



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Prisoner swap approved

Israel's Cabinet narrowly approved a prisoner swap with Hezbollah.

By a vote of 12-11 on Sunday, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government approved the deal in which Israel would release around 400 Arab prisoners in exchange for the return of Israeli businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers held by Hezbollah.

Those who opposed the exchange said it would bolster the Islamic fundamentalist group's prestige and place Israelis abroad at risk of kidnapping. Many Israelis also criticized the swap for not dealing with missing Israeli airman Ron Arad, who disappeared after bailing out of his fighter jet over Lebanon in 1986 and whose fate remains unknown. [Page 3]

Arafat maintains security control

Yasser Arafat will maintain control over security in the Palestinian Authority's new government.

Under the 24-member Cabinet announced by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei on Sunday, Arafat loyalist Hakam Balawi will get the interior minister portfolio, with responsibility for internal security; other security will be controlled by a "national security council" run by the Palestinian Authority president.

Arafat's rejection of Qurei's candidate for interior minister, Nasser Yousef, resulted in a standoff that delayed the formation of the new government slated for parliamentary ratification Wednesday.

Arafat has repeatedly refused to cede control over the Palestinian armed forces, or use those forces to rein in Palestinian terrorists.

"This government will be judged solely on whether it performs its obligation of reining in terror," a source in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office said.

Middle East face-off in Midwest

Demonstrations and counter-demonstrations were staged outside a conference for pro-Palestinian activists in Ohio.

The activists at the Palestine Solidarity Movement forum chanted "Allahu Akhbar," or God is great, while the pro-Israel side responded with "Am Yisrael Chai," the people of Israel live. Despite the tension, last Friday's rallies at Ohio State University in Columbus, which involved 50 people, were peaceful.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Birthright gets go-ahead for future, but funding sources still not secure

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish partnership that has sent nearly 50,000 youths from around the world on free trips to Israel is slated to continue past its five pilot years.

Birthright Israel, the free trip for young Jewish adults who have never been to the Jewish state on a peer tour, enters its fifth year this winter amid struggles to secure funding from two of its three main backers.

Despite the commitment announced recently by birthright's steering committee to continue the program, some say the resolve of funders who have faltered in the past remains in question. That's why birthright backers are expected to lobby for the program at the North American Jewish federation system's annual General Assembly, which will be held Nov. 16-19 in Jerusalem.

Funds for the \$210 million program are evenly divided among 14 philanthropists, world Jewish communities — largely the federation system — and the Israeli government.

But the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization for North American federations, has failed to get all of its members to allocate the amounts requested for the program.

An internal UJC memo revealed that, as of Oct. 29, the federation system had fallen \$7.5 million short on funding for the program, which has sent some 30,000 young adults to Israel from North America.

Citing its economic crisis, Israel plans to withdraw all but a token amount of funding for the program this year. Funding levels will return to normal after this year, Israeli officials said.

However, judging from past difficulties in raising money for the program, Lynn Schusterman — whose philanthropic foundation has provided \$5 million for the program — is skeptical that birthright's future funding is assured.

"We have two partners that aren't at the table," she said. "The philanthropists are great," but "we have two other partners that are not."

"The Israeli government, of course, has said that they'll be there," Schusterman said, but "when they made their first commitment, they were going to be there and they're not — and the same for the federations."

Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of Diaspora affairs and birthright's steering committee chairman, announced recently that "all partners will continue their commitment for the next five years, and then renew for the next 500 years."

But ultimately, the decision will be up to Israel's finance minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

In the federation system, UJC CEO Stephen Hoffman is promoting the program, which has been one of the largest providers of tourism to Israel during the intifada.

In an Oct. 31 memo to federations, Hoffman included a personal anecdote, about visiting his daughter's university, to illustrate the need to reach out to Jewish youth.

"I was struck hard by the realization of how little I really understand this younger generation," Hoffman said. "As a system, we need to collectively pause and ask whether we understand how the next generation identifies themselves as Jews."

"Too many federations have not fulfilled their full requested shares," he continued, referring to birthright. "Is it really about limited funds, or too many priorities? Or is it our failure to understand the different way we have to reach this generation?"

Marlene Post, chairwoman of birthright Israel USA, said she is "optimistic" that

MIDEAST FOCUS

12 Palestinians killed

Twelve Palestinians were killed in weekend clashes with Israeli soldiers. In one of the clashes in the Jenin refugee camp, Israeli forces also captured a leader of Islamic Jihad believed to be involved in last month's bombing of the Maxim restaurant in Haifa.

On Saturday, acting on information reportedly received from the Islamic Jihad leader, soldiers also discovered a bomb factory in Jenin.

U.N. protects Palestinian kids

The United Nations passed a resolution protecting Palestinian children, but postponed one that would protect Israelis.

Israel criticized the Egyptian resolution, which passed Nov. 6, because it did not call for the protection of both Israeli and Palestinian children. An Israeli resolution that condemns suicide bombers who kill Israeli children was postponed until next week.

Citizenship law blocked

Israel's highest court ordered the government to explain why it changed a law to deny automatic citizenship to Palestinians who marry Israelis. In its decision Sunday, the court also temporarily blocked the state from deporting the Palestinian spouses of three Israeli citizens.

The decisions on the citizenship law came in response to a petition from Arab legislators, lawmakers from the Meretz Party and civil rights groups.

Baby food scare

The Israeli Health Ministry warned parents not to use a soy-based baby food feared to be linked to infant deaths. Israel Radio reported on Saturday that two babies had died and three were hospitalized with possible brain damage after eating the kosher Remedix Limited product. A lack of Vitamin B1, or thiamine, is believed to be responsible for the deaths.



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Hoffman can get North American Jewish federations to pony up.

Until now, she said, Hoffman has been preoccupied with reshaping UJC, an organization formed four years ago from a merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, United Jewish Appeal and United Israel Appeal.

"What you're seeing is that this is a new focus," Post said.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Agency for Israel, a UJC beneficiary, plans to increase funding for birthright.

"We have increasingly upped the ante, so to speak, in putting in more money this year geared to youngsters wanting to go to birthright from the former Soviet Union" and "countries where the communities there don't have the assets to send them," said Carole Solomon, chairwoman of the Jewish Agency's board of governors.

Solomon could not say how much the agency would provide this year, since its budget process is not yet finished. However, the Jewish Agency "would probably be close to doubling our commitment," she said.

"I think there's been a tremendous investment, and not just financial," in birthright, Solomon said. Data "proves that it is an extraordinary life-changing experience for these youngsters."

In light of the recent National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, which Solomon said showed a shrinking Jewish population in the United States, "anything that works that positively" is worth "whatever support we can give it," she said. □

On Israel visit, Maryland governor strengthens homeland security ties

By Dan Baron

JERUSALEM (JTA) — He came to Israel with the promise of strengthening ties as the United States and Israel together confront terrorism.

And along with a slew of bilateral deals with homeland security firms in his home state of Maryland, Gov. Robert Ehrlich, Jr. delivered something that can't easily be priced: a sense of empathy with Israelis reeling from three years of Arab terrorism.

Shuttling between top-level meetings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during his four-day trade mission this week, Ehrlich found time to talk with new immigrants to Israel from Maryland — including Seth Mandell, whose son, Koby, was bludgeoned to death by Palestinian assailants in a West Bank cave two years ago.

"He's a man of the people who puts people first," former Baltimore resident Chevy Weiss told JTA after hosting Ehrlich, a Republican, in Beit Shemesh on Friday.

Following talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Finance Minister Silvan Shalom, Ehrlich announced the Maryland/Israel Partnership in Homeland Security, a symbiosis of his state's facilities and Israel's hard-earned expertise.

"As the terrorist threat increases, community leaders must have the most effective technology, tools and trained professionals to respond," he said. "Maryland is ready to provide support for firms setting up operations in the state."

The Homeland Security Partnership will include conferences, seminars and exchange visits to examine issues such as risk analysis and preparedness.

An immediate measure announced by Ehrlich's office was the implementation of Israeli-developed security precautions at Baltimore/Washington International Airport and the city's port.

Medical and security specialists among the governor's 27-member delegation met with Israeli counterparts.

Barry Bogage, director of the Maryland/Israel Development Center, suggested that pharmaceutical firms from Maryland eventually could team up with Israeli experts to manufacture vaccines against biological attacks.

Ehrlich also toured Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem to learn about its cutting-edge trauma techniques, honed through dealing with casualties from dozens of suicide bombings.

Briefed about a Hadassah-affiliated laboratory's stem-cell research, the governor asked what the Orthodox Jewish outlook on the practice was.

Ehrlich also announced the expansion of two Israeli technology companies in Germantown, Maryland. □

JEWISH WORLD

Reform changes its name

The Reform movement's synagogue arm changed its name. The 130-year-old Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which represents 920 North American Reform synagogues and an estimated 1.5 million Jews, voted overwhelmingly last Friday at the group's 67th biennial in Minneapolis to become the Union for Reform Judaism: Serving Reform Congregations in North America.

JCC grows in Munich

A cornerstone was laid for a Jewish community center in Munich on the 65th anniversary of Kristallnacht. The ceremony was seen as sign of confidence in the future of Jewish life in Germany, despite the recent arrest of neo-Nazis who allegedly had planned to set off a bomb at the ceremony.

Agent: Iran behind AMIA bombing

A former Iranian intelligence agent testified that top Iranian officials were involved in the 1994 bombing of Argentina's main Jewish community center.

Abdolghassem Mesbahi told an Argentine court Nov. 5 by video link from Germany that Iran was behind the attack on the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people.

Mesbahi said Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei directed a special committee that initiated the attack. An Iranian official rejected the accusations as "baseless allegations and lies that have been devised by Zionists and the judge of the case to cover up their political plot against Iran."

Milton Shapiro dies

Milton Shapiro, a former president of the Jewish National Fund, died last Friday of cancer at age 81.

An attorney and philanthropist, Shapiro served as JNF president from 1993-1997. He also served as chairman of the American Zionist Fund and president of the Zionist Organization of America, and was a former board member and trustee of United Israel Appeal and a member of the board of governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

JNF lauded Shapiro as the driving force behind Operation Promised Land, JNF's effort to help settle more than 1 million Soviet Jews in Israel by building thousands of new homes.

Australia outlaws Hamas

Australia outlawed Hamas as a terrorist group last Friday. Any Australian belonging to Hamas, or training, funding or recruiting members for it, faces 25 years in jail. Attorney General Philip Ruddock told Parliament that there were no proven links between Hamas and Australia, but that it was a "matter of prudence" to outlaw the group.

Mixed feelings in Israel after Cabinet approves prisoner swap

By Dan Baron

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Cabinet approved this week by the slimmest of margins the government's prisoner-swap deal with Hezbollah, but Israelis remained split over whether the move ultimately would bolster their security.

On the one hand, Sunday's decision to trade 400 Arab prisoners being held by Israel for an Israeli businessman, Elhanan Tannenbaum, and the bodies of three soldiers held by Hezbollah since 2000, meant that the Jewish state was willing to go to great lengths to secure the return of its kidnapped citizens.

On the other hand, many feared the exchange would increase the prestige of Hezbollah, the Lebanon-based and Iran-supported Islamic fundamentalist group, and give Arabs and Muslims greater incentive to kidnap Israelis.

Some Israelis also criticized the agreement for not dealing with missing Israeli airman Ron Arad, who disappeared after bailing out of his fighter jet over Lebanon in 1986 and whose fate remains unknown. Two of the Arab prisoners slated for return to Lebanon were captured by Israel as bargaining chips for information on Arad.

In a 12-11 vote, the Cabinet in principle approved the deal, which was developed through secret negotiations by representatives of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Opening the eight-hour Sunday Cabinet session, Sharon dismissed the disrepute that has grown surrounding Tannenbaum — who reportedly was abducted after being lured to Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, in the hope of making a shadowy business deal — and appealed to his ministers' human benevolence.

The alternative to the exchange, Sharon said, according to Cabinet sources, would be "leaving a Jew, an Israeli citizen, in the hands of Hezbollah, thereby bringing about his death."

But critics countered that the release of the two Lebanese warlords Israel has held as bargaining chips for Arad's return — Hezbollah leader Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid and Shi'ite activist Mustafa Dirani — meant that the government was forsaking an Israeli soldier in the field.

"Today marks the beginning of Ron's funeral procession," Arad's wife, Tami, told Israel Radio. "But it will not end today," she said. "As far as I am concerned, it will continue for another 17 years."

Sharon appointed a special team to pursue information on Arad's fate.

A Cabinet statement said Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz reserved the right to suspend or rescind the prisoner exchange based on the outcome of the probe.

Given that the exchange could take place as early as Thursday, according to some reports, the statement could prove to be little more than a rhetorical flourish.

The three Israeli soldiers slated for release, Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad, were kidnapped along Israel's northern border in October 2000, shortly after the launching of the Palestinian intifada and several months after Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon. All three are believed to have been killed during their abduction or shortly thereafter.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah, which has been building prestige as an Arab power since its guerrilla attacks helped end Israel's 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000, placed its own last-minute obstacles on the deal.

Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah told the Lebanese daily A-Sapir last week that the group was demanding the release of all Lebanese citizens from Israeli prisons. That would include Samir Kuntar, one of two terrorists who orchestrated a brutal attack on an Israeli family in the northern Israeli town of Nahariya in 1979.

Israel, for its part, says it will not release prisoners with "blood on their hands" — meaning those directly involved in killings.

That condition reportedly clinched the support of leading Cabinet members for the prisoner-exchange deal, including Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Construction and Housing Minister Effi Eitam, who led opposition to the deal, was unmoved by those guarantees.

"Hezbollah is an evil group, and this will only encourage more kidnap terrorism," he told the JTA after the vote. □

Britain's Conservative Party elects first Jewish leader ever

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — A former hard-line government minister has become the first Jew ever to lead a major British political party.

Michael Howard, 62, was declared the leader of Britain's opposition Conservative Party on Nov. 6.

No one came forward to challenge him after the party dumped its previous leader, Iain Duncan Smith, last week.

Geoffrey Alderman, a historian of British Jewry, said Howard's candidacy carried symbolic importance for Britain's Jews but probably would not bear tangible benefits.

Actually, Alderman said, having a Jewish prime minister could be detrimental to the Jewish community, expressing a concern similar to those voiced by some U.S. Jews during the 2000 vice presidential run of Sen. Joseph Lieberman.

If Lieberman had become vice president, Alderman said, some Jews worried he would have had to "bend over backwards on the Middle East" to prove that his religion was not a factor in determining U.S. policy.

"Michael Howard would also be under such pressures" if he became Britain's prime minister, Alderman said. "It is of more benefit to Anglo-Jewry to have a prime minister who represents a Jewish constituency than to have a prime minister who is a professing Jew."

Alderman cited the example of Margaret Thatcher, the former prime minister who previously had represented the heavily Jewish London constituency of Finchley.

"She made friends with the Jews and she never looked back," he said. At one time, Thatcher had five Jews in her Cabinet — "more than anyone before or since," Alderman said.

Stuart Polak, director of the Conservative Friends of Israel lobbying group, rejected Alderman's suggestion that Howard might be constrained by his Judaism.

"It happens to an extent, but the bottom line is that Michael Howard is someone who will never sell the issues that affect the Jewish community or Israel down the river," he said. "We have somebody who understands the issues affecting the Jewish community better than most."

Sir Malcolm Rifkind, a widely respected former foreign secretary and a possible future Conservative Party leader who also is Jewish, said he, too, did not think Howard's religion would impact a premiership.

"The issue doesn't arise," Rifkind said. "As prime minister, Michael Howard will do what is in the interest of the U.K. There are constraints, but they are national and political, not personal."

The Conservatives — or Tories, as they are commonly known here — have had an ethnic Jewish leader before, the 19th-century prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli. But Disraeli was baptized a Christian long before he entered politics.

In Disraeli's day, there were serious constitutional questions about whether a Jew could be prime minister, Alderman said, since the prime minister advises the monarch on the appointment of Church of England bishops.

After Disraeli, there were no Jewish Conservative lawmakers for generations.

But the anticipated selection of Howard to lead the party more than 120 years after Disraeli has raised no apparent concerns.

The British media has noted his immigrant background — his father came to Wales from Romania in 1939, and one of his grandmothers died in Auschwitz — but has had little to say about his Jewishness.

Some British Jews, however, say they detected a hint of anti-Semitism in an Oct. 30 story about Howard in the Daily Mail, a solidly Conservative newspaper that supports Howard's candidacy for party leader.

In the story, Edward Heathcoat Amory wrote that Howard "would like to be seen as the very model of that virtually extinct animal, the proper English gentleman. His enemies would complain that he is . . . bent on passing himself off as something he isn't."

Jewish television personality Vanessa Feltz responded in the next day's Daily Express — the Mail's arch-rival — whose owner, Richard Desmond, is Jewish.

"Heathcoat Amory does not use the 'J' word. He does not come out and call Michael Howard a Jew," Feltz wrote. "What he does instead is to introduce the concept of Michael Howard's Jewishness by stealth. It is articles such as this that give unwitting succor to racists and anti-Semites."

For his part, Howard has made little of his religion, neither hiding it nor making overt displays of it.

In September, he told the London Jewish Chronicle that he "accepted those Jewish values I was brought up with. They are still an important guide and influence on my life."

He is a member of St. John's Wood Liberal synagogue, one of London's flagship Liberal, or Reform, temples.

A member of Conservative Friends of Israel, he has opposed efforts by pro-Palestinian lawmakers to demonize the Jewish state.

But the former lawyer is far better known in Britain for his skepticism of the European Union, his conservative fiscal thinking and his law-and-order stance than for his foreign policy positions.

As Home Secretary — Britain's top law-enforcement official — under John Major from 1993 to 1997, Howard introduced private prisons and pushed for tough sentencing standards.

When Tony Blair — then campaigning to be prime minister — vowed to be "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime," Howard famously replied, "I know what causes crime: criminals."

Howard refused to make Holocaust denial a crime when he was home secretary, arguing that to do so would make martyrs of Holocaust deniers.

Howard has vowed to lead the Conservative party "from the center," but few political analysts predict that he will take it to victory in the next election, which is expected within two years.

The Tories trail the Labor government by a huge margin in Parliament, and some analysts say Howard's role is to shore up the party and give it a fighting chance to win the election after next.

If Howard does bow out after an election defeat, the Tories could replace him with another Jew — Rifkind or the rising young star Oliver Letwin. □

Sharon condemns tree destruction

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon condemned the destruction of Palestinians' olive trees by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

After more than 1,000 trees were cut down, Sharon issued a statement last Friday saying he viewed the actions "with utmost gravity," and had ordered security forces to take all necessary measures to apprehend those responsible. □