

IN THE NEWS
Ceremony honors three slain soldiers

A ceremony was held for the three Israeli soldiers whose bodies were returned to Israel by Hezbollah in a prisoner swap.

Speaking at Thursday's ceremony for Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel's enemies should not take the deal as encouragement to kidnap more Israelis.

In addition to the three soldiers' bodies, Israel also got back businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum in exchange for more than 430 Arab security prisoners.

Elhanan Tannenbaum: spy or entrepreneur?

An Israeli businessman held hostage by Hezbollah said he was abducted while seeking information on missing airman Ron Arad.

"It could be said that the matter I came to Lebanon about was the air force navigator who fell prisoner," Elhanan Tannenbaum told the militia's television station Al-Manar on Wednesday, hours before being flown out under a prisoner-exchange deal with Israel.

Hezbollah, which abducted Tannenbaum in October 2000, has insisted he was a spy, while Israeli media reported that he might have been pursuing illicit business deals.

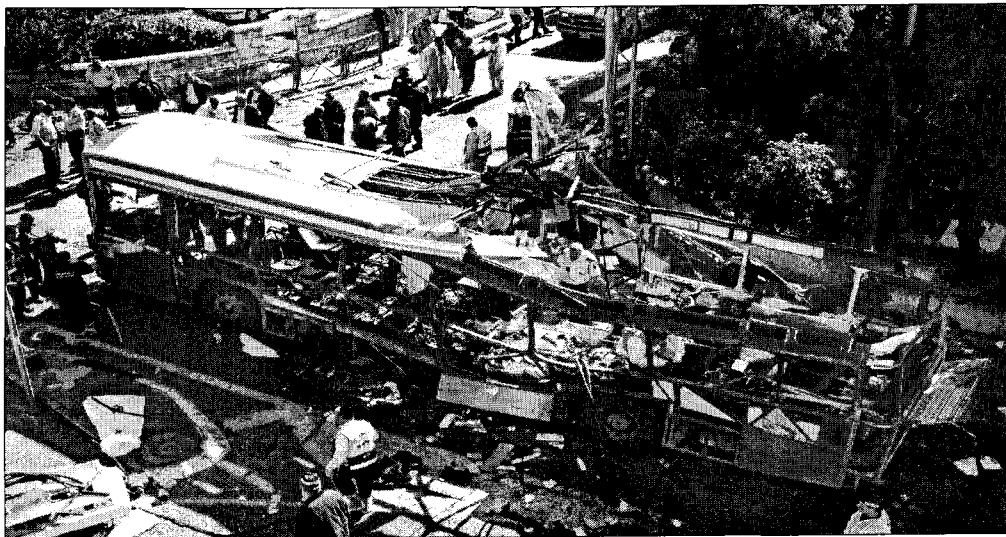
Tannenbaum told Al-Manar he had expected to profit from what he described as a private investigation into the fate of Arad.

Money given for aging communities

The United Jewish Communities received \$4.9 million for a program for the elderly. The allocation, part of a law signed last Friday, makes money available for naturally occurring retirement communities — or NORCs — in 21 communities across the country. NORCs are communities in which a large segment of residents are 65 or older.

WORLD REPORT

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Brian Hendler/JTA

TERROR IN JERUSALEM

A suicide bomber killed at least 10 people aboard a Jerusalem bus. The attack, near Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's residence, came as American envoys visited the region. Page 3.

Peace plans abound, and Israel waits and sees

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the U.S.-led "road map" plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace stalled, Middle East leaders are looking at alternatives to get a peace process moving again.

In Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon wants to use a visit to Washington next month to discuss his contingency plan for unilateral Israeli separation from Palestinian-populated territory.

In Saudi Arabia, there are signs of a new plan to make peace between Israel and the entire Arab world based upon territorial concessions and an agreement in which Palestinian

refugees would be resettled in a newly created Palestinian state and other Arab countries, not Israel. Turkey has offered to mediate between Israel and Syria, and between Israel and the Palestinians. Egypt still is working on an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire.

And outside of the Middle East, members of the "Quartet" — the United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations — are trying to resuscitate the moribund road map but are ready to listen to new ideas. The question remains, however, whether any of these initiatives can work.

Israeli officials are skeptical.

Sharon is convinced that the current Pales-

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**NEWS
ANALYSIS**

■ *Israel is skeptical that any new plans will increase its security*

Continued from page 1

tinian leadership — in which Ahmed Qurei is the Palestinian Authority prime minister but Yasser Arafat, the P.A. president, really pulls the strings — will not be able to take the road map any further.

Sharon argues that the Palestinians will not fight terrorism and will fail to create the necessary conditions for peace negotiations.

The Americans agree, but they have problems with Sharon, who they suspect may be planning to annex large swathes of West Bank territory.

Last week, Sharon sent his bureau chief, Dov Weisglass, to Washington to persuade the Bush administration that he has

no such designs. Weisglass told President Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, that Israel intended to leave all territorial questions open for negotiations, which could start whenever the Palestinians were ready to stop the violence and start talking.

Indeed, he said, Israel hopes that once it finishes the fence it is constructing in the West Bank, it will be able to provide the security against terror the Palestinians so far have been reluctant to create.

If successful, then, the fence actually could create the peace and quiet essential for successful negotiations, Weisglass said.

By most counts, the Americans remain skeptical. They're afraid Sharon's unilat-

eral moves will further alienate the Palestinians, not help the cause of negotiations.

Sharon will have to work hard next month to convince Bush that his unilateral moves will not compromise the president's vision of two states for two peoples.

The new Saudi plan, which so far has been reported only in the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Siyasa*, goes further. According to the report, all Arab states would normalize relations with Israel, including exchanging ambassadors, if Israel withdrew to its 1967 borders. That would mean leaving the West Bank, which was captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War; Gaza, which was captured from Egypt, and the Golan

Heights, captured from Syria.

Additionally, 2 million Palestinian refugees would be absorbed in the new Palestinian state and 2 million more would be absorbed in the Arab states. Israel would not have to take any.

Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah reportedly already has presented the plan to the State Department and aims to have it approved at the next Arab League summit, scheduled for March. Israel would be hard-pressed to reject such an all-encompassing proposal, but it is unlikely that it would sail through the Arab League.

For one thing, the Palestinians are unlikely to waive their rights to have Palestinian refugees resettle in Israel proper. For another, the Arab states have never been eager to absorb Palestinian refugees.

Turkey's offer of mediation has been welcomed by Syria, and neither Israel nor the Palestinians have rejected it. But though Turkey is particularly well placed to play an honest broker, being both a predominantly Muslim country and a close ally of Israel's, Turkey does not carry the clout of a major power and could not replace the United States as the main mediating force.

Nevertheless, any successful Turkish diplomatic role would greatly enhance the country's international prestige.

All the while, the Egyptians have not given up on their efforts to mediate a cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians, which would include a year-long suspension of attacks by Hamas and Islamic Ji-

had. In exchange, Israel would be asked to suspend its policy of targeted killings and other pre-emptive military measures.

But Palestinian terrorist groups have shown little inclination to agree to a cease-fire — or adhere to one — and in any case a cease-fire would not suffice for the Americans and the British.

They are insisting on a detailed Palestinian security plan as a basis for taking the road map forward.

Israeli officials describe the envoys' mission as "maintenance," and say it is not expected to trigger a renewal of peace talks. Indeed, in an election year, the Israelis do not expect heavy U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian process.

Israel is staying cautious on all fronts. It has not taken seriously Syrian overtures to return to the negotiating table — which some Israeli officials have called public-relations ploys — and is not jumping at the chance to use Turkey as a mediator.

Israel still is waiting for the Palestinians to crack down on terrorism, and there has been no official reaction from Jerusalem on the reports of the Saudi plan.

But pundits and opposition leaders are beginning to ask if the government is being unduly cautious, missing chances for a dramatic transformation of its ties with the Arab world in a changing Middle East.

Much of the heightened activity on the peace front clearly is part of the domino effect of the U.S. presence in Iraq.

Regional players are well aware that the U.S. ultimately wants to achieve peace in the Middle East, and autocratic Arab states want to show Washington that they are on the right side of the war on terror to safeguard against becoming future targets of U.S. forces.

The Saudi, Egyptian and Syrian peace moves are intended, at least partly, to impress the United States. On that score, they are similar to Libyan and Iranian offers to scrap their nuclear-weapons programs.

The dilemma Israel faces is not simple: Should they exploit this new Arab willingness to talk peacemaking — and risk giving the Arabs easy diplomatic gains without any tangible peace results? Or, should they put off peacemaking on the assumption that waiting will improve their bargaining position with the Arabs, who will be inclined to offer even more the longer they are ignored by Washington?

For the time being, it seems, Israel will wait and see.

Israel is trying to convince the Americans its security fence might actually jump-start peace talks with the Palestinians.

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Suicide bus bomber kills 10 in Jerusalem

By DINA KRAFT and DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — “How will I find anyone alive?” the 21-year-old security guard asked as he broke down the door and climbed onto the charred ruins of bus no. 19, stepping over body parts and choking on the smell of burned flesh.

Then Nir Azouly spotted a young woman with dark curly hair slumped in her seat, her face and eyes drenched in blood. She was breathing, and he moved aside the body at her feet to pick her up and carry her off the bus.

Azouly kept going in after that, pulling out five people — including a teenage boy stuck between seats — from the tangled carnage of the bus that had been full of morning commuters.

At least 10 people were killed and dozens were wounded in Thursday morning's suicide bombing in Rehavia, a quaint residential neighborhood of the capital. The bomber left a note calling the attack revenge for Israel's killing of five terrorists and three bystanders in a Gaza Strip raid the day before.

“There was a huge fireball and the bus went up in flames,” eyewitness Meshulam Perlman, a florist, told reporters. The blast scattered debris and body parts as far as the prime minister's official residence, though Ariel Sharon was at his Negev Desert ranch at the time.

The Al-Aksa Brigade, part of the PLO's mainstream Fatah movement, claimed responsibility for the attack. The United States, United Nations and European Union all condemned the attack.

Terrorists “have once again struck a blow against the aspirations of the Palestinian people,” U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said.

The attack came a day after Israel killed eight Palestinians — five members of Islamic Jihad and three bystanders — in gun battles in the Gaza Strip.

Thursday's attack also clouded a landmark prisoner exchange between Israel and the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah, brokered by Germany.

Identifying the dead from the Jerusalem attack has been a slow process, said Tal Malovec, spokeswoman for the Jerusalem municipality, because the bodies are in such bad condition. She said the blast was especially powerful.

“I mostly saw bodies in pieces. It was

hard to identify what I was seeing,” Azouly said. “The bus was full of smoke. There was a stench of bodies and death.”

Among the passengers was Victor Chaim. He had just stepped onto the bus at the previous stop and was looking for a seat when the explosion occurred. Chaim was hurled backward and injured both his legs lightly. Someone pulled him out of the bus, dragging him by his jacket.

“It was chaos. The people in front of me were not moving,” he said, “and the silence after the explosion was incredible.”

Chaim, 41, who immigrated from France a year ago, said the bombing would not shake his determination to stay.

“I want to stay in Israel. This is my life here, in this land,” Chaim said, speaking from bed at Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital.

As if timed to ratchet up regional tensions, the bombing came just as Israeli forensic scientists were in Cologne confirming that three bodies recovered from Lebanon were soldiers killed in a border ambush in October 2000. Also repatriated was an Israeli businessman, Elhanan Tannenbaum, who was abducted by Hezbollah shortly afterward.

The forensic team's findings gave the green light for Israel to free some 435 Arab security prisoners. Many Palestinians who gathered to meet their liberated kinsmen in the West Bank carried yellow Hezbollah flags, a mark of the prestige the swap bestowed on the Lebanese group.

Tannenbaum and the bodies of the dead soldiers arrived back in Israel on Thursday evening. The coffins of the soldiers, draped in Israeli flags, were on display in a hangar at the base, where several hundred people gathered for a state ceremony.

Many Israelis worried that the swap would encourage terrorist groups to kidnap more Israelis and hold them for ransom.

“We will grind our teeth at the almost unbearably heavy price we are paying for captives both alive and dead, and we will also wilt with worry that the wholesale release of terrorists will bring waves of attacks in its wake,” the editor in chief of Israel's Ma'ariv newspaper, Amnon Dankner, wrote in a front-page opinion piece.

In fact, Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah warned that Israel would regret its refusal to release Samir Kuntar, a terrorist who murdered an Israeli family in a particularly gruesome attack in 1979.

In future kidnappings, Nasrallah said, every effort would be made to keep the Israelis alive — making them more valuable as ransom.

Sharon, speaking at the state military ceremony for the dead soldiers, said Israel would resort to more extreme measures if terrorists made a practice of kidnapping Israelis.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said Thursday that any retaliation for the bus bomb-

ing would be muted — possibly in a nod to U.S. envoys John Wolf and David Satterfield, who were in the region to try to shore up the U.S.-led “road map” peace plan.

Instead, Jerusalem mounted a media offensive, running graphic bombing photographs on the Foreign Ministry Web site and citing the attack as proof of the need for a West Bank security fence.

“This hideous attack is another indication that Palestinian terrorists have not missed a beat in their complete dedication for striking at Israelis in the heart of their own cities,” David Baker, of the Prime Minister's Office, told JTA. “If anyone has not been convinced of the necessity of the security fence, they need only look at the pictures.”

The staffs at Hadassah and Shaare Zedek hospitals in Jerusalem dealt mostly with blast injuries and other internal injuries, broken limbs and shrapnel wounds.

“We've seen too much,” said Irit Yagen, chief nurse, who was worried about recruiting extra staff for Sabbath shifts.

Patients piled in — one with broken limbs, another with a blasted lung.

In one bed, Shalom Zaken, 54, the bus driver, said his head hurt and he couldn't hear. He had seen nothing unusual, he said.

Nearby, security guard Azouly was injured from lifting wounded. His mother was waiting in the hospital when he arrived. He said he wanted to know the status of the woman he pulled from the bus.

“I don't know where she is. I want to know how she is doing and I hope to see her,” he said. “I hope she is alive.”

“We've seen too much.”

Irit Yagen

Nurse in Jerusalem

Hezbollah deal not Israel's first such swap

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The debate in Israel over this week's prisoner-exchange deal with Hezbollah is not the first time a swap deal has roiled the Jewish state.

Considering Sheik Hassan Nasrallah's pledge that Hezbollah would kidnap more Israelis, this debate might not be the last.

On Thursday, Israel was slated to receive Israeli businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah in October 2000 in exchange for some 435 Arab security prisoners.

Many Israelis are concerned that the Lebanon-based Islamic group would be encouraged to kidnap more Israelis to secure the release of more prisoners and to strengthen its image as a David winning battles against a Goliath.

"The key issue is what will happen with the terrorists that we release," Moshe Arens, a former defense minister and foreign minister, told JTA. "If we know for sure that as a result of this deal 10 Israelis will be killed, we probably would not have agreed to it. I, for one, would have opposed it. Is there a chance that consequently 10 Israelis or perhaps even more will be killed? Unfortunately, the answer is yes."

Even before the swap, there were indications that one prisoner in particular would try to murder again.

Steven Josef Smyrek, a German who converted to Islam and was jailed after coming to Israel on a Hezbollah suicide mission in 1997, plans to rejoin the Lebanese militia upon his release, according to a German reporter who interviewed him.

Despite his present position, Arens was among the ministers who supported a past prisoner-swap deal, called the Jibril deal.

On May 20, 1985, some 1,150 Palestinians were traded for three Israelis soldiers — Hezi Shai, Yosef Groff and Nissim Salem — who were captured in Lebanon and held by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, led by Ahmed Jibril.

The deal, initiated by then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was sharply criticized at the time, but Rabin won the support of the Cabinet. Unfortunately, most of the released prisoners returned to their homes in the West Bank and Gaza and two years later became some of the foot soldiers in the first intifada.

"Everyone involved in the Jibril deal is aware that we made a mistake," Arens said.

Minister Yitzhak Navon, a former president of Israel, was the only one to oppose the deal. "One should have the guts to tell the families of the prisoners that there is a line which the state cannot cross," Navon said.

In the long history of Israel's armed conflict with the Arab world, Israel always has paid a heavy price in prisoner-exchange deals.

For example, following the Sinai Campaign of 1956, Israel released more than 5,500 Egyptian soldiers in return for four Israeli soldiers.

And at the end of the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel released 6,708 Arab soldiers and civilians in exchange for a handful of Israeli prisoners and the bodies of fallen soldiers.

However, as long as the deal was with legitimate governments at the end of a "regular" war, there was no moral dilemma.

The dilemmas began only when the terrorist organizations began capturing Israeli soldiers and holding them as bargaining chips. This began only once Israel began sinking in the Lebanese mud.

On April 4, 1978, six Israeli soldiers and a civilian mistakenly entered an area controlled by PLO terrorists in the Rashidiya region in southern Lebanon. Four soldiers were killed and one soldier was captured alive. The soldier was released almost a year later, in exchange for 76 terrorists held in Israeli prisons.

This pattern repeated itself after the Lebanon War of 1982.

Since 1983, there have been eight prisoner exchanges, and the latest is among the most controversial.

The Israeli soldiers in the deal — Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Souad — were on a patrol mission along Israel's border with Lebanon on Oct. 7, 2000, when they were ambushed by Hezbollah gunmen dressed as U.N. observers. The terrorists dragged the soldiers into Lebanon, leaving evidence of bloodshed behind. A year later, Israel officially declared that the soldiers had been killed during the kidnapping.

Tannenbaum, the only Israeli captive in the current deal who is known to be

alive, is a controversial figure. Unlike the soldiers who were kidnapped on duty, Tannenbaum, a reservist, was seized in Arab territory after having traveled there on a supposed business trip.

The exact details of Tannenbaum's capture are unclear. Tannenbaum left Israel for Brussels in early October 2000, then flew to Abu Dhabi. After that, he either went to Beirut on his own free will or was kidnapped and brought there.

A former artillery commander, Tannenbaum had faced dire financial difficulties in

recent years. His inclusion in the deal was met with intense criticism by some Israelis, who asked why Israel was releasing security prisoners in exchange for a civilian who might have become a hostage because of his own mistakes.

Notably absent from the release roster is Ron Arad, the Israeli airman who went missing after bailing out from his failing jet over Lebanon in October 1986. Arad is believed to have fallen into the hands of the Lebanese Shi'ite organization Amal.

Some critics have argued that Israel missed opportunities to release Arad early on. However, successive Israeli governments have tried to locate him.

At one time, he was believed to have been held by Shi'ite activist Mustafa Dirani, who claimed that Hezbollah had captured Arad from him and passed him onto the Iranians. Israel later kidnapped Dirani and Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid as bargaining chips for Arad, but to no avail. Both men were expected to be included in this week's deal.

As part of a reported second phase of this deal, Israel hopes to receive information about Arad in exchange for the release of another high-profile Arab prisoner.

The campaign for Arad's release fueled the ongoing debate in Israel over the appropriate price to pay to free Israelis held in captivity.

The debate turned particularly caustic in recent months, when Arad's family sued to try to block the deal to release Dirani and Obeid without receiving any new information about Arad.

'The key issue is what will happen with the terrorists that we release.'

Moshe Arens

Former Israeli defense minister

French Jewish group is torn by strife

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — Intercommunal strife is threatening the future of one of Europe's largest Jewish organizations.

Following months of political maneuvers, anonymous letters and personal attacks, two senior members of the Paris Consistoire at the center of the dispute have filed a legal request demanding that the courts place the organization under judicial administration.

That would remove financial control and administration from the community for only the second time in almost 200 years — an idea that Consistoire President Moise Cohen strongly condemned.

"It is unbelievable that two Jews, who are members of the Consistoire, are trying to destroy the community," Cohen told JTA. "The last time this was done was in 1940, during the Shoah."

Cohen's comment, a reference to the dissolution of the Consistoire by the collaborationist Vichy regime, follows the recourse to legal action brought by Consistoire General Secretary Maurice-Ruben Hayoun and Sammy Ghozlan, one of the organization's five vice presidents.

Both men say that after a two-year struggle to change the way the Consistoire is run, they have no alternative.

To date, they have rejected calls from other Consistoire executive members to have the matter adjudicated by the Paris Beth Din or the Central Consistoire — both bodies that the pair say have an interest in backing Cohen.

According to Ghozlan, Cohen is guilty of "gross mismanagement" and of "not keeping the organization's expenses in check."

Cohen denied the charges, saying the Consistoire possessed "considerable resources," while its financial problems were short-term.

"All Jewish organizations are feeling it at the moment," he said. "We have over 1,000 people working here. It only takes a drop in revenue of one-half of 1 percent to make things difficult."

Ghozlan and Hayoun, a long-time opponent of Cohen on the Consistoire executive,

have strongly criticized the fact that the Consistoire is paying for a car for Cohen.

Cohen is not paid, though the presidency is virtually a full-time job in an organization that runs more than 100 synagogues and employs around 1,000 people.

At the center of recent developments is Cohen's attempt to force Ghozlan and Hayoun out of the executive on the grounds that their official roles are incompatible with the public attacks they have leveled against the Consistoire in a series of open letters and articles on community Web sites.

On Jan. 20, Cohen asked the whole executive to resign so that a new board could be appointed. The maneuver was designed to force out Ghozlan and Hayoun, though they and three other members of the executive refused to hand in their resignations.

Lazare Kaplan, a senior member of the executive and a Cohen supporter, said the president had been left with little choice.

"These articles do great damage to the Consistoire," Kaplan said. "We told them, 'You are part of the executive. You either abide by majority decisions or you leave and become part of the opposition.' We have to get rid of them."

"What am I supposed to do? Either I let these things pass and I'm an accomplice — in which case I'm letting down the people who elected me — or we do something about it," Ghozlan said.

Created in 1808 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the Consistoire traditionally has held a virtual monopoly over the religious institutions of Western Europe's largest Jewish community, with a vast administration that includes the Paris Beth Din, marriage and divorce registrars, and a burial board.

It also generally has been recognized by the state as the official Jewish community organization in France — though since World War II a great part of its political role has been taken over by the CRIF secular umbrella organization of French Jews.

Nevertheless, as the most powerful influence in CRIF and by far the largest Jewish organization in France, the Consistoire remains important.

In recent years, however, the Consistoire — which gets its money from donations, kashrut supervision and membership fees — has not been immune to the reductions in financial resources that have plagued many European Jewish organizations.

Cohen said the Consistoire "only exists through the generosity of its members," but that it now has to compete with other charities. "We have the same problems as all Jewish organizations in France," Cohen said. "People raise money for Israel but they forget to give money to their own community."

Kaplan said Ghozlan's criticism of Cohen stems from other sources.

"He wants to run the community's security organization," Kaplan said, a reference to Ghozlan's Bureau for Vigilance Against anti-Semitism, which the former police commissioner set up in opposition to the Jewish Community Protection Service, which is backed by both the Consistoire and CRIF.

Another source of tension, Kaplan said, is Ghozlan's advocacy of separate Jewish community councils for the Paris suburbs, which Cohen regards as duplicating or competing with the Consistoire's role. Ghozlan is president of the Seine Saint-Denis Council of Jewish Communities.

Kaplan admitted that the Consistoire "has serious financial problems," but insisted that it was still solvent.

"We had problems with a reduction in meat sales with the fears over mad-cow disease and, like other Jewish communities, we are facing increased competition from other kashrut boards," he said.

Kaplan said Cohen's supporters had offered to set up a three-man committee, which would include former French Chief Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat, to mediate the issue, but that Ghozlan and Hayoun had rejected the idea.

Ghozlan told JTA he believed the court likely would appoint a mediator, perhaps a leading Jewish judge, rather than an administrator.

All sides now seem likely to accept such an outcome. But whatever the result, community leaders have been shocked by the recourse to legal action.

"This is terrible. The idea that someone who is not even Jewish could run the Consistoire is deeply damaging to the community," one senior community leader said. ■

'People raise money for Israel, but they forget to give money to their own community.'

Moise Cohen
Consistoire president

High schoolers trained to back Israel

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — As a college student in the former Soviet Union, one of Natan Sharansky's first forms of resistance was to call himself Natan rather than Anatoly.

The move symbolized the return to his Jewish roots, the legendary refusenik turned Israeli Cabinet minister told a group of Jewish high school students here on Jan. 15.

"If you don't speak your mind in the years when you are a student, you will not do it at all," Sharansky said.

He said associating with Israel had boosted his image on campus during his student days.

Sharansky keyed the half-day event of pro-Israel lectures, with workshops like "Israeli history in 30 minutes" and testimonials from recent college grads marking the launch of a national campaign called the Israel Advocacy High School Coalition.

The coalition of 34 Jewish groups — ranging from Hillel to Young Judaea — was organized by Sharansky and the Jewish National Fund to instill pride in Israel among Jewish high school students and arm them with Israel-advocacy tools.

The program represents a concerted effort that several Jewish groups recently began on their own.

The American Jewish Committee, in coordination with the Solomon Schechter High School of New York, created the Israel Knowledge, Advocacy and Responsibility program, offering teaching material ranging from visual aids to workshops.

B'nai B'rith Youth Organization has developed a two-week summertime Israel-advocacy program in which the second half is spent lobbying students' congressmen in Washington.

The recent New York session was a pilot program the coalition plans to replicate in cities across the United States by targeting Jewish high school students through youth groups and day schools, according to JNF.

When the start of the intifada sparked anti-Israel activity on U.S. college campuses, Jewish organizations found themselves scurrying to equip ill-informed Jewish students with basic facts about

Israel. After three years of advocacy programs for college students and the formation of an umbrella group, called the Israel on Campus Coalition, to coordinate them, Jewish groups now are hoping to get ahead of the curve by prepping Jews still in high school.

"Our work on college campuses with Caravan for Democracy, our college activist program, during the past two years has shown us that it is imperative that we begin preparing our students while they are still in high school for what they will face when they get to college," JNF president Ronald Lauder said in a news release.

Indeed, several of the groups appear to be applying the Israel-advocacy models and resources they use on college campuses for the new high school initiative.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which puts out Israel Campus Beat, a weekly e-mail primer for college students on Israeli current events, has plans for a high school version, the High Alert.

Organizers of the Israel Project, a Washington-based polling and research group that is working with Israel and Jewish groups to improve public perceptions of Israel, taught the high schoolers the do's and don'ts of Israel advocacy.

"Keep it simple, stupid," Israel Project director Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi told the group.

"Avoid analysis paralysis," she warned, and reminded students that they don't have to have all the answers.

For many of the students, Sharansky's presence drove home the significance of Thursday's event.

They said they felt ready to take on the challenge of becoming advocates for Israel and ensure that their future college campuses will not erupt with the kind of hysteria shown in a video clip they watched of an anti-Israel mob at Concordia University in Montreal.

"Most people are willing to sit down and have a fairly civilized conversation about the crisis in the Middle East," said Benjamin Smyser, 18, a senior at the Solomon Schechter School of New York who

is going to Wesleyan University in the fall.

Smyser said he long has been exposed to news and education about Israel. Since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000, he and his friends have debated the situation often.

"We may not be adults yet per se," he said, but "I feel that certainly we're ready to handle this stuff."

Aimee Almeleh, a senior at Solomon Schechter High School of Long Island, said the Concordia video clip made her more eager to join the fray.

If those students can "carry on and scream about whatever they feel is an injustice, it empowers me to get up and express what I really feel is an injustice," said Almeleh, who is heading to Princeton University in the fall.

She added, however, that as a Jewish day school student, she already feels a strong sense of pride and knowledge about Israel.

The program might be more effective by targeting Jewish high school students that are less identified, she said.

Deena Greenberg, 17, a senior at the Solomon Schechter High School of New York and student chairwoman of the new program, disagreed.

It's "really important to start already with those who really care," and "who are going to be active on campus and then spread that spirit among others," Greenberg said.

She is president of her school's Israel Action Committee and a participant in an Israel-advocacy writing program for high school students, called Write On For Israel.

The program marks a long-overdue beginning, those involved in the effort say.

"For too long the community as a whole has ignored the campus and the high school part of our community," Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Presidents Conference, told the group.

"We're trying to catch up," he said. "It's 'too late once people are there or intimidated.'"

High school students are given a crash course in how to sell Israel to their peers.

BUSINESS

In Israel, it's morning again for high-tech world

By BUZZY GORDON

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — An annual report on venture-capital investment in Israel seems to confirm that Israel's high-tech sector is emerging from the doldrums and regaining its solid footing.

Israeli high-tech companies raised \$1.01 billion from domestic and foreign venture-capital firms in 2003, managing to stay above the \$1 billion mark for the fifth straight year.

Although the figure is 11 percent below the \$1.138 billion raised in 2002, 20 more private Israeli companies — a total of 372 — raised money in 2003.

Moreover, \$529 million was invested in the second half of 2003 — the best second half for venture-capital flows to Israeli high-tech since 2000.

According to the annual survey conducted by the IVC Research Center, a division of Giza Venture Capital, investment in seed-stage companies tripled in 2003 from the year before. IVC polled 125 venture investors, of whom 66 are Israeli management companies and 59 are other, mostly foreign, investment entities.

Ze'ev Holtzman, IVC's research chairman, is optimistic about 2004.

"We foresee an increase in the pace of technology investments in light of the more buoyant capital markets in Israel and abroad," he said.

Israeli officials are equally as optimistic. "Israel's economy in general, and the high-tech sector in particular, is picking up," said Liana Foksheanu, an economic officer with the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

"Bilateral economic relations between Israel and the U.S., and even European as well as Asian countries, are progressing well. We fully expect this momentum to carry into 2004."

Foreign investors directly accounted for nearly 60 percent of the venture-capital investment in private Israeli companies, injecting \$589 million into the high-tech economy in 2003. ■

Plan to build near memorial in Ukraine provokes Jewish ire

By VLADIMIR MATVEYEV

KHARKOV, Ukraine (JTA) — For decades, World War II memorials erected in Ukraine did not specifically acknowledge Jewish suffering.

Now Ukrainian Jews are facing a new controversy connected to memorializing the war's victims at a proposed commercial construction site near the location of a mass grave for thousands of Holocaust victims.

Some leaders of the Jewish community of Kharkov, Ukraine's second largest city, are protesting a proposed gas station and adjacent stores on a busy highway near a recently unveiled monument that marks the site of a Holocaust-era massacre.

"The Kharkov Jewish public was not informed about the planned construction," and if it had it would hardly give its consent to the proposed development, said a recent article by Pavel Sokolsky, a local Jewish leader, and Vladislav Nagriner, a journalist.

The article was published last month in the Jewish Observer, a Kiev newspaper.

The authors of the article called on the city council to overturn its earlier decision that would allow the construction of a gas station with a car wash, parking lot, food service and shops for drivers near the memorial in Drobitsky Yar. The memorial is outside Kharkov, home to about 50,000 Jews.

The two activists have called on Jewish organizations in Ukraine and abroad to support their fight against the proposed construction, which they said would compromise the sacred nature of the site.

City authorities, at first reluctant to discuss the issue with journalists, said last week they may reconsider their September 2002 decision to allocate land to Gefest.

Between December 1941 and January 1942, Nazis and local collaborators killed more than 15,000 Jews in Drobitsky Yar.

A memorial was dedicated in December of 2002 in the presence of Ukraine's president, Leonid Kuchma. A 9-foot-tall

menorah stands beside the highway at Drobitsky Yar and above the valley below.

To one side, a tree-lined road winds to a massive white arch with the years "1941-1942" framed in a circle on the outside and bright blue Stars of David within. Below the arch is a sculpture depicting the tablets of the Ten Commandments. "Thou Shall Not Kill" is engraved in several languages, including Yiddish and Ukrainian.

Sokolsky, editor of the local Jewish paper, Shalom, blamed Leonid Leonidov, chairman of the Drobitsky Yar Memorial Committee, and Larisa Volovik, director of the Kharkov Holocaust Museum, who last August approved the commercial construction project without consulting the Jewish community.

"A single organization cannot decide such questions in secret," Sokolsky said. "It is necessary to move either the gas station or the menorah."

Volovik said, "The construction of a gas station and accompanying struc-

tures will be held away from Drobitsky Yar, away from the entry to the memorial complex."

She said the company that will build and operate the station already has shown enough sensitivity to the issue by contributing to the renovation of the Kharkov Holocaust Museum. The company also agreed to plant trees near the service station and will pay for a spotlight to light the memorial menorah nearby, according to Volovik.

"We cannot prohibit the construction that will be conducted outside the memorial zone on the land belonging to the city," Volovik said.

A representative of the company that will build and operate the service station said the construction will take place more than 80 yards from the memorial sign and more than 800 yards away from the actual burial site of the victims.

Svetlana Streltsova, a spokeswoman for the Gefest firm, said she believes the gas station will bring more visitors to the memorial site. "When stopping to refill the car and have a rest, people will stop automatically by the memorial," she said. ■

Either the gas station or menorah must be moved, one activist says.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. Red Cross: 'Progress' on Israel

The International Red Cross is making progress in admitting Israel's relief agency, the American Red Cross president said.

Marsha Evans said Wednesday that the American Red Cross would withhold its dues from the international group until it admits Magen David Adom.

But she added that she was "hopeful" because the international group "forcefully" asked Switzerland's government in December to convene a conference to resolve the issue.

Muslim countries object to the red Star of David, the symbol of Israel's national emergency-response organization.

In the meantime, she said, there is a much closer relationship between the U.S. and Israeli rescue organizations, including training.

Addressing the National Press Club in Washington, Evans also said the United States has successfully encouraged other national Red Cross groups, including Britain's, to forge closer ties with Magen David Adom.

Poll: U.S. Arabs, Jews want peace

Arab and Jewish Americans back U.S. engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, a new poll says.

A survey of 500 Jewish Americans and 500 Arab Americans by Zogby International indicated support for U.S. involvement in the conflict but also reflected disappointment with President Bush's performance in the region.

Seventy-six percent of Jewish respondents rated Bush's performance as negative, compared with 75 percent of Arab respondents. Among Arab Americans, nearly 73 percent said they would be more likely to support a political candidate who says the United States must be actively engaged in trying to bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Almost 72 percent of American Jews agreed. The poll, conducted earlier this month for the Arab American Institute and Americans for Peace Now, has a margin of error of 4.5 percent.

Columbia hire blasted

Jewish groups criticized Columbia University for hiring a controversial former U.N. official.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Zionist Organization of America blasted the hiring this month of the former U.N. human rights commissioner, Mary Robinson, to teach in the school's Department of International and Public Affairs. Robinson repeatedly has criticized Israel for what she sees as its human-rights abuses, and she presided over the U.N. conference against racism in Durban, South Africa, that became an anti-Israel fest.

Canadian native leader out

A controversial Canadian Indian leader was rejected as a candidate for a national committee.

Only days after David Ahenakew was nominated, Canada's Assembly of First Nations rejected the former native leader as a candidate to sit on the federally funded aboriginal committee. Ahenakew, who provoked controversy in December 2002 by praising Hitler's attempt to exterminate Jews, is awaiting trial on hate-related charges.

Initially dismayed by Ahenakew's brief inclusion on the list, Canadian Jewish groups welcomed the AFN's decision to remove his name from consideration. "I think that is a welcome response and an appropriate response," said Keith Landy, head of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

England and New England papers unite

A British Jewish news operation is merging with Boston's Jewish newspaper. The London Jewish News/Totally PLC, and The Jewish Advocate/Jewish Advocate Publishing Corp., will merge under the umbrella of Totally PLC.

Michael Sinclair, chairman of the London Jewish Times will head up the U.K.-based operation and Rabbi Y.A. Korff, chairman of the Boston-based Jewish Advocate, will direct the U.S.-based operation. Korff will become the largest shareholder of the company, which owns the London paper and now the Advocate, as well as www.totallyjewish.com, www.totallyjewishtravel.com and Yediot Alondon, a newspaper for Israelis in London.

WORLD

Italy to probe anti-Semitism

Italy soon will have a government committee to investigate and fight anti-Semitism and racism.

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced the move this week, saying there was "profound concern about the rise of episodes of intolerance and anti-Semitism in Europe."

The committee, which will begin operation in coming weeks, will be composed of representatives of several government ministries. Its task will be to monitor episodes of racism, anti-Semitism and religious intolerance and determine how to educate people against such attitudes and punish acts when they occur.

Belarus cemetery a dumping ground

A historic Jewish cemetery in Belarus reportedly is being used as a garbage dump and a place to graze cattle.

Citing a report in this week's edition of an independent newspaper in Belarus, the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union said the 400-year-old cemetery is in the town of Chernikov in Belarus' Mogilev province.

Several years ago, local authorities removed the fence surrounding the cemetery grounds; since that time residents have turned it into a garbage dump.

'Palestine' boosted in El Salvador

The mayor of El Salvador's capital gave the keys to the city to the Palestinian ambassador for Central America.

This week's move by Carlos Rivas Zamora in San Salvador caused an uproar among Jewish leaders and Israeli officials in El Salvador. In addition, a Palestine Square was inaugurated near an Israel Square in the city.

Israeli officials said they would work to get a map removed on the Palestinian monument that has the words "Palestine, Holy Land" over the State of Israel.

The names of two major candidates in March 2004 presidential elections — both of whom are of Palestinian origin — support the monument, officials said. Several hundred Jews live in El Salvador, which has a Palestinian community of 60,000 people.

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli settlers jailed

An Israeli court jailed two West Bank settlers for 15 months on weapons charges.

Yitzhak Pass, whose infant daughter, Shalhevet, was killed by a Palestinian sniper in Hebron in 2001, and his brother-in-law, Matityahu Shvu, admitted to trying to smuggle 88 pounds of explosives into Jerusalem last year.