

IN THE NEWS

Israel, Hezbollah near prisoner swap

Israel and Hezbollah are set to swap prisoners.

According to weekend announcements by Jerusalem and Beirut, Israel will release 435 Arab security prisoners in return for an Israeli businessman and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers held by the Lebanese militia since 2000.

Israel money cut in spending bill

The U.S. Senate agreed to a spending bill that cut close to \$150 million from the annual allocation to Israel.

The Senate passed the omnibus spending bill Jan. 22 with a 0.59 percent across-the-board cut, as the House did last year. That reduces the \$2.6 billion in military and economic aid Israel was to receive this year by \$150 million.

The spending bill also has more than \$10 million in appropriations for Jewish community projects.

Jewish groups trash Gibson's Jesus movie

Two leading Jewish groups gave a thumbs-down to Mel Gibson's new movie about Jesus' death.

Officials of the Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee who saw the film at separate screenings said it echoed centuries-old charges that the Jews were behind the crucifixion. "At every single opportunity, Gibson's film reinforces the notion that the Jewish authorities and the Jewish mob are the ones ultimately responsible for the crucifixion," ADL National Director Abraham Foxman said.

David Elcott, director of inter-religious affairs for the AJCommittee, said the movie offers an "ugly" vision of Jews and "reasserts offensive stereotypes about Jews that Catholic and Protestant leaders have overwhelmingly rejected."

WORLD REPORT

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Rebbetzin Jungreis spreads the power of positive thinking

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — The head of security was getting antsy. It was past closing time at the Jewish Community Center here, but the women were not ready to leave.

Just one more question to Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis was all they wanted. The guard, his arms folded across his chest, raised his eyebrows and waited.

In the crowded meeting room, several young Jewish women sat around a table talking with Jungreis, in town recently on her second visit from New York in less than a year.

The women, participants in Mayan, a program of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, peppered Jungreis with questions.

"If we were all present at Sinai, were we also present in Egypt as slaves?" "How do you make a good shidduch?" "Why is everything Eve's fault? Why didn't Adam just say no?" "Why do women have to light Shabbat candles?"

Jungreis, 67, is more than accustomed to questions. As founder of the Hineni Heritage Center, a 31-year-old Jewish outreach program in New York, she thrives on them as she works to spread her brand of Orthodox Judaism.

"I get hundreds of e-mails every couple of days with personal problems from all over the world," she says. "There is never a tough question. I can answer every one, because all my answers are based on Torah."

Jungreis, a petite, smartly dressed woman who says she needs only four hours of sleep per night, recently went with the executive director of Hineni, Barbara Janov,

to Amsterdam, Budapest, Berlin and London, where Jungreis spoke at the annual Jewish Encounter Conference.

When she is not teaching Torah at Hineni or writing her weekly column for the Jewish Press newspaper, Jungreis visits Jewish communities around the world.

She is the author of several books, many of which have been translated into several languages, and she delivers inspirational talks, including ones about her dramatic survival as a child at Bergen-Belsen.

Jungreis' main message is that Jews will survive through faith and positive thinking.

Once called a "Jewish Billy Graham," she says that as a woman, "I can reach people a different way than a man. I can touch their hearts; they can let their emotions go."

In Berlin, there were more women than men in the audience of 150 at the Jewish community center. Mayan had raised funds from local Jews and private donors to help sponsor the visit, fulfilling a dream of Tatiana Paradny-Gabriel, 27, one of tens of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union now living in Germany.

"Rebbetzin Jungreis literally saved my life," says Paradny-Gabriel, a singer who met Jungreis while studying in New York.

"I was in a very difficult situation at the time," she says, without divulging details. "You reach a point where you don't know why you live and why you are there."

At a low point, she was introduced by friends to Jungreis.

"Sometimes she can be very tough, but with time you understand she was right," Paradny-Gabriel says, explaining that she

Continued on page 2

PROFILE

■ *Jungreis' answers to hundreds of e-mails are all based on Torah*

Continued from page 1

"came back to my roots" through Jungreis. "I realized I don't live only for myself, and that is why I brought her here to help the people here."

Despite the connection, it was not easy for Paradny-Gabriel to convince Jungreis to come to Berlin for the first time, which happened in 2002.

Berlin "is a hard place for me," Jungreis told JTA. "To hear the German language is hard. My natural reaction is to think, 'Juedische Schweinhund, ach-tung, Heil Hitler,'" — giving the German for "Jew swine-dog, hail Hitler."

"I lived with it. You can't shake it so fast," she says.

But Jungreis came back because she saw a need.

Wicka Dolburd, 23, director of the Mayan program, says, "A lot of these girls are going back to tradition, and it is important for them to see someone who will give them the courage to continue, even if it is just once a year, or once in their life."

Jungreis' family has always tried to inspire.

After surviving the Holocaust, Jungreis remembers that her father, Rabbi Abraham Jungreis, gathered all the orphans in a displaced-persons camp in Switzerland and made shidduchim, or matches, between the young men and women. Jungreis says it was an expression of the optimism that runs in her family.

Though her father wanted to immi-

grate to Palestine, the family was unable to get the necessary papers.

So instead the family moved to the United States in 1947.

In 1955, Jungreis married Rabbi Meshulem Jungreis — a distant cousin with the same family name — and together they founded an Orthodox congregation on Long Island.

Jungreis, now a rebbetzin, or rabbi's wife, started doing Jewish outreach work in the early 1970s.

Her first Hineni lecture was held at Madison Square Garden before 18,000 people on Nov. 8, 1973.

The Jungreis' two sons and two daughters now are all either rabbis or rebbetzins — and all are involved with Hineni.

A big part of the Jungreis' work is matchmaking. So how does one make a good shidduch?

"Everyone has a soul mate, but people don't know how to look," Jungreis says. Instead of seeking someone with "deep pockets," seek a mate with "compassion, modesty and loving kindness."

Even on his deathbed, Jungreis' late husband was making matches.

"Lying in his hospital bed, he opened his eyes and said, 'Let's talk the truth. See

that Jewish boy, the doctor,'" Jungreis recalls. "I didn't know if I should laugh or cry. He wanted to gather one more mitzvah before he met his maker."

Jungreis described her trip back to Germany as triumphant.

"And at the end of the day, we have to remember that we are here, and to be here in Berlin is another miracle," she told the group at the community center. "I walked through the snows of Germany from Bergen-Belsen, and here I am, speaking about Torah and Judaism in Germany."

After her talk, Jungreis signed copies of her books in English and

Hebrew; German editions will come out soon.

Rachel Maier, 60, who waited patiently in line for a book and blessing from Jungreis, said she was so moved that she "had to fight with my tears" during the talk.

Though it was late, Jungreis made time for one more question at the Berlin event as the guard paced impatiently.

"What about people who lost their faith after communism — what do they have to do to keep their faith?" someone asked.

"Even the most hardened Jew is a Jew," Jungreis said. "Don't give up." ■



U.S.: U.N. unwise on fence

NEW YORK (JTA) —The United States believes an international court hearing on Israel's West Bank security barrier is unwise.

But the Bush administration hasn't decided whether to submit a brief supporting Israel.

A State Department official said last Friday that the U.N. General Assembly resolution referring the matter to the International Court of Justice in The Hague "would undermine rather than encourage direct negotiations between" the Israelis and the Palestinians to resolve their differences.

The State Department is still "examining how we might participate" at the Feb. 23 hearing, the official said, noting a

Jan. 30 deadline to submit material to the court.

The official repeated the U.S. concern that the route of the barrier might stymie Palestinian statehood, contributing to the American reluctance to submit a brief on Israel's behalf.

The official also suggested that the advisory nature of any court ruling at The Hague made the issue less serious and made it less crucial for the United States to step in.

Most observers have believed that the United States would stay out of the court case. This belief was based on the observation that while the United States dislikes the idea of a hearing on the fence, it likes the fence itself even less. ■

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THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ The Claims Conference is expected to announce it has identified the 1,778 living victims of Nazi medical experimentation. The survivors will begin receiving a symbolic amount of money from a fund established after negotiations with the German government and German industry. The amount of money is small, but insiders say the moral statement here is large.

TUESDAY

■ New Hampshire's primary could signal the end of the road for Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.). Considered the first major Jewish candidate for president. Polls show Lieberman trailing four others in the crucial race.

■ Academy Award nominations are announced. Divine Intervention, a film from "Palestine," is vying for a foreign film bid. Something else to watch out for: Jewish-themed documentaries have done quite well in recent years.

■ The K kosher World Conference and Expo begins in Los Angeles. In recent years, kosher food events have bustled, with a wide array of products on display.

■ Countries across Europe mark Holocaust Memorial Day. The commemorations are held on the day Auschwitz was liberated in 1945.

WEDNESDAY

■ An international conference in Rome is focusing on 20th-century concentration camps. The Wednesday-Thursday meeting will be opened by a former Italian president. In addition to Nazi camps, the conference will examine concentration camps in both Bosnia and the Soviet Union. It also will include a session devoted to the experience of Libyan Jews during the Holocaust.

FRIDAY

■ The deadline for U.N. member countries to submit a written statement to the International Court of Justice at The Hague on Israel's security fence. In a 90-8 vote, with 74 abstentions, the U.N. General Assembly voted Dec. 8 to ask the court to rule on the legality of Israel's security fence. While Israel has no international support for the fence, it believes that as many as 30 countries will write letters of protest to the court, fearing it could become politicized by taking up the issue. The court is slated to take up the issue Feb. 23.

■ The U.N. Security Council is expected to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Israel believes that UNIFIL, whose mandate is extended by the Security Council every six months, helps keep peace on its northern border.

Sharon proud of prisoner deal, but some observers are worried

By DAN BARON

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Free at last, but at what price?

That was the question on some Israelis' minds over the weekend after a German mediator helped seal the deal on a long-awaited prisoner swap between Israel and Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia group.

Barring last-minute delays, an Israeli businessman and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers held by Hezbollah since October 2000 were scheduled to arrive in Tel Aviv on Thursday.

In return, Israel was slated to release some 435 Arab security prisoners.

Despite the asymmetry of the exchange and its inconsistency with Israel's general principle of refusing to negotiate with terrorists, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was upbeat about it.

"In my opinion, we made the proper, ethical and responsible decision," he told his Cabinet on Sunday.

But set against Israel's ongoing conflict with Hezbollah, the deal drew warnings from security experts that it would increase the risk that Israelis would be kidnapped for ransom.

Last week, Hezbollah — which the U.S. and Israel classify as a terrorist group — killed a bulldozer driver with the Israeli army who was clearing mines along the border.

"It can be assumed that the liberation bash Hezbollah is planning will send the signal to terrorists of all stripes that this is a tactic that pays," terrorism analyst Boaz Ganor wrote in Israel's daily Ma'ariv.

There is added controversy around the fact that the only live Israeli to be repatriated as a result of the deal, Elhanan Tannenbaum, was nabbed by Hezbollah during an alleged illicit business trip to the Persian Gulf.

While a military honor guard will await the arrival of the three dead soldiers — Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad — at Ben-Gurion Airport on

Thursday, Tannenbaum can expect a far more modest reception.

He may even be prosecuted for violating Israeli law by traveling illegally to hostile Arab states.

Notably absent from the release roster is Ron Arad, the Israel air force navigator who went missing after bailing out from his failing Phantom jet over Lebanon in 1986.

Arad was long believed to be dead, but in November, Israeli President Moshe Katsav said he had good reason to believe that Arad is still alive.

At the time, Katsav refused to elaborate, but he did say his belief was more than simply "a gut feeling or a heartfelt wish"

As part of the deal, Israel agreed to free both Hezbollah leader Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid and Shi'ite leader Mustafa Dirani, both Lebanese prisoners it hoped to trade for Arad.

But Jerusalem claimed its own victory in refusing to release Samir Kuntar, a Lebanese jailed for life for killing

three Israelis in a 1979 terrorist attack.

Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah last year had threatened to make his demand for Kuntar's release a deal-breaker.

According to Israeli security officials, Hezbollah has been given a grace period to provide information on Arad, perhaps from Iran.

In exchange, Israel would retry Kuntar with a view to commuting his sentence to time already served.

Thursday's deal has its precedents. In the early 1980s, Israel released more than 5,700 security prisoners in exchange for eight Israeli soldiers captured in Lebanon.

In 1998, it released 60 Lebanese security prisoners in exchange for the remains of an Israeli commando who had been killed in action.

"We may deal asymmetrically, but no one can deny the premium Israel puts on human life," a senior political source in Jerusalem said. ■

The deal could send a message to 'terrorists of all stripes' that kidnapping works.

Boaz Ganor
Israeli terrorism expert

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Hague dossier sent

The United Nations has submitted a dossier to the International Court of Justice on Israel's West Bank security fence.

At the court's request, the U.N. secretariat this week submitted the U.N. resolution calling for the court at The Hague to rule on the legality of the fence, and the background of events leading up to the resolution. U.N. member countries that wish to present written material to the court must do so by Jan. 30.

The court is scheduled to take up the issue Feb. 23.

British politician canned

A British lawmaker lost her party job for saying she might be a suicide bomber if she were Palestinian.

Speaking at a pro-Palestinian lobby Friday and later repeating her comments on national television, Jenny Tonge said she did not condone suicide bombers' actions but understood their motivation. "I do understand why people out there become suicide bombers — it is out of desperation. If I was in their situation," she said, "I might just think about it myself."

The leader of Tonge's Liberal Democratic Party, Charles Kennedy, announced her dismissal as the party's spokeswoman on children.

Date set for anti-Semitism parley

A European conference on anti-Semitism has been set for Feb. 19. The European Commission, which temporarily canceled the meeting after Jewish leaders accused it of anti-Semitism, announced Friday that the conference will be held in Brussels on Feb. 19.

The seminar was organized in response to a rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Europe since the Palestinian intifada began.

Brits oppose a Jewish PM

Nearly one in five Englishmen would prefer that a Jew not be prime minister.

One in seven think the Holocaust is exaggerated, according to a poll published last Friday in Britain's Jewish Chronicle. The poll, which interviewed 1,007 people in England, Scotland and Wales, found that 18 percent disagreed with the statement, "A British Jew would make an equally acceptable prime minister as a member of any other faith."

Last Friday's Daily Telegraph suggested the findings could deal a blow to the electoral chances of Michael Howard, the current leader of the opposition Conservative Party. Howard, a former home secretary, belongs to a Reform temple.

MIDDLE EAST

Top attorney named

Ariel Sharon was absent from a vote confirming Israel's new attorney general, who will decide whether to indict Sharon.

Menachem Mazouz, who was approved by the Cabinet on Sunday, succeeds Elyakim Rubinstein as attorney general. The change-over comes amid a corruption scandal that threatens the prime minister.

A businessman friend of Sharon has been charged with trying to bribe Sharon's sons when Sharon was foreign minister. State Attorney Edna Arbel said the prime minister himself could be indicted as early as next month, but Mazouz would have a veto option.

Aides close to Sharon said he decided to recuse himself from the vote on Mazouz's appointment to avoid the appearance of any impropriety.

Gaza scouts killed

Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinians scouting the Gaza Strip boundary fence.

The two men, dressed in battle fatigues and carrying binoculars and cell phones, were shot dead Saturday by troops who suspected they were planting a bomb. Security officials later said the men likely were sent to spy on Israeli forces in the area ahead of an attack.

Ilan Ramon's diary found

The diary that Israeli astronaut Col. Ilan Ramon kept on the doomed Space Shuttle Columbia mission surfaced.

A Native American tracker discovered fragments of paper from Ramon's diary in Texas months ago, and NASA officials sent the items to Ramon's widow, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Rona Ramon in turn gave the badly damaged documents to Israeli police forensics specialists to decipher.

Sudan backing aliyah?

Sudanese officials reportedly agreed to help Israel bring some 18,000 Falash Mura to Israel.

The Sudanese will help bring the Ethiopians, who claim Jewish ancestry and practice a brand of Orthodox Judaism, to Israel via Khartoum. The agreement reportedly came in a meeting between Israeli and Sudanese officials in Khartoum, the Kuwaiti newspaper al-Seyassah reported Friday, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Israel does not have diplomatic ties with Sudan, but the alleged rapprochement was the result of a condition set by the United States in return for helping to resolve the Sudanese dispute between north and south, the paper quoted European officials as saying.

Israeli bank holding Holocaust assets?

Israel's Bank Leumi is holding hundreds of inactive accounts of Holocaust victims, an investigator said.

Accountant Yehuda Barlev, who led a Knesset probe of the bank, said documents revealed that Bank Leumi not only knew how much money belonged to the Holocaust victims but used some of their assets for its own business expenses, Ha'aretz reported. Bank officials rejected the charges as myths.

Grace period

Jerusalem suspended the deportation of a Palestinian man whose son is an Israeli soldier.

The High Court of Justice issued the stay Sunday on proceedings against Adel Hussein, a native of Tulkarm living illegally in Israel. When Hussein was married to Stella Peretz, a Jewish Israeli, the couple had a son, Mohammed.

Mohammed Hussein is now a soldier in the Israeli army's Bedouin battalion. Hussein senior told the High Court he could be killed by vigilantes if forced to return to the West Bank. The family's story recently was featured in The New York Times.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. to Syria: Dump Hezbollah

Syria must end its support for Hezbollah or face punitive sanctions, a State Department official said. The official emphasized that Syria must show it has cut ties to such groups by mid-year or face sanctions under the Syria Accountability Act.

"We've been clear with President Assad that we're seeking a Syrian shift regarding its support for Hezbollah," the official told JTA. "I would hope that the Syrians would understand that any support for Hezbollah is a destabilizing influence."