

## IN THE NEWS

**Sharon clinches unity coalition**

Ariel Sharon's new government was sworn in.

The national unity coalition made up of the Israeli prime minister's Likud Party, the opposition Labor Party and the United Torah Judaism faction was sworn in at the Knesset on Monday after being ratified by a vote of 58 to 56, with six abstentions.

**Abbas extends an olive branch**

The Palestinian Authority president-elect extended an olive branch to Israel.

"We extend our hand to our neighbors. We are ready to make peace based on justice and we hope that the response will be positive," Mahmoud Abbas said Monday on Palestinian television.

"As we said before, we are committed to peacemaking and the peace process and the 'road map' — peace plan, he said.

But Abbas has ruled out a crackdown on Palestinian terrorist groups, as mandated by the road map.

**Jewish group meets Bush about tsunami**

An American Jewish group was among 19 nonprofits that met with President Bush to discuss tsunami relief efforts.

Bush focused on "efficient collaboration and the idea of staying for the long haul," said Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service, who attended Monday's meeting at the White House on last month's Southeast Asian tsunami, which killed more than 160,000 people.

Meanwhile, more than 40 faith-based development, relief and grassroots advocacy organizations, led by AJWS, released a letter calling on President Bush to support bold action to address the debt crisis in the region.



# WORLD REPORT

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## Israelis are hopeful but wary as Abbas wins Palestinian election

By DINA KRAFT

**T**EL AVIV (JTA) — Edna Bar-Or wants to be optimistic about the prospects for peace after this week's Palestinian elections but, like many Israelis, she's not sure she can be.

"I very much hope it will bring good," said Bar-Or, 55, surrounded by stacks of laundry and hangers of pressed shirts at her dry-cleaning shop. "I want to be optimistic, but I don't think anyone knows what will be."

Israelis followed news of the Palestinian Authority elections Sunday, pausing to listen to radio and television news broadcasts and to read newspaper front pages plastered with large photographs of Mahmoud Abbas, better known as Abu Mazen.

Yasser Arafat's former deputy won the vote by 62 percent and will become the next president of the Palestinian Authority.

The low-key, silver-haired Abbas, who repeatedly has spoken out against the violent nature of the intifada — but has said he will not crack down on terrorists — appears to be a leader Israel might be able to negotiate with.

Abbas' sometimes moderate comments give Israelis a measure of hope that his election could be a historic turning point, but they know an uphill effort lies ahead for him.

"I'm not jealous of him at all; he has so many problems to handle," Bar-Or said.

Israelis, like Palestinians, are keenly aware of the tall order that lies ahead for Abbas: uniting more than a dozen compet-

ing security forces; renewing peace talks with Israel toward an independent Palestinian state; and instituting reforms to quash corruption within the Palestinian Authority.

Israeli officials said it was in Israel's interest for the P.A. elections to go as smoothly as possible. Army bulldozers removed roadblocks throughout the West Bank to ease voters' freedom of movement, and international observers said movement was relatively unfettered.

The army also stopped operations across the West Bank, except for villages in the area where an Israeli soldier was shot and killed and four others were wounded in a drive-by shooting over the weekend.

Speaking on Israel Radio, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said that Israel hoped for a smooth election process "so that starting from tomorrow, the new Palestinian leadership will be able to do what it is required to do.

"I think that the leader who is elected will have to wage a genuine struggle against terror immediately," Shalom said, adding that Israel expects a "new, different Palestinian leadership that will be prepared to move in the direction of peace."

But some Israelis are skeptical about the potential for change since Arafat's death two months ago.

"Do you really think these elections will mean something?" asked David Weinberg, a Tel Aviv lawyer, as he walked past the memorial marking the spot where Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was slain in 1995.

"Anyone with half a brain can see this

*Continued on page 2*

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

## ■ *Israelis glimpse hope in Abbas victory, though some say wait and see*

*Continued from page 1*

is the same group of terrorists," he said. "Maybe some people see change, but Abu Mazen says he will start talking. He is not saying he will actually do anything."

Weinberg has little faith in the new unity government set to take power in Israel this week. "I only see more of the same continuing, and maybe even worse things to come," he said.

Yigal Karmon, a senior researcher at the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzilya, doesn't expect Abbas to be able to make a breakthrough peace deal with Israel.

Karmon views Abbas as an ideologue like Arafat, who will not press for major changes.

"I think only a younger leadership that grew up in the West Bank and Gaza will be able to reach a compromise with Israel," Karmon said.

But Abbas could be a partner to short-term progress in such moves as a coordinated Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to Karmon.

Israel also will have to take stronger action against Hezbollah, which is carrying out an increasing number of anti-Israel attacks from the West Bank and Gaza, Karmon added, if Abbas is to have a chance of helping forge a more peaceful period.

David Ohana, a professor of Israeli history at Ben-Gurion University, sees in Abbas a Palestinian leader with whom

Israelis finally can imagine negotiating.

"Arafat was a myth and Israelis could not speak with myths," Ohana said. "Arafat symbolized the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians in black and white, so it was easy not to see the gray.

"The most important thing about Abu Mazen," he added, is that "he is not a picture or myth but he is a human being."

Abbas also dresses like a European leader, and looks like someone who could be a neighbor, he said.

Ohana said Israelis are about to face the first challenge.

"I think this is a test case for us first of all, not the Palestinians. If we want to solve the problems, we have here an opportunity," he said.

Afu Badawi, 48, an Israeli Arab from Nazareth, works at a falafel stand making pita bread. Working the pita dough, his hands covered with flour, he said he thinks Abbas will have to make some tough choices if he wants to succeed.

"He needs to do the right thing for his people, to focus on rights, the economy and make sure everything is free of corruption," Badawi said. "Otherwise he will just be a continuation of Arafat."

Golan Shiri, 30, who works at a different falafel restaurant, is skeptical about Abbas' ability to do much of anything.

"Abu Mazen can want to make changes all he wants, but does that mean he will really be able to make a difference? It's not so much up to him," he said. "It's the warlords who really control things, not the officials."

Office clerk Shlomo Tenami, 58, also has little hope that Abbas' victory will lead to a revolution in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

"I hope but I don't have a lot of hope, because we have tried so many times before," he said. "Every time we give them land, the violence just continues."

Ben Caspit, a political commentator for the Ma'ariv newspaper, wrote a column Sunday headlined "His Victory, Our Hope."

The column focused on the great expectations and challenges that accompany the elections and new governments

soon to emerge, not just in Ramallah but also in Jerusalem, where the Knesset approved a unity government Monday.

He wrote that both Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "have their backs up against the wall. The opposition is stepping up its pressure and the extremists are threatening," Caspit wrote, adding that "the coming weeks will be fateful — the greater the hopes, the greater the dangers."

However, Caspit wrote, "If there is any kind of hope out there, now is the time for it."

At the Bookworm, a Tel Aviv bookstore cafe, owner Eliana Ydov said Abbas' chances for success — and in turn Israel's — are linked to what Israel does to help facilitate changes.

"If the new government supports" Abbas, "maybe this time there will be something," she said. ■

**'I very much hope it will bring good. I want to be optimistic, but I don't think anyone knows what will be.'**

**Edna Bar-Or**  
Israeli Business Owner

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## 'Murder victim' shows up in Tel Aviv

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli held for murder was cleared after his presumed victim turned up alive.

Pawel Smirnov, a homeless man from Tel Aviv, was arrested last year after police found a body in a burned-out house near where he was squatting.

Under interrogation, Smirnov con-

fessed to killing a fellow vagrant, Sergei Dvorkin, who had gone missing around the same time.

But this week Dvorkin appeared in Tel Aviv, prompting the State Attorney's Office to drop its case against Smirnov.

Dvorkin said Thursday that police had coerced his confession. ■

# Germany weighs changes to Jewish immigration

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — Germany is considering changes to its controversial new immigration law concerning Jews from the former Soviet Union, but Jewish leaders will be consulted over any move, the country's interior minister said.

Otto Schily's statement Friday was designed to head off criticism of the new law, which took effect Jan. 1, from the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Schily said talks with the Central Council will continue on the law, which is expected to restrict Jewish immigration to Germany from the former Soviet Union.

Schily also accused unnamed individuals of trying to sow ill will between the ministry and the Central Council, which has questioned aspects of the new law.

The Central Council said it first learned details of the new law on Dec. 13. The law, presented as a response to Germany's struggling economy, restricts immigration to economically secure people under age 45 with a basic knowledge of German.

In addition, Jewish applicants from the former Soviet Union must obtain a certificate from a synagogue in Germany affirming that they would be accepted into the community.

The rules are not yet set in stone, Schily said. He promised that the Central Council, which represents some 105,000 Jews in Germany, would be included in talks on any changes.

The Conference of Interior Ministers of German states is continuing to discuss the matter, which it must decide. The German Parliament's committee for internal affairs also will discuss the issue Jan. 19.

On Dec. 20, the council's president, Paul Spiegel, called aspects of the law "completely unacceptable." He expressed concern for 27,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union who have been waiting, some more than six years, for their applications to be processed.

The Interior Ministry enacted a temporary regulation Dec. 29 granting entry to those who had received official invitations by Jan. 1 under the former "contingency refugee" regulations for ex-Soviet Jews.

Last Friday, the Interior Minister an-

nounced that new regulations would be developed for applicants still waiting for an answer, or those who wish to apply.

The "goal is to strengthen and ease their integration" in Jewish communities and in Germany, Schily said, adding that he expected the cooperative relationship with the Central Council to continue despite the need to solve difficult problems.

German officials consider a law that might restrict Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, Israel's ambassador to Germany, Shimon Stein, said he had no problem with an immigration law that discouraged Jews in the former Soviet Union from coming to Germany. He told the German newspaper *Freies Wort* that the new rules were in keeping with the Israeli position, according to which there are no Jewish refugees since all Jews have a homeland in Israel.

Israel has been embarrassed that in recent years more former Soviet Jews have moved to Germany than to Israel, which offers them less in welfare benefits. But Stein said he respected the decision of some Jews to move to Germany. ■

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

# Argentine Jewish group honors Jewish Agency office

By FLORENCIA ARBISER

BUENOS AIRES, (JTA) — The local office of the Jewish Agency for Israel has received an award from the central institution of Argentine Jewry, but it's not resting on its laurels.

The annual AMIA award, given Dec. 21, was received primarily as a challenge: The Jewish Agency knows it has much work to do in Argentina to combat assimilation and a lack of Jewish teachers, Arieh Avir, JAFI's Latin American director, told JTA.

Avir was born in Argentina and made aliyah 42 years ago. He returned to his native country two and a half years ago to head the regional Jewish Agency office.

"I've found that the local Jewish community in Argentina is truly Zionist and committed to Israel. But there is a lot of work to be done," Avir said.

Avir feels the Jewish Agency is succeeding in Argentina by focusing primarily on providing Jewish education and then on promoting aliyah. According to the Jewish Agency, 2004 saw an increase of 4 percent in the number of Argentine children attending Jewish schools. That increase came although the country's economic crisis

made it difficult for families to pay for Jewish education.

Another 1,600 children attend informal Jewish educational projects. Avir called the support the informal education projects receive from the UJA-Federation of New York "crucial."

To continue providing Jewish education, JAFI is launching a new center in Buenos Aires, in conjunction with Israeli universities, to train Jewish teachers.

In case aliyah drops as Argentina's economy stabilizes, JAFI is working with yearlong university exchange programs and programs that offer the possibility of working in Israeli hotels or caring for elderly Israelis.

This year marked the first of what AMIA hopes will be annual awards. In addition to the Jewish Agency, Argentine Jewish economist Bernardo Kliksberg was honored in November for his commitment to fighting poverty in Latin America.

Kliksberg is coordinator of the Inter-American Development Bank's Social Capital Inter-American Initiative. The author of 40 books and hundreds of papers, he has been a consultant to 25 governments and to international organizations including the United Nations and UNICEF. ■

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Bush invites Abbas

President Bush invited Mahmoud Abbas to the White House. "I look forward to welcoming him here to Washington if he chooses to come here," Bush said Monday, a day after Abbas won the Palestinian Authority presidential election.

Bush shunned Abbas' predecessor, Yasser Arafat, because of his ties to terrorism.

### Emanuel appointed to top Democratic post

Democrats appointed a Jewish congressman to run their 2006 House elections.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the U.S. House of Representatives minority leader, appointed Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) on Sunday to the chairmanship of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Emanuel, a major fund-raiser for former President Bill Clinton, is the third Jewish representative in a decade to hold the post.

### AIPAC prober was transferred after rebuke

A top FBI official investigating a pro-Israel lobbying group was posted to lead the bureau's Portland, Ore., office shortly after a group he headed was implicated in "inappropriate" conduct in the investigation of a Jew at the CIA.

David Szady, now in charge of the controversial FBI probe of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, was made special agent in charge of the FBI's Portland division in May 1999, just a month after then-CIA Director George Tenet admitted that the National Counter Intelligence Policy Board was involved with "insensitive, unprofessional and highly inappropriate" language regarding the case of CIA attorney Adam Ciralsky, Portland's Jewish Review reported.

### Bronfman to stay at WJC

Edgar Bronfman was unanimously re-elected president of the World Jewish Congress.

Around 500 delegates representing Jewish communities around the world also confirmed Israel Singer as chairman of the WJC's board of governors Monday at the organization's plenary session in Brussels.

The WJC decided, though, to defer vice presidential nominees presented by the WJC's nominations committee after delegates objected to the absence of women and Israelis from the proposed panel.

### Survivor, war hero dies at 90

Michel Thomas, a French-born Jew who received a Silver Star for his service in the U.S. Army during World War II, died Saturday in New York.

He was 90 years old. Thomas served in combat during the battle of Autrey, France. Among his other exploits, Thomas, a master linguist, infiltrated a postwar Nazi and SS group plotting to form an underground terrorist organization.

Thomas was a member of the French Resistance.

### Orthodox war on drugs

Orthodox rabbis, yeshiva heads and day school principals in the New York area met recently to discuss substance abuse and other teen problems in their schools.

The Orthodox Union, which convened the meeting, is putting together three task forces to fight the issue. O.U. officials said the community can no longer ignore the problem.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Sharon demands crackdown

Israel called on the Palestinian Authority president-elect to crack down on terrorism.

"The main focus at this stage, following the election, should be Palestinian action on terror," Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office quoted him as telling visiting Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) on Monday after a final tally showed Mahmoud Abbas winning 62 percent of votes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### Death on the border

Israel struck three sites used by Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon in retaliation for the killing of an Israeli army officer along the border.

A Hezbollah gunman and U.N. peacekeeper from France were reported killed in Israel's attack.

### Israel: Hezbollah upping terror support

Hezbollah has boosted support for Palestinian terrorist groups, Israeli defense officials said.

According to data from the Israeli Defense Ministry that was released on Monday, the Lebanese militia orchestrated at least 20 percent of Palestinian attacks against Israelis in 2004, at a cost of some \$9 million.

### Moving into Gaza

Despite plans to evacuate Israelis from the Gaza Strip, the settler community there is growing.

Interior Ministry figures released this week showed that Gaza's settler population grew by 4.8 percent over the last six months, more than the overall growth figure of 2.6 percent for Gaza and the West Bank together.

### Close call over Dimona

Two Israeli pilots almost were shot down over the Dimona nuclear reactor.

Israel's Channel Two television reported Monday that the accidental overflight a few weeks ago prompted the Israel Air Force to scramble two jets with orders to determine whether the ultra-light planes were piloted by terrorists.

When their identity was determined, they were turned away from the desert reactor.

## WORLD

### Blair confirms Palestinian conference

Tony Blair said he believed an upcoming London conference on Palestinian reform could help prompt President Bush to push for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

Confirming the event would be held March 1-2, the British prime minister said helping the Palestinians develop their basic infrastructure would prepare them for a viable state.

### Milan's chief rabbi quits

The chief rabbi of Milan resigned.

Giuseppe Laras, 70, said he resigned because of pressure from board members of the community and because of a reduction in staff and resources, the Jerusalem Post reported.