



## IN THE NEWS

## Happy birthday, Israel

Israel kicked off its Independence Day celebrations.

The Jewish state's 56th birthday began at sundown Monday, when 16 athletes lit candles at a blue-ribbon ceremony at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Independence Day was preceded by Israel's memorial day, when Israelis remembered the country's 21,782 fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism.

Bereaved families and friends flocked to cemeteries around the country, and many Israeli businesses were closed.

## Hamas weighs informer hunt

Worried that Israel will kill more leaders, Hamas said it may hunt for Palestinian informers.

"These agents are the ones who provide the occupation with information on movements of the leaders," Hamas politburo member Mohammad Nazzal told reporters in Bahrain.

"Now Hamas, along with other Palestinian groups, is studying ways to deal with this phenomenon," he said.

Scores of suspected Palestinian collaborators already have been executed by vigilantes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but Hamas is under extra pressure after Israel, acting on intelligence tipoffs, killed two of its leaders in less than a month.

## Israel, Jews protest Brahimi statements

Israel wrote a letter to the U.N. secretary general protesting anti-Israel statements by the top U.N. envoy for Iraq.

In a letter to Kofi Annan, Israel's U.N. ambassador, Dan Gillerman, blasted a statement by envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who called Israeli policy "the great poison in the region."

Gillerman demanded that Annan inform Lakhdar of his misconduct for partisan criticism of Israel and drawing "a specious and unfair connection between the situations in the two arenas."

# WORLD REPORT

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## Gone, but not forgotten: Israel mourns its fallen soldiers

By DINA KRAFT

**M**OSHAV MAGSHIMIM, Israel, (JTA) — The eve of Israel's memorial day for fallen soldiers, Yom Hazikaron, is also Omri Atzmon's birthday.

Born 51 years ago, Atzmon has a smooth, smiling face, a flop of dark hair covering his forehead, in photographs taken when he was 21 years old.

Today, those photos are all that remains of Atzmon, wearing a face that never changes.

A member of an elite special forces team in the Israeli army, Atzmon was killed on the ninth day of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. He was deep in the Sinai Desert when Egyptian artillery fire hit his armored vehicle, killing Atzmon and his eight fellow crew members.

Atzmon lies buried alongside his comrades in the military section of the Kiryat Shaul cemetery.

On Monday, Yom Hazikaron, his younger brother Yavin — now older than Atzmon ever was — tends to the roses and lilies neatly arranged in copper and clay vases on the grave.

Members of Atzmon's family are among the countless Israelis who stand packed between the rows of graves, which stretch out as vast fields of square stones, broken only by cypress and palm trees.

In the small Jewish state, it seems that almost everyone has the grave of a friend or loved one to visit on Yom Hazikaron.

Here, in the cemetery at Moshav Magshimim, friendships have been forged.

Aging army buddies with graying hair and spreading paunches mingle with the parents and siblings of their fallen friends.

The relatives themselves long have become acquainted. Year after year they stand alongside each other by the row of graves.

Waiting under a baking sun for the official Yom Hazikaron ceremony to begin, they exchange family news: who has died, who was born, who had an operation, who is starting college.

The cemetery is divided into chronological sections — the soldiers killed in the 1956 war and the 1967 Six-Day War are in their own areas; the Yom Kippur War fallen are in another.

A younger set of parents and friends fill the section reserved for soldiers killed in Lebanon and in Israel's battles since. That section is particularly crowded.

At 11 a.m., there is a piercing wail as the nationwide memorial siren sounds. The hush that falls over the crowd at Kiryat Shaul, one of Israel's 43 military cemeteries, echoes that felt all over the country. A sea of heads bows in grief and remembrance.

On the streets and highways of Israel, drivers stop their cars in the middle of the road and stand at attention while the siren wails. Everyone — shoppers, stockbrokers and schoolchildren — pause for the siren.

There are so many to remember.

From Nov. 29, 1947, through April 4 of this year, 20,196 soldiers died defending Israel. The Israeli government put the figure of total dead through Sunday, the eve of Israel's memorial day, at 21,782, including fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism.

The latest name added to the list was Cpl. Yaniv Mashiah of Jaffa, 20, a member of

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**ISRAEL'S  
MEMORIAL  
DAY**

## ■ *Gone, but not forgotten: On Yom Hazikaron, Israel mourns its fallen soldiers*

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Israel's Border Police, who was killed in a Palestinian ambush outside Hebron on Sunday night.

In recent years, Yom Hazikaron has changed to incorporate not only soldiers but victims of terrorism.

"We hoped that we would not add more names to the list of fallen," President Moshe Katsav said Sunday in his speech at the state ceremony marking the beginning of Yom Hazikaron, at the Western Wall plaza in Jerusalem.

"To our regret, it was another year of pain and of blood in the streets, another year of sorrow and grief, a year in which the awareness grew within us that we are fighting to defend the lives of citizens of Israel and for the security of the state," he said.

■

For the entire night and day of Yom Hazikaron, the only songs played on the radio are sad, Hebrew songs, many of them about the young men and women killed in the country's wars. Lyrics recall lives struck down in their prime and the ache of goodbye.

On the moshav in central Israel where Omri Atzmon lived, he still is known as the boy with "golden hands" — who grew up working the land and was able to fix anything broken. A ceremony was held Sunday night at the moshav in memory of Atzmon and another two young men from the moshav killed in action in the Yom Kippur War.

Honored and remembered alongside them is Eli Cohen, the Israeli spy who

infiltrated the highest levels of the Syrian regime before being discovered and hanged in 1965 in Damascus. His widow lives on the moshav.

Guy Atzmon, Omri Atzmon's 19-year-old nephew and a soldier in an Israel Defense Forces' artillery unit, lowers the Israeli flag to half-mast while his brother Chen, 12, plays a military salute on the trumpet. Chen began playing the trumpet three months ago so he would be able to play at the ceremony.

At the Atzmon house, the memory of Omri remains fresh. His father Rafael, 74, says Omri is so present in family members' minds that he half expects his eldest son to walk in the door at any moment.

Everyone's favorite stories about Omri are swapped around a table filled with a mountain of food — homemade stuffed grape leaves, tahina, lasagna, salads and cakes. Photo albums are passed around depicting his short life: Omri as a toddler, Omri at summer camp, Omri on a class trip swimming in a desert pool.

**Four boys have been named in memory of Omri Atzmon.**

Yavin Atzmon, the youngest of the family's four sons, was just six years old when his brother Itai, two years younger than Omri, walked in and told the family that Omri had been killed.

Itai Atzmon was traveling in the same convoy as Omri, only about 150 meters behind, when he heard the explosion that ripped apart Omri's armored vehicle.

At the moshav ceremony, the letters of the word "yizkor," Hebrew for "remember," are set aflame, burning in the night sky.

Four boys have been named in memory of Omri.

Rifka Atzmon, Omri's mother, says that every day has been Yom Hazikaron for her since her son died, but that on the day itself she feels the family is not alone in its grief.

"We feel that the nation of Israel is with us, embraces us and this moves us — that everyone is with us and we are not alone," she says. "We want there to be an end to the deaths . . . we want peace, we want quiet so others will not have to die. But there seems to be no end." ■

## Sharon fights for withdrawal plan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Likud Cabinet members refusing to lobby for the Israeli prime minister's disengagement plan may lose their jobs.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Education Minister Limor Livnat, all of whom reluctantly endorsed Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan from the Palestinians, after it received President Bush's backing earlier this month, have made clear that they will not campaign to persuade Likud members to vote for the plan in a May 2 party referendum.

According to sources in the Prime Minister's Office, an infuriated Sharon has hinted that the three might lose their Cabinet seats.

"They can be replaced — especially if we end up in a national unity government with Labor," a source said Monday, alluding to talk that Sharon could form a broad coalition government with the main opposition party.

Aides to Netanyahu, Shalom and Livnat did not immediately comment.

Israel's Channel Ten television said over the weekend that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, the most vocal booster of the disengagement plan, received Sharon's assurance he would keep his portfolio no matter how the Cabinet roster changes.

Sharon also is planning to return to Washington next month to promote his withdrawal plan. Sharon, whose attendance at the annual AIPAC conference May 16-18 was confirmed Monday, also is likely to meet with President Bush during the visit.

Another Bush-Sharon summit, coming after the May 2 Likud Party referendum on the Gaza withdrawal plan, would expand on details of Israel's plan for disengagement from the Palestinians.

There's no word yet on whether Bush will address the AIPAC conference, though U.S. presidents traditionally have done so in election years. The State Department's top envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, John Wolf, who rarely makes public appearances, also is scheduled to address the conference. ■

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# Israelis jump into fray of Swiss banks settlement

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israeli officials are blasting recommendations that money from the \$1.25 billion Swiss banks settlement should be used to help Holocaust survivors in the former Soviet Union before others.

The criticism surfaced Sunday in a special meeting of the Knesset's Ministerial Committee on the Restoration of Jewish Property, which included Cabinet minister Natan Sharansky and Sallai Meridor, co-chairman of the World Jewish Restitution Organization and chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Their meeting came after Judge Edward Korman of the Eastern District of New York received a report by Judah Gribetz, a special master he appointed to advise him in the case, urging that the bulk of some \$600 million remaining from the Swiss bank settlement go to the poorest survivors in the former Soviet Union and Central Europe.

The Gribetz report reflects "a total ignorance of the needs of survivors in Israel and throughout the world except for those in the FSU," Meridor told JTA through a spokesman.

Such harsh criticism surfaces as Korman is due April 29 to hear some of the nearly 100 parties seeking a piece of the landmark 1998 class-action settlement, in which major Swiss banks agreed to compensate Jews or their heirs whose accounts were looted during the Holocaust.

Because documentation for many if not most account holders was destroyed, the settlement aimed to award other Holocaust victims as well, spurring scores of appeals since.

So far the court has awarded \$593 million, including nearly \$155 million to 2,000 account holders.

In his report, Gribetz echoed previous statements by Korman to argue that the top priority now should be providing food and emergency aid to survivors in the former Soviet Union, who need the most aid and receive the least government assistance.

But the WJRO, representing eight appeals from Israeli survivors and other groups including Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, asked Korman for 48 percent of the remaining funds to aid Israeli survivors and education and remembrance efforts in Israel.

In making their appeals, the Israelis point to a study by Hebrew University demographer Sergio DellaPergola, who estimated that 511,000 of the world's 1,092,000 survivors, or 47 percent, live in Israel. Many have arrived from the former Soviet Union since 1990, they add, and many are needy.

"The report has done very badly in terms of survivors and commemoration," Meridor's spokesman quoted him as saying. "You could not say that giving food is more important than giving mental health assistance or assistance to the disabled survivor who cannot get out of bed, or giving a home to a survivor who made aliyah but has no place to live."

Neither Gribetz nor Korman would comment about such charges.

At one point, Korman wrote that his chief aim of helping the neediest survivors would not be met in an appeal "for funds equal to whatever percentage of the world survivor community it represents without regard to whether those survivors are in fact as needy as survivors in other countries."

Gribetz also wrote that the court considered a handful of demographic studies that estimated the world survivor population, ranging from 687,900 found by Jacob Ukeles of New York to DellaPergola's figure.

Each study varied in its count of local populations, but Gribetz found the studies missed the point of survivor needs.

Gribetz echoed a Brandeis University report commissioned by the American

Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which administers aid in the former Soviet Union, that found survivors there are "clearly more disadvantaged" than others.

Meanwhile, Israel Singer, the WJRO chairman and president of the Claims Conference, which handled reparations from Germany and other countries, said he would likely ask Korman for a "supplemental hearing" to discuss other issues.

Though Korman has been vocal in criticizing the Swiss banks for delaying the settle-

ment process, "it doesn't mean you have to give up and give money to some Jewish organization," Singer said.

The Israeli protests join challenges from U.S. survivor groups such as the Miami-based Holocaust Survivors Foundation, which has promised to demonstrate at Korman's hearing.

Sharansky also reportedly will testify to Korman via a video-conference hookup, and Nobel prize winner Elie Wiesel has submitted a letter underscoring the need for remembrance.

But one Jewish official close to the case, who asked not to be named, voiced surprise at the intensity of the Israeli and U.S. reactions.

These appeals to Korman are "just one step in the process," the official said. "The Israelis are acting like this is a fait accompli. Nothing is etched in stone. There is no reason to get desperate."

Korman has indicated it could take weeks before he makes a decision. ■

'The Israelis are acting like this is a fait accompli. Nothing is etched in stone. There is no reason to get desperate.'

Anonymous official

## Arabs freeze anti-Israel U.N. resolution

NEW YORK (JTA) — A U.N. Security Council resolution denouncing Israel for extrajudicial killings was frozen.

Algeria, which introduced the resolution, decided not to ask for a vote, anticipating a U.S. veto and others' abstentions, said Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.

"There's a growing understanding at

the United Nations that these repeated demands for the Security Council and the General Assembly to condemn Israel is actually an abuse of U.N. time and resources," Mekel said.

But Israel expects the Palestinians soon to call for a resolution backing Palestinian claims to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and eastern Jerusalem. ■

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Saudi FM: We don't fund Hamas

Saudi Arabia says it has cut off funds to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers.

"Now not a penny is going from Saudi Arabia," Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, told NBC's "Today" show in an interview broadcast Monday. "The controls are really very stringent."

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell welcomed the statement. "I'm pleased that he is being so categorical about it because our information is that the Saudis now see it the same way we do," he said.

### Vanunu: raising money, seeking protection

The brother of Mordechai Vanunu has appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury to protect the Israeli nuclear whistle-blower.

Vanunu has taken up residence at the Anglican St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem following his release from prison last week. Vanunu became a member of the Anglican Church, of which the Archbishop of Canterbury is head, in the 1980s, not long after his conversion to Christianity.

### Revisiting Iraqi WMDs

Israel's army chief of staff said Iraq had chemical weapons before the U.S. invasion last year.

In an interview published Monday in Israel's Yediot Achronot newspaper, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon said Israeli intelligence identified Iraqi aircraft that were designed to deliver chemical weapons in attacks on the Jewish state.

"They were specially rigged for these kinds of missions, dispersing chemical weapons," Ya'alon said. "We are talking about dozens or no more than hundreds of kilos of material" that was toxic.

### New Hamas leader revealed

A co-founder of Hamas reportedly has taken over the terrorist group's leadership.

Ha'aretz reported Monday that Mahmoud Zahar, a surgeon who spent several stints in Israeli jails for co-founding Hamas, was secretly elected to replace the group's recently assassinated leader, Abdel Aziz Rantissi. Second-in-command is Ismail Haniyeh, former chief aide to slain Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Hamas' No. 3 man is Sayed Issam, a Hamas spokesman.

## NORTH AMERICA

### U.S. to help Palestinians ready for pullout

The United States will help Palestinians assume responsibility in the Gaza Strip before an Israeli pullout, the State Department said.

"The Palestinians have to step up to the plate and take responsibility there, have to take responsibility for preventing violence from that area, for running that area and for taking advantage of the opportunity of the Israelis pulling out of settlements," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday. "It's clear that we and others will assist them in doing that."

### High court won't hear mealtime prayer case

The Supreme Court has chosen not to hear a case challenging mealtime prayers at a state-funded military college.

Lower courts had ruled that the Virginia Military Institute violated the separation of church and state by holding the prayers, even though cadets were not required to participate.

The court said that cadets were coerced into participating because of the school's culture of "obedience and conformity." The Supreme Court's decision means the appeals court ruling stands.

### White supremacist planned murder

White supremacist Matt Hale was found guilty of planning to murder a federal judge.

Hale, leader of the World Church of the Creator, was convicted Monday in a Chicago federal courtroom of solicitation of murder and three counts of obstruction of justice.

Hale arranged for a man to kill Judge Joan Lefkow after she ruled against him in a trademark case. The judge wasn't harmed.

## WORLD

### Holocaust-era gold treasure discovered

The son of a Holocaust survivor recovered a cache of gold coins his family had buried in Poland during the Holocaust.

Working with a Polish investigator, Mark Biederman, 43, helped recover the cache of 63 old gold coins, dating as far back as 1703, that the family had buried in a ceramic pot beside the family home in Lodz. Biederman, from southern Ontario, was planning to fly to Poland this week to take possession of the coins, which are said to be worth a fortune.

Although the Polish investigator got official permission for the search, Biederman said he still anticipated a bureaucratic struggle to take the coins out of the country. They currently are locked in a safe at Lodz's Town Hall.

### Bomb scare in Berlin

A bomb scare Monday at Berlin's Hilton hotel shook up delegations preparing for an international conference on anti-Semitism.

The alarm, which followed an anonymous phone call to police at about 5:30 p.m., was lifted when no explosives were found in a four-hour search.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told JTA he had been meeting in the hotel with other Jewish leaders and the U.S. ambassador to Germany, Daniel Coats, when the alarm sounded.

The hotel was cleared of more than 400 guests and 80 personnel while a team of 150 policemen with bomb-sniffing dogs searched the hotel and neighboring streets were closed off.

### Terrorist's family on trial

The family of a British Muslim involved in a Tel Aviv suicide bombing went on trial in London.

The wife, brother and sister of Omar Khan Sharif were accused in Old Bailey criminal court Monday of failing to inform authorities of Sharif's plan to take part in the April 30, 2003 bombing, which killed three people. Sharif failed to detonate his explosives and fled after his partner, Asif Hanif, blew himself up outside Mike's Place pub on Tel Aviv's beachfront. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sharif's body later washed up on the shore. His relatives claim they didn't know of his plans.

### Europeans on Jews, Israel

Anti-Semitic attitudes have declined in most European countries, but so has support for Israel, according to a new survey.

The Anti-Defamation League survey, released in advance of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's conference on anti-Semitism, found the most dramatic declines in anti-Semitic attitudes in the past two years came in France and Spain.

In France the drop was from 35 percent to 25 percent. In two of the 10 countries surveyed — the United Kingdom and the Netherlands — anti-Semitic attitudes increased.

In the United Kingdom, 24 percent of those surveyed held anti-Semitic attitudes, up from 19 percent in 2002.