

IN THE NEWS

E.U.: Refer Iran to Security Council

The European Union says it is prepared to refer Iranian nuclear activity to the U.N. Security Council for sanctions.

In a statement Thursday the "E.U.-3" — Britain, France and Germany, the countries that have been negotiating with Iran — said Iran technically was liable for referral to the Security Council last summer when it resumed uranium conversion.

However, the Europeans resisted pressure from Israel and the United States at the time, hoping to persuade Iran to agree to strict supervision.

After one last attempt last month, the E.U.-3 concluded "the Iranian government now seems intent on turning its back on better relations with the international community."

Pat Robertson apologizes to Sharon

The Rev. Pat Robertson apologized for saying Ariel Sharon's stroke was punishment for Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

In a letter sent Thursday to Omri Sharon, son of the ailing Israeli prime minister, the evangelical Christian leader asked for forgiveness "for saying what was clearly insensitive at the time."

Israel kills Palestinian terrorists

Two Palestinian terrorists were killed during an Israeli raid on the West Bank.

Commandos raided Jenin on Thursday in search of terrorists, killing a senior member of Islamic Jihad in a gunfight.

A comrade of the fugitive then blew himself up near an army unit, but caused no other casualties.

■ **MORE NEWS, Pg. 8**

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WORLD REPORT

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Office of Roy Blunt



Paul Morse/White House

Reps. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) and John Boehner (R-Ohio).

Leading candidates for high post in House are both strong on Israel

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Tom DeLay's Jewish friends — and enemies — can expect the same friendliness to Israel and affection for faith-based funding from whomever replaces him as majority leader in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Under indictment for alleged campaign finance abuses in Texas and reportedly under investigation in Washington for his ties to disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, DeLay (R-Texas) resigned from the second-ranking House job earlier this month.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The two declared candidates to succeed DeLay are Roy Blunt of Missouri, the Republican whip, and John Boehner of Ohio, chairman of the House's Education and Workforce Committee. Both are 56.

The vote will take place after President Bush's State of the Union address Jan. 31.

DeLay was known for his affection for Israel and its settlement movement.

Boehner and Blunt don't have the same closeness to Israel's right wing, but both men have records that please the pro-Israel community.

"Both have traveled to Israel, their voting

Continued on page 2

■ Top picks for House majority leader post strong on Israel

Continued from page 1

records are very strong, both are great candidates," said an official of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, who asked not to be identified because it's AIPAC's policy not to comment on political races.

Blunt probably has the advantage on Israel issues. Working with Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), his Democratic counterpart, Blunt has initiated pro-Israel resolutions that are guaranteed overwhelming passage, and he leads a trip to Israel every two years for Republican freshmen.

"He has been eager and willing to be a role model and a passionate advocate with regard to other members on the Middle East," said a senior Jewish community leader with strong Republican ties. "Blunt has taken the opportunity and run with it to do a number of proactive things with the Jewish community."

If Blunt is distinct from DeLay in any way, it's that he has shunned American Jews and Christian evangelicals who speak for Israel's far right — a constituency that considers DeLay a hero.

Blunt helped pass a House resolution last year welcoming the election of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, fending off attempts from DeLay's office to water it down. As Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon formulated his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, Blunt did not return calls from hard-line settlers who visited Washington to lobby against the pullout.

In 2003 Blunt married a lobbyist for the

tobacco industry, Abigail Perlman, who is Jewish, in a Jewish ceremony with a rabbi. Blunt already had warm Jewish ties stemming from his relationship with St. Louis' Jewish community, but Jewish lobbyists say Perlman deepened those relations.

"She has been a key liaison with the Jewish world and has helped to expand his knowledge and relationship with the community," said William Daroff, the top lobbyist in Washington for the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella group and, until recently, a deputy director of the Republican Jewish Coalition.

A key focus for Blunt has been trying to end traditional Jewish financial and electoral support for Democrats.

"Increasingly, if you ask a Jewish voter which party is more dependably pro-Israel and focused on the war on terrorism, they would say the Republican Party," Blunt told JTA in a 2004 election-eve interview.

Perlman figured in a controversy that could dog candidates eager to distance themselves from lobbying scandals of the sort that brought down DeLay: Blunt revealed his relationship with Perlman in 2003 only after he had championed legislation that would have favored the tobacco industry.

Still, as the No. 3 Republican in the House after Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) and DeLay, Blunt is favored for the majority leader job.

Boehner has not assumed as prominent a role on Israel, but that's mostly a function of his domestic emphasis as chairman of the Education Committee. He is committed to the Jewish state, according to those who know him.

Daroff began his own political career as a page for Boehner in the Ohio House.

"Even as far back as 1986, Boehner had a keen understanding of the role Israel plays as a bulwark of democracy and freedom in the region from a Cold War perspective," Daroff said. "He always saw Israel as being on the side of the good guys."

Boehner represents a mostly rural district in southwestern Ohio that has

virtually no Jews, but he has gone out of his way to keep his door open to Jewish interests.

Joyce Garver Keller, executive director of Ohio Jewish Communities, said Boehner was receptive to the lobbying group's efforts to extend special education funding to religious schools.

"He really has always seen himself as someone who has a broader constituency for all Ohioans," she told JTA. "He has been open to taking our calls."

Both Blunt and Boehner are committed to faith-based funding, which has won them friends among Orthodox Jews. Boehner especially played a prominent role in making sure that funds for students evacuated because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita went to parochial as well as public schools, a cause championed by the Orthodox Union.

However, that makes both men controversial for the majority of the Jewish community, which opposes the erosion of laws keeping government funding from going to groups that discriminate on hiring based on religion.

The Reform movement in particular was outraged when a Boehner amendment passed in September that would remove a ban on discriminatory hiring from organizations that receive federal funding for Head Start preschool programs. The amendment has yet to pass the Senate.

Jewish activists who favor existing safeguards for church-state separation say they see little of substance that distinguishes Blunt and Boehner from DeLay, who also strongly favored faith-based funding. On style, though, there is a difference: DeLay was likelier to socialize with Jewish groups, especially the Orthodox, that did not openly oppose any Republican plank.

"Both Boehner and Blunt are folks who reached out more to the broader Jewish community than DeLay ever did," said a representative of a group prominent in lobbying for church-state separation, who spoke anonymously to avoid conflict with the Republican Party.

"They sought to build broader bases in the community."

Boehner [has] a keen understanding of the role Israel plays as a bulwark of democracy and freedom in the region.

William Daroff
UJC lobbyist

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Israeli survivors get less as they age

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Holocaust survivor Avri Michal sits in a wheelchair with one arm paralyzed and one leg amputated. He does not know how he will get by if his live-in health assistant is taken away from him.

"Without him, I cannot survive. He does everything for me," said Michal. His eyes cloud over and he looks down at the cold tiled floor of his living room.

Michal, 73, survived the Holocaust as a boy by hiding in a mechanics garage in Czechoslovakia.

He is now among the thousands of elderly and needy survivors in Israel who face an uncertain future because the welfare group that helps them lacks the funds to continue.

The Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims in Israel announced last week that it would be freezing two of its main programs.

One of the programs supports survivors such as Michal who return from hospital stays and need medical assistance at home.

In 2005, about 5,500 survivors were provided such care by the foundation.

The other program serves some 20,000 survivors by providing medical supplies such as eyeglasses, dentures and adult diapers, as well as some medications not provided through the Israeli health-care system. The foundation would need an additional \$10 million to restore the programs, its officials said.

More than 90 percent of the foundation's activities are funded by the Claims Conference and the foundation's leaders fault the organization for not increasing its funding to meet the rising needs of the growing number of elderly, poverty-stricken Holocaust survivors.

The remaining budget comes from the Israeli Finance Ministry.

Ministry officials said that its funding to the foundation continues and noted that the ministry even increased funding last year by approximately \$1.2 million.

It was not clear if the ministry would provide additional funds this year as well.

Meanwhile, the cost of caring for these survivors is soaring as they age and encounter more serious medical problems, said foundation officials.

"We all understand that helping the

Holocaust survivors is not an economic problem, but an ethical problem," said Wolf Factor, the foundation's chairman.

Factor himself is a survivor of Auschwitz.

A study cited by the foundation concluded that about 40 percent of Israeli Holocaust survivors live below or just barely hover above the poverty line.

The number of needy applicants approaching the foundation has increased by more than 60 percent since it was established in 1994, but funding has not gone up to meet the new demand.

Factor questioned the Claims Conference's funding choices, suggesting that certain projects claiming foundation funding, such as Holocaust commemoration and youth trips to Poland, are not as immediately relevant as helping survivors in need.

The Claims Conference is an international organization that distributes reparations to survivors.

He said he hoped the Claims Conference and the Israeli state would "come to their senses and understand that honoring the memory of the Holocaust is not only to remember the dead, but essentially to remember the living who still need us."

A Claims Conference spokesman told JTA: "We hope that others in Israel will recognize the importance of these programs and will likewise ensure that additional significant funds are provided for these purposes."

The Claims Conference said it has increased its funding to the foundation every year since it was founded and expects to give it \$40 million in 2006.

Michal's live-in health care assistant, a young Filipino named Dexler, is his lifeline.

He bathes and dresses Michal, prepares his meals, and makes sure he takes all his medications.

He is also his link to the outside world, pushing Michal in his wheelchair

for walks through a nearby park and in the neighborhood. "They know why the money is needed," said Michal, complaining about those who have not granted the foundation increased funding.

Michal lives on \$570 a month from National Insurance, the Israeli equivalent of Social Security. He spent all his savings after falling ill with a circulation problem that led to the amputation and partial paralysis. After surviving the war in a mechanics garage he opened up his own garage in Tel Aviv but had to close it when he became incapacitated. Providing

a support system is especially important for ailing Holocaust survivors, said Batya Rappaport, a social worker who works with survivors through the foundation.

When survivors fall ill past traumas are often triggered as they remember their experiences during the war fighting illness and weakness in order to survive.

"They feel like they are losing everything, that they are losing control," she said.

'We all understand that helping the Holocaust survivors is not an economic problem, but an ethical problem.'

Wolf Factor

Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims

Jewish ruins found

JERUSALEM (JTA) — New archaeological findings indicate that Jews continued to live in Jerusalem even after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Excavations near the Shuafat refugee camp in northern Jerusalem uncovered what appear to be relics from an active Jewish community that existed after the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 C.E., Ha'aretz reported.

The discovery runs contrary to prevailing wisdom: that Jewish settlement ceased with the Roman onslaught.

The Israel Antiquities Authority began digging at the site in 2003.

Archaeologists believe the settlement was Jewish because of the stone vessels they discovered there. The researchers also say stone basins at the site may have held ashes from the destroyed Temple.

Young Jews rebuild communities in E. Europe

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — Sixteen years after the end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, Jewish communities nearly destroyed by Nazism, communism and emigration are still tiny.

But those who were kids when the Iron Curtain fell had the great benefit of a Jewish Marshall Plan: Thanks to the efforts of organizations like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Lauder Foundation and the Jewish Agency for Israel, these teens were able to discover their Jewish identity in ways that would have been unthinkable before 1989.

This new generation of Jewish leaders wants the world to know that Judaism in Warsaw, Bratislava and Budapest, Bucharest and Sofia and Belgrade, is a living, breathing organism that thrives on the oxygen of enthusiasm — their enthusiasm.

Shabbat Shalom from Warsaw

Dorota Zielinska, 27, is like most other Jews in Warsaw: She grew up not knowing she was Jewish. She spent her childhood in Wadowice, a small town in southern Poland where the late Pope John Paul II was born.

"It's a conservative place where being different is not easy. People would say to my mom, 'We haven't seen you in church lately, what's wrong?'" she said.

When she was a teenager, she found out that her grandmother had survived

Auschwitz, and worked for the Jewish community of Warsaw after World War II.

Zielinska felt close to her grandmother and wanted to know more about her heritage. After the fall of communism, Zielinska made what her family considered a rather radical choice — to attend a summer camp run by the JDC and the Polish Union of Jewish Religious Communities.

"I finally found out who I was there," she said.

She later attended leadership seminars sponsored by JDC in Poland and Israel.

When Zielinska decided to commit to having a Jewish life, her parents were worried.

"We're glad you're happy,' they said, 'but don't go telling your friends,'" Zielinska said. "In vil-

lages like ours, the worst thing you could say is that you are Jewish: You'll lose your business."

Then there was her non-Jewish grandfather, her father's father, whom Zielinska describes as the poster child for provincial anti-Semitism.

"Even last year he said that disliking Jews is nothing strange because 'Jews want to be everywhere,'" she said.

None of this deterred Zielinska. After finishing college in Warsaw, she became director of youth development for the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland and launched a Sunday school and the community's first Jewish youth club. She also administered the community's summer camp.

The community had to eliminate her post for financial reasons, but again Zielinska persevered: She moved over to Bejt

Warszawa, a congregation of about 200, where she is youth project manager.

Zielinska marks Shabbat each week, especially because she wants to share it with her 4-year-old daughter.

"After the confusion I went through, I wasn't sure how to tell her that she was Jewish, but because there are programs now, it's easy," she said.

Rapping son of a rabbi in Budapest

Adam Schoenberger is lucky: As a rabbi's son, he has always known what it meant to be Jewish.

Because he'd grown up among some 80,000-100,000 Jews in Budapest, being Jewish was not an oddity for Schoenberger. Nonetheless, he was aware that young Jews in Hungary aren't very active in Jewish communal life.

Schoenberger, 25, sought to change that. Two years ago he became leader of Marom, the Conservative youth movement and the newest organization for young Jewish adults in the Hungarian capital.

"What I saw was that there were no options for young Jewish people to have Jewish-themed cultural experiences, so we at Marom started to do big events, like klezmer concerts and a Chanukah festival where 800 people turned up," he said.

He partly credits the event's popularity to the fact that attendees were not asked if they were Jewish and didn't have to be a member of any Jewish organization.

Schoenberger helped start a Jewish theater and founded a hip-hop band that sings about Jewish life in Hebrew. He writes the lyrics. The band is called Hagesher, which means "the bridge" in Hebrew.

"We sing about the energy that you need to give to the community because it can still be a bit depressing after communism," he said. "The most important contribution I can make to Jewish life is to show everyone how colorful and culturally rich the Jewish tradition is."

Marom sponsors lectures about Jewish history, Talmud, psychology and anthropology, and offers a Friday-night Kiddush.

"The main thing is that we are tolerant and pluralistic," Schoenberger said. "If someone on Sabbath wants to smoke

Those who were kids when the Iron Curtain fell had the great benefit of a Jewish Marshall Plan.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD



Credit: Moni Franes/Weinberg Foundation/JDC

Alexander Oscar, left, vice president of Shalom, the main umbrella organization for Jewish communities in Bulgaria, at a 2003 program in Turkey sponsored for young Jews from the region.

a cigarette, then that's his prerogative. And we have gender equality," a concept that is still novel in the former Eastern Bloc.

When he's not rapping or writing a libretto for alternative theater, Schoenberger studies comparative literature and linguistics at Hungary's University of Pec.

Small is beautiful for Slovaks

Tomas Faerber scoffs when he hears that Slovak Jews have a reputation for being indifferent to their faith.

"My generation is not apathetic; we had to do so much to recover from communism. We have a lot of energy," he said. He was in essence describing himself.

When Faerber, 26, was a teen in the mid-1990s, he went to Israel thanks to a grant from the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Bratislava Jewish community.

"I was only there for three weeks, but it was the first time I met so many people with my background and I made friends who are still my friends now," he said.

"It gave me so much that I wanted to give something back to the community," he said.

He participated in the annual Lauder/JDC 12-day-long summer camp in Szarvas, Hungary, where over 2,000 students from more than 20 countries learn about Jewish identity. Faerber liked it so much that he became a Szarvas counselor. Together with a fellow counselor — who now is secretary of the Bratislava Jewish community — he organized Jewish "seminars" for Bratislava teens.

Faerber became president of the Slovak Union of Jewish Students and works part time as the JDC's only representative in Slovakia. He also is general counsel for a Slovak investment-insurance firm.

He says that since Slovaks suffered through concentration camps and then communism — which was anti-religious and particularly anti-Jewish — it should come as no surprise that most Slovaks are secular.

Faerber dismisses bleak predictions that in 10 years Slovakia's Jewish communities will disappear. The community today numbers only about 700 people.

"Having a small community can be an advantage," he said. "If you have 800 people, you really know them and can personally encourage them."

In Bulgaria, from camper to leader

"At the beginning I was only a chanich, a little camper," recalls Alexander Oscar,

27, vice president of Shalom, the main umbrella organization for Jewish communities in Bulgaria.

"The year the community opened up, when communism ended, I was 11 and I went through every level of Jewish activity I could. I was a madrich," or counselor, "and then I became a teacher for the madrichim," he said.

The importance of madrichim in Bulgaria cannot be overstated, he said: "In a community where 55,000 of the 60,000 Jews emigrated to Israel after World War II, each one of us now can really make a difference to the community's survival."

Oscar has a single message for Bulgarian Jews.

"Young Jews want to be full participants in the greater non-Jewish world and they feel that if they spend time on Jewish matters, they will be shut out from other opportunities," he said. "I'm here to show them that you can do it all."

Oscar spends much of his free time at community headquarters in Sofia, but he also is a doctor, a urology resident at a local hospital.

"For the past year I have managed to approach a lot of young people in the community — businessmen, architects, lawyers — and now they are also volunteering their time for the community," he said. "We need to put as much time into Jewish education in Bulgaria as we do in supporting Israel."

Tangoing to Jewish music in Romania

Erwin Simsensohn was in a Jewish choir from the age of 4 and spent vacations with his observant grandparents. But growing up in Piatra Neamt, a city of 100,000 in northeastern Romania with a Jewish community of just 100 people, Simsensohn didn't know many other kids like him.

Then he attended the Lauder/JDC summer camp in Szarvas, Hungary.

"The experience is a life changer; it gave you a sense of Jewish identity, a sense of belonging," he said.

The camp inspired Simsensohn to create similar identity-building programs in Piatra Neamt. Continuing his pursuit of Jewish knowledge, for two years running he won the country's JDC-sponsored Torah competition, and represented Romania at a competition in Israel.

Simsensohn, 26, kept up his voluntary activities for the Jewish community throughout his college days in Bucharest. He was on the board of the European Union of Jewish Students and helped or-

ganize a Hillel summer educational program for 400 students.

After getting a degree in theater directing and international business, Simsensohn landed a lucrative post in advertising.

"About two years ago the JDC offered me a job that gave me a chance to help the community," he said. "The salary was half the one I was making, but the spiritual income was so much higher."

So for two years Simsensohn has been working on plans for a JCC in Bucharest, due to begin activities next month.

"We need a place that would appeal to the 5,000 Jews of Bucharest, plus the large Israeli community," he said. "It's going to be a place where Jews who might not want to go to synagogue can still take part in Jewish life."

From Serbia to Israel and back

Like many other young Serbian Jews, Sandra Levi fled her country in 1999 to escape from military conflict, the rule of a despot and a decrepit economy. She landed in Israel, where she learned Hebrew and the finer points of religious observance.

Last year, at the age of 25 and armed with a Latin American studies degree from Hebrew University, she returned to live in Belgrade.

"Belgrade is changing and becoming more European, whereas Israel was becoming more like the Middle East," she said.

"Aliyah is a touchy issue," she continues. "The truth is that I feel more Jewish in Belgrade. I go to temple every Friday even though I didn't go to synagogue so often in Israel."

With only 2,000 Jews in the Serbian capital, Levi feels that her presence in temple matters.

"In Israel everyone is Jewish," she said, "but here I feel really needed."

Levi believes she can make a difference to the Serb Jewish community by working with young people.

She has worked as a counselor at the Szarvas camp and recently ran workshops on Jewish traditions for Jewish teens and university students.

"The latest lesson I gave was on the meaning of 'evil tongues,' which is mentioned in the bible. I talked about the Jewish view of gossip and how words can be very harmful even if you don't mean them to be," she said.

Levi says her dream is to start a Jewish elementary school, but would be happy with a kindergarten.

Program tries to sell Israeli youth on the Negev

By DINA KRAFT

MITZPEH GVULOT, Israel (JTA)—Endless stretches of sand and sky surround the teenagers as they tumble off buses in the Negev Desert.

"It's really pretty here. It's very different from the Ukraine," said Larisa Protasova, 17, as she posed for a photo on the edge of a sand dune.

A recent immigrant to Israel, it was her first time seeing the Negev.

Protasova was one of 16,000 young Israelis — including immigrants as well as soldiers, students and youth group members — who were brought to the Negev on day trips last week, part of a campaign to convince them to make their lives here one day.

The two-day event over Chanukah, dubbed "Light Up the Negev," was organized by the Jewish National Fund-Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael with the express purpose of "selling" the Negev to Israel's youth.

The Negev represents about 60 percent of Israel's landmass, but has only about 8 percent of the country's inhabitants.

After the Gaza Strip withdrawal and with pressure expected to build on Israel to uproot settlements in the West Bank as well, developing the Negev has become a priority for the government, which recently approved \$3 billion toward building an infrastructure of jobs and communities in the region.

The JNF, meanwhile, has launched a \$500 million campaign specifically for Negev development.

Israelis traditionally have shunned the region because of its remoteness from the rest of the country, the lack of jobs and the relative harshness of desert life.

The vast majority of Israelis live in the center of the country, where the cost of living is much higher but opportunities for jobs are greater.

Officials hope the surge of investment will lure people south to fulfill the vision of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, to "make the desert bloom" by transforming the Negev into a center of life and trade, not the periphery it has remained since the country was born.

Plans include the creation of a biotech park in Beersheba, new tourism projects and several ecologically-minded villages

to be built with environmentally friendly materials. Also being promoted are swaths of land to be sold as ranches.

Israeli officials hope that some 250,000 more people will move to the Negev.

"We must educate young Israelis and let them know what opportunities await them once they move there: affordable housing, open spaces, jobs, a sense of community and a place in history,"

said Sharon Davidovich, who helped organize the event and formerly was a JNF shaliach in the United States.

Efrat Duvdevani, director of the recently formed Ministry for the Development of the Negev and Galilee, said there is a rare consensus in the Jewish world around the need to develop the two regions.

"The Negev and Galilee are not politically controversial. It is something that unites people and brings everyone together, including the Jewish community abroad," she said. "It has nothing that has to do with this party or that party but the history and, most importantly, the future of Israel."

The Negev is home to some 140,000 Bedouin.

Officials say the development plan will benefit them by bringing better education and housing, but some in the Bedouin community are opposed to the plan, fearing that additional building in the region will encroach on land they claim.

Over Chanukah, youth visited different sites throughout the Negev, including military bases, development towns and parks, learning about the region's history and environment.

Some of the youth spent time painting houses and planting trees in the town of Yeruham, while others cleaned out a riverbed or helped build a bicycle trail in Mitzpeh Ramon.

One group of immigrant youth from the former Soviet Union visited Mitzpeh Gvulot, an experimental farm from the 1940s just outside Kibbutz Gvulot.

"Do you know where you are on the map?" asked their guide, a female sol-

dier. The teenagers, all of them from the Tel Aviv area, shook their heads no and laughed.

The soldier showed them around mud buildings that a group of young pioneers built in 1943. One had served as a communal dining room, another as a bakery.

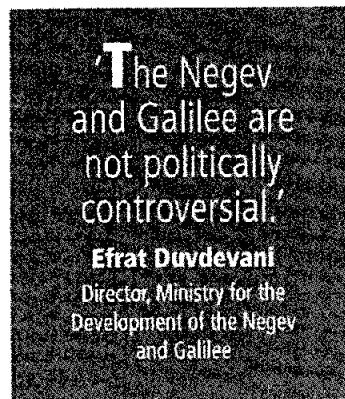
Arkadi Demianenko, 16, who immigrated to Israel from Ukraine in 2000, said the history was interesting, but he

didn't see his future in the Negev.

"It's far from modernity. It would be hard to get used to life here," he said, taking in the landscape of sand and scrubby trees.

But George Moscowski, 14, from the Tel Aviv suburb of Holon, said the openness of the scenery drew him in.

"In the future I'd like to live in a free, open place that is not crowded. Maybe it will be green one day," said Moscowski, who hopes to study computer programming.



Fischer praises Sharon

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Germany's former foreign minister said Ariel Sharon was a late convert to Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. "Opinions have always been radically divided over Ariel Sharon," Joschka Fischer wrote in this week's Die Zeit magazine, "since neither as a politician nor certainly as a soldier was he a man of peace."

Fischer, a leading advocate of Israeli-Palestinian peace during his term in office, praised Sharon for eventually realizing that the Jewish state would have to cede territory. "This was an unheard of, one might almost say a revolutionary, step. It is to Sharon's lasting credit," Fischer wrote. "However, the upcoming elections on both sides turn out, there can scarcely be a way back from the strategic turnaround from offense to withdrawal that Ariel Sharon began."

ARTS & CULTURE

Not just a pretty face, Ethiopian model opens doors

By LOOLWA KHAZZOOM

TEL AVIV (JTA) — It was early evening on Ma'ze Street in central Tel Aviv, and drivers were impatiently honking at the small white car stalled in the middle of the street. A young Ethiopian couple was peering out of the car in excitement, watching the outdoor photo shoot nearby, where Esti Mamo — one of Israel's top supermodels and the first Ethiopian-Israeli to make it in the industry — was being photographed in a Nike swimsuit.

For her contribution to the Nike shoot, celebrity stylist Dorin Atlas chose to work with Mamo for the first time.

"I saw authenticity in her, a rare beauty that most people don't have — an inner light," Atlas says. Mamo "is very connected to herself. She's classy. She embodies both strength and softness."

That classiness is what first got Mamo noticed in Tel Aviv eight years ago, when she was just 15 years old.

"I can say with certainty that Esti was the first Ethiopian model in Israel," supermodel photographer Avi Harel said. "She's made a tremendous impact on the industry, opening doors to women following her. Before Esti, you couldn't find any Ethiopian models getting work. Esti did a great service to her community."

Despite her success, Mamo remains down-to-earth. Maybe that's because every time she graces the cover of a magazine, she feels she's doing it for her entire community.

"I am a role model for a lot of Ethiopians who want to go in this direction," Mamo says. "I'm not getting rid of my culture, just adding new things to it, and educating society about who Ethiopians are."

Mamo hopes to put her community's issues on the map — not only in Israel, but across the globe. She has done photo shoots in Paris and is now in negotiation with modeling agencies in New York.

Wherever she models, she promises, she will educate those around her about Ethiopian Israelis. And when she finishes with her modeling career?

"I'll come back to Israel and run for Knesset," she says. ■

Hasbarah with comic books

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Glimpsed from certain angles, the wild tufts of white hair that leapt skyward from David Ben-Gurion's head looked like wings. Even so, the diminutive first prime minister of Israel seems an unlikely comic book character.

But if William Rubin has his way, Ben-Gurion — along with Moses, Theodor Herzl, Golda Meir, Ariel Sharon and a host of other historic Israeli heroes and heroines — will grace the pages of a new graphic novel set to tell the story of Israel from the Bible to statehood and right up through the present day.

"People today aren't reading the great works of Zionist history," says Rubin, executive director and CEO of the Community Foundation for Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago. "We require ways to teach this magnificent living history for the general and Jewish marketplaces in a real engaging and exciting framework."

That's where "HOMELAND: The Illustrated History of the State of Israel," comes in.

Its creators hope the book will tell Israel's story in an accurate and entertaining way, educating both Jews and non-Jews about the Jewish state, encouraging readers to visit Israel and answering one overriding question: Why is Israel relevant in the modern world?

"I happen to love comics and I think it's a form of storytelling that returns stories to where they belong — to the people, not just experts," says Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, vice president of CLAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

The text is being written by Marv Wolfman, an award-winning comics and cartoon writer who created "Blade The Vampire Hunter" and co-created the very popular Cartoon Network show, "The New Teen Titans." He is aided by members of the foundation staff. Mario Ruiz, an evangelical Christian and president of Valor Comics, is composing the art.

Scheduled to hit the presses in May, "Homeland" — the first title by Nachshon

press, an imprint of Chicago's community foundation — will become available to the public the following month.

The story will be told through narration by a female professor teaching a Middle East studies course at an American university. Students' questions will serve as jumping-off points for Israel's narrative.

The project is being funded largely by the Rosenwald School Initiative, and the Chicago foundation has backed it with significant use of its staff's time. Information is available at Nachshon's preliminary Web site, www.nachshonpress.com.

Some 10 percent of the 120-page book

will focus on the biblical period; another 10 percent will deal with the post-biblical period; and 80 percent will tell the story of Zionism from the 1860s through today. It will include 24 pages of archival photographs.

Aware that Israel's history is controversial and hoping to take the rug out from under those who might challenge the

book on a factual basis, the creators are making a point of depicting Israel in its entirety — warts and all.

It will include, for example, episodes dealing with Jonathan Pollard, the U.S. Navy analyst imprisoned for spying for Israel, and the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Christian militiamen in Lebanon, for which many blame Israel.

"This is a look at Israel with its blemishes, because it has to have academic integrity," Rubin says.

Jacob Lassner, a Jewish studies professor at Northwestern University, has been engaged as a consultant to check the book's historical accuracy. The authors have also included a poem on Page 1 that, Rubin says, acknowledges that the Palestinians have their own narrative about the region's history.

Eventually, the foundation hopes to translate the book into Hebrew and other languages, and plans to write a teaching curriculum to accompany it in both formal and informal Jewish educational situations, from day schools to adult education classes. ■

'It's a form of storytelling that returns stories to the people, not just experts.'

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield
Vice President of CLAL

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Bush calls Olmert

President Bush called Ehud Olmert, the acting Israeli prime minister.

The two leaders spoke Thursday morning, the White House said, and Bush expressed his "deep concern" about Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who suffered a stroke Jan. 4 and is still in the hospital.

"He wished the acting prime minister well in these difficult circumstances," the White House said in a statement.

The White House has tried not to appear too close to Olmert, who is likely to head the Kadima Party in March 28 elections.

Bush signs pact with Israel clause

President Bush signed a free trade agreement with Bahrain that is conditional on an end to the boycott of Israel.

The agreement signed into law Wednesday monitors Bahrain's compliance with ending all forms of boycotting Israel.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee helped shepherd the agreement through Congress in hopes it would set a precedent for other Arab nations angling for free trade pacts with the United States.

Likud ministers quit government

Three Likud Party ministers quit Israel's government.

Thursday's walkout, which comes into effect within 48 hours, was done under the orders of Likud chief Benjamin Netanyahu, who had delayed the move out of respect for ailing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

But one of the four Likud Cabinet members, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, said he was holding off on resigning until Friday.

Shalom's recalcitrance was an embarrassment for Netanyahu, as Thursday also saw a Likud primary in which party supporters chose candidates for the party's list for March 28 elections.

103 Congress members to Israel in 2005

More than 100 members of Congress visited Israel in 2005.

In his summary to the Israeli Cabinet this week on relations with the United States, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said 23 U.S. senators and 80 members of the U.S. House of Representatives visited Israel last year, some multiple times.

"The legislative branch has maintained its unique and long-standing status as a stronghold of support for Israel, transcending party lines and Congressional houses," he said.

Miller leaves Seeds of Peace

Aaron David Miller resigned as president of Seeds of Peace, a conflict resolution group.

Miller, a longtime Middle East adviser to the U.S. State Department who helped guide the Oslo peace process, became president of Seeds of Peace in 2003.

He helped expand the group's original mission from bringing together Arab and Jewish youths, and the group now works in the south Asian, Cypriot and Bosnian arenas.

Miller, who is Jewish, will be a scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, a think tank founded by Congress.

He is writing a book about the United States and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Swastika painted on Michigan school

A swastika and anti-Semitic epithets were spray-painted inside a Michigan school. Police are investigating last Friday's incident at the Bryant Middle School in Dearborn. Meanwhile, police in Tennessee said there is no evidence that three teenage boys accused of setting fire to a flag with a menorah on it were motivated by anti-Semitism.

MIDDLE EAST

Shoah museum: Islamist-denier link

The director of Israel's Holocaust museum warned against international indifference to the link between Islamic radicalism and Holocaust denial.

Avner Shalev, director of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, made the comments Thursday, Israel Radio reported, in response to reports that Iran is planning to hold a conference including Holocaust deniers.

Police crack down on Kach suspects

Israeli police cracked down on a settler group suspected of extremist ties.

Police shut down offices of the Jewish Legion in the West Bank settlement of Tapuach on Sunday, confiscating dogs held in its kennel. Police said the Jewish Legion, which trains guard dogs for settlements, was suspected of links to the banned Jewish extremist group, Kach, founded by the late Rabbi Meir Kahane.

WORLD

Jewish Agency boosted in former Soviet Union

The Jewish Agency for Israel accepted a \$50 million donation Sunday from a Russian-Israeli billionaire.

The donation from Arkadi Gaydamak is to go into a special fund for Jewish and Zionist education in the former Soviet Union and to assist at-risk youth in Israel.

In return for his donation, Gaydamak will be an observer on Jewish Agency committees dealing with education in the FSU.

"Mr. Gaydamak has been invited to participate in deliberations of the Jewish Agency institutions in which donors, community representatives, religious streams and different Zionist organizations from around the world take part," JAFI said in a statement.

Both Gaydamak and JAFI denied a report in Ma'ariv last week that Israeli police advised the agency not to accept Gaydamak's donation.

Gaydamak, who reportedly made his fortune trading in arms and diamonds in Angola, was forced to leave France, his home since 1972, after authorities issued an international arrest warrant for him on suspicion of tax evasion and bribery.

Chavez comments debated

Venezuelan Jews said the Simon Wiesenthal Center rushed to judgment when it accused the country's president of making anti-Semitic remarks.

The Forward reported that Venezuelan Jewish leaders and some American Jewish groups were writing to the center to say that it had misinterpreted Hugo Chavez's remarks in a Christmas Eve speech, and had thereby "interfered in the political status, in the security, and in the well-being of our community."

Chavez had said that while the world offers riches to all, "minorities such as the descendants of those who crucified Christ" have become "the owners of the riches of the world."

The president of the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela, Fred Pressner, said, "We believe the president was not talking about Jews and that the Jewish world must learn to work together."

Sergio Widder, the Wiesenthal Center's representative in Latin America, told the paper that the remarks were ambiguous at best, but that the decision to criticize Chavez had been taken only after careful consideration.

'Munich' to screen in Malaysia?

Steven Spielberg's "Munich" might be shown in Malaysia.

A film distributor in the mostly Muslim country said it would try to have the country's film censorship board approve the film.