

## IN THE NEWS

**Abbas, Bush to meet in Washington**

Mahmoud Abbas will meet with President Bush.

Bush and the Palestinian Authority president will meet next Thursday, two days after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon leaves Washington after delivering a keynote address at a conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

JTA has learned that Abbas' senior advisers counseled him against the visit, concerned that Bush has little to offer him and that a fruitless meeting will reinforce Islamic extremists before the Palestinians' July 17 legislative elections.

Abbas told colleagues he felt he had to accept the invitation, having already postponed the visit three times.

**Ayalon meets Pollard**

Israel's ambassador to Washington met with Jonathan Pollard, a first.

Daniel Ayalon met with Pollard on Tuesday at the North Carolina prison where he is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

Pollard, who was granted Israeli citizenship in 1995, has demanded such a visit for years, saying that the United States otherwise wouldn't take his requests for release seriously.

**Jewish groups take out NYT ad**

A coalition of U.S. Jewish groups is taking out a full-page in The New York Times praising Ariel Sharon for his Gaza withdrawal plan.

The ad, which will appear Sunday in the Op-Ed section, expresses "support for the Israeli prime minister's plan," which it calls "possibly the most painful decision of his career."

The groups also vow to intensify their efforts to encourage the U.S. government to help Israel in implementing the withdrawal, which is slated to begin in mid-August.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Candidate to head Jewish Agency said to grasp Israel-Diaspora ties

By DINA KRAFT

**T**EL AVIV (JTA) — Ra'anana Mayor Zeev Bielski can be seen in the mornings opening car doors for schoolchildren, ushering them toward their classrooms with a smile.

Now Bielski, 58, may be heading to one of the most powerful offices in the Jewish world — chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced Monday that Bielski was his choice to succeed Sallai Meridor, who announced last week that he would step down after six years at the helm of the agency, which facilitates immigration to Israel and runs Zionist education programs worldwide.

Sharon's backing, and a subsequent affirmation Monday by a key JAFI committee, the Advice and Consent Committee, virtually assures Bielski of the job.

The affable Bielski, who once played basketball in Israel's national league, is known today as a consummate politician and fundraiser. He's a fixture on Ra'anana's neat, flower-lined streets. Residents credit Bielski for the high quality of life in the city and for running one of the few municipalities in Israel with a balanced budget.

Ra'anana residents commend Bielski's effectiveness and efficiency: He has an e-mail address to take comments from the public, with responses promised within 24 hours. He could not be reached for this story.

Bielski also knows his way around the Diaspora: A pioneer of JAFI-sponsored

partnerships between Israeli and Diaspora communities, in recent years he teamed Ra'anana with MetroWest, an affluent New Jersey Jewish community, a relationship that has proven hugely beneficial to the town.

The relationships Bielski has built with American Jewish leaders and others will help if he becomes JAFI chairman.

"That nomination is about as good a thing that can happen to the Jewish people as anything in the last number of years," said Stephen Greenberg of Manhattan, who worked with Bielski when Greenberg was vice president of the United Jewish Communities of MetroWest's executive committee.

Greenberg met Bielski more than 20 years ago at a conference that brought Israeli and Diaspora Jewish leaders together to map a common agenda. Bielski has made a point of staying in touch with his Diaspora friends, Greenberg said.

"I know it sounds trite, but if there's a person who is really not just uniquely qualified, but is probably the perfect individual to bridge the gap between Israel and the Diaspora, it's Zeev Bielski," Greenberg said.

He cited Bielski's "spectacular personality that endears him to people" and his understanding of the way Diaspora Jews approach life.

Greenberg also pointed to Bielski's sense of innovation. A formula that he helped create enabled Ra'anana residents to help integrate new Russian immigrants. That program became a model in Israel.

"I think he has a very good grasp of the Israel-Diaspora relationship," said Ste-

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BEHIND  
THE  
HEADLINES

## ■ Likely new head of the Jewish Agency for Israel is noted for his Diaspora relationships

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phen Hoffman, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland and former CEO of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella body for the North American federation system.

"I think he has grown to understand and appreciate the role of the Diaspora in Israel's life and the role of Israel in the Diaspora's life, and that's a key understanding if you want to lead the Jewish Agency," Hoffman said.

Diaspora backing will be critical for JAFI's next chairman: The agency continues to struggle to secure funding from the federation system, its primary financial backer, and must put into effect a new strategic plan that emphasizes strengthening Diaspora Jews' Zionist identity.

"This position has become more and more important as the Jewish Agency has become more and more challenged," said Richard Wexler, UJC's vice chairman and head of JAFI's North American Council. "Pillars of the Jewish Agency, such as rescue" of Jews in endangered Diaspora communities, "are being challenged in a post-rescue era, and we need someone in this position who can inspire greater American Jewish support. That will be Zeev Bielski's challenge."

Bielski's first extended professional contact with Diaspora Jews came when he was dispatched by the Jewish Agency to South Africa in 1977 to head the organization's aliyah department there.

It was there that he met his wife, adding an extra understanding of Diaspora Jewry

and the immigrant experience to Israel.

Soon after returning to Israel in 1982, Bielski helped found the Israel Forum, which tries to strengthen education and business ties between Israelis and Diaspora Jews. He later became the organization's president.

After several years as a businessman, he was elected mayor of Ra'anana in 1988.

"This is the best town in Israel to live in, largely because of his efforts," said David Schwartz, 42, who immigrated to Israel from New Jersey. "The city is extremely well run. He's very accessible."

Schwartz, who helps raise money for Ra'anana's local TALi school, based on the North American Jewish day school model, has appreciated Bielski's support for the institution.

"I'm going to be sorry to see him go because I don't know of anyone with his charisma or vision that is in line to replace to him," Schwartz said.

A childhood friend, Dubi Harel, director general of the World Zionist Organization's finance department, said Bielski has a special touch with people that will serve him well as JAFI head.

"He's the kind of person everyone loves," Harel told JTA. "He knows how

to reach consensus with everyone. He'll be close with the Board of Governors and the employees of the agency, and he'll know how to connect everyone."

Bielski is expected to be approved by the Zionist General Council, which meets in Jerusalem on June 21, and the agency's assembly, which meets June 26.

*JTA Staff Writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.*

**'He's the kind of person everyone loves. He knows how to reach consensus with everyone.'**

**Dubi Harel**

World Zionist Organization

## Arab-Latin summit angers Jews

By MIKE KEPP

SAO PAULO (JTA) — Brazilian Jewish leaders are criticizing a recent summit of South American and Arab countries for not sticking to economic and cultural issues and instead taking a stance on terrorism that seems to justify attacks against Israelis.

Leaders from 12 South American and 33 Arab nations ended their May 10-11 summit — meant to promote economic, cultural, scientific and political cooperation — by signing a declaration that urged Israel to abandon what they called Palestinian territory.

While the "Declaration of Brasilia" rejected terrorism "in all its forms and manifestations," it asserted the right "to resist foreign occupation in accordance with the principles of international legality and in compliance with international humanitarian law."

Jewish groups condemned the clause, considered a reference to the actions of terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. The Israeli Confederation of

Brazil, an umbrella organization for 13 regional Jewish federations, issued a "No To Terror" manifesto in response to the summit declaration.

Osias Wurman, a confederation vice president, told JTA that "Brazilian government authorities assured Jewish leaders that this summit would not be political, and instead they imported the conflict between Israel and Palestine to Brazil. Furthermore, the summit only considered that conflict from the point of view of the Palestinians, not the Israelis."

The summit also denounced U.S. economic sanctions against Syria.

Wurman added that Brazilian President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva also "used the summit to build Arab-country support for Brazil's bid to get the votes needed to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council."

Lula raised the idea of hosting the summit during a visit to North Africa and the Middle East in December 2003. The United States tried to participate as an observer to the summit, but the request was rejected at a preparatory meeting in Marrakesh.

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# Uzbek Jews scared but safe amid unrest

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Jewish leaders in Uzbekistan say members of their community feel safe and that no Jews have been hurt in recent unrest that has hit parts of the country.

But speaking off the record, some Jews told JTA that Jews could begin leaving Uzbekistan later this year if the situation continues to deteriorate.

In an interview published Tuesday, Uzbekistan's main Jewish religious authority said it was business as usual for his community, and condemned those responsible for anti-government protests in the Central Asian nation of 26 million.

"The Jewish community of Tashkent and other cities continues to live a normal life," David Gurevich, a Chabad emissary and chief rabbi of Uzbekistan, was quoted as saying by AEN, a Russian Jewish news agency affiliated with the Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities, a leading sponsor of Jewish life in Central Asia.

"The Jewish community condemns any disorders against the existing authorities," he added.

Violence erupted last week in the eastern city of Andijan when armed men stormed a jail and took control of the local administration building. The rebels were joined by thousands of people who took to the streets to protest the trial of 23 local businessmen on charges of Islamic extremism and to complain about poverty and unemployment.

Government authorities blamed the turmoil on radical Islamic groups, and troops opened fire on the crowd.

Uzbek authorities said soldiers shot only at gunmen from a radical Islamist group, but on Tuesday added that more than 150 people had been killed. Opposition sources said the death toll was closer to 800.

The unrest later spread to the eastern border town of Korasuv, where locals seized control of government buildings Saturday.

Andijan, where the turmoil started, is home to some 500 Jews, according to Gurevich.

"No members of the Jewish community took part in the unrest," said the rabbi, adding that the small synagogue in Andijan remained open.

A Moscow-based Jewish official said his organization has been in touch with the Uzbek Jewish community, and that there

had been no calls for urgent help.

"There is a certain sense of stability now after what happened in Uzbekistan, and although I don't think this will last long, at this point there is absolutely no panic or sense of urgency within the community," said Roman Spektor, a spokesman for the Moscow office of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

Nearly 90 percent of Uzbekistan's estimated 20,000 Jews live in Tashkent, the capital, which has not been hit by protests.

"In Tashkent everything is quiet, as if nothing is happening anywhere in the country," a Jewish activist, who asked not to be identified, told JTA on

Tuesday in a telephone interview from the Uzbek capital.

"When the government point of view dominates the press and airwaves here, we don't even know exactly what is going on," the activist said. "Rumors seem to be the most reliable source of information."

The Federation of Jewish Communities, which operates synagogues and day schools across the former Soviet Union, said it will increase the budget for Uzbekistan to make sure the Jewish community has enough security.

"We are sending them additional funds to set up more armed guards around schools," said Avraham Berkowitz, the federation's Moscow-based executive director. "They are actually in a lot of fear, but

the leaders of the community are trying to calm down the people."

Since independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has been ruled by autocrat Islam Karimov. Despite his increasingly poor record on human rights and democratic issues, Karimov has earned a reputation in the United States as a leader able to keep a tight rein on Islamic fundamentalists in an area plagued by radical and separatist trends.

Apparently as part of his campaign to please the West, Karimov has made many overtures to the Jewish community, allowing Jews to open synagogues, schools and charitable centers.

"Karimov's government has always been very helpful to the Jewish community, allowing Jews to practice freely, to be public, to educate their children," Berkowitz said.

A Moscow Jewish woman who has family in Uzbekistan said she urged her relatives to pack up and leave as soon as they can.

"I called my sister in Tashkent the day it all began," said Mira Rivlina, a pediatrician from Moscow. "I asked her what else needs to happen to make her understand she doesn't have to sit there any more. But you know, she has family, two kids, and it's hard to make a quick decision unless someone breaks into your own apartment one day."

While there's now no indication that Uzbek Jews are planning to leave, "if the situation drags on for months, we can expect more people will go on aliyah or move to Russia," Berkowitz said.

**'The Jewish community of Tashkent and other cities continues to live a normal life.'**

**David Gurevich**  
Chief rabbi of Uzbekistan

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

## A brief history of Uzbek Jewry

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — A large indigenous Jewish community — known as Bukharan Jews, after the Uzbek city of Bukhara — lived in what is now Uzbekistan for many centuries.

Beginning in the late 19th century, when the region fell under the Russian influence, Ashkenazi Jews from the European sections of Russia settled in the region as well.

After the advent of communism and its war on religion, Jews in Uzbekistan,

like those in the other remote parts of the Soviet Union, found it easier to keep their traditions alive than did Jews in the European part of the Bolshevik empire. There, Jewish religion and traditions were subject to persecution.

The community grew substantially during World War II with the arrival of thousands of Ashkenazi Jewish refugees and evacuees from Nazi-occupied parts of the Soviet Union. The two communities, Bukharan and Ashkenazi, still retain their distinctive features, and they rarely intermarry.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### U.S. envoy praises P.A. security moves

A top U.S. envoy to the Middle East praised the Palestinians for undertaking security reforms.

The Palestinian Authority has taken "essential steps" to "re-structure its forces, to cause a single line of authority to exist," Gen. William Ward said Tuesday after meeting P.A. Interior Minister Nasser Yousef in Jericho.

Israeli officials say they believe P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas has good intentions but has failed to take substantive steps to clamp down on terrorists.

The United States wants Israel to accelerate its accommodation of Palestinian demands before Israel's planned withdrawal this summer from the Gaza Strip.

### Rice blasts Syria

Condoleezza Rice criticized Syria for its continued support of Palestinian terrorism.

Speaking Wednesday to two U.S. journalists in Iraq, the U.S. secretary of state said Syrian support for terrorism is particularly problematic because it comes at a time when Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is trying to create a democratic government and end Palestinian violence.

The Syrians, she said, "need to take a look at where they are and get in step with the region."

### Laura Bush to visit Middle East

Laura Bush will visit Israel on a trip to the Middle East this week. The first lady is scheduled to leave Thursday night for a five-day trip to Jordan, Israel and Egypt. While in Israel, Bush is slated to meet the wife of President Moshe Katsav as part of a focus on empowering women and girls, a White House official said. Bush also will also speak Saturday to the World Economic Forum in Amman.

### Diskin eyes Jewish terror

Jewish terrorism is a leading Israeli security concern, Israel's new Shin Bet chief said.

"There are right-wing groups that are growing in strength and want to carry out a terrorist attack against the Temple Mount as well as against the prime minister. We are very worried by this," Yuval Diskin said Tuesday in his first briefing to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

He said the potential for Jew-on-Jew violence would increase as the mid-August date for Israeli withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank nears.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Arab, Jewish legislators debate terrorism

An Arab American congressman and a Jewish American congressman discussed Israel's place in a debate over terrorism.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.), who is Jewish, challenged the U.S. State Department for not being tougher on Saudi Arabia in its terrorism report.

In a congressional session last week, Sherman told Philip Zelikow and John Brennan, who drafted the report, that the first sentence on Saudi Arabia should describe Saudi funding of terror rather than its support of the fight against it.

Zelikow countered that while individual Saudis may fund Hamas, the government does not. Sherman conceded the point, but said the language should be stronger.

Rep. Darrell Issa (D-Calif.), an Arab American, said a plot by Jewish extremists to attack his offices in 2001 should have been classified as international terrorism.

### Testimony: Bayoil boycotted Israel

A Houston oil company agreed to boycott Israel in the Iraqi oil-for-food scandal, according to congressional testimony.

Dan Berkovitz, counsel to the Democrats on the Senate's Homeland Security Committee, which is investigating charges that officials and companies took kickbacks from Saddam Hussein's regime under the U.N. humanitarian oil-for-food scheme, said Bayoil agreed to boycott conditions in its dealings with Iraq.

### Toronto Jewish campus on the way

The UJA Federation of Greater Toronto officially broke ground Sunday on a 50-acre state-of-the-art community development.

The nearly \$79 million Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus, which will take five years to complete, will feature a diverse range of family and social services as well as fitness, sports and health programs.

It also will house a number of cultural agencies plus facilities for child care, camping, conferences and meetings.

Also included will be a new campus for the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto and up to four new elementary schools, which UJA says will make the Lebovic site the world's largest Jewish day school outside of Israel.

The school is scheduled to open in September 2006.

The development was made possible through gifts from private donors, particularly a gift from brothers Joseph and Wolf Lebovic.

## WORLD

### Affluence, assimilation 'age' Jews

Jews are the world's oldest population, a new study found.

According to data released Tuesday by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, around 16 percent of Jews in Israel and the Diaspora are over 65, more than twice the average proportion of elderly worldwide.

The Jerusalem Post quoted one of the study's editors as citing the tendency of younger Jews to assimilate or have fewer children.

Another possible factor is the relative affluence of Jews in most parts of the world, meaning that more survive into old age.

### British envoy wants boycott rescinded

Britain's new minister for the Middle East called for a British academic boycott of Israel to be resolved.

Kim Howells welcomed the decision by the Association of University Teachers to review its controversial policy at a special meeting called for May 26.

The group voted last month to sever contacts with Haifa and Bar-Ilan universities.

### Fund fights Israel boycott

A new fund was established to combat boycott actions against Israeli institutions.

In partnership with the American Society of the University of Haifa, the American Jewish Committee started the fund with a \$10,000 donation.

The fund will help Israeli institutions injured by academic boycotts use legal means against such actions and press for apologies.

The fund was created in the wake of last month's decision by Britain's Association of University Teachers to sever ties with Haifa and Bar-Ilan universities.