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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush won't party for Israel

President Bush will not attend a gala for Israel later this month in Washington because he never received an invitation, White House officials say. [Page 3]

Hamas man killed in Gaza strike

A senior Hamas activist was killed Thursday in an Israeli helicopter strike in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians said two missiles struck the car in which Ayad El-Beik was traveling on Thursday.

Israel said El-Beik was involved in planning terrorist attacks, and had a hand in past attacks that killed 19 Israeli civilians and soldiers.

He also had been involved in an organization Al-Qaida established in the Palestinian areas to carry out terror attacks against Israel, Israeli officials said. Hamas vowed revenge for his death.

Bush to give Mideast speech

President Bush is expected to address the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in a speech Friday.

Speaking to reporters Thursday, Bush said he would use a commencement speech at the University of South Carolina to talk about avenues for diplomatic progress, just before Secretary of State Colin Powell leaves for meetings in Israel, the Palestinian territories and Arab states.

"Of course we're going to make progress," Bush said in a meeting with the emir of Qatar.

"And the reason why we'll make progress is that the Palestinian Authority has now got a leader in the prime minister who has renounced violence, and he said he wants to work with us to make the area more secure."

Relief for L.A. houses of worship

An interfaith council in Los Angeles established a fund to repair four houses of worship damaged by recent arson attacks.

The announcement by the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council came after an incendiary device was thrown through a stained glass window in the sanctuary of Valley Beth Shalom, one of Los Angeles' leading Conservative congregations.

The attack was the third at area houses of worship within two days, and the fourth in the last two weeks.

ISRAEL'S ARAB MINORITY

Feeling economically isolated, Israeli Arabs reach out to Jews

By Gil Sedan

UMM EL-FAHM, Israel (JTA) — After a long and winding drive through the narrow alleys of this congested Arab town, one finally gets to the prize — a mountain with a breathtaking view.

On the left lies the green and brown carpet of Israel's Jezreel Valley. In front are the biblical hills of the northern West Bank, checkered with the white rooftops of Palestinian settlements and red-tile roofs of Jewish ones.

This could have looked like an earthly paradise — were it not for the new, ugly fence that cuts through the attractive scenery, a bitter reminder of the political reality that denies both Jews and Arabs the pleasures this place could have offered.

The fence was erected only a few weeks ago, part of a security barrier under construction along Israel's border with the West Bank to prevent Palestinian terrorists from crossing into Israel — and which might one day form a border between Israel and a Palestinian state.

Umm el-Fahm lies west of the fence, inside Israel proper. With 42,000 residents, it is the second largest Arab enclave within Israel's pre-1967 borders, after Nazareth.

Most Israeli Jews don't know of the beautiful view from the top of the hill — and they wouldn't care to check it out.

For some Israeli Arabs, however, the reality of the fence is motivating them to try to mend fences with the Jewish majority: As Israel celebrates its 55th birthday this week, some Israeli Arabs appear to have rediscovered their Israeli identity.

Two and a half years ago, days after the Palestinian intifada began, residents rampaged at the entrance to Umm el-Fahm, cutting the major Wadi Ara traffic artery and assaulting drivers who appeared Jewish.

Since then, Jews have avoided Umm el-Fahm, not patronizing its restaurants, discount furniture stores and olive oil shops. In fact, Israeli Jews largely have avoided Arab areas anywhere in the Galilee since the October 2000 riots.

With an upsurge of terror attacks along the Wadi Ara road and in the neighboring Jewish towns of Afula and Hadera, local Arabs also have cut down on visits to their Jewish neighbors, avoiding the unpleasantness of feeling like suspects. As a result, the two populations are growing further apart.

Some Israeli politicians have suggested that as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians, Umm el-Fahm should be handed over to the Palestinian Authority in exchange for West Bank settlements that would be annexed to Israel.

That set alarm bells in Umm el-Fahm ringing. Though the strength of the Islamic Movement has made Umm el-Fahm nearly synonymous in recent years with anti-Israel radicalism, most residents — like the vast majority of Israel's 1.3 million Arab citizens — would prefer to be a minority in the Jewish state than to live under the Palestinian Authority.

Thus, even though the new fence cuts them off from their Palestinian brethren in the West Bank, many Israeli Arabs welcomed it. Perhaps, they said, it means the government didn't really consider turning them over to the Palestinian Authority after all.

There is a general consensus here that the fence is a good idea, said Kassem Zeid, a retired journalist, at his home in the eastern suburbs of Umm el-Fahm.

Zeid still fears that the idea of a future territorial exchange between Israel and Palestine may be revived. That's why he and a group of some 20 friends are working on

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon: Abbas a 'partner'

Ariel Sharon described the new Palestinian Authority prime minister as a "partner." In a taped broadcast aired Thursday, the Israeli prime minister said Mahmoud Abbas understands that "it is not possible to defeat Israel with terror."

Israel, P.A. gear up for Powell

Israel and the Palestinians exchanged accusations ahead of a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell.

An aide to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat on Wednesday accused Israel of trying to sabotage Powell's visit and delay implementation of the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Israel, in turn, insisted that the Palestinians launch a crackdown against terrorist groups.

In a related development, the Palestinian official for Jerusalem affairs, Sari Nusseibeh, said the road map is unfair to the Palestinians.

Journalist killed by Israeli fire

A British journalist killed in the Gaza Strip last week was hit by Israeli fire, an autopsy confirmed. Earlier, the Israeli army had said it was possible that James Miller had been struck in the back by Palestinian fire.

Israeli fund rated No. 1

An all-Israeli mutual fund is the highest performing international mutual fund on U.S. stock exchanges so far this year. The AMIDEX35 fund was ranked first out of 1,832 international funds as of May 5, with a return of more than 26 percent.

The index has done well this year because of the diversification of Israeli companies, the poor performance of Israeli firms on the index last year and the improved geopolitical situation related to the war in Iraq, according to Cliff Goldstein, president of AMIDEX funds.



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a new campaign designed to mend relations with the Jews.

The group meets once a month in a private residence to work out the details.

Eventually they want to call a news conference under the title "Umm el-Fahm greets its Jewish neighbors."

Large posters will be posted at the entrance to town — where three local youngsters were shot to death in the October 2000 riots — residents will open their homes to Jewish visitors and local stores will cut their prices by half.

"Umm el-Fahm is now perceived as a second Jenin," the reputed terrorist capital of the West Bank, Zeid said. "This does injustice to both Jews and Arabs."

Zeid is a strange bird on the Arab scene. For years, he worked for the defunct daily paper Al-Hamishmar, published by the defunct, leftist Zionist party Mapam — which eventually merged with Ratz to form the Meretz Party.

At the same time, he is a devout Muslim, praying five times a day, staying away from wedding halls because men mingle there with women, indicating that he has made the pilgrimage to the Islamic holy places in Mecca and Medina. "I am absolutely convinced that most of the residents of this town share the same feelings," Zeid said. He longs for the days when Jews and Arabs will not fear each other.

The driving force behind the soul-searching in Umm el-Fahm is clearly economic: Only after the October 2000 riots did Israeli Arabs realize how much they depended on Jewish customers. The colorful Nazareth market that used to be a major attraction for Jewish neighbors now closes down by midday.

Only a trickle of Jews visit Nazareth's restaurants. But most window signs are still in Hebrew, an indication that residents haven't given up hope.

Whatever the reason, as Israel celebrates its 55th birthday this week, some Israeli Arabs have rediscovered their Israeli identity, for better or worse.

Now the residents of Nazareth, Umm el-Fahm and the rest of Israel's Arab population nervously await the outcome of the Orr Commission. The committee was appointed to investigate how 13 young Israeli Arabs were killed by police during the October 2000 riots.

It is difficult to predict how the committee's findings will affect the delicate relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

Whether the committee finds police responsible for the deaths, or whether it puts the blame on Arab rioters, extremists may try to take advantage of the committee's findings. Therefore, the committee "will probably share the responsibility between both sides," said Dr. Afu Aghbariya, a city councilman who works as a surgeon at Meir Hospital in Kfar Saba.

Aghbariya, a member of the Hadash Party, says Israeli authorities actually welcome the Islamic Movement because it gives them a justification for their alleged discrimination against the Arab population.

A devout Communist, Aghbariya has little good to say about the Islamic Movement, which is the dominant force in Umm el-Fahm and which seems intent on antagonizing the Jewish state.

That's why Aghbariya welcomes the initiative of Zeid and his friends: The wider Umm el-Fahm opens its gates to Jewish visitors, he feels, the better chances it stands to get rid of its fundamentalist Muslim bosses. □

Big Israel givers to be feted

NEW YORK (JTA) — People who have donated at least \$1 million to Israeli causes will be honored with an award named for Israel's founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion.

The United Jewish Communities federation umbrella will present the Israel Education Fund Ben-Gurion Leadership Award to 37 major donors to its Overseas Supplemental Giving/Israel Education Fund.

"Few people realize the profound impact that donors have made on the Israeli landscape," both physically and in nurturing community growth, said Terry Rubenstein, president of the overseas fund.

The honorees, who gave a minimum of \$1 million apiece either in one chunk or to multiple projects, will be named next month, UJC spokesman Glenn Rosenkrantz said. Since its launch in 1964, the education fund has raised \$600 million. □

JEWISH WORLD

3 charged in Tel Aviv bombing

British police charged three people in connection with last week's deadly suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.

Zahid Hussain Sharif, 46; Paveen Akthor Sharif, 35; and Tahari Shad Tabassum, 27, all from Derbyshire in England, were charged with failing to disclose information about a terrorist act.

Paveen Sharif also was charged with aiding and abetting acts of terrorism overseas.

Crown Heights jury deliberates

The jury is deliberating in the retrial of the man accused of killing a yeshiva student in the 1991 Crown Heights riots.

Lemrick Nelson now admits he killed Yankel Rosenbaum, but says he was drunk when he stabbed him and wasn't motivated by anti-Semitism.

The judge in the civil case reversed his earlier decision and allowed the prosecution to tell the jury that, at a 1997 criminal trial, Nelson had denied killing Rosenbaum.

FBI watching Hamas, Hezbollah

The FBI increasingly is focusing on U.S. supporters of Palestinian terrorist groups.

According to The Washington Post, the FBI is using powers granted to it in a recent court decision to track U.S.-based support for Hamas and Hezbollah, which are on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Genetic legislation reintroduced

Hadassah welcomed the introduction of legislation that would prevent genetically-based discrimination.

The bill would prevent insurers and employees from discriminating against people who genetic testing finds have a higher chance of contracting certain diseases.

The legislation was prompted by a desire to make people — such as Ashkenazi Jewish women, some of whom carry a genetic mutation that makes them more likely to develop certain types of cancer — less wary of taking the genetic tests.

Condoms for Israel

Student activists in San Diego passed out condoms that read, "Israel: It's Still Safe to Come."

Activists with Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life at the University of California at San Diego dispersed the condoms with a pamphlet promoting Israel's record in protecting the rights of women and gays, in contrast to other countries in the region, the San Diego Jewish Press-Heritage reported May 2.

The move is part of UCSD Hillel's "Got Israel" campaign.

Fingers pointed in schedule snafu as Bush will pass on Israel 55 gala

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish leaders have been promoting an appearance by President Bush at a gala later this month honoring Israel's 55th birthday.

There's just one catch: The White House says Bush was never invited — and doesn't plan to attend.

Organizers of the event are blaming the Israeli Embassy in Washington, saying Ambassador Daniel Ayalon told them the embassy spoke with senior White House officials to make sure the event was placed on Bush's calendar.

Embassy officials say they indeed mentioned the gala to senior administration officials.

When the Spirit of Israel Concert was announced in late February, organizers were steadfast that both Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would attend, though the White House would not confirm.

Jeanne Ellinport, executive director of the Israel Forever Foundation, which is organizing the event, said at the time that it was on Bush's calendar.

Yet advertisements for the concert haven't mentioned either Bush or Sharon, only the presence of "special guests." The event is expected to feature performances by comedians Jerry Seinfeld and Ben Stein and singers Tony Bennett, Norah Jones and Tovah Feldshuh.

Still, reporters inquiring about the concert have been told that Bush and Sharon were expected to attend, generating a buzz in Washington.

Now, less than two weeks before the May 19 event, the White House says it received word of the gala only this week, and Bush won't be able to attend because a state dinner has been scheduled with Gloria Arroyo, president of the Philippines.

"Not a single document ever came to the White House about the Israel concert," a White House official said. "We have never even discussed it, because we never received anything."

Sharon is expected to be in Washington sometime this month, but Israeli officials say it's unclear whether he will be here for the gala. Supporters of the event are less than convinced by the White House argument, claiming that it could be a political excuse.

Sources say Bush's appearance at an event honoring Israel's birthday would be seen around the world as presidential support for the Jewish state. Some feel that might harm U.S. efforts to serve as an impartial mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

White House officials claim the concert first came to their attention through a gossip column in Tuesday's Washington Post that noted Arab-American concern at the joint appearance at the gala by Bush and Sharon and wondered what signal it would send to the Arab world.

When asked about the Post item on Wednesday, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer repeatedly and angrily called the report "inaccurate."

"No, the president on that night has an event that will be announced shortly," Fleischer said. "He had other plans with other foreign leaders that night."

The White House officially announced the state dinner for Arroyo on Thursday.

Organizers of the event said they didn't send a formal request to the White House to follow up on embassy assurances that Bush would attend because the embassy told them to not to. "I specifically inquired of the ambassador about the scheduling of the president and the prime minister, and I was advised it was on the schedule and that scheduling matters were being handled by the embassy," said Richard Heidemann, who is serving as national chair of the foundation with his wife, Phyllis.

Moshe Fox, minister of public affairs at the embassy, said he didn't know if the event indeed had been placed on the president's calendar, but said "it was raised with White House officials."

Heidemann said the embassy is working to find another administration official to appear on Bush's behalf, and has asked for a videotaped message from the president.

Organizers hope to sell out the MCI Center in downtown Washington, which can hold close to 13,000 people, and to use the concert to launch Israel@55, a yearlong series of educational events across the United States. □

As Israel celebrates its 55th anniversary, JTA has asked prominent Israelis from across the political spectrum to discuss the challenges facing the Jewish state. This is the second in the series.

CHALLENGES AT 55

Pursue peace and reform — but not by sacrificing security

By Zalman Shoval

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Fifty-five years is not a very long time in historical terms — especially when talking about a people who have been around for thousands of years. But the balance sheet of those 55 years has certainly been impressive.

Not everything went the way our founding fathers had hoped for. They believed in peace, but Israel was invaded by seven Arab armies the day it was founded, and there have been six wars since then — the latest being Yasser Arafat's "Al-Aksa Intifada."

The basic reason for all those wars was that the Arab world refused to recognize the Jewish people's right to a national homeland in an area they consider to be exclusively their own. But as we look back — the drama of the Jewish people has made the rebirth of the State of Israel, in spite of all the obstacles, an epic poem without precedent or comparison in the annals of history.

Some things were obviously lost on the way, though not altogether — the spirit of egalitarianism, for instance. And some would say that there is insufficient concern these days for social justice, though others would reply, correctly, that Israel allocates proportionately more for social and welfare payments than any other country in the West. So, why are there still so many poor people?

Which brings me to the first challenge that Israel faces on its 55th anniversary: How to reform its economy and do away with its historical and often politically motivated "baggage" of bureaucracy — so as to make the economy grow and at the same time improve the lot of the underprivileged?

Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is currently trying to do just that. But his — actually our — chances of success will depend, first, on the determination of the government as a whole to overcome the opposition of vested interests and second, on two factors that are largely beyond our control: ending the international economic recession and changing the political and security situation.

Which brings us to the other major challenge facing Israel today: peace and security.

America's important victory in Iraq has removed a major threat to the peace of the world — not least, of course, to Israel.

If, indeed, the United States will pursue President Bush's declared aim of fighting all those who engage in or support terror — Syria, Iran and Libya rank first and foremost among those — the Middle East may actually become a less dangerous neighborhood.

But we are not yet there, and lest one forget Arab-Islamist terror, like fascism and communism before it, is not out to reform, but to destroy.

Therefore, for the world to breathe more easily, those who preach and perpetuate terror who must be destroyed.

Next to America, Israel is one of the terrorists' most hated targets because it represents the values and principles most obnoxious to them — including democracy, human rights and equality for women.

Major parts of the Palestinian national movement still are an integral part of the international brotherhood of evil and violence — though, hopefully, the United States victory over Saddam Hussein will persuade them to abandon violence and give peace a chance.

There is a lot of talk these days about the "road map." Will it work? It's too early to tell.

There are some parts in this road map that suggest that more than one cook had a hand in it.

And surely the non-American members of the "Quartet" (the European Union, Russia, the United Nations) not only have their own political and economic interests in the Middle East, but the way they behaved in connection with Iraq should make one wonder about the role they should play in the peace process.

At the heart of the road map lies the expectation that in a few short years from now there would arise a "democratic, viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel." But what if it will turn out to be just another undemocratic, brutal, aggressive rogue state like so many others in the region?

Indeed, one of Israel's most urgent diplomatic and strategic challenges will be to persuade Israel — American friend and ally — that, while Israel is willing to make major sacrifices for peace, it will never agree to endanger the physical security of its citizens or compromise the 2,000-year-old dream of the Jewish people.

In other words, before there can be any movement on the largely uncharted terrain of the road map, there will have to be a real change in the Palestinian leadership. New names are not enough. New deeds are required.

And there must be an absolute end — "forever," as Bush has said — to Palestinian terror, violence and incitement.

No less important, Israel should not be required to agree a priori, even in principle, to Palestinian statehood unless the Palestinians abandon once and for all the "right of return" — which is another term for annihilating Israel by flooding it with hundreds of thousands of "refugees."

All of the above aren't just political preconditions; they are natural prerequisites to give the road map any realistic chance of success.

Basically, the United States and Israel have the same strategic interests and the same aims — though there could be differing attitudes on one or more issues.

Considering the vast amount of mutual goodwill and the understanding that Israel enjoys regarding its vital interests with so many parts of the American public, including the administration itself and Congress, such differences should not be allowed to develop into unnecessary and unhelpful disagreements.

All said, and in spite of the fact that the chances for peace may be more propitious than they have been since before the "Oslo debacle," Israel's security for a long time to come will still depend on its ability to defend itself and on its close strategic alliance with the United States.

Indeed, the close ties between the United States and Israel may be deemed an important American strategic interest as well — especially in light of the unstable internal situation in some of America's traditional Arab allies — not a few of them, as recent events proved, being fair-weather friends at best. □

(Zalman Shoval was twice Israel's ambassador to the United States, from 1990–1993 and 1998–2000. He is a former Likud Member of Knesset and currently serves as a part-time diplomatic adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.)