washington that affects the Jewish community."

Richard Wexler, a member of UJC's budget committee, said Aviv "understood our system well and could articulate it brilliantly."

UJC's Washington Action Office, which also houses UJC's Human Service and Social Policy Pillar, is charged with lobbying for government funds that help sustain local services provided by Jewish federation agencies.

Such services include Jewish family services, low-income housing and health care.

The federation system, through its social service agencies, receives \$5 billion to \$7 billion a year in federal and state grants, the bulk of which is through Medicare and Medicaid, Aviv said.

She cited as an example the \$6 million in federal funds her office helped secure for federation-supported agencies serving the elderly.

The appropriations bill passed recently by Congress contains funds for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, or NORCs, in 13 Jewish communities across the country.

Aviv said her office's greatest accomplishment since she came in 1994 was to get local Jewish communities to understand that "we have a massive stake in the federal agenda and budget."

With the Jewish community's current preoccupation with Israel and terrorism, she said, "I am concerned that people don't agree on the degree to which this area is at risk."

This is not "a criticism of people's priorities, but a plea" that the Jewish community not lose sight of what's at stake in terms of U.S. government funding, she said.

Stephen Hoffman, UJC president and CEO, praised the work of Aviv and her office.

They have "helped to achieve major wins for our domestic and international interests," he said.

"She will leave our Washington operation in the strongest possible position to continue achieving successes in the future."

"We are thrilled for Diana Aviv for her professional opportunity to lead a key entity in the nonprofit sector. Of course, the Independent Sector's gain is UJC's loss."

But some believe her loss will provide new opportunities and approaches.

And some insiders say her taking the helm at Independent Sector may be a boon for the Jewish community.

"To have someone who knows the Jewish community so well and is so well respected" in political and religious circles in Washington head Independent Sector "will be helpful in ensuring that both the Jewish community remains informed about issues that affect all nonprofits, including our own, and that Jewish concerns will certainly be heard in the broader nonprofit community," Saperstein said.

According to insiders, possible candidates being talked about to replace Aviv include Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center, and Reva Price, JCPA's Washington representative. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel's new face at United Nations hopes to exploit his business skill

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — When the U.N. Security Council erupted in debate last week over whether to back a U.S. war on Iraq, Israel's new ambassador to the U.N. was conspicuously absent.

It wasn't by accident: Israel wants to keep a low profile on Iraq because of the Arab argument that a United States attack on Baghdad would be for Israel's benefit.

"We are following the developments very closely," said Dan Gillerman, who assumed Israel's U.N. ambassadorship in January.

Indeed, two Israeli representatives attended the Security Council meeting. But Israel is trying to be "low-key," Gillerman said. "We're not part of it."

Gillerman, the former chairman of the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce, director of Bank Leumi and the Bank of Israel and CEO of chemical and agricultural technology companies, is Israel's first U.N. ambassador to come from the business world.

His appointment comes as the United Nations faces a momentous debate on whether to back a U.S.-led war on Iraq, which could prompt an Iraqi attack on the Jewish state and upset the fragile dynamics of the Middle East.

And though Israel recently won its first chairmanship of a U.N. body in 42 years, the Arab-dominated United Nations — in which Libya heads the human rights commission and Syria sits on the Security Council — has been hostile ground for the Jewish state.

According to Dina Siegel Vann, U.N. and Latin American affairs director for B'nai B'rith International, Gillerman's success in the corporate "world of sharks" has prepared him well for the hostile U.N. environment.

Gillerman has positioned himself as an outsider — for example, after launching an Israeli-Palestinian business dialogue at the 2001 World Economic Forum in New York, he joked that "we live in a world where politicians build walls and businessman build bridges." Yet he now finds himself inside one of the most labyrinthine political organs around.

The challenge is natural for him, Gillerman says.

"The things I did up until now have really been a preparation for this point," Gillerman told JTA last week.

"I always believed in personal diplomacy," says Gillerman, who — with his smoothed hair, impeccable clothes, resonant voice and air of authority — is the picture of polish.

In fact, Gillerman has used his business and political connections to advance Israel's interests in the past, often running ahead of the political echelon.

He led an Israeli delegation to China to discuss trade a year and a half before the two countries established diplomatic ties, and brokered underground relations with Eastern European countries before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

He also snuck into Communist Hungary to meet the country's prime minister, and arranged a meeting for the Hungarian politician with Ariel Sharon, then Israel's minister of industry and trade.

Gillerman said leaders in business and diplomacy might apply Dr. Ruth's description of safe sex: an act that satisfies both partners and hurts neither.

Gillerman hopes to use his U.N. position to promote peace,

wipe out terrorism and boost Israel's image.

"Israel is ready and Prime Minister Sharon is ready" to make "very far-reaching and even painful concessions for peace," he said. "But in order to do that, he must have a partner."

Gillerman said he has found great understanding at the United Nations for some of Israel's positions.

The time is close when Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat will either be forced from office or will appoint a prime minister to run Palestinian affairs, Gillerman said.

Last week, Sharon met with Salam Fayed, the P.A. finance minister, who is overseeing P.A. financial reforms that the international community has demanded.

In fighting Palestinian terrorism, Israel is "fighting the world's war," Gillerman said.

On Feb. 20, in his first speech before the 15-member Security Council, the only U.N. body with binding authority, Gillerman reiterated that message

"I call on the Security Council to implement a policy of zero tolerance for terrorism," Gillerman told the body's Counter Terrorism Committee, asking the group to pressure and shame states that support terror. "The time has come to stop talking, and start acting."

Gillerman wants to transform Israel's U.N. presence from a "one-issue mission" consumed with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a "multi-issue mission" that shares Israeli expertise in technology, medicine and social welfare.

Such a program would cost "a small amount of money" — under \$10 million, Gillerman estimated — but would help Israel's image.

Israel enjoys strong bilateral ties with many U.N. member countries, but those friendships typically don't prevent those states from bowing to Arab pressure to vote for pro-Palestinian resolutions at all types of U.N. meetings.

Israel's selection as one of the three vice chairs for the U.N.'s working group on disarmament does not represent a significant shift in the Jewish state's position at the world body, Gillerman said.

But it proves "you should never give up," he said. "I hope it's a precedent which we will be able to emulate again in the future."

For now, Israel is fending off a Palestinian-drafted resolution on terrorism at the annual meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, an unofficial group of 135 U.N. member states that is meeting in Malaysia.

Gillerman noted the absurdity of Palestinians drafting a resolution on terrorism, but joked that no group is better equipped to write about the subject.

He anticipates that he'll return to business after his diplomatic stint. In the meantime, his business background will shape Israel's diplomacy.

The new ambassador has instituted morning staff meetings — a practice he learned from former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani — and a spirit of entrepreneurship and initiative, he says.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, calls Gillerman a charming figure.

"A lot more people are going to know who Dan Gillerman is" than his predecessor, Yehuda Lancry, whom Foxman praised as an effective, low-key diplomat.

Foxman said Gillerman will complement Israeli Ambassador to the United States, Daniel Ayalon, and its consul general in New York, Alon Pinkas, giving the Jewish state a more articulate lineup than it has had in years. □