



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush: 'Geneva accord' a plus

President Bush called the "Geneva accord," the unofficial Middle East peace proposal, "productive."

Speaking at the White House on Thursday with Jordan's King Abdullah, Bush said any agreement for the Middle East must include a Palestinian commitment to fight terror and the emergence of a Palestinian state. The president said Israel must improve conditions for Palestinians, citing settlements, illegal outposts and the security barrier Israel is erecting in the West Bank.

U.N. slams Israel

The U.N. General Assembly passed six resolutions on Israel and the Palestinians on Wednesday.

Among the resolutions, the United Nations backed the "road map" peace plan, urged Israel to destroy its security barrier, called for Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights and demanded shared control of Jerusalem.

The General Assembly passes an annual barrage of resolutions to coincide with the anniversary of the U.N. partition plan of 1947. The six resolutions are part of some 20 resolutions passed by the United Nations each year that Israel considers hostile.

Funding cut after E.U. report

European legislators blocked funding for a center whose report said Muslims were responsible for anti-Semitism.

A member of the European Parliament said the \$240,000 was being held up until a controversy surrounding the report was cleared up. The Vienna-based E.U. Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia suppressed the report, but it was released this week by European Jewish groups.

UJC picks Washington executive

Charles Konigsberg will head the United Jewish Communities public policy arm in Washington.

Konigsberg, who worked for nearly 20 years in the U.S. government's legislative and executive branches and for both parties, will lobby for the health and human services priorities of North America's Jewish federations. Konigsberg also founded the Capitol Hill Jewish Staff Forum, the first organization of Jewish staffers on Capitol Hill.

Konigsberg replaces Diana Aviv.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Economic signs may be improving, but times still tough for Israel's poor

By Dina Kraft

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Crumbs tumble down Yigal Alperson's white beard as he eats his one guaranteed meal of the day at a crowded Jerusalem soup kitchen.

Tables spill over with immigrants, the elderly and single mothers, the predominant faces of Israel's poor as the country's economy is battered seemingly from every direction.

Three years of Palestinian violence have scared away investors, a worldwide economic downturn has devastated Israel's once thriving high-tech industry, factories are closing because of foreign competition, and government cutbacks in welfare and social spending in response to a \$6 billion deficit have taken their toll.

"My situation is difficult. We don't have anything to eat," says Alperson, 66, an unemployed statistician who supports his wife and five children on the \$888 he receives each month from Israel's national insurance system.

"This is security, you know," he said pointing to a plate piled high with steaming pasta, chicken cutlets and green beans at Meir Panim, a soup kitchen designed to look like a restaurant. "At least you know you'll be eating today."

Israel's unemployment rate is near 11 percent, almost 18 percent of families are living in poverty and the number of poverty-stricken children is on the rise. Israel now has one of the highest poverty rates in the developed world, according to 2002 statistics released recently by the National Insurance Institute.

A study of some 150,000 households, released this month by the JDC-Brookdale Institute, found that 8 percent were having severe difficulty buying enough food.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's announcement recently that Israel's recession was over sparked a storm of protest. Netanyahu swiftly backtracked from his remarks, saying instead that there were signs of economic recovery.

Exports are up and that's a good sign, said Karnit Flug, who heads the Bank of Israel's research department. The stock market also has risen in recent months.

But it's still too early to tell if Israel is headed toward better economic times anytime soon, Flug said.

There is a lot of uncertainty about the "security issue and prospects for improvement of the geopolitical situation," Flug said. "The ability of Israel to utilize its potential growth will depend on improvement in these areas."

The government has argued that the economy's problems stem not only from the intifada but from more inherent problems in the structure of Israeli industry. To address these problems, Israel is trying to privatize many state-owned companies to boost competitiveness.

It has begun aggressively deporting foreign workers, whom government officials say take jobs away from Israelis and bring down wages for unskilled labor.

The 1990s saw a dramatic increase in foreign workers in Israel. With 200,000 foreign workers, the Jewish state has one of the highest rates of foreign laborers in the world, experts say.

Whether or not Israelis are interested in taking these unskilled jobs remains to be seen.

Another government project, reducing welfare support payments for the poor, is expected to increase poverty rates, the JDC-Brookdale study found.

By setting a time limit for unemployment benefits, for example, the government

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinians discuss cease-fire

Palestinian representatives of 13 groups, including terrorist organizations, met in Cairo to discuss a possible Palestinian cease-fire.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel would commit to a cease-fire reached at the Egyptian-mediated talks, a high-level Palestinian official told the Jerusalem Post.

Palestinian officials say the Palestinian Authority prime minister wants to be able to present Israel with a cease-fire to demonstrate the Palestinian Authority's seriousness about cracking down on terror.

Report: Israel hyped Iraq threat

Israeli intelligence exaggerated the threat to Israel posed by Iraq, according to a new report written by reserve Brig. Gen. Shlomo Brum for Israel's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies.

Reacting to the report Thursday, Israeli Knesset member Yossi Sarid called for an inquiry into Israeli intelligence leading up to the Iraq war.

Palestinian tells army about bomb

A Palestinian man alerted Israeli police in the West Bank about a bomb hidden inside a bag.

The bag had been placed along the road this week at a West Bank junction and contained between 20 and 35 pounds of explosives. The commander of Israel's West Bank police force commended the Palestinian man and the police for their swift action.

Palestinians egg Palestinians

Palestinian protesters pelted with eggs their delegates returning from the "Geneva accord" signing.

Children threw eggs at one of the Palestinian delegates and chants of "Death to the traitors and collaborators" were shouted at another, the Jerusalem Post reported. Palestinian policemen rescued the latter representative.



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hopes to encourage people to go back to work. But in Israel's present economy, finding work is increasingly difficult.

The reforms "in the short term create a lot more poverty," said Jack Habib, a social economist who directs the JDC-Brookdale Institute. "More people are in need, but all the services they need are being cut back."

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein is the president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, which funds soup kitchens across the country, as well as a network of warehouses where the needy can receive free furniture and other household goods.

The government is embarrassed by how its stringent new fiscal policies are affecting the country, Eckstein claims.

Such policies "have changed the face of Israel. Now the question is how to portray the public image of Israel," Eckstein said. "No one wants to portray it as a third-world nation, but to portray it as an idyllic place where everything is hunky-dory is morally and practically wrong."

The government is defending its policies, taking out ads in the national press saying the reforms are the only way to help the economy. Netanyahu says the cuts are necessary if Israel wants to have a modern economy.

Critics say other solutions — such as raising taxes and investing massively in infrastructure — could ignite growth and, in turn, boost tax revenue.

According to recent surveys, however, most Israelis think the economy is suffering because of the intifada and won't improve until the diplomatic impasse is resolved.

In fact, it's not only unskilled workers who are having trouble finding work: As the economy slides, the highly educated also feel the pinch.

Leah Rizel, 34, has a master's degree in human genetics and has worked for several years in genetics labs. For the past five months, however, she has been unable to find work.

At this point, she said, "I'll do anything for a job because I have bills to pay and a child to raise."

It can be overwhelming "to see the amount of educated people, people with degrees, at the unemployment office," she said. "Getting an education these days does not mean you are going to get a job."

On Jerusalem's Ben-Yehuda Street, the city's once-bustling pedestrian shopping mall, the situation is grim. Repeated terror attacks have kept both tourists and locals away.

Shop owners say they barely clear \$220 a week.

"Zero. There is nothing," snapped Yosef Zakai, owner of a Judaica shop. "Except for someone calling from the United States for a Star of David, there is nothing. There is no work."

A few doors down, a man named Yosef said he wasn't sure how much longer he could afford to run the women's clothing store his parents opened in 1949.

"This is the hardest period ever for the store," he said.

Across from his shop, he pointed out names etched on a memorial plaque — eight victims of a 2001 suicide bombing.

"Here one died," he said, pointing at a corner of stone pavement. "Here another, here another."

Yosef's voice trailed off, and he headed back to his store — where, atypically, a customer was waiting. □

A guide to restitution

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Claims Conference published an online guide to Holocaust restitution programs. The group's Compensation and Restitution at a Glance Chart now is available at the Claims Conference's homepage at www.claimscon.org.

The guide provides a country-by-country breakdown of current compensation and restitution programs and contact information. Information on art and insurance policies relating to the Holocaust era and the Swiss banks settlement also is included.

"This online publication will aid Holocaust survivors and people working in agencies that assist survivors in navigating the sometimes complex process of applying for compensation and restitution," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference. □

JEWISH WORLD

Judge out in AMIA case

The judge investigating the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in Argentina was dismissed.

On Wednesday, a court dismissed Juan Jose Galeano on suspicion that he may have paid a bribe to one of the witnesses in the case. Jewish groups, who have long been critical of Galeano, applauded the decision. The July 18, 1994, bombing at the AMIA center killed 85 people and wounded 300.

U.S. Arabs double since 1980

The number of U.S. residents of Arab descent has doubled since 1980. According to a U.S. Census report published Wednesday, 1.2 million people reported Arab ancestry in 2000, up from 610,000 in 1980.

More than a third, 37 percent, said they were of Lebanese descent. The next largest groups were Egyptian and Syrian, at 12 percent each. Palestinians constituted 6.1 percent of the respondents.

Half of the population lived in five states: California, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey and New York.

OSCE to watch anti-Semitism

A European security organization wants its member states to collect statistics on anti-Semitism. The Anti-Defamation League commended the decision Tuesday by foreign ministers of the 55-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

More patrols for New York's Jews

Police are increasing their patrols of Jewish neighborhoods in New York following a spate of anti-Semitic attacks. The New York Police Department will keep a close watch on Jewish areas, particularly in Brooklyn, following a series of incidents in which tires were slashed in the heavily Jewish neighborhood of Borough Park and swastikas were scrawled in both Brooklyn and Queens.

Charles helps Polish Jews

Britain's Prince Charles helped launch a drive to build a Jewish community center in Krakow, Poland.

At a World Jewish Relief dinner to launch the appeal in London on Wednesday, the heir to the British throne spoke of his visit to the city last year and the "dream I had of helping to sustain this historic community." Prince Charles is reported to have made a "substantial personal donation" to the project, which is scheduled to be completed in 2005.

Pray for rain

Jews outside of Israel begin praying for blessed dew and rain. On Dec. 4, the only secular date on the Jewish religious calendar, Diaspora Jews were slated to begin inserting words asking for rain into the Shmoneh Esrei prayer.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Donor offers \$10 million to fund, but with secular string attached

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — If Felix Posen had his way, American Jewish schools would teach the Bible less as a holy book than as a classic work of literature.

"You teach Judaism as a culture. You start with the Bible, the first piece of literature we Jews created," Posen said. "God is not dead; he is a literary hero."

Some may consider that heresy, but Posen maintains that about half of American Jews who identify as cultural Jews and do not affiliate with any religious denomination would agree with him.

That led the millionaire donor who is based in London to become the first Jewish philanthropist to answer Wall Street wizard Michael Steinhardt's recent call for others to match his own \$10 million pledge toward a \$100 million Fund for Our Jewish Future, which would focus on Jewish education.

On Monday, the Center for Cultural Judaism in New York, backed by the Posen Foundation, which is based in Lucerne, Switzerland, pledged \$10 million to Steinhardt's proposed fund — provided that about half of the total money goes to teaching secular and unaffiliated Jews about Judaism from a cultural, non-religious viewpoint.

Steinhardt said he wanted to study the proposal further before commenting.

Posen and the center, which he supports and which serves as the clearinghouse for the Secular Humanistic Judaism movement, say the money would reverse a decline in Jewish activity by addressing the educational needs of those who consider themselves culturally Jewish.

In making their case, they point to the 2001 American Jewish Identity Survey, by the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

The study, which Posen helped bankroll, found that 49 percent of Americans born or raised as Jews consider themselves secular to some degree.

In the wake of that study, the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey found that 44 percent of the 4.3 million Jews with some kind of Jewish connection did not affiliate with a synagogue, Jewish community center or other Jewish institution.

That overlap shows that about half of American Jews who either are secular or unaffiliated with a Jewish movement are "currently not served by most of Jewish life," said Myrna Baron, executive director of the Center for Cultural Judaism.

Steinhardt long has supported Jewish day schools and programs such as college Hillels and birthright Israel — which sends young Jews to Israel on free trips — as ways to strengthen Jewish identity. Posen said he agrees with that sentiment.

But while the number of Jewish day schools has skyrocketed in past decades to some 700, and enrollment is rising, most Jews remain "Jewishly impoverished" and the total U.S. Jewish population continues to dwindle, Posen said.

"Something isn't working," he said.

Posen hopes his donation could be used to teach Jewish culture — whether it's modern literature, history or even Jewish holiday customs — from a non-religious perspective in Jewish schools, after-school programs and Hillels.

Non-denominational Jewish day schools that serve all the major Jewish denominations could incorporate cultural studies or teach them alongside religious classes, just as 50 of Israel's 2,000 schools now do, he said.

It's unclear whether other major funders who might want to contribute to Steinhardt's proposed fund would agree to Posen's conditions.

"Right now, 50 percent of the funds that have come in have been from Posen, so I don't think it's unreasonable for him to make demands," said Mark Charendoff, president of the Jewish Funders Network, which advises Jewish family foundations and other philanthropists outside the federation system. But, he added, "If the other \$80 million comes in large chunks from philanthropists, I'm not sure how they're going to react to him setting criteria on how their money is going to be spent."

But he agreed with Posen that more could be done for many Jews who are not well served by existing institutions. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

For some cadets at West Point, Jewish life is shelter in a storm

By Peter Ephross

WEST POINT, N.Y. (JTA) — There's a joke at the U.S. Military Academy that 50 percent of the first graduating class was Jewish — and that it's been downhill for Jews ever since.

The joke is true, at least on the face of it: Simon Magruder Levy was indeed half of West Point's two-person graduating class in 1802, and Jews have made up a much smaller proportion of graduating classes since. But Jewish life appears to be alive and well among the 80 or so Jewish cadets currently enrolled at the hilly campus beside the Hudson River.

"It's a really close-knit group. They're my closest friends," Megan Williams, West Point's Hillel student representative, says of the other Jewish cadets.

That friendship can be crucial for cadets at West Point, where the roughly 4,000 students who make it through four grueling years receive a free education in exchange for at least five years of post-graduate service in the army.

Some of the Jewish cadets come from military families. Some are descendants of Holocaust survivors who want to give something back to the country that provided a haven for their grandparents.

A few admitted they had to overcome parental resistance to enroll. After all, becoming a U.S. military officer may be no shame, but it's not the career most Jewish parents envision for their kids.

Jacob Bergman found that out when he informed his Israeli parents of his plans to attend the military academy.

"When I said I was going to West Point, they were like, 'What?!'" Bergman recalls.

But Bergman — recruited as a track athlete and attracted to West Point by the promise of something beyond a normal college experience — persevered.

Now, four years later, Bergman, who was born in Israel but grew up in White Plains, N.Y., is a senior at West Point. He has earned the prestigious appointment of honor captain, the student who sits with the academy's superintendent and decides what punishment should be meted out to cadets who violate regulations.

His parents have since come around, he says, and his father now is proud to visit him at the academy.

His father "lives vicariously through me," Bergman says.

Bergman's years at West Point haven't just educated him and taught him leadership and military skills — ranging from fieldwork in weapons training and hand-to-hand combat, to classes in military strategy and ethics — they've also made him feel more Jewish.

It started the summer before his first, or plebe, year.

Known as Beast, cadet basic training is "five weeks of all the things you've seen in movies: sudden-death haircuts, buckle-shining, wall-jumping, scrambling cadets looking perplexed," writes David Lipsky, author of "Absolutely American," a recent book on West Point.

One of Bergman's older friends told him to ask for permission to participate in prayer services on Friday nights during Beast.

"No matter how scared you are during basic training, tell them you want to go to services on Friday nights," Bergman remembers his friend saying.

Bergman did and his commanders complied, allowing him and the other Jewish cadets to go to the school's Jewish chapel to pray.

The multimillion-dollar edifice at the top of the campus "was a sanctuary during basic training," Bergman says.

Dedicated in 1984, the chapel recently hosted the third Jewish Warrior Weekend when some 40 students from civilian universities, as well as some from the other service academies, visited West Point to get a taste of cadet life.

The tall white building features a sanctuary that seats several hundred people. The services draw cadets, faculty members and local Jews, including members of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America.

The building also has a library, small exhibits and a hallway plaque with the name of every known Jewish cadet graduate, from Levy through Lt. David Bernstein, a 2001 West Point graduate who was killed this fall in Iraq.

The most famous of the Jewish graduates, David "Mickey" Marcus, is known for parachuting into Normandy on D-Day and then helping convert the Haganah into a regular army during Israel's 1948 War of Independence. He was killed in the 1948 war by friendly fire.

Like Jewish students at other colleges, West Point cadets celebrate the Jewish holidays on campus, and they mark Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Living a completely observant Jewish life at West Point is difficult, cadets admit: There aren't enough observant students to merit making kosher food available, and the demands of studies and military training make Sabbath observance nearly impossible.

Some Jewish students, like Matt Moosey, say they refrain from eating pork and shellfish.

"People do their best here," said Moosey, a Sephardi Jew from a military family in Fort Collins, Colo.

The military does its part for soldiers in the field, providing kosher MREs — meals ready to eat — for those who want them.

There's also a Jewish choir at the academy that is about two-thirds Jewish and performs songs such as "Ani Ma'amin" and "Jerusalem of Gold" alongside old military standards at synagogues and college campuses.

"I've been as active in Jewish life here as I was at home," says Ben Diamond, a plebe who was a member of the Conservative movement's United Synagogue Youth in his hometown of Houston.

The choir also is a way to introduce soldiers — particularly non-Jewish cadets from small towns with few or no Jews — to Jewish culture.

It's all a matter of education, says Maj. Elizabeth Robbins, who has served as the cadets' Jewish lay leader while West Point's Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Carlos Huerta, is deployed in Iraq.

"Almost all of the issues of religious intolerance are based on ignorance, not malice," Robbins says.

While many Jewish college students elsewhere are at the forefront of student antiwar movements, Jewish students here appear universally supportive of the war on terrorism.

That the United States is allied with Israel makes the war personal, Jewish cadets say. But they're clear about one thing: The United States comes first.

"We might be very proud of Israel, but our first and foremost duty is to the United States of America," Moosey says.

And many say they're as connected to God as to country.

When Bergman goes out in the field, for example, he makes sure he has his essentials, like his weapon and water. But he also carries a Bible and a camouflage yarmulke.

"You believe in religion in a foxhole," he says. □