

## IN THE NEWS

## Israeli officer killed along border

Hezbollah gunmen killed an Israeli army officer on the Lebanese border.

The officer's jeep was gutted by a roadside bomb Sunday as he patrolled Shebaa Farms, which has been an occasional flash-point for violence during the past four years.

The Shi'ite militia claimed responsibility, prompting Israeli airstrikes against three sites used by its gunmen in southern Lebanon.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Sunday's flare-up was the first in Shebaa Farms in almost six months.

## Palestinian rockets fly into southern Israel

Terrorists in the Gaza Strip fired rockets into Israel.

At least two rockets, believed to have been launched by Hamas, landed around Sderot in southern Israel on Sunday, causing no casualties.

Hamas has rejected calls by Palestinian Authority presidential hopeful Mahmoud Abbas to stop the rocket salvos, which often draw Israeli retaliation.

## Couple confirmed killed in tsunami

Two young Jews missing since the Southeast Asian tsunami have been confirmed dead.

Nikki Liebowitz, 30, of Sydney, was formally identified by her boyfriend's cousin and brother-in-law on the Thai island of Phi Phi after a positive DNA test this week.

The body of her boyfriend Avadya Berman, 31, also was found and is being flown back to South Africa, where he will be buried Sunday or Monday.

Liebowitz will be buried in Johannesburg on Sunday.

Berman had planned to move to Sydney at the beginning of February to start a new life with Liebowitz. [Story, Pg. 3]

# WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

## Abbas faces challenges as he takes Palestinian helm

By GIL SEDAN

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — Mahmoud Abbas, who declared victory in the race for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority on Sunday, wore a bandage on his finger during the election campaign.

Abbas was injured in a work accident: As he waved through his car window to cheering crowds during an election stop, a security guard mistakenly pushed a button and the electric window went up, catching his finger.

It was a minor price to pay for a campaign in which many had feared for Abbas' head, not his fingers — and his finger injury is nothing next to the headaches he will face after Sunday's election.

Abbas' internal challenges are just as menacing as his fragile relations with Israel.

For one, he has limited powers: Abbas begins his career as Palestinian Authority president with a limited budget and many internal rivals waiting for him to fail.

Palestinian society is torn among conflicting currents — religious and secular, left and right, internal splits within each political camp and too many local chieftains focused on their own limited interests.

"The burden on his shoulders is rather heavy," Faisal Horani, a Palestinian writer, said in an interview with Ha'aretz, "but under the Israeli occupation, he does not have the necessary tools to cope with the responsibility."

"I already feel sorry for him," said Nazmi Al-Juabi, a history professor at Bir-Zeit University in the West Bank and one of the signatories of the "Geneva Accord," an informal peace proposal formulated in 2003 by

Israeli and Palestinian public figures.

Abbas will need to transform himself into a national leader. Given the heritage of his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, that's no easy task.

Abbas will have to transfer the balance of power from the Palestine Liberation Organization — an organization that includes most Palestinian factions, including refugees abroad — to the executive branch of the Palestinian Authority.

In other words, he will need to upgrade the Palestinian Authority into a state-in-the-making with an effective government after the past four years of intifada violence have undone the strides the authority made during the years of the Oslo peace process.

The opportunity is there for thorough changes: The current P.A. Cabinet, which is made up of 25 ministers, will resign immediately after the elections.

So far, Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei has kept his status as second-in-command. He and Abbas see eye to eye on relations with Israel but their personal relations have been strained.

Other key figures such as Finance Minister Salam Fayyad, Foreign Affairs Minister Nabil Sha'ath and Saeb Erekat, who is in charge of negotiations with Israel, are likely to go along with Abbas and not pose difficulties.

Internal politics pose still another problem. Fatah is still the strongest party in the PLO, but it has gone through a number of crises in recent years as a result of tensions between the "Old Guard" leadership and the younger generation, whose most prestigious figure is Marwan Barghouti, serving a life sentence in an Israeli jail for his role in terrorist attacks.

The presidential race pushed aside the in-

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NEWS  
ANALYSIS

## ■ *As he takes over, Abbas faces a number of internal challenges*

*Continued from page 1*

ternal Fatah struggle, but it is likely to be renewed now.

"If there is no change in the internal composition of Fatah, the movement may split this year," Cabinet Minister Kadura Fares warned.

Trying to win the hearts of the younger generation, Abbas announced recently that internal Fatah elections would be held no later than August.

Abbas also faces the challenge of reforming the security forces: Internal rivalries in the Palestinian Authority allowed for the rise of local chieftains and a near-total breakdown in public order. One way to mend the situation will be for Abbas to rein in the number of competing security organizations.

The Palestinian Authority currently has 15 security organizations that often duplicate each other, and that together have an estimated 65,000 people on payroll.

Though Palestinian leaders often claim they don't have the manpower to crack down on terrorist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the huge security forces give the Palestinian Authority one of the highest ratios of security personnel to citizens in the world.

Abbas will need to unify the disparate security organizations into three or four large ones. That still isn't ideal, but would be a far cry from the present state of near-anarchy.

Arafat used to encourage internal rivalries to strengthen his own position by preventing anyone from amassing power

and emerging as a potential rival. Abbas doesn't have Arafat's charisma to repeat these tactics, nor would they serve his interest.

But he will need to take into account several strongmen who may prove troublesome if their political and professional aspirations are not fulfilled.

Among the key players are Rashid Abu Shbak, commander of the preventive security force — basically, the secret service — in the Gaza Strip; Jibril Rajoub, former commander of preventive security in the West Bank and presently Abbas' national security adviser; Tawfik Tirawi, head of military intelligence; and Abdel Razek Majaideh and Haj Ismail, Gaza Strip and West Bank commanders of the Palestinian national security forces, the largest P.A. military force, with 40,000 troops on its payroll.

One old-time supporter of Abbas is Mohammed Dahlan, the former preventive security head in the Gaza Strip. Dahlan currently is "unemployed" but still wields considerable influence in Gaza, and has a good chance to be incorporated into the new government.

Hamas is still the main opposition force. Its electoral power is estimated at 20 percent, but its power on the street is sufficient to make Abbas' life miserable.

If Abbas wants a cease-fire agreement with Israel, he will need to reach an understanding with Hamas — though the Palestinian Authority is committed, under international agreements like the Oslo accords and the "road map" peace plan, not to reach an understanding with Hamas but to eradicate it.

Abbas said during his campaign that he would never crack down on terrorists. Though Israel and the United States are likely to give Abbas time to consolidate his power, it's not clear that they will allow the Palestinian Authority to continue to reap diplomatic benefits before it makes good on its most basic peace process obligation.

"We came to the polls with no prejudice," said Sheik Hassan Yousef, leader of Hamas in the West Bank. "Let's wait and see what he will do, and then we shall formulate our standing."

In the absence of radical Hamas leaders

such as Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdul Aziz Rantissi — both killed last year by Israel — and after four years of largely futile intifada, Yousef's approach may become the predominant Hamas policy.

Though Hamas didn't endorse the elections and most likely will continue to oppose negotiations with Israel, it may reach an understanding with Abbas, provided that it is given a greater role in decision-making.

The Palestinian Authority suffered considerable economic damage in four years of intifada. Though it has received billions of dollars in foreign aid, much of it went to terrorism and corruption,

leaving the authority with a meager \$19 million in its bank accounts and needs that exceed \$135 million, according to Fayyad.

The hope is that in a stable post-election era, international donors will again open their wallets.

Another major challenge is widespread corruption in the civil service. For the past eight years, various reports have shown that senior P.A. figures have stolen millions of dollars in public funds.

Al-Juabi of Bir-Zeit University said Abbas needs to grant the judicial system greater powers and freedom from external pressure to allow a strong hand against corruption and stabilize the rule of law.

Most analysts predict that given the complexity of the challenges he faces, Abbas can't win on all fronts. It's expected that he will prefer to stabilize the internal Palestinian situation, even at the cost of postponing possible progress in negotiations with Israel.

Abbas' next electoral challenge will be parliamentary elections scheduled for June. By then he must be strong enough to make sure that the Hamas opposition is contained.

Will the gray leader meet the challenge? On the face of it, chances are slim — but precedent gives reason for optimism.

When Anwar Sadat took over as Egyptian president after the death of the flamboyant Gamal Abdel Nasser, he also was described as a weak successor — but eventually emerged from Nasser's shadow to become one of the legendary leaders of the Arab world.

**Hamas' power  
is enough to  
make Abbas' life  
miserable.**

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).  
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# Tsunami kills Australian Jewish couple

By HENRY BENJAMIN

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Two young Jews missing since the Southeast Asian tsunami struck have been confirmed dead.

Nikki Liebowitz, 30, of Sydney, was for-

## THIS WEEK

### MONDAY

■ The World Jewish Congress holds a plenary session through Tuesday in Brussels focusing on the rise in anti-Semitism. Participants also will discuss interreligious dialogue and the needs of small Jewish communities around the world, and issues of financial transparency at the organization. After the meeting, some participants will spend two days in Jerusalem in a show of solidarity with Israel.

### WEDNESDAY

■ Two congressmen will meet with the Egyptian president on Wednesday. Reps. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) and Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) will discuss Egypt's role in facilitating Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip. Egypt's increased role in the process has earned it high points with the United States, and in his statement, Wexler said he would thank Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

### THURSDAY

■ The Reform movement will honor a veteran actor and folk singer, and an African American leader, at its annual commemoration of Martin Luther King Day. The commemoration, to take place at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, will honor Theodore Bikel, an Israeli American folk-singer and character actor who has appeared in dozens of films, including "My Fair Lady" and "The Defiant Ones." Hilary Shelton is the Washington director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Both men will be honored for their civil rights activism.

### FRIDAY

■ Limmud New York, a Jewish educational weekend, begins in upstate New York. Jews of all ages and across denominations will enjoy three days of non-stop Jewish learning, culture, activity and experience. Offerings include hundreds of interactive classes ranging on themes from Talmud and prayer; hip-hop klezmer improv and bible jazz; and an exploration of how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Jews have been accepted into the Jewish community.

### SUNDAY

■ The board of Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America begins four days of its midwinter meetings in New Jersey.

mally identified by her boyfriend's cousin and brother-in-law on the Thai island of Phi Phi after a positive DNA test.

The body of her boyfriend Avadya Berman, 31, also an Australian resident, was also found. Both Berman and Liebowitz are slated for burial in South Africa.

Berman had planned to move to Sydney at the beginning of February to start a new life with Liebowitz.

The couple had been working in their native Johannesburg before Liebowitz left in July for Australia.

She left Sydney at the beginning of December to attend a friend's wedding in Johannesburg, where she met up again with Liebowitz. From there the couple traveled to Asia for an extended holiday and planned to settle down in Sydney.

A three-day scuba-diving holiday on Phi Phi was a scheduled highlight, but those plans came to a tragic halt on Dec. 26.

Liebowitz and Berman had just finished breakfast with South African friends Ilana and Gary Sweidan. Berman headed for the pool and Liebowitz headed for Ilana Sweidan's room. Ilana Sweidan stopped in the lobby of the Phi Phi Princess Hotel to make a phone call.

Tanya Bensimon, 29, and Leonard Hammersfeld, 37, of Melbourne, who had just announced their engagement two days earlier, were sitting by the pool and gazing out at the normally still waters of the lagoon.

"Suddenly there was this one wave in the middle of the lagoon ... such a strange sight that people were laughing ... but the locals looked quizzical," Hammersfeld said. "Then my mobile rang. A friend from Melbourne was holidaying in Phuket where the tsunami had already struck, to warn us of the imminent danger.

"The wave hit the beach, sweeping everything in its way. It sounded like a jet. Twenty of us headed for the roof of the building, but five didn't make it," he said. "We were stuck there for three hours and watched the other five tsunamis hit the low-lying island. For those down on the beach, there was no escape."

Back at the hotel, the first wave of the tsunami had struck. Ilana Sweidan

struggled to keep her head above the water flooding the lobby.

When the wave receded, Liebowitz was nowhere to be found. When the second wave struck, a stranger dragged Ilana Sweidan to higher ground. The Sweidans spent hours looking for their friends, to no avail.

Hammersfeld said he didn't know Berman, "but I can tell you, anyone who rushed down to the beach to look for family or friends was doomed. Six tsunamis struck Phi Phi that morning."

"Phi Phi was like a war zone," he said. "There were bodies everywhere."

Hammersfeld, now back home in Melbourne, added, "The first help came in from the Israel Defense Forces, closely followed by Chabad from Thailand, before we saw assistance arrive from other countries. We feel so much for the families" of Berman and Liebowitz.

Berman's sister Rama Klevansky, 35, told JTA from her home in Sydney, "I had been looking forward so much to my brother joining us in Sydney."

Berman had visited Sydney many times and was there in July for Liebowitz's birthday, she said.

"He has South Africa in his soul ... but he was looking forward very much to the challenges of setting up home in a new country," she said.

Klevansky told JTA that Berman was a wonderful sportsman and soccer player. But most of all, she said, Berman and Liebowitz "loved nature and spent lots of weekends together going native."

Klevansky has 20 photographs of Phi Phi on the walls of her home in a Sydney suburb.

"It will always remain one of my favorite places in the world. It stole my heart," she said, "and it stole my brother. He was my heart."

Klevansky's husband Howard and a cousin flew to Thailand with a sample of Klevansky's DNA. They met up with Interpol, which had collected DNA from Berman's parents in Johannesburg.

Ronnie Figdor, spokesman for Australia's Jewish Emergency Management Plan, told JTA that all other members of the country's Jewish community known to be in the disaster area have been accounted for.

**A scuba-diving trip ends in tragedy.**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Jewish leader to meet Bush on tsunami

The president of the American Jewish World Service is among the leaders of nonprofit groups expected to discuss tsunami relief with President Bush.

Ruth Messinger is slated to attend the meeting with Bush at the White House on Monday morning.

### ADL welcomes Klansman's arrest

The Anti-Defamation League welcomed the arrest of a Ku Klux Klan leader charged with the 1964 killing of three civil rights activists.

The arrest of Edgar Ray Killen, charged with killing Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, who were Jewish, and James Chaney as they worked to register black voters in Mississippi "has been a long time coming," the ADL wrote in a statement.

A 1967 trial of Killen ended in an 11-1 deadlock. He was arrested last week based on new evidence.

Killen pleaded not guilty to the charges, which were made famous in the 1988 movie "Mississippi Burning."

### O.U.: Our pies are all kosher

The Orthodox Union denied that nonkosher pies went out under its kosher certification.

Officials with the group said nonkosher pies were made in 2001 at Mrs. Smith's Bakery as the plant was closing, but that none of the nonkosher pies had the group's seal on them.

After a lawsuit from a Jewish lawyer in Raleigh, N.C., Flowers Foods, a Georgia-based company that owned Mrs. Smith's at the time, settled last month without acknowledging liability.

Flowers agreed to distribute \$2.5 million to charities, including the Orthodox Union and Jewish Family Services.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Coalition goes to Knesset

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon finalized talks on a new Israeli government.

Coalition deals between Sharon's Likud Party and the Labor and United Torah Judaism parties were handed Sunday to the Knesset, 24 hours ahead of a ratification vote.

At Monday's session, the Knesset is also expected to name Shinui party chief Yosef Lapid to head the Israeli opposition, replacing Labor's Shimon Peres.

Having joined forces with Labor and UTJ, Sharon will command 66 of 120 seats in the Knesset, a majority crucial to pushing through his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank this year.

### American to head Bank of Israel

A U.S. financier will be the next governor of the Bank of Israel. The vice chairman of Citigroup, Stanley Fischer, accepted the central bank's top post.

Fischer has served as an informal adviser to the Israeli treasury.

In order to take the position, Fischer will have to immigrate to Israel, Ha'aretz reported.

### Pollard denied 'Prisoner of Zion' status

Israel turned down an appeal to designate Jonathan Pollard a "Prisoner of Zion."

An Israeli committee that seeks the release of Pollard, a U.S. Navy intelligence analyst imprisoned since 1986 for spying for Israel, asked the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption to grant the symbolic

status, used in the 1980s to increase pressure on the Soviets to release prisoners.

The ministry turned down the request this week, saying Pollard's espionage could not be classified as "Zionist activity."

### Anthrax antidote on the way?

Researchers at Israeli and U.S. institutions have developed what could be a basis for an antidote to anthrax.

The scientists at Israel's Technion — Israel Institute of Technology and the Scripps Research Institute in California have developed an antibiotic that neutralizes a key protein found in anthrax toxins, according to a paper published in the German journal *Angewandte Chemie*.

The antibiotic still has to be tested in both animals and humans.

### Israeli physicist cited

A leading British science journal honored an Israeli quantum physicist.

Dorit Aharonov of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is among four innovative thinkers cited in the latest issue of *Nature*, which honors the 100th anniversary of Albert Einstein's publication of three of his landmark theories.

The U.S.-born Aharonov, 34, is working on a new computational model, based on the law of quantum physics, that has caused a revolution in theories of computer science.

## WORLD

### WJC delegates meet in Brussels

Anti-Semitism, Holocaust restitution and issues of financial transparency are to be discussed by delegates at the World Jewish Congress plenary.

The approximately 500 delegates from more than 80 countries will also elect a new executive and governing board at the meeting in Brussels.

WJC President Edgar Bronfman was expected to stand for re-election on Monday morning.

The WJC's senior vice president, Isi Leibler, who has raised concerns about the organization's finances, is also expected to stand for re-election, JTA has learned.

Senior officials with the WJC are expected to back a list of vice presidential candidates Monday to replace Leibler.

### Auschwitz visit to mark liberation

Germany's president is to take six Holocaust survivors on a visit to Auschwitz on Jan. 27 to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp.

Senior officials at the WJC told JTA on Sunday that the historic visit by Horst Koehler will represent a "mea maxima culpa" on behalf of the German people.

Koehler is to be accompanied by the chairman of the WJC governing board, Israel Singer.

### German Jews reach out

Jews in Germany are reaching out to help victims of the Southeast Asian tsunami.

The Berlin Jewish Community and the Foundation New Synagogue-Centrum Judaicum are co-sponsoring a benefit concert Jan. 16. Entrance is free, but donations will be taken at the event.

Several Berlin Jewish musical groups have volunteered to perform. "The community has to join in, and we do it gladly," Ina Stern, head of community's cultural department, told JTA.

She said it's not known if any victims of the tsunami were members of Germany's Jewish population, which officially numbers about 105,000.