

IN THE NEWS
**Release roster
for prisoners OK'd**

Israel finalized details for freeing the first group among 900 Palestinian prisoners.

Under Sunday's Cabinet decision, 500 prisoners will go free this week as a goodwill gesture to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. [Story, Pg. 3]

**Hezbollah rejects
U.N. call to disarm**

Hezbollah urged its followers to help thwart a U.N. resolution demanding that the terrorist group disarm and that its Syrian backers leave Lebanon.

"God's curse on this international resolution. If we do not bother with it, it will fall by itself, because America, Israel and France and those behind them cannot enforce it directly," Sheikh Naim Kasseem, the militia's deputy secretary-general, told followers Feb. 10.

His remarks came amid a visit to Syria and Lebanon by U.N. envoy Terje Roed-Larsen.

**Playwright
Arthur Miller dead**

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Arthur Miller died Feb. 10 at age 89.

Miller was best known for "Death of a Salesman," which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1949, and the 1953 Tony Award-winning play, "The Crucible."

Miller, who died at his Connecticut home, grew up in New York and faced anti-Semitism while working in an auto-parts warehouse before going to college.

Miller refused to name fellow members of the entertainment world as Communists during the McCarthyite era of the 1950s.

In 1980, Miller wrote the script for "Playing for Time," a book by Fania Fenelon, who survived Auschwitz by playing the violin to entertain Nazi officers.

Miller opposed demands to have Vanessa Redgrave removed from the lead role because of her support of Palestinian causes, saying such a move would have amounted to blacklisting.

WORLD REPORT

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Reality show is good for Israel but does that make it good TV?

By DINA KRAFT

NEVE ILAN, Israel (JTA) — "Quiet on the set!" shouts a production assistant, and silence falls over the fake marble floors and dark wood panels of a television studio designed to look like a conference room in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem.

As a make-up artist dabs more powder on the forehead of Yaakov Perry, the former head of Israel's Shin Bet internal security service, the contestants on Israel's hit reality show, "The Ambassador," adjust their dark tailored suits, clutch leather attache cases and eye each other nervously.

The cameras roll and Nahman Shai, the thin, bespectacled former Israeli army spokesman who is one of the show's three judges, looks up and says, in a voice as serious as war, "It's time to decide."

The time has come to vote another contestant off of the show, which features 14 young Israelis competing to be chosen as the best person to promote Israel's image abroad.

Within Israel, the show has added some glamour to the task of Israel advocacy — in Hebrew, "hasbarah." Abroad, the show has gotten amused media coverage. Nonetheless, Israel still must battle attempts to paint it as an international pariah.

The show, which has its finale Sunday, taps into Israel's desire to be better understood on the international stage, to replace the army generals and stiff government spokesmen on CNN's screens with engaging, telegenic young people who might more easily win sympathy for Israel's side in its conflict with the Palestinians and the rest

of the Arab world.

"For me, hasbarah is like a war. And like any other war, we have to win it," Shai said during a break on the set. "The Palestinians learned how to play the game and know how to sell their message, sometimes better than we do."

Israelis spend a great deal of time thinking about how they are perceived abroad, so perhaps it is only natural, observers say, that it has become the first country to produce a reality television show on that subject.

Shai notes that Israel has been defending its right to exist since the state was born. "The Ambassador" has brought that task into the living rooms of Israelis, who for the first time are discussing such questions as how Israel should best explain its decision to build the security fence to the world at large.

The show's director, Givon Snir, said he thinks the show works well because it speaks specifically to Israelis. "The conversations that get people going here most are about politics. It touches everyone and hasbarah is part of that. Paris Hilton and 'The Simple Life' would just not work here. It's too American."

On each slickly produced episode, the contestants are presented with a different challenge, ranging from debating the Israel-Arab conflict before an audience of Cambridge University students to meeting with real-life ambassadors to conducting television interviews with French and Arab journalists.

In between the serious part — discussions of current issues, visits to Europe,

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■ Reality show's contestants face off to win job defending Israel

Continued from page 1

and training sessions with top political consultants — there are also reminders that this is reality television after all, with all the requisite backbiting, scheming and personality politics.

The contestants, all between 24 and 30 years old, include lawyers, business students, an Ethiopian immigrant and both religious and secular Jews. Selected from a pool of thousands of applicants, they are attractive and well-spoken in both Hebrew and English.

The show was modeled in part on the U.S. reality show "The Apprentice," where Donald Trump eliminates one contestant on each show until he chooses the one who will be his assistant. At the end of each episode of "The Ambassador," the panel of judges kicks another contestant off the show. The winner will be rewarded with a yearlong job at Israel at Heart, a New York-based organization that promotes Israel's image.

"You watch the way Israel is seen around the world and it hurts," said Joey Low, the American millionaire who founded Israel at Heart, explaining why he agreed to the producer's request that he provide the prize.

Among the show's most popular contestants is Tsvika Deutch, a 26-year-old chemistry student with golden hair and a knitted kippah who lives in a student village in the Negev. The affable, ever-smiling Deutch recently was voted back onto the show by viewers after he was kicked off by the judges.

"I always felt I had a knack for talking to people and explaining things," said Deutch. His participation on the show has demonstrated to him what an uphill battle pro-Israel spokesmen have. "You are up against many years of Israel battering. It is very hard to change the image in one meeting. It's a long process. You have to tell your story and to tell the truth and hope it penetrates."

He's now one of the show's three finalists.

Yael Ben-Dov, 27, acknowledged the difficulty of explaining to the world images that seem to show Israel as the aggressor.

"We need to let people see the whole picture, to let people know the facts before they judge us," said Ben-Dov. "We are here trying to protect ourselves, not trying to hurt anybody on purpose."

A column by Simon Spungin in Ha'aretz has been following developments on the show with a critical eye, complaining the contestants have been less than charismatic and describing the show as flat and unoriginal. Its success in putting issues on the table, however, has been applauded.

"The only redeeming feature of the show so far — and the reason it has

been the subject of newspaper articles and television reports — has been the opportunities it has afforded to address issues that are central to Israel's future," wrote Spungin recently. "It is rare for a prime-time television show to mention

such charged issues as the separation fence, discrimination against Israel's Arab citizens, and the occupation. When these subjects are raised, it is usually in the framework of political discussions or news broadcasts. It was refreshing, therefore, to see 'The Ambassador' try to

tackle them, though the treatment was superficial."

Tova Herzl, the recently retired Israeli ambassador to South Africa, has served in diplomatic posts around the world. Admitting that she has not seen much of the series, she commends it for raising the Israeli public's knowledge of hasbarah. But she warned that it takes more than the right turn of phrase and a telegenic face to be effective in the nuanced world of media and diplomacy.

"Being pretty and articulate is certainly important, but it's not enough," she said.

'The conversations that get people going here most are about politics. Paris Hilton and "The Simple Life" would just not work here. It's too American.'

Givon Snir

Director

Court to rehear Nazi auction case

NEW YORK (JTA) — A U.S. federal court said it would rehear arguments about whether Yahoo could host auctions featuring Nazi memorabilia.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said Feb. 10 it would rehear arguments in the five-year-old case against Yahoo, brought by two French human rights groups seeking to ban the sale of Nazi-related items on Web sites viewable in France.

After a 2000 ruling in a French court,

the Internet company removed Nazi-related items from its French-language auction site, but kept items on its American version.

A U.S. court previously ruled that Yahoo assumed a risk of violating foreign law if it ran Web sites that were accessible in foreign countries, but the decision was reversed by an appeals court last August.

The new arguments are expected to begin this spring.

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THIS WEEK**TUESDAY**

■ K kosher World Expo takes place at the Los Angeles Convention Center. The expo, which will be open to vendors and buyers on Tuesday and Wednesday but to consumers only on Wednesday, seeks to "bring kosher to mainstream and mainstream to kosher," according to the event's operators. The event, which has an Israeli pavilion, also offers tastings, seminars and chef education.

■ The Egyptian ambassador to the United States discusses his country's role in the revived Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at the Brookings Institution in Washington. Ahmed Abul-Gheit will discuss Egypt's role in securing the border with the Gaza Strip and training Palestinian Authority security forces.

WEDNESDAY

■ The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will begin its annual leadership mission to Israel. More than 100 people, representing most of the conference's 52 national Jewish groups, will join the conference, which ends Feb. 20. The mission comes after some representatives of the Conference of Presidents visited Romania and Bulgaria.

■ In a joint hearing, two congressional committees consider Iran's sponsorship of terrorism. Yonah Alexander, an Israeli-American expert, and Matt Levitt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy are among experts testifying to the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittees on the Middle East and on terrorism.

SATURDAY

■ Israeli leftists are staging a rally in Tel Aviv backing Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The demonstration comes after settlers and others opposed to the withdrawal held their own rally last month.

■ Brit Tzedek v'Shalom kicks off its national conference in New York. Keynote speakers for the three-day event are Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, former Israeli army chief of staff and a former Cabinet minister, and PLO executive committee member Yasser Abed Rabbo.

SUNDAY

■ Edah, a modern Orthodox group, meets in New York City for its fourth international conference. The group will examine such areas as the Jewish perspective on Islam, Orthodox responses to the growing Reform movement, intermarriage and drug use in yeshiva high schools.

Israel to let some prisoners go

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas are building on their cease-fire pledge.

Topping off a series of goodwill gestures, Sharon's Cabinet approved the release of 500 Palestinian security prisoners on Sunday— although the terms of the release include a grace period during which Israeli terror victims can lodge appeals.

None of the prisoners in this group have been directly involved in murderous attacks on Israelis.

"This is not an easy step, but this gesture possibly could help the Palestinian Authority consolidate its rule and boost trust between the two sides," Sharon told fellow ministers.

Another 400 prisoners are to go free later this month, subject to negotiations in a joint Israeli-Palestinian committee over the final release roster.

And in a move that surprised even Palestinians, Israel said it would allow 39 terrorists who it deported to the Gaza Strip or Europe after they holed up in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity in 2002 to return to the West Bank.

For his part, Abbas has made good on a pledge to step up security in territories the Palestinians want for a state — although this falls short of the counterterrorist crackdown called for in the U.S.-led peace "road map."

Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which refused to submit to the truce Abbas declared at last Tuesday's summit with Sharon in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik, have instead promised "calm."

After Saturday talks with Abbas, the terrorist groups said they reserved the right to attack Israel in response to its military actions but would refrain from doing so immediately, in a bid to bolster the new Palestinian Authority president.

Abbas has won Israeli and U.S. plaudits

for his efforts to stop armed Palestinian violence, especially as implementation of Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip looms.

But many Israelis fear that failure to disarm Palestinian terrorist groups would be a recipe for renewed bloodshed, either during the withdrawal plan or after.

Rancor among settlers slated for evacuation from Gaza and the northern West Bank has deepened to the point where some Israelis fear a return to the domestic discord that characterized the aftermath of the Oslo interim peace accords in the mid-1990s.

Security sources said Sunday that at least 80 civil servants, including at least two members of Sharon's Cabinet, had received death threats over their support for the pullbacks.

"I am shocked at this lawlessness. We have to carry out real steps," Sharon was quoted as saying after Transportation Minister Meir Sheerit revealed a letter that contained threats against the lives of his wife and children.

In what could signal tougher legal measures promised by Israel's attorney

general, Menachem Mazuz, seven settlers accused of blocking Palestinian motorists and attacking an Israeli policeman in Gaza were charged Sunday with disorderly conduct, illegally congregating and attempting to disrupt a police officer in Beersheba Magistrate's Court.

A 17-year-old yeshiva student also is under arrest, on suspicion of heckling Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and slashing the tire of his car while he attended a wedding last week.

Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said the national mood reminded him of the run-up to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

"I am telling you, they will try to murder Prime Minister Sharon," he warned fellow ministers.

Sharon's bodyguard unit, like those of several other officials, has been beefed up. ■

'This is not an easy step, but this gesture possibly could help the Palestinian Authority consolidate its rule and boost trust between the two sides.'

Ariel Sharon
Israeli Prime Minister

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Exiles to return

Israel agreed to let exiled Palestinian terrorists return.

As part of last week's cease-fire deal between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, 39 gunmen who were deported to the Gaza Strip and Europe after holing up in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity in 2002 are to be allowed back to homes in the West Bank.

Israel called their return, which is expected in the next two weeks, a probationary deal under which the Palestinian Authority will have to ensure they do not resume terrorist activity.

According to Palestinian sources, another 17 Palestinians from the West Bank who were deported to Gaza also will be allowed to return.

Iraqi imam condemns summit

An Iraqi Shi'ite imam condemned the Israeli-Palestinian summit in Sharm el-Sheik.

Arab leaders should not walk "hand in hand" with the Zionists, Hashim Abu Ragheef, who is allied with the militant cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, told worshippers Friday at a mosque near Najaf. "This is the message of the leader, Al-Sadr," who "calls on the Arab people to stand up to these events and not walk hand in hand with Zionists who killed the Palestinian people," he said.

Politicians under fire

Dozens of Israeli officials are under protection for fear they could be targeted by Jewish extremists.

Security sources said Sunday that as many as 80 civil servants, including Cabinet members, are receiving Shin Bet protection following a spate of death threats attributed to Israelis opposed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

According to the daily, Transportation Minister Meir Sheerit had received a letter threatening the lives of his wife and children.

Last week, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was heckled while attending a wedding at Kfar Chabad village, and had to be hustled away by bodyguards.

A 17-year-old yeshiva student is under arrest in the incident.

Gaza settlers charged

Seven settlers face criminal charges with disorderly conduct in the Gaza Strip.

The suspects, aged 24 to 27, were charged in Beersheba Magistrate's Court on Sunday.

According to the indictment, the group blocked a Gaza road last week and attacked Israeli police who arrived to disperse them.

Farewell, femme fatale

Mossad's most famous hit woman died.

Sylvia Rafael, who was jailed in Norway for her part in a botched 1973 assassination, died of leukemia in her native South Africa over the weekend.

She was 67. Rafael immigrated to Israel as a young woman and was recruited by Mossad while working on a kibbutz, soon becoming one of the spy agency's most accomplished field agents.

Operating under cover as a Canadian freelance photographer, she led the hunt for the Palestinian masterminds of the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

A year later, her team shot dead a Moroccan waiter in the Norwegian town of Lillehammer, mistaking him for the chief of the Black September terror group. Rafael was sentenced to five years.

Her prison term was shortened because of her poor health, and she eventually married her defense attorney and resettled in South Africa.

Her body is to be brought to Israel for burial.

NORTH AMERICA

Jewish groups join for Holocaust education

Three Jewish groups will work together to promote Holocaust education and anti-bias teaching in U.S. schools.

The Anti-Defamation League, the Shoah Foundation and Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial announced the project Feb. 10.

The program will teach the history of the Holocaust within the context of issues of diversity, intolerance and genocide.

It is expected to begin in the fall of 2005.

Romania, Romania, Bulgaria

More than 50 American Jewish officials are on a five-day mission to Bulgaria and Romania.

The trip is in conjunction with the annual leadership mission to Israel of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The two former Communist countries recently joined NATO and have sent soldiers to Iraq as part of the U.S.-led coalition.

The Conference of Presidents said the visit provides an opportunity for American Jewry to show appreciation for and strengthen Bulgaria's and Romania's support for the United States and their friendly relations with Israel.

Canadian minister presses Syria, Lebanon

Canada's foreign minister called on Syria and Lebanon to work toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Pierre Pettigrew met Feb. 10 with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah and urged both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to show restraint and remain focused on the goal of peace.

He also sent a message to two of Israel's neighbors: "I am going to say to Syria and Lebanon, if you really want to help them, you must reinforce the authority and the credibility of President Abbas in the path he is determined to follow with such good intentions, and to discourage extremist groups which illegally utilize violence in a very bad way against the interest of the Palestinian people."

B'nai Brith Canada criticized Pettigrew for laying a wreath on Yasser Arafat's grave during his visit.

Canadian bill would tax settlement products

A Canadian legislator introduced a bill to exclude goods produced in Israeli settlements from the Canada-Israel free trade agreement.

The bill would ensure that "products from territories occupied by Israel since 1967 would not benefit from the advantages provided in the agreement," said Pierre Paquette of the Bloc Quebecois, who presented the legislation.

WORLD

London mayor under fire

British Jewish groups are criticizing London's mayor for comparing a Jewish newspaper reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard.

The president of the British Board of Deputies, Henry Grunwald, said Mayor Ken Livingstone's "insensitivity seems to know no bounds."

Livingstone made the comments last week in a verbal clash with reporter Oliver Finegold of the London Evening Standard, a paper